Teaching Reading with Nonfiction - *"Just the facts, Ma'am…"*

The Facts About What our Students are Reading

- The average child spends less than 4 minutes a day of his/her leisure time reading nonfiction materials (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010).

- The average child spends about 3.6 minutes with nonfiction text in school each day.

- Juvenile fiction outsells nonfiction by 4-to-1 (Mulliot, 2012).

- In a study of 20 first grade classrooms, informational text comprised, on average, only 9.8% of all the text available for students to read (Duke, 2000).

- The average number of nonfiction books per child in high-income school libraries is 3.3. In poorer districts, it's even less.

The Facts About the Need to Increase the Amount of Nonfiction our Children Read

- Nonfiction is "real-world reading". Statistics show that at least 85% of the reading adults do is nonfiction. Children need to be prepared for this reality.

- In studies conducted in the past 10 years, researchers have found that *what* children read is as important as *how much* they read.

- Nonfiction improves students' background knowledge, which can account for as much as 33% of variance in student achievement (Marzano, 2000).

- Nonfiction reading has the potential to motivate young children to read by tapping into their personal interests (Caswell & Duke, 1998).

- Fifty percent (50%) of the passages on the elementary Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA)-III are nonfiction.

- With the implementation of the Common Core Standards, at nearly all grade levels, students are expected to develop research skills across content areas with a strong focus on nonfiction, including literary nonfiction; essays; biographies and autobiographies; journals and technical manuals; and charts, graphs, and maps (Gewertz, 2012).

The Facts About the English/Language Arts Common Core Standards

- Minnesota adopted the ELA Common Core Standards in 2010. The MCA-III test questions are based on the Common Core.

- The Department of Education's "College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards" (CCR) are interwoven throughout each sub-strand of the ELA Common Core. (See handout). The 4 main components of the CCR standards are: 1) Main Ideas and Details, 2) Craft and

Structure, 3) Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and 4) Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity.

- Each standard in the Common Core has benchmarks identified by a four-digit code. For example, in the code 5.2.8.8—

  - The "5" refers to grade five;
  - The "2" refers to the sub-strand (For the Reading Standards, a "1" stands for Literature and a "2" stands for Informational Text)
  - The first "8" refers to the eighth CCR anchor standard, "*Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence*"
  - The second "8" refers to the benchmark for that standard, "*Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s)*".

The Facts About Critical Literacy

- *Critical Literacy* is actively reading text in a way that promotes deeper understanding of socially constructed concepts such as power, inequality, injustice, and control. Training in *critical literacy* helps students to understand, question, analyze, and critique societal attitudes, beliefs, and values. It helps create thoughtful, reflective, and active citizens.

- The four key principles governing instruction in *critical literacy* include:

  - Challenging common assumptions and values
  - Exploring multiple perspectives and imagining those that are silenced or absent
  - Examining relationships, especially those with differences in power
  - Reflecting on and using literary practices to take action for social justice.

The Facts About Teaching Nonfiction

- Any strategy taught to students should be modeled for them several times before expecting them to perform it on their own.

- Some good, general strategies students should know about reading nonfiction text are:
  - Preview the text, reading headings, subheadings, and looking at graphics.
  - Using think-alouds with students.
  - In most cases, read nonfiction text more slowly than fiction.
  - Re-read text when necessary.
  - Look back in text when necessary.
  - The illustrations and graphics in nonfiction are very important, and may contain information not included in the text.

- It's important to help students identify the general format of a nonfiction text (sequence, cause/effect, problem/solution, compare/contrast, description, list).

Evidence-Based Strategies for Teaching with Nonfiction Text

Key Ideas and Details

Think Alouds – The teacher verbally models his/her thought processes while reading a selection. This may include visualizing, defining unfamiliar words, decoding, and asking questions about the text. Students are able to witness the thought process of an expert reader and apply the strategy to their own reading.

Reciprocal Teaching – Students are in groups of 4, and each student plays a different role while reading the text: 1) Predictor: predicts what the text will be about based on the title/cover, and predicts what may appear in the next sections of longer text; 2) Clarifier – records unknown words or hard-to-understand ideas that need to be discussed with the group; 3) Questioner – develops 3 open-ended questions about what has been read to check the group's understanding, and 4) Summarizer – states the main ideas or summarizes the text, or parts of it.

Main Idea Sort – After reading a text, the teacher writes main ideas and details of the text on separate notecards. Individuals or small groups sort the cards to distinguish the main ideas from the details. Students share their reasoning for why they sorted as they did.

Quick Draw – After a section of nonfiction text is read, students create a pictorial summary of what was read by drawing a quick sketch, including as many details as possible. Students are allowed to share and describe their drawings to others. (It is helpful for the teacher to model this strategy several times before having the students do it.)

Red Card, Green Card – Give each student a small red card and a small green card. After reading a piece of nonfiction text, ask the class a question about the text, and call on a student to provide an answer. Note: Open-ended or higher level questions with more than one possible answer will make this activity more beneficial and interesting (i.e. After reading a text about the kinds of pets people have, ask, "Would it be better to have a dog or a cat as a pet?") After the student answers the question, ask the other students to hold up the red card if they disagree and the green card if they agree. Call on students to share why they agree or disagree.

What's the Title? – Before having students read a text (or before reading one aloud), cover the front cover and the title page, and don't tell the students the title. When finished with the text, ask students to suggest titles for the book—What was it mostly about? What were the big ideas? Compare the students' titles with the author's title.

Snowball Toss – After reading a text with several main ideas, explore and make a list of all the main ideas with the students. Write each main idea on a separate sheet of paper. Put students in groups of 3 or 4 (so there are an equal number of groups and main ideas). Crumple up the main ideas papers into "snowballs". Toss the "snowballs" around the room so each group gets one. Have the groups open up the papers and read the main idea. Each group then needs to find and write on the paper one supporting detail from the text. Then crumple the papers and repeat until each group has a chance to respond to each main idea at least once.

QAR (Question-Answer Relationship) – An explanation of this strategy can be found at: http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/question_answer_relationship/

Timeline - Have students create timelines of events contained in sequential text. Or, provide the events on slips of paper, and have the students put them in order.

Exit Slips – After reading a piece of text, ask the students to respond independently in writing to two or three important questions you pose to them about the text. Collect and read responses, and adjust the next day's instruction based on the understandings evident (or not evident) within the responses.

1-2-3-4 – After reading the text, have students write a 4-paragraph reflection of the text using the following format: 1st paragraph – Big Idea, 2nd paragraph – Important details, 3rd paragraph – Personal connections to the text, and 4th paragraph – Any questions you still have. Have students share their writings with partners, a small group, or the whole class.

Craft and Structure

Structure Search – On separate notecards, the teacher writes the names of several different text structures the students will encounter in the nonfiction text they are reading (i.e. heading, title, index, glossary, chart, map inset, etc.). Notecards are handed out, one to each student. While reading, the student locates somewhere in the text the text structure on his/her notecard. Then, on the back of the notecard, the student writes the ways this particular structure helped him/her to understand the text.

Author/Illustrator Studies – Throughout the year, focus on various authors or illustrators. Share books by a chosen author/illustrator and help students identify the style or unique features of the authors/illustrators.

Help children compare the styles of different authors/illustrators you study. A pdf of an author study toolkit can be found here: http://www.readingrockets.org/content/pdfs/authortoolkit_rr.pdf
Venn Diagram - On one side of the Venn Diagram, write "author" and on the other write "illustrator". Ask students to help complete the diagram by describing the styles of each, and the ways each use their craft to help us understand and enjoy the text. The students will see that the author and illustrator have similar and different roles.
Context Clue Challenge – Put students in groups of 3 -4. Provide groups with a list of 3 or 4 difficult words from the text they've read. Ask students to write definitions to the words on their list, without using a dictionary, glossary or any other reference. They may use only each other and the text as resources. When finish, put 2 groups together to share their definitions and come up with a definition for each word both groups agree on.
Four Square – This is a vocabulary aid. See attached for graphic organizer.
3-2-1 Strategy – This strategy required the student to write 3 discoveries, 2 interesting ideas, and 1 question he/she still has after reading the text. Model this strategy several times before expecting independence of the students.
Four Corners – After having students read text on a controversial topic (i.e. Should animals be kept in zoos?), discuss the author's point of view with students. Then mark 4 corners of the classroom: Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Have students go to the corner of the room that best represents to what extend they agree or disagree with the author. Have students discuss their reasoning with those in their group, and then return to their desks and write a brief defense of their own positions [i.e. "I strongly disagree with (author) because…"]
Anticipation Guides – Create a set of statements related to the text students are about to read. The best statements often contain a controversial element. Before reading, students should decide whether they agree or disagree with the statements, or whether they think the statements are true or false. After reading the text, the students should revisit the statements and their responses to see if their thinking has changed as a result of reading.
Website Features – Explore some websites with students like "Time for Kids" or "National Geographic for Kids". Have students discuss the feature similarities and differences between web sources and print sources (i.e. You can often link to videos on a web source but not on a print source.) Ask students to discuss which web sources they see are the most helpful and why.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Helpful Illustration? – Some illustrations can add information that goes beyond the text, and others may just clarify or provide a visual representation of a concept in the text. Some illustrations are helpful, and others may not be. Have students discuss certain illustrations in their texts – Are they helpful or not, and why? Encourage the students to think about: What clues do I see in the illustration? Why did the illustrator draw this? Can I learn anything from this illustration?
Write a Caption, or Caption Match - For illustrations without captions in students' text, have them create their own captions. For illustrations with captions, make Xeroxed copies of up to 5 of them. Separate the caption from the illustration, and then have the students match them.
Author's Point – After reading a text, provide students with a statement (either true or false) about the author's purpose (i.e. "I think the author wrote this text to try and convince us that global warming is not really happening.") Have students go back into the text, finding actual words of the author to prove your statement either true or false.
Hula Hoop Venn Diagram – Have students read two different texts about the same topic. Put students in groups of 6-8 and give them two Hula Hoops. Students should place the hoops into a Venn Diagram on the floor and use notecards to label the sides of the diagram, either by book title or author/illustrator. Tell students they should think about ways the two texts were similar and different, including the ways the author and illustrator presented information, whether the authors seemed to agree or disagree on certain points, etc. Then, each student should state either one similarity or one difference to his/her group and stand in the Venn diagram in an appropriate place. For example, if a student says, "I think both authors agreed that global warming is really happening in the world", he/she should stand in the overlapping center of the Hula Hoops. When all students have made a statement and stood in the hoops, they can start over.
Get My Point? – Introduce a piece of nonfiction text by listing the author's key points on the board. Review those points with the students. Pair up students, and have one start reading a short section of the text. While one student is reading, the other student marks with a Post-It flag sentences that support any of the author's key points. Have students take turns reading and marking sentences. When finished, have students either sort sentences by key points, or discuss the sentences the students found as a whole class.

Divide and Conquer – Put students into groups of 2. Assign each group an image (illustration, chart, map, etc.) from a piece of text. After examining the image, one person should tell the main idea the image is trying to convey. The second person should tell whether he/she feels the image clarifies or expands on the text or not, and if so, how.
2-2-2 – Have students read **2** texts on the same topic. When finished, have them list **2** similarities between the texts and **2** differences. Share findings in class.
Three Facts and a Fib – After reading a piece of nonfiction text or examining a graphic or illustration from the text, have students independently write 3 facts they gained from the text/illustration and one "fib". Have them share their facts and fib with another student. The job of the other student is to figure out which statement is the fib.
Listen, Watch, or Written? – Have students read text on a certain topic, and then listen to or watch information (video, recording, etc.) about the same topic (i.e. Reading King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and then watching of King actually giving the speech). Discuss how the two formats are the same and different and which form they feel is better and why.
Write Around – After reading text, give students 2-3 minutes to respond to the text in writing. Then, have students pass their responses to another student who will then respond to the text again or respond to what was written by the first person. After several "passes" of the papers, have students read the responses on their original papers and discuss any interesting findings.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

Read, Cover, Remember, Retell – See attached sheet for process.
Coding/Tracking the Text – Students mark the text, when possible, while reading, using coding symbols. (See attached for symbol samples.) When finished reading, students can share markings with a partner, getting clarification or sharing key points.

"Read, Cover, Remember, Retell" Comprehension Strategy

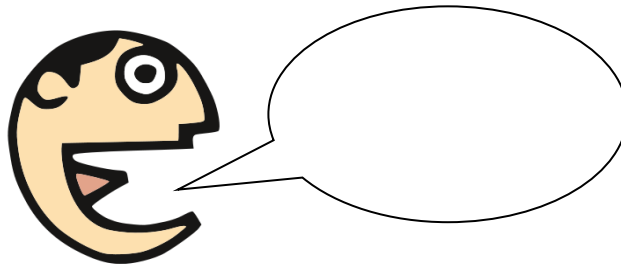**Read** – **Read a small section of the text.**

Cover – **Cover what you just read with your hand.**

Remember - **Think about what you read.**

Retell (Writing Optional) – **Summarize what you read orally or in writing.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Picture	**What is it? (Define in your own words.)**
Antonyms or Synonyms **Antonyms –** **Synonyms -**	**Your sentence with the word:**

Text Coding and Tracking Symbols	
☐	Draw a box around the main idea(s) in text.
___	Underline the details in a text.
◯	Circle key words to remember.
?	Use a question mark to identify something confusing in the text.
!	Use an exclamation mark to identify new information.
*	Use an asterisk to identify something interesting.
⧠	Use a checkmark to identify already known items.
X	Mark with an "X" items that contradict what is already known.
👁	Draw an eye to indicate an opportunity to mentally visualize.
∞	Use the infinity symbol to show a connection to another text, to self, or to the world.
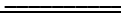
Anticipation guide		
Before Reading		After Reading
A D	1. Cats make better pets than dogs.	A D
A D	2. Cats are funnier than dogs.	A D
A D	3. Cats enjoy bringing gifts of "critter parts" to their owners, and because this shows true devotion, it is a positive trait of cats.	A D
A D	4. Cats are better than dogs at providing stress relief for their owners.	A D
A D	5. Cats are less demanding than dogs.	A D

2 – 2 – 2

2 Texts

2 Similarities:
1.

2.

2 Differences:
1.

2.