

- Regardless of a student's age, there is something about a good picture book that captures the attention of readers. Whether it is a series of sharp photographs or colorful and detailed illustrations, the images often enable the text to leap off of the page and come to life. Russell Freedman, Seymour Simon, George Ancona and Raymond Bial are all noted nonfiction writers that have produced award-winning nonfiction picture books. Encourage students to indulge in the works of these authors. Consider the saying, "A picture speaks a thousand words." How do the images complement their related text? What added information can be taken from the images?
- Nonfiction is an exciting genre in that it is rich with facts. In addition, there are many different types of nonfiction available for students to enjoy. In fact, the Orbis Pictus Award and Robert F. Sibert Medal are two major awards presented annually to distinguished works of nonfiction. Consider with students how nonfiction award winners are determined. Determine a list of important criteria for "good" works of nonfiction. What criteria might make one book stand out from another? Use this list to create a checklist for assessing nonfiction books. Have students select some of their favorite nonfiction books and assess them using their list. See if students can use the information from their assessments to make a top-ten nonfiction list. Publish this list to share with other classes. If one book were to be selected for an award, which would it be?
- Just as students check the source of a web site to ensure that information is credible, it is also important that students do the same with works of nonfiction. Present students with a nonfiction book and instruct them to brainstorm the ways in which they can determine if the information is credible without reading the book from start to finish. Some students may suggest looking up book reviews, others may suggest turning to the bibliography, while others may suggest finding out more information about the author. Some questions to pose to students as they engage in this exercise include: What should readers look for in the bibliography when evaluating a text? What makes a good source? If an author is not an expert on the topic, does that mean that the information in the book is not credible?
- Some biographical works have the term "authorized" in their titles while others are titled as "unauthorized." Discuss what these terms mean in relation to biographies. What are the pros and cons of gathering information from an unauthorized biography? How about an authorized biography? Why is it important to be aware of this when evaluating biographies? As an extension, pretend an author has signed on to write your students' biographies. Have students create an outline of facts about themselves to be used in their authorized biographies.

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- When authors choose to write with a comparison and contrast structure, there are a couple ways in which the text can be organized. Point-by-point, whole-to-whole and similarities-to-differences are some patterns that authors may follow. Engage students in a study of these three patterns using nonfiction picture books. Visit www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=974 for a fun lesson created by ReadWriteThink.

Suggested Resources

Periodically, Internet and print resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com.

- www.newseum.org/exhibits_th/index.aspx?item=exhibits_past&style=c
The Newseum's archive of past online exhibits is a great resource for learning about the history of newspapers as well as powerful news events.
- www.ncte.org/elem/awards/orbispictus
A resource for great nonfiction works, the Orbis Pictus Award is administered annually by the National Council of Teachers of English. Since 1990, this award has honored the author of an outstanding nonfiction book.
- Zarnowski, Myra, Richard M. Kerper and Julie M. Jensen. (eds.) *Best in Children's Nonfiction: Reading, Writing and Teaching Orbis Pictus Award Books*. National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL; 2001.

Works Featured in Analyzing Nonfiction

- Armstrong, Jennifer. *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the Endurance*. New York: Crown, 1998.
- Macaulay, David. *The Way Things Work*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.
- Tan, Amy. "Fish Cheeks," in *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 125-127.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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TITLES IN THIS SERIES

- ANALYZING & APPRECIATING POETRY
- ANALYZING FICTION
- ANALYZING NONFICTION
- ELEMENTS OF FICTION
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ANALYZING NONFICTION

Grades 5-9

At the middle school level, students have already been introduced to some basic elements and characteristics of literature. They have been called upon to organize and communicate their understanding of what they read as well as express their own opinions. *Literature for Students* reinforces these skills and challenges students to approach them with a more critical eye. This series journeys through fiction, nonfiction and poetry and explores important elements and characteristics of each. By examining interesting excerpts by a diverse group of authors and sharing one-on-one moments with the hosts as they reflect on their own interests and experiences with literature, students will be challenged to analyze how language is used, how ideas are organized and the many ways in which people connect with and appreciate these different forms of literature.



Program Summary

There are lots of reasons to pick up a book and so many different kinds of literature to read. Nonfiction is the genre, or type, of literature that is based on factual information. This type of information includes first person accounts, recorded scientific data and historical documents. When reading nonfiction, it is helpful to know about the source of the information. Information can come from primary or secondary sources. Neither type of source outweighs the other because they both offer different perspectives. In some cases, one type of source may be more helpful than the other.

There are many different types of nonfiction. Interviews, historical documents and speeches are all fascinating forms of primary sources. Speeches are especially interesting in that they can open a window into both the events they address as well as the personalities of the speakers. Diaries and journals are very personal forms of nonfiction. Most were not written with an audience in mind so they often provide a very candid glimpse into the inner world of their writers. Newspapers provide up-to-date news and analysis of local, national and international events. In addition, they provide a glimpse into everyday life through articles, ads and editorials. Essays can include either primary or secondary sources of information. The purpose of an essay can be to express an opinion, persuade or entertain the reader or describe an incidence of significance. Informational texts utilize multiple sources to focus on a topic in depth. Biographies and autobiographies are types of nonfiction that place a human face on history. They provide an intimate look at individuals from all walks of life.

Nonfiction texts contain many features to help readers find and understand the information they are seeking. By simply skimming and scanning texts, readers are able to find a great deal of information to help them decide whether or not to read on. The introduction, summary and conclusion sections can provide a general idea of the body of the text. Italicized and bold-faced terms are typical indicators of something important. Illustrations, charts, maps and photographs are a visual way of highlighting key points. Other helpful features include the glossary, bibliography and index. In addition to nonfiction's basic features, it is also helpful to look at how the overall text is arranged, or organized. Authors typically try to choose a text structure that supports the purpose of their presentation. Some works of nonfiction are organized in chronological order, others look at the causes and effects of a single event, while others use comparison and contrast to show the similarities and differences between people, things or events. Another interesting format of nonfiction is the inverted pyramid in which the most important information is presented first. Details follow in descending order of importance. This is a typical structure of news articles.

Nonfiction is a tool for learning and understanding. It is important to evaluate, and sometimes even challenge, what you read. Even if you are reading for pure enjoyment, nonfiction requires some critical thinking. Evaluating nonfiction often begins with identifying the author's purpose. *(Continued)*

It is also important to separate fact from opinion. For example, a statement might begin, "Scientists have proven..." or "Some scientists believe..." Which do you think is most likely to precede a passage that is widely accepted as fact? In addition, readers should consider the how current the information is as well as the sources consulted for the content of the text. Keep an eye open for bias. When bias is intentional and pervasive, it may be viewed as propaganda. The important thing to remember when evaluating nonfiction is to be a critical reader: read with an open mind and be aware of the issues that can make a text a useful or not-so-useful resource.

Vocabulary

nonfiction — Literature that is based on fact.

primary source — Text written by a person directly involved in the events he or she is describing. Written primary sources include speeches, journals, documents and letters.

secondary source — Text written by someone who was not directly involved in the events he or she is describing. Written secondary sources include history books and encyclopedias.

interview — A meeting in which information and opinions can be collected from a person. Transcripts of interviews can serve as useful primary sources.

historical documents — Dated documents that recount a transaction or event.

diaries — Personal records of daily thoughts and events, also referred to as journals.

essay — A short piece of prose writing that deals with a subject in a tightly focused way or expresses a particular point of view.

informational texts — Fact-based texts written primarily to impart information.

biography — A nonfiction narrative about a person's life.

autobiography — A nonfiction narrative in which the writer tells his or her own life story.

inverted pyramid — A nonfiction format in which the most important information is presented first. Details follow in descending order of importance. Many news reports and journalistic pieces are written in this way.

headline — The title of a news article.

subhead — A secondary title of a news article.

dateline — A feature of news articles that indicates where the story took place.

body — The main part of a literary or journalistic work.

chronological order — A nonfiction format in which events are told in the order they happened. *(Continued)*

cause and effect — A nonfiction format that examines the roots and impact of an event.

compare and contrast — A nonfiction format that examines the similarities and differences between people, things or events.

fact — Information verified as true.

opinion — A view or judgment on a particular matter or event.

evidence — Factual information that supports an author's argument or point of view.

bias — A leaning or slanting toward a particular point of view.

propaganda — Information spread with the intent of promoting a particular cause. Propaganda is often manipulative, emotional and logically flawed.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Distinguish between nonfiction and historical fiction. Discuss both their similarities and their differences. How might these genres rely upon, or support, each other?
- Poll students to find out more about their nonfiction reading preferences. What topics are of personal interest to them? Is there a certain type of nonfiction (e.g., diaries, biographies, informational texts) that they are drawn to? What was the best piece of nonfiction they ever read? In what ways did it stand out?

Follow-up Discussion & Activities

- Nonfiction works can consist of primary sources, secondary sources or a combination of both. Engage students in a comparative study of nonfiction sources by challenging them to gather a variety of works on a single topic. Students might return with informational texts, biographies and transcripts of interviews with experts or individuals involved, related news articles and even encyclopedia entries. Sort through these different types of nonfiction. Classify each work based on its source. Is it primary, secondary or both? How do you know? Then, determine the contexts in which each nonfiction work would be helpful. When would a diary be more useful than an encyclopedia entry? When would a combination of interviews, historical documents, news articles and informational texts be useful?
- Ask students to write and share their own definitions for creative writing. Is it possible for creative writing to include expository writing? Essays such as Amy Tan's "Fish Cheeks" and Mark Twain's "Two Ways of Seeing a River" are both examples of nonfiction essays creatively woven together. There are even nonfiction books that are artfully constructed in such a way that they read like novels, but are based entirely on fact. Select an excerpt from a piece of creative nonfiction and invite students to read it and take it in. Describe the ways in which the excerpt is like fiction. *(Continued)*