

NEW LENSES

We teach strategies for reading factual texts to our youngest children. That might seem rather dull. But I was in a classroom the other day where reading instruction was any thing but. The second graders read a nonfiction selection the day before I came to visit.

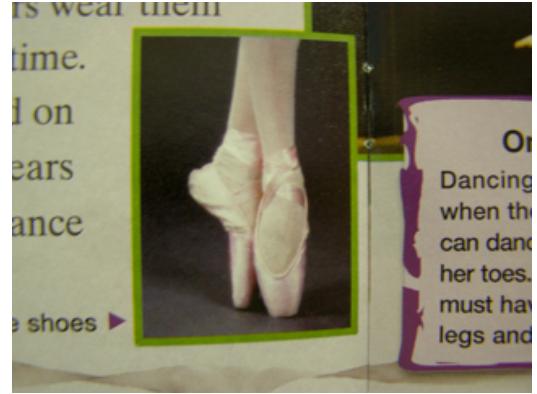
On the day I observed, the teacher gathered a reading group of 5 on the floor. She handed each child a book, a checklist of nonfiction conventions – some of which they’d learned and some of which they were learning – and a couple of sticky notes. She told the students that since they had read and enjoyed the book already, they were going to look at the book with a different lens this day. “Watch me,” she said.



We often say we’re going to look at information with a different lens, but this teacher meant it - literally. She pulled out a box of big, old-fashioned glasses – a gift from her optometrist. She carefully perched a big pair on her nose and proceeded with the lesson.

“Oh! There is a nonfiction convention!” she exclaimed, acting as if the glasses made every thing clearer. “The author has used the word “danseur” and she’s written /dan-sooer/ right after the word. I will sticky note that place. I want to talk about what that is with my group.”

The teacher continued. “I think I’ve found another convention. There’s a picture of ballet shoes. I can see them close up. Do you see all the detail, all the ribbons that wrap around the shoes? Look at the picture on the other page. You can hardly see the shoes at all, but *this* picture is like a zoom lens on a camera. I can really see the shoes closely.” She scanned her definition sheet. “I’m going to mark this convention as a cut away.”



She asked each of the students in her small group to select a pair of glasses so that they, too, could look at their books through different lenses. She reminded them they had their definition pages and their sticky notes. She asked them to select just 2 pages to reread, search for nonfiction conventions, and mark the convention with a sticky note. Then, they wrote a note as to how they thought the author used it. Later, students shared and assessed their sticky notes in discussion groups.

These young readers hopped to it. They were so excited to wear their glasses (without real lenses). Somehow the glasses made them more studious. The metaphor was not lost on them. They used their glasses to search and think about what nonfiction conventions were in the text and the purpose of each.

I left thinking that maybe that simple box of lenses could be used for so many more searches we could facilitate in school. Sometimes these gimmicks are just what children need so they can play, be children, and learn at the same time. How smart is that?

Nonfiction Text Features	
feature	purpose
Fascinating Facts Title	tells me what I will be reading about
1. What is highlighted? 2. What is marked? Table of Contents	a list of topics in the book with page to help me locate information
atom bold print	helps me recognize the important words
graph	helps me understand pieces of information and how they fit together
1. making crystals 2. floating needle activity contents	as a reader helps me find experiments to do
We tried to find the thing a pins Acknowledgements	helps me know more information about who puts the text together

NEW LENSES Lesson Day 1

CONNECT

Generate excitement for reading nonfiction by preparing a basket of books, magazines, and newspaper article on subjects of interest.

TEACHING POINT

Authors use special concepts of print when writing nonfiction articles. As authors, we need to know the same features when we're writing.

TEACH

Pose the question, What are nonfiction features of text? Make a list of the features students know. Think aloud how you would read to discover the features. Say things like, *That is a photo with a caption. I know that. I will mark it with my sticky note. I will write "photo + caption" on my sticky.* Remind the students to use the list of Nonfiction Features if you've provided one.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Let students select a pair of glasses. They work alone or in teams to find features they know or wonder about.

ASSESS

Move from one student to another to see if they understand what they're looking for.

NEW LENSES Lesson Continued

CLOSURE

In reading group the next day, compare the features they found. Discuss how and why each is used. Add to the list. Facilitate discussion where students answer questions for one another, students look up features in their dictionaries and glossaries, or the teacher explains when the kids are at a loss.

REFLECT

Students stick their Post-It notes into their daybooks. They can draw pictures of new features. They write about the new features they found, explaining how each is used. Use a double-entry format like on page 3-4. (No need to run the pages as a worksheet when students can record in their own way in the writing notebooks.)

Looking Closely at Nonfiction

These kinds of statistics have made teaching how to read nonfiction the topic of much conversation in recent years.

- 60% of texts on test are nonfiction selections
- The number of adults engaged in reading literature -- defined as novels, short stories, plays and poetry -- was 46.7% in 2002, down from 54% in 1992 and 56.9% in 1982.
- 1993-2003: The number of titles published increased 58% while fiction readers declined 14%.

(Source:

<http://www.parapublishing.com/sites/para/resources/statistics.cfm>)

Tips for Reading Fiction

(1) Readers usually speed through fiction pretty quickly and (2) typically read the selection only one time; (3) readers find it easy to create mental pictures, even mental movies, as they read and imagine themselves living in fantasy worlds created by authors; (4) in fiction, it's not so important to remember the details as much as the big picture; and (5) readers interpret themes and characters differently and so discuss personal conclusions in book clubs.

Tips for Reading Nonfiction

(1) Takes several readings; (2) creating mental pictures is limited, but (3) reading to gather facts is key; (4) a question about a nonfiction text usually has a right or wrong answer; (5) to get the most from reading, students can take notes; (6) students are taught to slow down and pay attention to nonfiction conventions: bold or italicized words, charts and graphs, illustrations or photographs, headings and subheadings.

Nonfiction Text Features

	Definition or picture
Title or Heading	
Subtitle or subheading	
Table of Contents	
Index	
Bold print	
Italics print	
Information boxes or sidebars	
Photos	
Pictures	

Labels	
Captions	
Graphs	
Cut-away diagrams	
Table	
Chart	
Flow Map	
Map	
Parentheses	
Quotation marks	