

Introduction

Peek in the door of a primary classroom during choice reading time and you are likely to see students looking at, talking about, and reading nonfiction books with great enthusiasm. Who wouldn't want to peruse photos of killer creatures in their natural habitats or see pictures of interesting-looking people from around the world?

Left alone, young readers often use these texts like a photo album, ignoring captions and text and letting the pictures tell the story. Unless we teach them *how* to effectively read nonfiction expository text, that in which text features are an integral part, they may never move beyond the “photo album” stage. Ironically, authors use text features to help readers more fully understand the text, but it is these same features that can prove problematic.

Peek in the door of a typical intermediate classroom during choice reading, and you will see a whole lot less nonfiction being read. When these students pick up a book, most leave nonfiction on the shelf and go for a narrative text. Why does this happen? The complexity of informational text, compounded by the use of text features to convey important information, can sway intermediate students toward fiction for pleasure reading. In our experience, when students are explicitly taught how to read and comprehend nonfiction texts, they understand these texts better, perform better on standardized tests, and are more likely to choose them to read them.

The idea for this book evolved as we looked at ourselves, our students, and our information-rich world. We are friends, co-authors, and research partners, and we are very different readers. For pleasure reading, Nicki gravitates toward the latest fiction. Michelle is much more likely to be caught reading a journal article in her free time. Working so closely together and both being rather analytical, it didn't take long for us to recognize we attack texts differently. If we are discussing an article or a book about (what else?) teaching, Nicki is usually drawn to the main body of text, while Michelle often is quite taken with the flowcharts and tables. Noticing these differences and learning from each other helped us realize that the special skills and knowledge required to read nonfiction expository text can and should be taught.

We all want children to read a wide variety of texts. Reading nonfiction enhances prior knowledge and expands students' vocabulary. Students will not only enjoy these texts now, but are likely to read more of them in their lifetime than narrative fiction. What's more, with the Internet and television, the world our children live in is increasingly graphically oriented. Teaching students to extract the full meaning from images and text is critical to their future success.

What's Included in This Book

The primary goal of this instructional resource is to assist you in teaching your students what a text feature is, how to use it when reading to better comprehend, and how to create it in their writing. In Chapter 1, we touch upon relevant college and career readiness standards and grade-level expectations for specific text features. We then describe the *Knowledge of Text Features Assessment*, which we have developed for students in kindergarten through first grade and in grades 2 and up.

We have also included a class profile, so you can quickly see your students' results at a glance. We created an e-book (available with the online content), which can be printed or used on a computer to assist when giving this assessment, although other content texts, such as those found in your classroom, can be used. Depending on how your students do on the *Knowledge of Text Features Assessment* and/or your teaching standards, you will be able to dip in and out of chapters based on students' needs and instructional goals. This will allow you to appropriately differentiate instruction.

This lofty goal is possible with the lessons in Chapters 2 through 4 and your thoughtful instruction. The lessons follow a gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), with the beginning lessons being more teacher-directed and the final lessons requiring students to demonstrate knowledge of the feature being taught. Within each of these chapters, the lessons are loosely hierarchical, with the more primary ones listed first.

In Chapters 2 through 4, we have categorized text features as either print features (those that support the reader mainly through print), graphic features (those that support the reader mainly through images), or organizational features (those that help the reader navigate the organization of the text). Chapter 2 includes lessons on print features, Chapter 3 has lessons on graphic features, and Chapter 4 contains lessons on organizational features. When logical, we have combined lessons for features with similar purposes, such as drawings and photographs.

Prior to lessons in each chapter, you will find mini-introductions for the text features targeted in that chapter. Each lesson then follows a predictable format. The lesson title, purpose, and materials are listed at the beginning. The directions open with a little teacher talk, explaining the feature to students. Feel free to use our words as a script or just a reference, depending on your comfort level. These lessons have students seeing and exploring text feature examples and manipulating or creating text features on their own. Each lesson closes with a review of what was learned, modifications for younger or less-able students, assessment options, and technology connections.

Ultimately, we want students to integrate their knowledge of all text features when reading to learn. Chapter 5 contains tried and true activities to help them do so. These include the text feature walk, creating class books, and conducting text feature scavenger hunts developed to help students put together their text feature knowledge.

Our appendices include helpful and important resources referenced throughout this book. The online content has printer-friendly versions of these resources, as well as lesson supports (such as the Thinksheets referred to in lessons) to facilitate implementation, examples of each text feature, and the picture book used for assessment purposes (and described in more detail in Chapter 1), to allow for more student engagement. To assist readers in assimilating their knowledge of text features learned and sharing this knowledge with other students, a readers' theatre script has been developed for each of the text feature chapters (print, graphic, and organizational) and is included with the online content.

Also included with the online content are PDF forms of Thinksheets that you and your students can fill out directly on a computer using Adobe Acrobat. Look for this icon () on the Thinksheets in Appendix E and in the online content listing at the end of this book to see which files can be filled out online. You may retrieve the online materials using the information on the copyright page.