What's Special About Nonfiction?

Grades: 1–2, 3–5

Overview

Students learn about non-fiction writing by noticing characteristics of format (layout, captions, recaps) and by talking about their own experiences with fiction and nonfiction such as fairy tales and recipes/board game directions.

Objective

Students will:
- See that, while nonfiction may be different from a fairy tale, storybook, or novel, it can be fun to read
- Understand that nonfiction will play a role not only in this year’s curriculum, but in daily life for years to come
- Identify some of the basic characteristics of nonfiction literature
Materials
- Classroom social studies or science textbook
- Example of fiction (e.g., storybook)
- Samples of nonfiction literature (books, menus, maps, magazines, etc.)

Directions

**Step 1:** Discuss what nonfiction is with students:
- Point out examples that are all around them: books about their favorite animals, lunch menus, maps, classroom magazines, etc.
- Define nonfiction: It gives information. It explains, informs, or persuades.

**Step 2:** Use the chart below to guide a discussion of the characteristics of nonfiction and how reading nonfiction is different than reading stories or novels. Use examples from a social studies or science textbook to illustrate some of these characteristics.

### Characteristics of Nonfiction Text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How does nonfiction text look different from fiction?</th>
<th>There may be chapter titles and section headers that preview information.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Each page has words in a variety of fonts and type sizes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Bold</strong> or <strong>italic</strong> fonts may be used to signal important words or phrases.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Diacritical marks may be used to guide pronunciation.</td>
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<td>How are graphic aids used?</td>
<td>Maps, charts, diagrams, photographs are usually included to illustrate or summarize information.</td>
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<td>Captions or labels must be examined carefully for relevant information.</td>
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How is the vocabulary different?
- There may be more words that are unfamiliar. Look for multi-syllabic words like "photosynthesis" that may be difficult to pronounce.

What do we know about nonfiction?
- There is a great deal of information to be understood and remembered.

**Step 3:** Explain how these characteristics are “clues” that will help them understand what they're reading.

**Step 4:** Have students share experiences they've had with nonfiction.
Try these prompts:
- What books about real people, places, and events have you read?
- Do you enjoy reading these types of books? Why or why not?
- When you look at an article or a biography, do you look at the illustrations and read the captions?
- Have you ever had to read directions for a board game or ingredients in a cookbook?

Subjects:
- Content Area Reading