

Determining Importance in Nonfiction

Anchor Chart of Tips for Reading Nonfiction

By Stephanie Harvey

- Think of facts, questions and responses. Write these down as you read.
- Reading nonfiction takes time. You may have to reread to make sure you understand.
- Reread so you don't forget what you are reading.
- Reading fiction is like watching a movie. Nonfiction is more like a newscast or watching a slide show.
- Stop often and ask yourself if what you are reading makes sense.
- Important to abbreviate when you take notes.
- Think before you write.
- Nonfiction reading is reading to learn something.

Reading with Meaning

Debbie Miller

Determining Importance at a Glance

What's Key for Kids

- Readers distinguish the differences between fiction and nonfiction.
- Readers distinguish important from unimportant information in order to identify key ideas or themes as they read.
- Readers use their knowledge of narrative and expository text features to make predictions about text organization and content.
- Readers utilize text features to help them distinguish important from unimportant information.
- Readers use their knowledge of important and relevant parts of text to answer questions and synthesize text for themselves and others.

Strategies That Work
Stephanie Harvey

Chapter 9 Determining Importance in Text: The Nonfiction Connection

“Throughout Stephanie’s education, teachers had instructed her to highlight the important parts. But no one had shown her how. She assumed that if the writers of these massive textbooks had written it down, it must be important. So she highlighted just about every letter of print. Highlighting is easy; determining what to highlight is the challenge (page 117).”

Stephanie Harvey writes, “Determining Importance means picking out the most important information when you read, to highlight essential ideas, to isolate supporting details, and to read for specific information. Teachers need to help readers sift and sort information, and make decisions about what information they need to remember and what information they can disregard (page 117).”

“Readers of nonfiction have to decide and remember what is important in the texts they read if they are going to learn anything from them. (page 118)”

Debbie Miller says, “We must teach our students what nonfiction is. Teaching our students that expository text has predictable characteristics and features they can count on before they read allows them to construct meaning more easily as they read.”

- Nonfiction books are organized around specific topics and main ideas
- Nonfiction books give you information that is true.
- Nonfiction books try to teach you something.
- When readers read nonfiction books they make predictions about the kinds of things they expect to learn. They activate their schema and the topic and what they know about the type of text they are about to read.
- Nonfiction books have features.

FQR Chart
Facts-Question-Response Chart

The strategy emphasis supports students to ask questions, determine importance in the text, and respond, voicing their own opinions and thoughts. Eventually the children will be able to use this response method independently to read for information in text they have chosen at their own reading level. The children record factual information, ask questions, and respond to merge their thinking with the content.

When students have the opportunity to share and explain their own thinking about text, they learn and remember important information.

Example: "The Comeback of Humpbacks" National Geographic for Kids (Sept 2000)

Facts	Question	Response
Leaping out of the water is called breaching	Is all jumping called breaching?	
30x more than in 1965		WOW! That is a lot. That was a good comeback.
Humpbacks were almost gone until a law was created to protect humpbacks		I don't like the hunters using only one part of the whale. Reminds me of the white men wasting the buffalo.

Facts	Questions	Responses

Reading with Meaning, pages 149-150

Identify what the conventions of nonfiction text are and how they help us as readers. Debbie Miller suggests spending one day on each convention. The teacher should bring in examples of at least five places in nonfiction texts that support that convention. Then the children look for the convention and share them with a partner, small group, whole group. It is not enough to identify the convention and purpose, we must also identify how they help us as readers.

Conventions	Purpose	How they help us as readers
Labels	Help the reader identify a picture or photograph and/or its parts.	
Photographs	Help the reader understand exactly what something looks like.	
Captions	Help the reader better understand a picture or photograph.	
Comparisons	Help the reader understand the size of one thing by comparing it to the size of something familiar.	
Cutaways	Help the reader understand something by looking at it from the inside.	
Maps	Help the reader understand where things are in the world.	
Types of print	Help the reader by signaling, "Look at me! I'm important!"	
Close-Ups	Help the reader see details in something small.	
Table of Contents	Help the reader identify key topics in the book in the order they are presented.	
Index	An alphabetical list of almost everything covered in the text, with page numbers.	
Glossary	Helps the reader define words contained in the text.	

List of mini lessons for nonfiction texts

- Scanning
- Skimming
- Accessing the text through the index
- Using headings and signposts to the information we want
- Strolling through the pictures in order to orientate ourselves to the text
- Not reading the text in order
- Accessing the text through the table of contents
- Reading the picture captions
- Activating prior knowledge or schema
- Noting characteristics of text length and structure
- Noting what type of organizational pattern the text is using
- Determining what to read in what order
- Determining what to pay careful attention to
- Determining what to ignore
- Deciding to quit because the text contains no relevant information
- Deciding if text is worth careful reading or just skimming
- Pay attention to surprising information. It might mean you are learning something new.

Guided Reading the Four Blocks Way, pages 58-62 “What’s for Reading?”

“You want the children in your classroom to know that they will read something every day during Guided Reading, and as Guided Reading time approaches, you want them to begin asking themselves “What’s for reading?” Then you want them to know they can take a quick peek at the text and see the kinds of reading they can anticipate. “What’s for reading?” is a previewing technique where the children decide what kind of text they are going to read and what special features that text has.”

Reading With Meaning, page 146

Have the students look at nonfiction and fiction texts and determine what are the characteristics of both types of text.

Make a Venn Diagram reflecting what they learned.

FICTION	BOTH	NONFICTION
Beginning middle end Setting Characters Problem Events Resolution	Title Illustrations They help you learn They are fun to read	Bold print Index Table of contents Photographs
Stories Themes	Words	Captions Headings Cutaways Information Ideas
Pictures Read from front to back		Amazing facts Read in any order

Reading with Meaning
Debbie Miller
Pages 150-151

Wonder Boxes

Throughout the study of questioning and nonfiction, ask the children to place a wonder card or two in a basket. Two or three days a week, draw one out and search for the answer. Another option is to generate wonder questions and have the students choose one, then do research for the answer.

Debbie Miller shows them how to think aloud about certain questions:

- What do I already know about the topic?
- What type of book or other source will help me best?
- Where will I find the information?
- How is the information organized in the source? How will I go about locating what I need?

Wonder Question
What I learned...
Source:

After looking through the source of information ask yourself, "What did I learn? How can I synthesize my learning for myself and others?"

Strategies That Work, pages 134-137

Sifting the Topic from the Details

Topic and details form is effective in allowing for the students to list essential information but lacked a place for their responses. The third column for response allows kids to interact with text personally and ensures that they have a place to record their thoughts, feelings, and questions.

Three Column Notes

Topic	Detail	Personal Response