

I want to share a success that I had that turned out to be unbelievably easy. I decided to use a "frog theme" to introduce my year. I have about 30 non-fiction books on frogs. Ten are the same "rookie readers" that are really easy reading. I told my second and third graders that we would be learning about frogs and that I wanted them to preview the books on frogs before I started teaching the unit.

In 3 minutes, the class had "looked" at the books. This wasn't exactly what I had in mind as far as the time so I quickly decided to come up with a way to focus their attention for a longer time. I passed out 5 Post-its to each child and told them to put the post-it on anything that they found new or interesting. They quickly asked for more post-its. (They didn't have to write anything at this point, just use the post-it to mark the interesting spot.) At the end of 30 minutes, I told them to stop. They groaned because they wanted more time. I gave them a few more minutes. Then I told them to share their interesting information with two others in the class. Everyone was really involved in looking at the pictures.

After that, I told each student to write down 2 facts they learned -- each one on a separate half sheet of unlined paper. I told them to write big. Since they were getting the information directly from a book, I told them I expected the spelling to be correct (for the most part, it was) (At this time in the year, I wasn't concerned about copying directly.) We grouped the information by categories. Many wrote down more than 2 facts.

I was amazed at how well this worked. Most of the key information on frogs was discovered by the students. I encouraged every child to look at a "rookie reader" and one other book. I had to add very little to the discussion. The kids took real ownership in what they learned. They were excited to explain to others what words like "amphibian" and "hibernate" meant.

Each child worked individually in researching their information. Some information was gathered by more than one child because in many cases the same book was read by more than one child. The "rookie" readers helped assure that all key information was covered. I helped the few children who couldn't read. There was 100% participation. Most children had more than one entry. Every child had at least one entry.

I put all the information together and typed it into a book. I've attached the book to this e-mail. The kids all got a copy. We will be using it as Reader's Theater this week. The kids loved it that I typed it up using their names to show who found each piece of information.. This whole project took one afternoon of class time. (Plus my time typing.) We gave copies to the other second and third grades at our school. Several copies were sent to the library.

The next day, the kids re-explored the books. They especially looked for the post-it notes that their classmates put in. Then we went on to a lesson on verbs. We came up with 30 verbs that concern frogs. (We'll use this to write sentences in a subsequent lesson.)

The kids want to re-explore the books a third day. They told me they were excited because they were authors the third day of school. Talk about motivation! They will be adding some illustrations to the books in the days ahead. Even my "non-readers" are excited. The other kids are helping them read the entries.

Future plans for the unit:

We will be reading some information from enchanted learning.com on frogs, and doing some venn diagrams comparing frogs and toads. I will be reading some of the more difficult books to the kids, specifically highlighting the areas where the post-its were used.

I have many fiction books on frogs. We will be comparing fiction and non-fiction books.

In conclusion, think about using post-its in exploratory sessions. I was amazed at how well it worked. It really helped the kids focus their thinking and become responsible readers. Also, another reason for the success was the fact that I had a wide variety of reading material at different reading levels. The pictures were extremely interesting, even if the words were hard for some to read.

We also did a graph on how many kids have ever touched a frog (4) out of 20.

I teach at a Title 1 school. This was a 2/3 class. I hope this gives you some ideas of a quick way to jump-start your year or your introduction to non-fiction books.

I will, of course, have to do lots more modeling on reading non-fiction books. I wanted an initial "shock and awe" experience for the children to build confidence. It worked!

Joan Matuga

**Below is the work done by Joan's students.

Frogs and
Toads
Information
gathered by
2nd and 3rd
Graders
in Mrs.
Matuga's Class
Fall, 2003



Photo from Encarta

Frogs and Toads

I provided about 30 non-fiction books on frogs and toads for students. I told them to look through 1-2 books and find new or interesting facts about frogs. I asked them to use sticky notes to mark the facts. After about 40 minutes, I asked the students to choose 1-3 facts they had selected and write them on separate sheets of paper. I helped the class organize the information they gathered. This was our introduction to frogs and toads.

Look at what they discovered on their own! When we were sharing what they found interesting, I added some additional information. I'm impressed at their joint efforts in research. Aren't you?

Mrs. Matuga

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Frog and Toad Facts

Robert and Sean

Frogs have been around on Earth for more than 200 million years. They were living here at the time of the dinosaurs.

Juan and Ashley

Frogs and toads are **amphibians**. This means that they can live both in the water and on land.

Daniel and Jeong

Frogs don't need to drink water. They take in water through their skin.

Jazmin

Frogs have wet, shiny, smooth skin. They jump far when they are trying to catch bugs.

Oliver

Frogs don't walk. They jump. Their back legs are very strong. They can jump a long way. Some can jump 20 times farther than their size.

Sean

Frogs have back feet like flippers that help them swim.

Mrs. Matuga

The biggest frog is the Goliath frog. It is about 34 inches long. The smallest frog is only about a half inch long.

Eric

Some frogs act dead to get away from danger. Many animals won't eat dead animals. Sometimes frogs hide from their enemies. They are camouflaged.

Maritza

Most frogs are small but they are fast.

Ashley and Argelia

Many frogs have webbed feet. This helps them swim.

Ashley, Emauni, and Lowden

Frogs come in many colors. Many are brown or dark green. Some are bright green, blue, white, red, or yellow. Some frogs have stripes or dots.

Argelia

Frogs have big eyes. The eyes are on top of their heads. Some even have fake eyes.

Bell and Mei-Lien

Frogs eat slugs, snails, spiders, worms, bugs, and flies. They even eat butterflies and bees.

Mrs. Matuga

Most frogs have long sticky tongues. They stick out their tongues to catch flying insects. They swallow their prey whole.

Michael

Frogs and toads blink when they eat. It helps them swallow their food.

Daniel

Bullfrogs eat rats and snails.

Lowden

Lowden has a big bullfrog that lives near the pond in his back yard. He makes loud noises.

Silvestre

The frog's skin color makes them almost invisible if they sit still. Their enemies can't see them.

Molly

Birds eat frogs. Snakes, foxes, rats, and many other animals do too.

Mrs. Matuga

There are more than 3,600 different types of toads and frogs.

Emauni

Many frogs live in or near ponds. They like to sit on lily pads.

Daniel

Frogs don't have to stay in the water. They spend most of their time on land under bushes and plants. They stay out of the sun.

Jeong

The poison dart frog is bright blue, yellow, and green. Its bright colored skin warns enemies not to try to eat it. Juan The poison from an arrow-poison frog's skin can kill a human being.

Michael

The golden frog has enough poison to kill 100 people.

Jeong

The poisonous red-bellied tree frog has a bright red tummy. No animal want to eat this frog because it would get very sick.

Damion and Robert

Not all frogs make the same sounds. The little tree frog, called a spring peeper, peeps. Other frogs make sounds like someone playing a banjo.

Maritza and Emauni

Most boy frogs make a croaking sound. If the girl frog likes his song, she hops over to meet the boy.

Damion, Emauni and Ashley

Male frogs puff out their throats. It kind of looks like a balloon.

Eric

Frogs and toads "talk" by pulling air from their lungs into a vocal sac. This makes their throats swell up like a balloon.

Juan, Miranda, and Ashley

In Texas, there are frogs that bark like dogs.

Daniel

The male tree frog uses its voice to attract a mate and to keep his rivals away. Females are usually quiet.

Jeong

The casque-headed frog has big buggy eyes and a very unusual nose. It looks like a duck's beak.

Michael and Miranda

Toads are frogs too! Most frogs like to live near wet places. Toads live mostly on dry land.

Emauni, Bell, Eric, and Ashley

Toads have dry, rough, bumpy skin that is often brown or dark green.

Michael

Toads don't move their eye sockets when they swallow food. Frogs do.

Emauni

Frogs can jump farther than toads. The legs of a toad are shorter than the legs of a frog. They move only a few inches at a time.

Bell

Frogs leap or jump to catch an insect and to head to the water.

Jazmin

Most frogs lay eggs in the water.

Maritza

Another name for a frog egg is "frogspawn".

Robert

Several species of tree frogs in the American tropics lay fewer than 40 eggs at a time. They don't lay their eggs in the water. They lay them on leaves or bushes or small trees that hang over streams.

Mrs. Matuga

Some frogs lay only a few eggs at a time. Others lay up to 40,000 eggs in a season, several thousand at a time. The eggs look like little black dots, surrounded by clear jelly-like balls. The female frog usually lays them in a big clump.

Juan and Silvestre

After a while, the eggs hatch into tadpoles. The tadpoles begin to grow. They look like fish at first. They have tails and gills on each side of their bodies.

Maritza

The tadpoles grow and grow. They grow back legs and then front legs. They get lungs.

Molly

The tadpoles grow tongues. The tongues are long and sticky.

Molly, Maritza and Mei-Lien

Not all tadpoles turn into frogs. Hungry fish like to eat tadpoles. The pond is dangerous for tadpoles. The tadpoles swim as fast as they can to get away.

Mei-Lin

Birds like to eat tadpoles. Sometimes frogs eat tadpoles too.

Molly

Tadpoles eat all the time. They need to eat to grow.

Oliver

Frogs live in most parts of the world. When it is cold, they hibernate. Young frogs and females hibernate on land. Males hibernate in the mud at the bottom of a pond. They sleep through the winter.