

Helping Your Students Become Better Nonfiction Readers

Most students in grades four through six have learned to read. They are now beginning the journey that will serve them the rest of their lives - reading to learn! Reading to learn requires new strategies and skills that must be taught.

We all have those children in our classes that love to read horse stories, mysteries, or fantasies. Many of them know how to go about reading a fiction book that they love. We must also teach these children strategies for reading and understanding various genres. They need to be taught skills such as the need to vary their rates, set purposes for reading, draw on background knowledge, make predictions, reread confusing parts, and stop and retell.

The articles in *A Breath Of Fresh Air* lend themselves to specific skill instruction in the important genre of nonfiction reading. These articles can help prepare your students for longer textbook reading and are a good practice for standardized testing. We have provided ideas to help your students read these selections, but our greater goal is that these ideas will serve as a model students will use when reading any type of nonfiction selection.

You may want to begin by discussing pre-reading strategies that students might use. We have provided a sheet for you and your students to use as a basis for this discussion. Encourage students to complete the sheet by checking off the strategies they use before reading each selection. Students should also begin to understand themselves as learners. They need to be aware that some strategies will be more beneficial for them. The open-ended questions provided are helpful in group discussions, teacher/student conferences, parent conferences, and they will give you insight into each child's strengths.

A checklist of strategies to use while reading is provided. This can serve as the basis for discussion and as a reminder to students as they read. Again, the open-ended question is provided to meet a variety of needs. A template for a bookmark is included. This can be copied for students to use while reading each article. This will model the process of note taking, an essential skill children should develop as early as possible, and will help students learn strategies for reading nonfiction material.

Too many students are so happy to complete assigned reading that they close the book without using important strategies that will help them to better understand and remember material. By modeling these strategies, discussing them, and encouraging our students to use them, they will become more effective nonfiction readers and learners.

We, at Maggie's Earth Adventures, would appreciate knowing the strategies you use to help children become more effective readers. By sharing our teaching ideas and working together, we can help all children reach their potential.