

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #8: Reading Nonfiction

Most of the reading our students will be doing as adults will be reading for information, and this takes a different set of skills than reading fiction. However, we mostly give our students practice with fiction. The sequential narrative framework (setting, plot, conflict, etc) are recognizable to most students because of their experience with movies, ghost stories, and fairy tales. Expository text has very different structures and once students understand them, they can improve their comprehension. These comprehension skills must be taught, not just caught.

1. Ask your students to make up a list of characteristics that they notice about nonfiction text. Surround the students with examples of picture books, longer informational books, and textbooks for their search. Help them discover what the "text structure" of nonfiction is. Have groups record their observations on chart paper. Combine group observations to come up with a class list. (Examples: title for every page, subtitles, captions and maps, table of contents, diagrams, footnotes...) From the class list, develop reading tips for nonfiction like "boldfaced print indicates something important."

2. There are some common text structures that writers of nonfiction often use. The Write Source 2000 (pp. 308-319) lists a few: description, main idea/supporting details, comparison/contrast, chronological order, cause and effect, and process. There is an excerpt that represents each kind of text structure and a note-taking strategy for improving learning. Create a bulletin board of these various text structures and have students find examples from their own reading to add to the display.
3. Try picking an every day topic and have students write sentences based on the common text structures. Here are a few that were done on the topic of goose bumps:

Cause and effect

Goose bumps make me shiver. When the temperature drops below 45 degrees, my skin crinkles in to goose bumps.

Comparison/contrast

Some people get goose bumps from fear. Others get goose bumps when they are touched emotionally.



Description

Goose bumps make me shiver. I get little bumps on my skin. They look like sesame seeds.

4. Let your teammates know that your students are analyzing text structures so during content area classes, they can reinforce these skills.
5. Add more nonfiction books to your classroom collection and use expository text more frequently in your daily instruction. A good rule of thumb is to have between 8-15 books per student in your classroom library. 40% of your book collection should be nonfiction especially if you want to motivate boys to read.

Source

Harvey, Stephanie. Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998.

