



Launching young readers!

Reading Rockets

Literacy in the Sciences: Activity No. 14
How to Read Nonfiction Text
By: Reading Rockets

Many kids love to read about science and nature as well as real people, places, and events. Nonfiction books present information in engaging and interesting ways. Find out how you can help your child learn to navigate all the parts of a nonfiction book — from the table of contents to the diagrams, captions, glossary, and index.

Related

[Getting the Most Out of Nonfiction Reading Time](#)

[A Quick Guide to Selecting Great Informational Books for Young Children](#)

[A Fresh Look at Your Home Library](#)

Kids love to read about real people, places, and events. Nonfiction books present real information in engaging and interesting ways. However, most kids read a lot more fiction than nonfiction, so spend some extra time helping your reader learn how to navigate a nonfiction book.

Talk about nonfiction

Begin by explaining that the book you're about to share is nonfiction. That means that the book will give us information that is true. The book will be organized around a specific topic or idea, and we may learn new facts through reading. Some kids even enjoy sorting their home libraries into fiction and nonfiction books. This simple categorization task helps your child understand the difference between fiction and nonfiction.

Look at the parts

Most good nonfiction books will have helpful features that are not a part of most fiction books. These parts include a table of contents, an index, a glossary, photographs and charts with captions, and a list of sources. Share the purpose of the features with your reader.

Table of Contents

Located at the front of a book, the table of contents displays a list of the big ideas

within the book and where to find them.

Index

An index is an alphabetical list of almost everything covered within the book, with page numbers. Readers can use the index to look up specific terms or concepts and go right to the specific information they're looking for.

Glossary

Located at the back of the book, a glossary contains key words that are related to the topic and their definitions. These definitions provide more information about new vocabulary words.

Captions

Captions are usually right under photographs, figures, maps, and charts. Captions give a quick summary of what information is presented in the graphic.

Photos/Charts

A lot of information can be found by "reading" the charts and photos found within nonfiction text. Readers will first need to figure out what information is presented. Then they'll need to discover how to navigate the information. Some charts use clear labels, others require more careful examination. Help your reader learn more about the different ways information can be displayed.

Be the reading boss

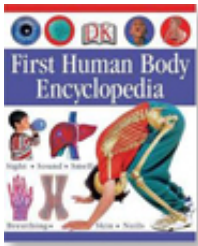
Nonfiction books do not have to be read from cover to cover. Readers can use the table of contents and index to jump right to the information they are most interested in. In that way, they are the "reading boss" of that book! However, if your reader wants to read from cover to cover, encourage him to use the table of contents to understand how the book is organized. "First we will learn about the different types of frogs. Then we'll learn where they can live, what they eat, and how they survive." Passages from the book can be reread as often as necessary until your child understands what is written. You can refer to pictures, charts and tables over and over again as well.

As natural learners, young readers are drawn to books that give information about something or explain something they've always wondered about. With a little help and guidance about reading nonfiction, you can feel good about introducing your child to a new world of information.

Recommended children's books

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0756609976/readingrocket-20>

First Human Body Encyclopedia



By DK Publishing

This beginner's encyclopedia shows what's inside the human body and how things fit and work together — through fascinating facts and close-up photographs. Everything from major body systems to individual cells are explored, using language that is easy for young kids to understand.

Here's a great way to help your child learn about and "read" different parts of a non-fiction book: table of contents, captions, maps, photos, illustrations, glossary, and an index. (Age level: 6 and up)

- **[Purchase book](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0756609976/readingrocket-20)**(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0756609976/readingrocket-20>)



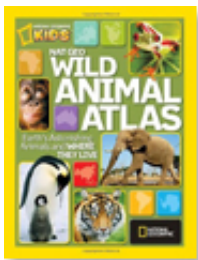
(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0439877555/readingrocket-20>)

Frogs

By Nic Bishop

Stunning color photographs of frogs as well interesting and quirky facts show how these beautiful, creatures survive in the wild. The photos vividly illustrate the amazing diversity of these creatures, from tiny poison dart frogs to mammoth bullfrogs. A glossary and index are included. Browse many more beautiful science and nature books by **[award-winning photographer Bishop](http://www.amazon.com/Nic-Bishop)**(<http://www.amazon.com/Nic-Bishop>).

- **[Purchase book](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0439877555/readingrocket-20)**(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0439877555/readingrocket-20>)

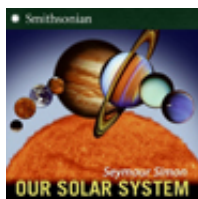


(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1426306997/readingrocket-20>)

Nat Geo Wild Animal Atlas: Earth's Astonishing Animals and Where They Live
By National Geographic Kids

In this child-friendly atlas, beautiful animal photos combine with colorful easy-to-read maps to teach young kids about geography through the wild creatures that live in different regions around the world. Thematic spreads present facts about habitats, endangered species, and more. A great example to introduce your child to the many elements of a nonfiction book: table of contents, captions, maps, photos, illustrations, chart & graphs, and an index. See also [**National Geographic Little Kids First Big Book of Animals**](#)(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1426307047/readingrocket-20>). (Age level: 5 and up)

- [**Purchase book**](#)(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1426306997/readingrocket-20>)



(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0061140082/readingrocket-20>)

Our Solar System
By Seymour Simon

Go on a fascinating tour of the sun, the eight planets, and their moons, plus asteroids, comets, and meteoroids. This beginner's guide to our solar system is filled with facts, engaging text, diagrams and charts, maps, and remarkable photographs. Find many more excellent [**science and nature books by Simon**](#)(<http://www.amazon.com/Seymoure-Simon>). (Age level: 6-9)

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(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1580891209/readingrocket-20>)

Teeth
By Sneed Collard

This large-size picture book combines friendly text with clear, full-color illustrations to

tell amazing facts about animal parts and how they work. Watercolor illustrations and graphics range from a huge close-up of a hippo's mouth to a picture of the hollow fangs of a venomous snake. A bibliography of books and websites as well as a generous glossary are included at the end. Your child might also like the companion book, [Wings](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1570916128/readingrocket-20) (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1570916128/readingrocket-20>). (Age level: 6-8)

- [Purchase book](#) (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1580891209/readingrocket-20>)
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Reading Rockets (2011)

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Comments

I love an article that boosts the profile of children's non fiction books! Where I live, in Australia, children's non fiction books are generally allocated much less shelf space in book stores, and are eligible for fewer book awards. Yet I believe these books are SO important in improving children's literacy skills and general knowledge through their presentation of relevant, real-life topics. So good articles like yours are appreciated!

Julie Murphy (children's

author) <http://members.optusnet.com.au/~julieamurphy/> (<http://members.optusnet>

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on January 9, 2012 - 6:32pm

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It is imperative that young students learn to read, comprehend, and respond to informative texts so they can be prepared to read and interpret more challenging texts in their future. The Common Core Standard is filled with helpful standards regarding informational texts . Classroom libraries should be filled with leveled and interesting informative texts, and teachers must learn how to present them to students so that they become a "wish" to read. Boys, in particular, have more motivation to read from informative texts. They are all about factual information! Struggling readers love the actual photographs to talk about and "preview" the vocabulary before they read the text with more success. When I taught, I made sure I had a plethora of informative texts around the topics I was teaching at the time. I had an area filled with science books - butterflies if we were studying butterflies, and social studies books about the cultures of Japan, China, Ghana, India...Think about historical fiction and global reads for a moment...Authors have to research the informative texts before they write the novel. Food for thought...

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on January 10, 2012 - 7:28am

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Reading Rockets is a national multimedia project that offers a wealth of research-based reading strategies, lessons, and activities designed to help young children learn how to read and read better. Our reading resources assist parents, teachers, and other educators in helping struggling readers build fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

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"You may have tangible wealth untold. Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold. Richer than I you can never be — I had a mother who read to me." — Strickland Gillilan