



Guiding Readers Through Non-Fiction

Effective Strategies for Small-Group Instruction

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INTRODUCTION

The times we live in influence our skills of reading. During the previous century, reading was a pleasurable pastime of the upper class of society or a part of the academic world, available to only a small segment of the population. In today's world, reading has maintained the aspect of pleasure, but access to reading has broadened to a wider audience. Reading continues to be a key feature in the academic world, but it is also an essential tool for everyone. It is now integral to our ability to function as a citizen of our society. The ability to make a livelihood or to manage a household often requires the ability to read. Indeed, the biggest change to reading in the past hundred years has been its functionality.

Reading is a part of daily life. It would be difficult to go through our regular routines without reading. With the move towards functionality of reading, there has been a shift in the popularity of genres of reading. Fiction has been replaced by non-fiction as our primary source of reading material. Forms of print that were scarce a hundred years ago saturate our world today. News magazines/papers, cookbooks, manuals, journals, directions or instructions, and texts are commonplace today. The Internet is a continuous source for information to read on our screens. We are living in the information age and reading is an important part of obtaining that information.

Our schools are reflections of society and, as the focus of reading has shifted, so has the nature of reading methodologies in our schools evolved. Traditionally, non-fiction was assumed to be a part of content-based curricula such as science and social studies. It was also assumed that fiction was the main genre for

developing reading skills. Non-fiction played a small part in the language arts program. Today, however, non-fiction material is an integral part of most curricula.

Teachers are aware that different skills are required for different forms of reading. The skills we use to read vary, depending on the purpose or intent of the reading. Those required for non-fiction are not necessarily the ones we use for fiction, and vice versa. The processes a student applies to a textbook are not the same as those used to engage in a novel. Non-fiction brings with it a different format and structure, which require other existing knowledge. As educators, it is our job to have students become as comfortable with, and knowledgeable about, non-fiction skills as they are with the processes they use for fiction. Our intention is to provide information and resources that will assist teachers in the job of teaching reading and providing students with the necessary skills for working with non-fiction material.

Reading non-fiction can be taught in a variety of ways, but one of the most effective teaching methodologies is small-group instruction. It allows teachers the opportunities to work more closely with students and assess their individual needs. Teachers are able to provide immediate feedback to the students and adapt material to fit the needs of each student. Of course, small-group instruction can have many different forms and there are many excellent practices for working with small groups. We have borrowed elements of the guided reading methodology to conduct our small-group instruction to help students learn about the nature of non-fiction and the key elements that go with non-fiction.

In this book, we hope to provide teachers with the information necessary for applying some of the practices of guided reading to their small-group instruction. We examine materials, structures, routines, goals and outcomes, assessment, and management. We created articles and essays as models of instruction that can be reproduced for classroom use. This book is intended as a resource to help teachers establish new practices or supplement existing ones with regards to small-group instruction. The materials are ready to use for grades four to seven students who are faced with increasing expectations to use non-fiction. The principles behind the practices discussed in the book can be adapted easily to fit the needs of students of other grades. We hope the material is as useful to other teachers as it has been to us.