Using non-fiction texts

Why use non-fiction texts?

Young children are increasingly interested in reading non-fiction books. These books are constructed around the relationships between facts. Children can follow their interests by reading about important issues, places, people and ideas, which help to build their general knowledge. Reading and writing a range of rich and varied text types increases a child's repertoire of reading strategies.

Learning to read – reading to learn

The AlphaWorld non-fiction texts are carefully scaffolded so that children who are *learning to read* are also *reading to learn*. Non-fiction texts carefully build children's knowledge of:
- how to read specialised vocabulary
- ways to read simple sentence structures which slowly increase in complexity
- different ways that non-fiction texts are organised to make meaning.

The features of non-fiction genres

Non-fiction texts introduce the reader to many different genres. Some non-fiction genres provide instructions, some report information, some recount ideas and others provide explanations or arguments. Access to a rich variety of genres positively influences children's literacy development.

The text structure in non-fiction texts depends on the information presented. The structure may be compare/contrast, problem/solution or cause/effect. This contrasts to many fiction texts that have a beginning orientation, a problem to be solved and a resolution.

Non-fiction	Fiction
Genres	**Genres**
• Recount	• Recount
• Procedure	• Narrative
• Explanation	
• Report	
• Discussion/argument	
Text structures	**Text structure** (narrative)
• Question/answer	• Beginning/orientation
• Problem/solution	• Problem
• Cause/effect	• Resolution
• Compare/contrast	
Text features	**Text features**
• Specialised vocabulary	• Language of story
• Photographs	• Illustrations or photographs support story
• Headings	
• Diagrams	
• Labels	
• Glossaries	
• Indexes	
• Table of contents	

Headings   Labels   Table of contents   Diagrams and charts   Index

The many different ways of presenting information in non-fiction texts mean a variety of page layouts and grammatical features are used. Authors use phrases, such as *scientists believe*, *in most cases*, *so far as we know*, or *perhaps*. The cohesion, or ways of linking ideas and the ways information is organised and linked for the reader, can be discussed in small or large groups.

Non-fiction books can be used for teacher-read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading.

Developing reading strategies

Children's reading strategies develop as they read non-fiction texts. Strategic readers orchestrate several strategies before, during and after reading. They learn how to access prior knowledge about the topic; predict what the book will be about; read for meaning by integrating information from different sources; and then they may retell the text. Some strategies will fit particular texts more than others and children need a range of strategies to be able to select the best to use with particular books.

> **Before reading**
> - Accessing prior knowledge
> - Predicting what the book will be about
> - KWL

Before reading, model how readers can make links to prior experiences and then pose questions about what the readers want to learn from the book. For example, to access prior knowledge a teaching strategy 'What I <u>kn</u>ow, What I <u>w</u>ant to learn and What I have <u>le</u>arned' or KWL is often used. Alternatively, graphic organisers such as a semantic web can be used to display the children's knowledge about a topic. Another technique can be used to ask children to make predictions about the content of the book and the specialised vocabulary the children can expect to read in the text.

> **During reading**
> - Self-monitoring the integration of information in the text
> - Using meaning information
> - Using sentence structure information
> - Using visual information (including diagrams and other non-fiction features)
> - Fluency

During reading, children will use reading strategies to self-monitor and to integrate information to do with meaning, sentence structure and graphic elements such as diagrams, maps, indexes and charts. They will monitor their fluency so as not to read too slowly or too fast in order to maximise comprehension.

> **After reading**
> - Retelling main ideas and details
> - Comprehension
> - Writing

After reading, strategies for comprehending texts can be developed by careful modelling. When the reader summarises the ideas in a retelling, use a retelling prompt. For example, "Tell me about: 1. the topic, 2. the most important idea and then 3. the supporting details."

Developing writing

The different genres in non-fiction texts are wonderful models for children to use in their writing. Every non-fiction text is based on several choices about how to select and present information for the reader. When children write their own non-fiction texts, they must make decisions about how to organise and present information in interesting ways.