

LITERACY ACROSS THE CONTENT AREAS

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HOW TO FIND GREAT INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Finding the right informational text can seem daunting, but it is possible and can be very rewarding for both you and your students. Sometimes you'll find the right piece with your first internet search; other times it can be a very time-consuming hunt. The key is finding pieces that your students will want to read either because they connect with what you've been doing in class or because they are topically interesting to them. So, here are some tips and resources.

TIPS

- Get to know the **New York Times Learning Network** – written and edited by teachers, an enormous trove of lesson plans based on articles related to timely issues as well as commonly taught novels (be sure to check out their “Text to Text” feature)
- Set Google news alerts for topic-related key words (www.google.com/alerts)

CURRENT EVENTS / ISSUES

- **NYT Learning Network** (M, H) <http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com>
- **Newsela** (E, M, H) <http://www.newsela.com>
- **PBS NewsHour Extra** (M, H) <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra>
- **TweenTribune** (M, H) <http://tweentribune.com>
- **CNN Student News** (M, H) <http://www.cnn.com/studentnews>
- **Time for Kids** (E, M) <http://www.timeforkids.com>
- **Slate** (H) <http://www.slate.com>
- **Kelly Gallagher's AOW** (H) <http://www.kellygallagher.org/article-of-the-week>
- **The Digital Textbook** (H) <http://englishcompanion.com/resources/digital-textbook>

HISTORY, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY and HEALTH

- **Library of Congress** (M, H) <http://www.loc.gov/teachers>
- **CommonLit** (M, H) <http://www.commonlit.org>
- **Facing History** (M, H) <http://www.facinghistory.org>
- **NewseumED** (M, H) <https://newseumed.org/our-edcollections/>
- **PsychologyToday** (M, H) <http://www.psychologytoday.com>
- **ReadWorks** (M) <http://www.readworks.org>
- **ScienceDaily** (M, H) <http://www.sciencedaily.com>
- **ScienceNews for Students** (M, H) <http://www.sciencenewsforstudents.org>
- **Business Week** (M, H) <http://www.businessweek.com>
- **TeensHealth** (M, H) <http://teenshealth.org/teen>
- **Wired** (H) <http://www.wired.com>
- **Wonderopolis** (M) <http://www.wonderopolis.com>

SPORTS and ENTERTAINMENT

- **NPR music/entertainment** (M, H) <http://www.npr.org/series/100920965/music-articles/>
- **Sports Illustrated for Kids** (M, H) <http://www.sikids.com>

PREPARING AN INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Finding a great informational text is just the first step. Your students may not be prepared to read it. Support their success with the text by scaffolding the reading process and anticipating stumbling blocks.

STEP 1: Don't overload your students

Challenge: Length – Though we do not want to shy away from readings of challenging length, many informational texts are too long and/or go beyond your instructional goals.

Strategy: Use excerpts -- While we want to expose our students to rigorous texts, that doesn't mean that they always have to read the entire text. Try to keep essential features intact, but exclude material that does not serve your instructional purposes.

The research began, Dr. Anderson said, with the hypothesis that neuropeptides, which are a kind of hormone in the brain, had a role in controlling aggression.

To find out which neuropeptides were important, the team tested different lines, of genetically modified fruit flies. All lines had been engineered so that at a certain temperature, around 80 degrees, a chemical change would make specific neurons fire. In each line the

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Deleted: The painstaking process of discovery, recounted step by step in the paper, gives a glimpse of modern brain research and the lengths to which scientists must go if they want to get down to the level of how neurons control behavior.

"They did a huge amount of experiments," said [Ulrike Heberlein at the Janelia Farm](#)

In the above example, we cut part of the fruit flies article that discussed other experiments regarding fruit flies. Removing it doesn't undermine students' comprehension of the key ideas.

STEP 2: Identify key vocabulary (not too many!)

STEP 3: Create pre-reading activities that front-load both key vocabulary and concepts

See vocabulary handout for examples of types of activities. Choose those that best suit your instructional goals, available time, and students' literacy needs.

STEP 4: Create discussion questions that lead students to notice and articulate key concepts and textual features

Incorporate these into a sidebar alongside the text so that you can use them to guide your students' reading of the text.

STEP 5: Create PARCC-style multiple-choice questions to check for understanding

These should address vocabulary in context, key ideas and details, integration of knowledge and ideas, and craft and structure. You don't always have to do this, and you can use it as an informal assessment if you like. But it will help if students are used to seeing these types of questions. Students can also make up these questions (in teams, for example).

STEP 6: Create follow-up writing and discussion activities that ask students to articulate key ideas and use textual evidence

These post-reading writing and discussion questions should ask students to demonstrate their comprehension of key ideas from the informational text using textual evidence. While some of these questions can address just the informational text itself, others should put the informational text in dialogue with another text (a literary text or another informational text).