Kylene Beers & Robert E. Probst

Reading Nonfiction

Notice & Note
Stances, Signposts, and Strategies

Heinemann
Portsmouth, NH

Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

The authors and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

Excerpt from *World History*, Student Edition. Copyright © 2006 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Reprinted with permission from the publisher, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

Abstract from "Americans' Attitudes Toward the Affordable Care Act: Would Better Public Understanding Increase or Decrease Favorability?" by Wendy Gross, Tobias H. Stark, Jon Krosnick, Josh Pasek, Gaurav Sood, Trevor Tompson, Jennifer Agiesta, and Dennis Junius. Copyright © 2012. Reprinted with permission from Jon Krosnick, Stanford University.

"Vampires Prey on Panama" by Chris Kraul from *Los Angeles Times* (May 18, 2005). Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

"The Dung Beetle as a Weapon Against Global Warming" by Jennifer S. Holland from *National Geographic Magazine* (September 6, 2013). Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

"Garana's Story: A Day in the Life of a Young Afghan Refugee" by Kent Page from *National Geographic Explorer* (September 1, 2002). Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

See page 301 for image credits.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress.
ISBN: 978-0-325-05080-5

Editor: Debra Doorack
Production Editor: Patty Adams
Cover and Interior Designs: Lisa Fowler
Typesetter: Gina Poirier Design
Manufacturing: Steve Bernier

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
19 18 17 16 15 EBM 1 2 3 4 5

Contents

Introduction

We Begin Again

The title for this introduction includes the word *again* as a nod to the title of the introduction in *Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading* (Beers and Probst 2013), which is simply "We Begin." At one point we wanted to title this introduction "We Continue," but that suggested that we would have to write a third book, and it would have to begin, "We End." Beginning a book with "We End" didn't sound like a good idea for a plethora of reasons.

So, we began *again*. Beginning again was hard, perhaps even harder than beginning the first book. The challenge wasn't only that of writing another book, though that certainly was challenging. It was also the problem of telling a second story in a way that would seem as new as the first. It required us to challenge ourselves as writers and you as readers.

And we do want this book to challenge you. We want you to pause to consider new ideas, mull over comments we make, and mark passages you want to reread and discuss with colleagues. We want you excited to start online conversations, discard what you know isn't true for you, make better what you see you can revise for your students, or adopt intact what seems immediately applicable. This book was ours as we wrote it, but now that it's finished, it's yours. Your reading is what will make it meaningful.

For those of you wondering, "What third book?" our plan as of this writing is to follow this book on reading nonfiction with a book about helping reluctant readers. If, however, we become reluctant *writers*, that might change. Perhaps we'll write a pamphlet.

This book was ours as we wrote it, but now that it's finished, it's yours. Your reading is what will make it meaningful.

You

And because it's your reading that counts, you should know that we had you in mind while we were writing this book. We saw you in classrooms, standing before twenty or thirty or sometimes forty students (and that's only one class). We saw you arriving early, staying late, listening intently to students, laughing with them, guiding them, urging them, steering them, and always teaching them.

We saw you nod as states promised that these new Common Core State Standards are the standards we've been waiting for, only to be told within a year, that, well, we're not actually going to use these standards but are going to adopt our own, only to discover that these new standards look a lot like the CCSS. We watched you face new assessments, endure new evaluations, and accept new policies that demanded your salary be tied to how individual children performed on a test. We watched you teach through salary freezes, increased class sizes, decreased time for professional development, and endless onslaughts of negative public opinion (coming often from politicians who seem to know very little about the public schools). Through it all, you kept doing what matters most: teaching kids. Every day. Like postal workers who deliver the mail no matter the weather, you delivered instruction even when facing a blizzard of new challenges.

Through it all, you kept doing what matters most: teaching kids. Every day. Like postal workers who deliver the mail no matter the weather, you delivered instruction even when facing a blizzard of new challenges.

Your Students

Not only did we have you in mind while writing this, but we had your students in mind, too: diverse, quirky, funny, solemn, noisy, quiet; monolingual, bilingual, trilingual; selfie-snapping, snapchat-chatting, text-messaging kids. This is the generation that has declared that email is "too slow" (and we had just figured out how to add attachments), that Facebook is for old people (and suddenly we aren't quite as proud of our Facebook pages), and that the one-second video is "just about the right length."

By 2016, every student in school will have been born in the 21st century. They will have grown up with the world at their fingertips, almost literally. The ubiquitous smart phone, with its countless apps and the Web's search engines, put, if not everything, then at least information *about* almost everything in their pockets.

There are the kids who make headlines for all the wrong reasons, and as we were writing, we were thinking of them too. What have we not done? What else should we be doing? Those kids who hurt others, who bully some to suicide, who strike out with knives and guns, were kids who sat in someone's classroom. They answered questions (or did not); they turned in homework (or did not). They walked our nation's schoolhouse hallways, and nobody noticed that something was amiss?

Those kids make the headlines, while far bigger groups of children and teens go about their lives making a difference. They stand up for those who are put down. They join teams, not gangs. They show up for car washes and school math/sports/band/drama/art/debate/FFA competitions.

This is also the generation that cares deeply about the environment, has logged more volunteer hours in universities than any other generation, has started gay-straight alliances on their school campuses, and has used the Internet to let people know about child labor issues, child poverty, and the plight of child immigrants. These are the kids who start antibullying campaigns in their schools, who raise money to dig wells for clean drinking water in Africa, who bring to our awareness horrific conditions of children who are forced to work for the cocoa bean industry along the Ivory Coast, who cut their hair in solidarity with their friends in chemotherapy, who believe in stamping out injustice and intolerance.

These kids you teach hate conformity and simultaneously work hard to always fit in. Like zebras moving across the Serengeti, they run as a herd, changing directions seemingly as one group, and yet, when they pause and you look closely, you see that each one has stripes that make it unique from the next. These kids you teach desperately need outstanding teachers and simultaneously need, desperately, not to admit this to anyone.

These kids you teach desperately need outstanding teachers and simultaneously need, desperately, not to admit this to anyone.

We watch kids from all walks of life enter your schools, some ready to work in your classroom, some already working in the world outside. Some leave to attend afternoon arts classes or sports events or participate in school clubs; others leave to rush home to watch siblings, sitting behind locked doors waiting for a parent to arrive home from job number two or three.

And some simply wait. They wait for a better tomorrow; they wait to discover how something they are learning in school will help them escape the street they live on. They wait for someone to notice it's winter and they have no coat; it's summer and they have no lunch; it's the start of school and they have no one to take them to the store for school supplies. They wait for a teacher to show them why knowing more will make them hunger less.

And Nonfiction

Writing this book also meant thinking about what nonfiction is, about how we would explain that to children and teens, about how we read nonfiction differently than we read fiction. Writing this book has meant reading a vast amount of nonfiction about things we had

never considered. So, if any of you want to talk about the role of the dung beetle in curbing global warming problems, we are here for you! It meant reading about one topic from various perspectives. It meant thinking about what it means to read history texts, science texts, political texts, technical texts, math texts, autobiographies, biographies, human interest stories, essays, op-eds, how-to books, and anything else that falls into the very large category called nonfiction.

So, with those three characters in mind (you, your students, and nonfiction), we set about telling our story—a true one, mind you—about the teaching of nonfiction.

It meant asking you how you teach with nonfiction, asking kids what they do or don't like about reading nonfiction, and asking ourselves how we as literature teachers feel about this push from the universe to teach more nonfiction. It meant turning to colleagues who know far more about books than we ever will (that's you, in particular, Teri Lesesne).

So, with those three characters in mind (you, your students, and nonfiction), we set about telling our story—a true one, mind you—about the teaching of nonfiction.

What You Will Find in This Book

At first, this was going to be a book only about nonfiction signposts. We began thinking about them while writing *Notice and Note*, and we wondered if the signposts we had found in the novels would show up again in nonfiction.

But as we were looking for nonfiction signposts, we realized that this book had to do more than *Notice and Note* did, that it had its own story to tell. This book had to discuss a stance that's required for the attentive, productive reading of nonfiction. It's a mindset that is open and receptive but not gullible. It encourages questioning the text but also questioning one's own assumptions, preconceptions, and possibly misconceptions. This mindset urges the reader both to draw upon what he does know and to acknowledge what he doesn't know. And it asks the reader to make a responsible decision about whether a text had helped him confirm his prior beliefs and thoughts or had enabled him to modify and sharpen them, or perhaps to abandon them and change his mind entirely. How did we finally begin to help students to adopt such a mindset? We taught them to keep what we came to call "Big Questions" in mind as they are reading. Those big questions opened up reflection about nonfiction in a powerful way.

We also discovered that we wanted this book to share strategies we've always found helpful for getting kids into nonfiction texts, helping them through the texts, and then extending their thinking after they've finished reading those texts. We added some new twists to some old strategies and found that with a little tweaking, some strategies that we—and perhaps you—had set aside could become powerful tools in a student's toolbox of strategies.

Stances. Signposts. Strategies. Those three topics form the heart of this book. We begin now with an overview of how we share these tools with students and how you might do the same. Then, as we did in *Notice and Note*, we look at some major issues confronting us all. And we conclude with what we hope are words of encouragement for all of you.

Into Practice

Reading a book is different from putting the ideas it conveys into practice in your classroom. We realize that and thought it important, up front, to share what it might look like when you start to combine stances, and the questions they imply, with signposts and strategies. What does it look like to put the ideas presented here into practice?

Stances. Signposts. Strategies. Those three topics form the heart of this book.

To answer that, we want to share with you a bit of a lesson we heard from a teacher. This teacher, burdened by constraints he felt from his district, had set aside what he told us he knew were *best practices* to instead use "*test practices* that I know will show the administration I did all I could to get kids ready for the almighty test." So, his lesson on a topic (any topic will do) basically followed this pattern:

- Show students an interest-building clip on the topic from the web.
- Tell kids what they need to know about the topic. They take notes.
- Have some discussion on the topic.
- Give kids a test on the topic.

Show. Tell. Discuss. Test. Do you notice what's missing? Where's the reading kids do to learn about the topic? When we asked the teacher that question, he pointed out that when he begins his series of lectures about the topic (lectures lasting from one day to several weeks), he often

has short articles from the web up on the whiteboard for all to read. We asked him if that was enough reading to help students become savvy readers of nonfiction. He stared at us for a moment and then responded that "the textbook is worthless, and frankly I don't have time for kids to read in class. And they don't want to read. They don't care about the topics we discuss, so if I gave them something to read, if they did anything it would be just a surface-level reading." We asked if he assigned reading for home. "Are you kidding?" he replied. "They wouldn't do it." Then he asked us, "So, if you were going to try to get kids into reading some nonfiction, how would you do it?"

Combining Stances, Signposts, and Strategies

We appreciated his invitation and began a series of lessons.

Day 1: We taught kids the Big Questions we want them to keep in mind as they read any text and had them practice this with a short text. These are the questions that help create questioning, curious, slightly skeptical stances.

Big Questions are discused in Part II.

Day 2: We taught them one signpost—Extreme or Absolute Language—and pointed out to them that noticing this signpost would help them think about the Big Questions.

Extreme or Absolute Language is discussed on p. 136.

Day 3: We introduced the topic they would be reading about by having kids do Possible Sentences and KWL 2.0. At the end of the lesson, they were asking (literally) when they would get to read the text. The teacher was stunned.

Possible Sentences is found on p. 185 and KWL 2.0 on page 193.

Day 4: Kids read the text (short, one page, single spaced), marking examples of Extreme or Absolute Language. Then they paired up with one other student and discussed what they both noticed. The class was abuzz with kids sharing, comparing, rereading, asking us if something was/was not a signpost (a pretty typical first-time response since kids are conditioned to look for "the right answer"), and more rereading as they kept thinking about why the author used that particular word or phrase.

Day 5: Kids continued their paired discussion, this time talking with each other about how noticing the Extreme or Absolute

Language informed their thinking about the Big Questions. We wrapped up by asking what they thought about this week. The comments ranged from "This was cool. I liked getting to read and figure out stuff" to "I didn't know about extreme, and I heard my brother using it" to "The Big Questions are easy but hard. They make you think differently about the text" to "Can we just do it like regular next week? That's easier."

After Day 5

At the end of the week, we had the chance to debrief with the teacher. He said that after Days 1 and 2, he wasn't too impressed because we had not covered any of the content he needed to get covered. He said that at the end of Day 4 he was surprised at the level of engagement he saw from this class of kids who were mostly disengaged from learning in general and from reading in particular. He said that when a few (well, two) students actually came into class a little before the bell rang (twenty seconds) and asked, "Do we get to use that article again and keep discussing it?" he knew he wanted to give this a try.

He was also impressed, he said, that we didn't have to do all the teaching. He pointed out that while we were busy all the time, moving from group to group, calling kids together for brief reminders, urging them to think more about something by rereading and talking again, we weren't the only ones doing all the talking. He did express reservations about how long it took to get into the text that had the content he needed his students to learn. We pointed out that once kids learn the Big Questions, the signposts, and some strategies, those days turn back to content days.

This is important to us. We can't create independent readers, actually, independent *learners*, if we never give them a chance to work independently and never give them a chance to read.

The teacher saw that firsthand when the following week he decided to repeat our pattern and realized he didn't need to spend Days 1 and 2 teaching the Big Questions or Extreme or Absolute Language. When he later wanted to add a signpost, he was obligated to build back in a day to do so. And when he taught the Fix-Up strategies in Part IV, he did spend about thirty minutes showing kids how to use each one.

The chart that follows offers an idea for how your time might look as you initially share these questions, signposts, and strategies with students. The following chart offers a slower pace.

This is just one way to think about time and sequence. Secondary teachers helping us with this book reported that they introduced the questions in one day, the signposts over four days, and some strategies the next week, so that kids were using everything by Week 3. That accelerated time frame seems smart to us.

THE FIRST 6 WEEKS	
Week 1 Students learn and practice reading with Big Questions in mind.	As you are teaching these, you are using the content your kids need to be reading. So, you are still moving forward with your content.
Weeks 2–6 Students learn one signpost per week. As they learn new signposts, they continue thinking about the others they've already learned.	Kids use the signposts to help them get to the Big Questions. Our most disengaged readers need the signposts to push them into deeper reflection about the text. As kids are learning to be alert for these signposts, you're asking, "How do these help you think about the Big Questions?"
Weeks 4–6 Students learn the three main Fix-Up strategies we use.	Although we present seven strategies in the book, three of them are great for students to use on their own to fix up confusions: Somebody Wanted But So (SWBS), Sketch to Stretch, and Syntax Surgery. Take a look at the ways we introduce them to students, and decide how you want to do it.
Throughout Weeks 2–6 You use the other strategies with students as needed/wanted.	The remaining four strategies should be used throughout this time—and the year—as you see fit.

What You'll Find Online

As you read this text, you will occasionally see QR codes in the margin. These codes take you to some videos that highlight students using the Big Questions, Signposts, or Strategies. We'd like to thank teachers Jeff Williams, Eileen Ours, Angie Rosen, Elizabeth Snevily, and Lauren Maynes who helped considerably and generously shared the smart thinking of their students.

Additionally, online you will also find templates that support the strategies and the teaching texts that support all the lessons. URLs and a QR code for these materials are provided throughout this book.

Accessing the Teaching Texts Found in Appendix B

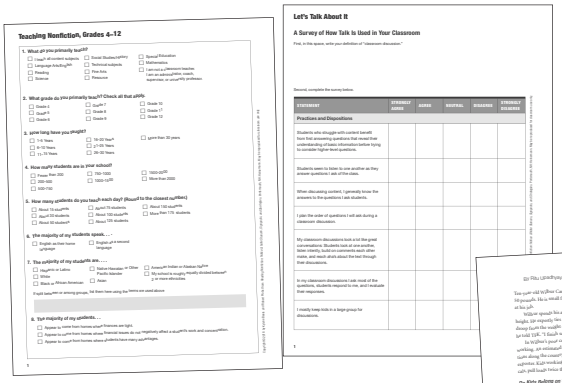
To access these files digitally, you need a Heinemann account.

1. Enter the URL http://hein.pub/readnfres2 or scan the QR code and enter your email address and password.
2. Click "Sign In."

If you need to set up a new account, click "Create a New Account."

3. Enter the key code XXXX and click "Register."

Teaching Materials You'll Find Online

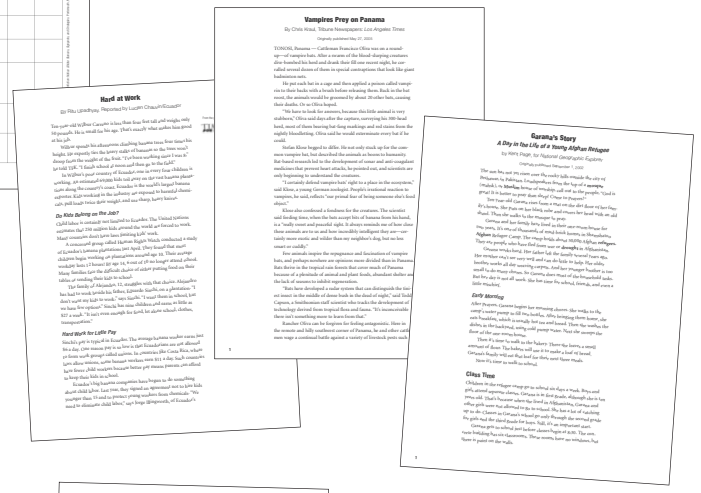


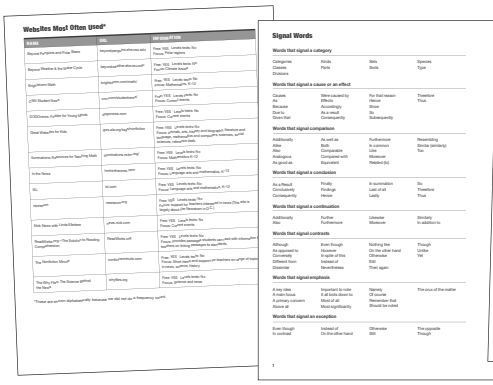
Complete copies of the two surveys that helped inform our work on *Reading Nonfiction.* See Appendix A.

http://hein.pub/readnfres1

Full-size versions of the nonfiction texts used in the lessons we teach. See Appendix B.

http://hein.pub/readnfres2





http://hein.pub/readnfres1

Booklists, word lists, and lesson templates. See Appendix C.

Before You Begin

We invite you now to think with us. In some places we hope you'll nod and agree. In other places, we hope the ideas will cause you to stop and wonder. And when you find places where you disagree, mark them, and when our paths cross—virtually or at a conference—let's do what colleagues do: talk and wonder together. But mostly, we hope you'll find something that will be helpful in your classroom. We believe you make a critical difference not only in the classroom, but in the very lives of your students.

And so, let's begin—again.

Issues to Consider

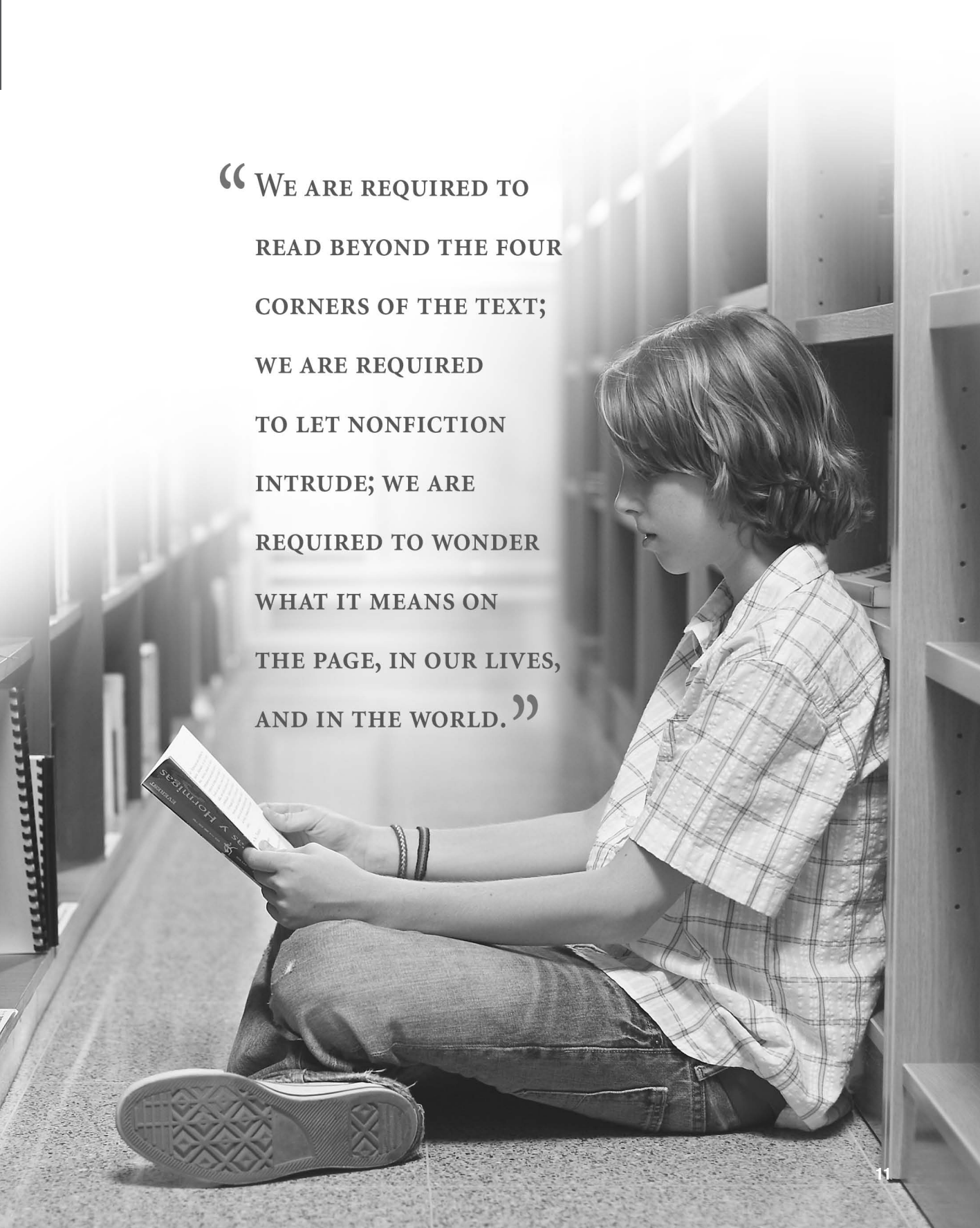
In Part I, we share ten issues that directed our thinking while writing this book. At the end of each section you will find "Talking with Colleagues." We encourage you to use these prompts to guide faculty conversations. But before we begin we want to tell you . . .

A True Short Story of Why We Wrote This Text

Once upon a time, a long time ago, printed texts existed to record critical historical events or explain man's relationship with God. As a result, what was written was expected to be factual and was, therefore, perceived that way. No one wondered if a text was fiction or nonfiction—first, because those terms were not yet used and, second, because if a text was written it was expected to be true.

And that makes sense. Creating a printed text took a long time. When people first started creating printed records, their "high-tech tools" consisted of the chisel and stone, later to be replaced by a clay or wax tablet. Eventually there was a monk in a dank, candlelit room with a scroll and a quill. Although writing on a scroll was certainly faster than chipping into a clay tablet, there still was no delete key. As a result, writing was laborious. If that monk made a mistake, then, well, actually we aren't sure what happened to those error-prone scribes of long ago. What we do know, however, is that those early writing efforts were not intended to create entertaining texts. The entertainment waited until evening, around the fire, provided by storytellers. If anything was written, it was to record. To inform. To educate. To illuminate. No flying carpets, trips to Hogwarts, or escapes through a magical wardrobe.

But, to paraphrase Bob Dylan, the times were changing. In China, then in Korea, and eventually in Germany, people were figuring out faster ways to produce written texts. The Chinese were early inventors of a moveable-type printing press, around 1040. Koreans had developed their own system by the early 1200s. And in 1450, a German, Johannes Gutenberg, invented a printing press with moveable type that allowed for the rapid (relatively speaking) reproduction of printed documents, making assembly-line book production possible for the first time. It seems logical that as printing became less time-consuming it could be used for less weighty tomes than those devoted to understanding man's (and we mean *man's*) relationship with God.



“We are required to read beyond the four corners of the text; we are required to let nonfiction intrude; we are required to wonder what it means on the page, in our lives, and in the world.”

Defining Nonfiction

The easiest, simplest, most straightforward, if inelegant, definition of *nonfiction* is probably, as the history of the term suggests, "If it isn't a novel, it's nonfiction." After all, the genre's very name, *nonfiction*, seems to admit that we know less about what it *is* than about what it *isn't*, and what it isn't is novels and short stories. But that definition isn't very helpful. It's about as useful as it would be to divide up the entire world of living creatures into human and nonhuman. If we did that, we'd have everything from amoebas to zebras, bacteria to blue whales, lumped together in one huge, unmanageable group.

So we discarded that definition and wondered if we might agree that nonfiction is a group of texts about the real world or real people. This definition is close to the one offered in many dictionaries and is better than simply saying, "Nonfiction means not fake." Ultimately we found it lacking because it emphasized the content of the texts and neglected the obligation imposed by such texts on the reader. Nonfiction isn't merely a group of books; nonfiction makes some demands on readers, and we wanted a definition that considered those demands.

Demands of Reading Nonfiction

At first glance, one might conclude that nonfiction works hard *not* to place demands upon readers. Flashbacks rarely occur; multiple narrators rarely intrude; unreliable narrators are almost never seen (though the deceptive author often rears his head). Steps in a process are often numbered. Signal words—*first*, *by contrast*, *another reason*, *consequently*—help readers determine text structure.

Maps, figures, graphs, headers, timelines, sidebars, photos, and illustrations—all devices meant to make texts "considerate" and support comprehension—appear in many texts of nonfiction. But those supports often create their own problems for some readers. All must be

read in tandem with the prose, sometimes without any explanation in the text telling you when to turn to the diagram, study the map, consider the chart, or look at the sidebar. With any Dorling Kindersley *Eyewitness* book, one could argue that reading no longer proceeds top to bottom, left page to right page, because pages are filled with short paragraphs, eye-catching graphics, and timelines that sprawl across pages. Yes, graphics, labels, sidebars, and fonts of different sizes are all meant to enhance reading and aid comprehension. Text features such as these are important and students should be reminded to attend to them. And for some students, we need to teach them how to read these aids. (See Figure 4.)

Furthermore, often it seems that nonfiction doesn't want the reader to suffer through the thinking required to make an inference. So authors tell us directly: "The Westward expansion benefited the young United States for many reasons . . ." or "Wolves should be

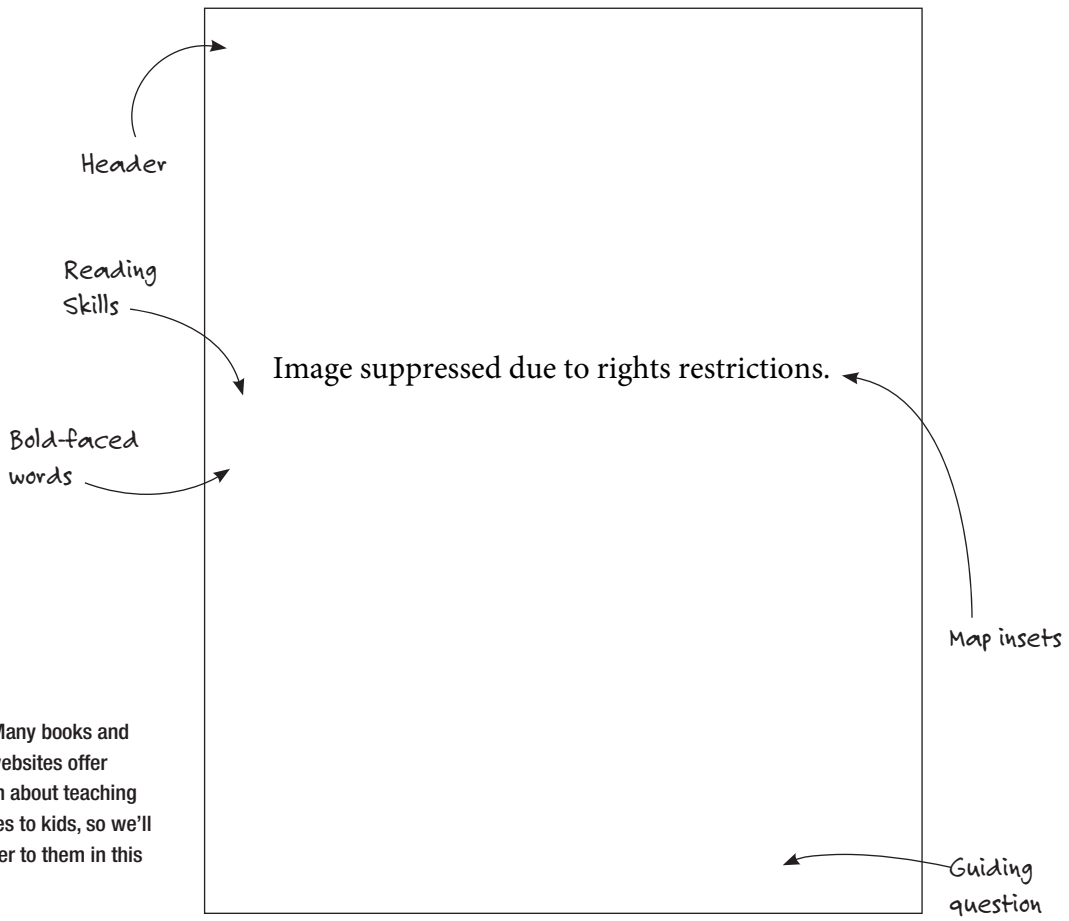


Figure 4 Many books and plenty of websites offer information about teaching text features to kids, so we'll seldom refer to them in this text.

reintroduced into these protected areas." No inferences required here. This direct language appears to ease the demands made upon us as readers, but then you realize that if you are going to read about how the Westward expansion benefited the United States, you should know who is providing those reasons, and before you accept that wolves should become a part of the wildlife in a particular area, you might want to hear what ranchers in that region have to say. You realize (or should) that the direct language might be used to discourage you from making an inference so that you will be less likely to dispute the author's point. That should raise all sorts of questions.

The reality is that the reading of nonfiction places many demands upon the reader. Not only does it require that we be on the lookout for biases, but it often requires more background knowledge than the reading of fiction does. Many times that required knowledge is technical, specific, and complex. The vocabulary can be intimidating, the syntax can be daunting, and the concepts can be abstract. For example, for those of us who are not physicists (such as your average eleventh grader), consider this sentence from a high school physics textbook: "Although both a simple pendulum and a mass-spring system vibrate with simple harmonic motion, calculating the period and frequency of each requires a separate equation" (*Holt Physics*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston 2002). Right.

Reading nonfiction, in many ways, requires an effort not required in the reading of fiction. We must question the text, question the author, question our own understanding of the topic, and accept the possibility that our views will change as a result of the reading we're doing. All those demands mean that the *reader* has great responsibility when reading nonfiction.

The Reader's Responsibility

Our job as readers of nonfiction is to enter into a text recognizing that the author is not offering *the* truth, but *one* vision of the truth. It is the reader's responsibility to resist the lure of the seemingly authoritative—or highly persuasive—text that the author wants us to accept without questioning. We must be alert to times when the author has purposefully—or not—made a statement we should challenge. And it is the reader's responsibility to question his or her own beliefs and assumptions while struggling with determining what's true—or not—in the text.

The Role of Truth

The United American Indians of New England celebrates a "National Day of Mourning" on the Thursday Thanksgiving is celebrated. This day, celebrated since 1970, is meant to bring to the public greater awareness of the misrepresentation of the Native Americans and the colonial experience (http://bit.ly/1GXq3zl).

But truth is an elusive quality. The author's perspective, her consideration of her audience, and sometimes mundane realities such as the amount of space available for the text all shape what a writer says and probably affect the truthfulness of any piece she writes. For example, an article in *National Geographic for Kids* about the first Thanksgiving paints a more realistic view of that gathering than some other children's accounts, but it still omits mention of the devastation of smallpox on the indigenous people (http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/history/first-thanksgiving/). The consideration of audience (young readers) presumably helped shape what the author chose to share.

But is this account *true?* Can it be accurate when many events are glossed over if not completely skipped? Do those omissions call into question the truthfulness of this brief account? Should the omissions be an indication of personal biases? The United American Indians of New England offers a perspective on Thanksgiving rarely (if ever) taught in our classrooms and certainly not presented in the *National Geographic for Kids* article. Does that mean that article is "wrong?" Does that mean it shouldn't be read?

Thinking through issues such as these helped us conclude that the author of nonfiction should, at the very least:

- Have a commitment to honest representation of its subject matter, to logic, and to evidence.
- Avoid carelessly or deceitfully misrepresenting as actual and true what is invented or false.

But "honest representation" for a second grader might be inadequate for a seventh grader and oversimplified, if not misleading, for a senior in high school.

And the Definition Is . . .

We've come to realize that in spite of all the headers and photographs, all the chapter titles and indexes, in spite of all that we do to make nonfiction look neat and navigable, *there is nothing neat and tidy about nonfiction.*

Nonfiction is the stuff of real life—life with all its contrasts and contradictions, all its tough questions and aha moments, all its half-truths

and little white lies, its moments when we have to say, "Well, let me clarify" or "That was taken out of context" or "What I really meant"—so, of course, there is nothing neat and tidy about it. Our job as readers of nonfiction is to enter into that potentially messy reading as a co-constructor of meaning. We're more likely to take on that role if we have adopted a definition of nonfiction that not only tells us what the author is doing, but reminds us that we, too, have a job. Much of our job in reading nonfiction is to evaluate what the author has done in the text.

Our job as readers of nonfiction is to enter into that potentially messy reading as a co-constructor of meaning.

Understanding all this, we eventually agreed upon a definition:

> Nonfiction is that body of work in which the author purports to tell us about the real world, a real experience, a real person, an idea, or a belief.

Notice—we don't say it is a text about something real. We say the author is purporting to tell us something real.

Is this definition too abstract for a seven-year-old child? Probably (not including *your* seven-year-olds). The seven-year-old needs to be given trustworthy texts and needs to learn to take information from them. But the mnemonic "NF stands for *not fake*" is too simple (too deceptively simple) for the twelve-year-old. Nonetheless, this is the definition that guided our thinking as we came to understand what it means to read nonfiction.

TALKING WITH COLLEAGUES

- You might start a conversation by sharing with others your definition of nonfiction. Discuss with others how nonfiction is defined in your school. Is there consensus? Are you comfortable with your definition? If the definition suggests to students that nonfiction is "true" or "real" or "not fake," how do you reconcile with students all the nonfiction that is not true?
- Next, you might discuss what you want students to understand about nonfiction by the time they leave your school, and make sure *that* understanding is reflected in changes seen across the school years.

- The word *purports* is important in this definition. Identify a few examples of nonfiction that only pretend to tell you about the real world but that, in fact, are deceptive or fraudulent, and discuss these with your colleagues.
- Flip through some of the textbooks—or articles or trade books—used in your school. Talk with others who teach your same content about any examples offered to students that you think are incomplete or grossly oversimplified. Make a plan for addressing those shortcomings.

Challenge and Change

Reading nonfiction, we've come to understand, is some of the most important reading we might do. If we are to read it well, we must develop the habits of mind that let us read with a skeptical eye and an open mind. We must be open to challenge and change.

Look for the Challenges

If you're interested in how we help students with difficult vocabulary, take a look at the signpost called Word Gaps, on pp. 168–179.

At times, the challenges our students face when reading nonfiction will be easily identified problems. Students may not understand how to read a graph. They may encounter difficult vocabulary. They may not have the patience to work through a longer or more complicated text.

But there are other challenges, ones that are more subtle and focus on the information or ideas presented in the text, that we think are more problematic. We don't want students to dismiss a text simply because they disagree with it, nor do we want them to accept a text simply because they do agree with it. If they accept faulty reasoning because the content matches their preconceived notions, they are missing an opportunity to learn. They need to learn to make judgments about what to accept and what to question and perhaps reject.

We find that the nonfiction signposts help students do just this. If you want to jump to those, go to page 112.

So we need to teach them to notice those moments when they grow dubious about what they are being offered, when they grow suspicious that something is not quite right, when the author seems perhaps to be overstating his case or making an unjustifiable claim, and again to pause and consider. Those moments may indicate that they are learning something new, that they are being presented uncomfortable but valid information, or those moments may indicate that they are being offered insubstantial, perhaps fraudulent or inaccurate notions.

If democracy functions best when there is a free and open exchange of thoughts so that the best thinking may rise to the top, habits of mind that lead to insularity are a threat. So the moment when we

find ourselves agreeing most enthusiastically may be the very moment when we most need to pause and consider the possibility that the author's convictions, sustained and strengthened by our own strong beliefs, may not have helped us investigate an issue but may instead have simply made our previously held ideas more rigid and intransigent. Teaching students to read with that skeptic's eye means considering both the author's biases and their own.

Be Open to Change

When ideas challenge us, we might need to change our preconceived notions. Change is, of course, most difficult when it affects strongly held beliefs or important social or political bonds. If a student belongs to a family with strong fundamentalist views, it might be difficult for him to deal with the scientific evidence for evolution. If one has worked his entire life in the oil and gas industry, it may be hard to cope with evidence regarding fossil fuel's effect upon the climate. Some cattleman dismiss flatly evidence that red meat may not be good for your health, and some in the dairy industry struggle with the evidence linking increased consumption of dairy milk to osteoporosis.

If democracy functions best when there is a free and open exchange of thoughts so that the best thinking may rise to the top, habits of mind that lead to insularity are a threat.

Closer to home, some teachers find it hard to give up the teaching of grammar in isolation to improve writing, even though research over the last sixty years has confirmed that such instruction does little or nothing to improve students' writing (see Braddock et al. 1963; Hillocks 1986; and particularly, Chin 2000 for a list of pertinent research studies). Principals read reports about the importance of choice when it comes to creating lifetime readers and make no changes. (See "Reading for Pleasure: A Research Overview" from the National Literacy Trust foundation [Clark and Rumbold 2006] for a thorough review of this topic.) As one principal responded, "That's all well and good, but we don't have the time or the money for that."

Studies have shown us the importance of fine arts in schools, and yet they are cut (see "10 Salient Studies on the Arts in Education"); pediatricians warn of the dangers of eliminating recess, and yet it is eliminated (see the American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement, "The Crucial Role of Recess in School"). We—the two of us—read the

research on the benefits of exercise and wonder if buying a stair master (Kylene) or exercise bike (Bob) counts as "change."

Perhaps we must teach students that changing one's mind isn't bad. Politics labels people who change their minds "flip-floppers," suggesting that once a position is determined there is no good reason for reversing one's thinking. But of course there is. We learn. We learn more. We discover. And thus, unless our goal is to discount what we learn, we must be open to change.

We write more about this important question beginning on page 100.

When we first began asking students to notice if something in the text had caused them to change their thinking about the topic at hand, many of them just stared at us. One fifth grader commented, "I don't really think while reading. I just read it." We continued to ask students, "How has your thinking changed as a result of reading this text?" and slowly we began to hear some interesting answers. After reading an article about child labor issues and Apple, one student reported, "I'm going to have to think about whether or not I want to support Apple by buying their products." After reading about child labor along the Ivory Coast of Africa, one group of middle-schoolers in Georgia started a campaign to change people's minds about eating chocolate from companies dependent on child labor.

We turn to nonfiction when we have questions we need to answer and answers we need to question.

More importantly, these students all told us that thinking about change affected the way they read the articles. "It was like they [the articles] meant more to me because I was thinking about how they were going to change me," LaTonya, a seventh grader in New York City explained.

Beyond the Four Corners of the Text

But it will be hard to accept that nonfiction should challenge us and change us if we accept what the architect of the Common Core State Standards, David Coleman, has said. In the Publishers Criteria for the Common Core State Standards, Coleman and his colleague Pimentel (2012) assert that as students read, they should "focus on what lies within the four corners of the text" (p. 4). They suggest students have a better reading experience when they focus only on what they find on the page. Publishers of textbooks (and other materials for students) have been told to avoid asking students questions that do not require answers from the text (p. 6). We should, we infer, turn first to questions that can be answered solely from the text.

Let us be clear: we have little patience with a curriculum that diminishes the critical importance of intertextual links and all but omits personal connections. Such a curriculum denies the referential nature of words—words refer to something out there in the world—and denies a primary reason for reading nonfiction—to learn something about our world, our place in the world, our understanding of the world. Such a curriculum leaves out the most important person in the education process: the student. And while it might prepare a student to answer questions on a multiple-choice test, we fear it would ignore the very question that makes a text relevant to a reader: "Why does this matter to me?"

We are required to read beyond the four corners; we are required to let nonfiction intrude; we are required to wonder what it means on the page, in our lives, and in the world.

We want to move students beyond what's in the text. We want them thinking carefully about what's beyond the text. We think such reading makes the reading of nonfiction rigorous, relevant, and radical.

FROM KYLENE: In 2015 Bob tweeted (yes, we can identify his tweets by the year in which they appeared), "We turn to nonfiction when we have questions we need to answer and answers we need to question." If this is true, we are required to read beyond the four corners of the text; we are required to let nonfiction intrude; we are required to wonder what it means on the page, in our lives, and in the world.

TALKING WITH COLLEAGUES

- How do you and your colleagues encourage students to think about how a text has changed their understanding or view about a topic?
- Education can be criticized for embracing too many changes. Is this a concern in your school? Why is it that some ideas are quickly adopted while others are ignored?
- Thinking back over all you've read in this section, what challenged your thinking? What changes would you like to put into place as a result of your reading?

The Importance of Stance

Fiction invites us to take one stance. The novel invites us to explore the imagined world the writer has created for us. We enter it willingly, and if we don't enjoy it, we put the novel down, acknowledge we just don't like this author or this genre, and move on. If we do enjoy it, we stay there until the end, maybe so immersed in it that we might describe ourelves as "lost in the book." Nonfiction, on the other hand, should come with a cautionary note that reminds us that getting lost in the text might be dangerous. The reader needs to remember that a work of nonfiction will try to assert something about his world, and he needs to take those assertions with a grain of skepticism. They may be perfectly true, they may be somewhat slanted or biased, or they may be flat-out lies. The slightly skeptical stance implies three questions . . .

Creating the Questioning Stance

We began to experiment with asking students to read with these questions in mind:

- What surprised me?
- What did the author think I already knew?
- What changed, challenged, or confirmed what I already knew?

These questions were easy enough that kids could remember them and yet robust enough that they yielded the closer, more attentive reading we wanted. And before long, we began hearing kids say, "When I was looking at my skateboarding magazine, I was surprised that . . ." or "My brother, he has Down's syndrome, and so I was reading about it and I found this part where I didn't understand, and I just asked myself, 'Well, what did the author think I already knew?' and then I figured out what was the problem and I knew what to do next. It was cool."

Reading with these Big Questions (see Figure 20) in mind encourages a critical, attentive stance and develops habits of mind that—if we can instill them in our students—may help them deal more attentively and intelligently with the nonfiction texts they will encounter throughout their lives. These questions encourage a stance that reminds students that nonfiction is intruding into their lives and their job is to decide if that intrusion is welcome or not.

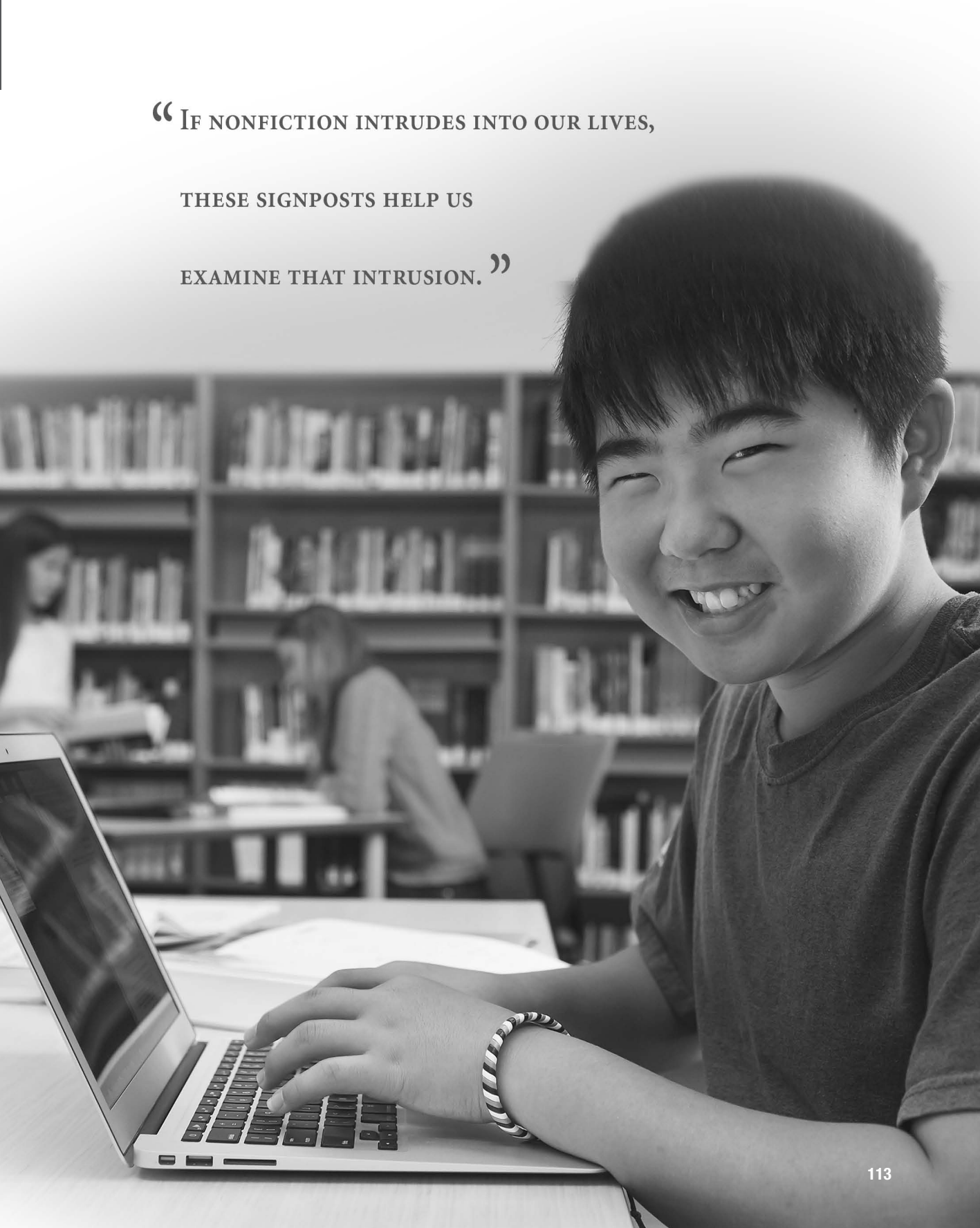
“If nonfiction is going to come knocking on the door of our lives, then once it has intruded, something ought to happen. Something we know should be challenged, changed, or confirmed.”

The Power of Signposts

Two boys who weren't impressed that we were visiting their social studies classroom and didn't much care for the signpost lesson we had just taught, Numbers and Stats, reluctantly agreed to reread a passage and look for the numbers and stats the author used and then to think about why the author used those numbers. We had previously taught them Extreme or Absolute Language, and at this point these two boys had only asked us one question: "Just how many of these signpost things are there?" They were relieved when we said, "Only five."

Slowly, they began, marking very little as they reread. When they turned to talk with one another, supposedly sharing what they had noticed and what thinking had followed, we saw a lot of conversation between the two, but regrettably didn't have audio recorders set up with small groups. Perhaps they were discussing Friday night's football game. When we pulled kids back together for a full-group report on how reading with Numbers and Stats in mind affected their thinking about the text, these two boys eventually spoke up.

BOY 1: So, like, I didn't see all those numbers everyone has been pointing out. I didn't know we could mark word numbers. But I saw an Extreme or Absolute. It was right here when it said "set me free." [Lots of interruptions as students pointed out that wasn't a Numbers and Stats or that they weren't supposed to find Extreme or Absolute language examples. Some decided to argue that "set me free" is not an example of Extreme or Absolute Language. Finally, we got students quiet again and D'Sean continued.] Like I was saying, this was Extreme or Absolute to me, and it made me start thinking


“If nonfiction intrudes into our lives,
these signposts help us
examine that intrusion.”

Initially, D'Sean said he didn't notice any numbers (p. 112).The numbers were written as words (*two* not 2), so he didn't recognize those as numbers. That pointed out to us that when we teach Numbers and Stats we need to specifically explain that 2 and two or one-half and ½ are all numbers.

Look at all the questions these boys have asked. This is the type of thinking we want students doing when they read nonfiction.

about how poor people seem to always have to do harder work. This was, well, if you just read the words, then it's about working in mills, but it's really more than that because it was like she was a slave. Man, she was a slave. That's really extreme. Because this was after slavery times and this was still happening, and with kids. At first I didn't even see it, but when I read it again, I don't know, it just jumped out at me as Extreme or Absolute.

BOY 2: Yeah. D'Sean marked something I didn't even mark with the "set me free," and at first I didn't see it. But when we started talking about it I could see it was extreme, and then it was like we, well, now we want to know why there weren't rules about going to school and why did the poor people have to do this, and didn't anyone care that this was just kids? I mean, just little kids. We want to know if this was done because they were disrespecting kids, or is this to just keep some people poor, you know because you can't go to school.

The Role of Strategies

From Kylene: Very early in my teaching career I told my class of seventh graders to complete the worksheet I had distributed. It was a worksheet in which students were to read short passages and then underline the causes and draw arrows to the effects. After I distributed the worksheet, and after all the students had inhaled the fumes from the mimeographed paper, I gave them these instructions: "Read the following passages, and for each one, underline the cause and draw an arrow to the effect."

Quite proud of my orderly management of the day thus far (though the kids were probably orderly because they were all stoned from the fumes), I returned to my desk to do something critically important, I'm sure. Most likely I was rewriting the names in my grade book because a new student had arrived and that meant my neatly alphabetized list of names was going to be out of order. But then that new student came and stood at my desk.

"I don't get it," the student said.

"Don't get what?" I asked.

"This. How to do this," he said waving the worksheet in his hand.

I nodded and patiently explained again what I had just said. "Well, you read the passages, then underline the causes, and draw arrows to the effects."

The student stood there and patiently said again, "Yeah, but how do I do this?"

I began to grow confused. "Do what?"

"This," he stated not quite as patiently as the first time.

"This what?" I asked, also not staying as patient as I had been. "You just read the passage and then underline the cause and draw an arrow to the effect." I said it slower and louder. Surely that would help.

The student seemed more puzzled and looked around the room. He finally said, "How does you telling me to underline the cause and draw an arrow to the effect help me do that unless I already know how to do that? How do I know unless I already know?"

I thought about that for a long moment. Then I asked him to return to his desk. His statement haunted me a long time (and I wrote about that student in *When Kids Can't Read:What Teachers Can Do*). I eventually concluded that I had confused two critically important words: *instructions* and *instruction*. I was great at providing instructions; I still had a lot to learn about offering instruction. *Instructions* are giving directions, orders, steps to follow. *Instruction* is providing insight for how to do something.

So in an effort to give kids *less* so they will use those tools *more*, we share only seven strategies in this section.

That year, I kept asking myself, "How can I show kids what a cause is if they can't already identify that cause? How do I show them how to make a comparison if they can't already do that?" *How do you know if you don't already know?* Eventually, I came to understand that the first thing I had to do was make kids' thinking—that invisible process of thinking—visible. I had to be able to listen to their reasoning, their understanding, their tentative attempts to reason through things if I hoped to be able to identify where they needed help. And that meant I needed to show them some strategies.

And Now You Begin

Louise Rosenblatt once told us that she had considered the title *The Journey Itself* for the book that ultimately became *Literature as Exploration* (1935/1995). She liked the metaphor of reading as a journey. It suggested that you were on an adventure, not knowing what you'd see on the roadside but alert and watchful so that you wouldn't miss it, not sure whom you'd meet along the way but willing to travel in their company for a while, not certain where you'd land at the end of the trip but curious to discover what this new place might be like.

But she was afraid that the book, if titled *The Journey Itself*, might be shelved by some careless librarian or bookstore clerk in the travel section, in between *To Kill a Mockingbird on $5 a Day* and *Frommer's Guide to Heart of Darkness*, so she settled for *Literature as Exploration*. That captured at least some of the essence of a journey.

The idea that reading was an *exploration* suggested that the reader would encounter something new, something at least potentially surprising and novel, something unknown. It was not like the drive to school in the morning. You know that route; you could drive it with your eyes closed—you may actually have done that on a Monday morning after a long hard weekend reading student papers. How many times have you arrived at school and realized that you hadn't seen many of the landmarks that you know lie along the route? You drove automatically, mechanically, barely aware of the traffic and the turns. Any surprises were likely to be unpleasant and annoying. The drive to work isn't a journey, an adventure—it's just a routine obligation, one you barely pay attention to.

Reading a book, whether it's fiction or nonfiction, should be more than just routine, though sadly, much of it does become just that. We may read through part of the morning paper simply because it's what we always do over our breakfast cereal. Unless some article strikes a particularly responsive chord, very little of what we read may sink in.

Louise Rosenblatt, a friend of John Dewey's, was a force in literacy education. Her first book, published in 1935, remains a touchstone text today. Her last book was published in 2005 when she was 101, several months before her death. She was a tireless advocate for reading education, always asserting that the success of our democracy was dependent upon all being literate to the highest levels.

And the novel we pick up just to pass time on the airplane may have little more effect upon us.

But both the novel and the morning paper have the potential for being more and doing more. Novels (and poems, plays, and movies) have the potential for refining our insights into human experience and deepening our sympathies. Newspapers (and magazine articles, scientific papers, editorials, and all the other texts that fall into the vast realm of nonfiction) have the potential for sharpening our understanding of the world around us, providing us with new information, new insights, or new ways of reasoning. Reading, whether in the realm of fiction or that of nonfiction, should be something of an adventure. It should be an exploration, a journey that offers some possibility for reflection, rethinking, and discovery. The journey through fiction and the journey through nonfiction are, however, slightly different. As we explained in previous pages, we found that difference to be one of invitation and intrusion:

Reading Nonfiction **has been our effort to help students take control over their own journeys through nonfiction so that, guided by reason and evidence, they get safely to a destination for which they can take responsibility.**

> Fiction invites us into the imaginary world the author has created; nonfiction intrudes into our world, and purports to tell us something about it.

That is not to say that fiction doesn't tell us something about our world. Certainly it does. But it does so by inviting us into that invented world and asking us to observe, listen, notice what's happening, pay attention to the patterns we see, weigh what we find there against the understandings and insights that we have brought to the text from our other readings and from our lives beyond books, and draw our own inferences. *Notice and Note* was our effort to help students journey through those imaginary worlds paying attention to them in ways that would generate deeper thought and good conversation.

Nonfiction operates in a somewhat less subtle, somewhat more direct fashion. Of course, nonfiction can be subtle and indirect, but it seldom denies that it is attempting to tell us about what *is*, not about what the author has imagined or invented. Nonfiction *purports to tell us something about our world.* Nonfiction acknowledges that it has the goal of shaping our understanding. It does that in countless different

ways, from the simplicity of a to-do list, to the complexity of a report on a scientific experiment, but it almost always makes some assertion about the way things are.

And we have to decide what to make of that assertion. We have to decide whether to accept it or reject it, or—more likely—we have to figure out how to integrate it into our thinking so that our vision of the world is sharper, clearer, better than it was before we read. In a sense, nonfiction takes us to a destination, and that destination matters.

With nonfiction . . . it isn't the journey itself that matters quite so much as where you end up.

So, perhaps if Rosenblatt had been thinking more of nonfiction and less of fiction and poetry when she was struggling to find the title for her book, she might have had other reasons for rejecting *The Journey Itself*. With nonfiction, although obviously we would prefer to enjoy, rather than endure, the trip from the opening to the concluding paragraph, it isn't the journey itself that matters quite so much as where you end up.

Reading Nonfiction has been our effort to help students take control over their own journeys through nonfiction so that, guided by reason and evidence, they get safely to a destination for which they can take responsibility. And so now we give it to you. It's your book now. It's you who will transform these ink blots on the page into meaningful practices for your students. You will take these ideas, make them yours, and in doing so will make them better.

We watch you remind students that what they cannot do, they simply cannot do *yet*.

We don't expect the journey to be easy. We know that it's a tough time to be a teacher, with policies shifting almost daily and the focus more often on the test than on the child. We watch you stand boldly against the practices you know are not best, not even good, and we watch you remind students that what they cannot do, they simply cannot do *yet*. We have always said the best hope for many children is a great teacher.

We so look forward to watching your journey with your kids and these ideas. It's your time to begin.

Let's Talk About It Survey

A Survey of How Talk Is Used in Your Classroom

First, in this space, write your definition of "classroom discussion."

Second, complete the survey below.

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Practices and Dispositions					
Students who struggle with content benefit from first answering questions that reveal their understanding of basic information before trying to consider higher-level questions.					
Students seem to listen to one another as they answer questions I ask of the class.					
When discussing content, I generally know the answers to the questions I ask students.					
I plan the order of questions I will ask during a classroom discussion.					
My classroom discussions look a lot like great conversations: Students look at one another, listen intently, build on comments each other make, and reach aha's about the text through their discussions.					
In my classroom discussions I ask most of the questions, students respond to me, and I evaluate their responses.					
I mostly keep kids in a large group for discussions.					

continues

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
I believe that student-led discussions about a confusing part of a text can improve understanding of the text.					
I believe I am responsible for telling students the accurate information that they must learn regarding the content I teach.					
I set the topic for discussion in my classroom.					
I believe my students mostly approach classroom discussions as a way to show that they read and understood the material rather than as a tool for improving understanding.					
I would like to have more classroom discussions in my classroom that are student-led.					
I remind students that talk is a powerful way to clarify confusions or expand thinking about a topic.					
I do not have time in my classroom to do much more than ask questions about what students have read.					

Next Steps

1. Do your answers reveal any patterns or dispositions you would like to change?

2. What's your plan for changing your practices in those areas?

3. Discuss your survey results with other colleagues. Are there patterns of response in your school that suggest areas of growth for the entire faculty?