In grades K-2, students LOVE to read non-fiction. They love to hear it. They love to write it. They love to discuss it. Then, sometimes around grade 4, this love for reading non-fiction can diminish and disappear. The following are observations and ideas for keeping the wonder and joy in reading non-fiction.

**WHAT CHANGES?**

When you look at K-2 non-fiction books, the books are LOADED with interesting pictures. The headings are very helpful, the main ideas are clear, and there are only a few things on every page upon which to concentrate. This changes dramatically starting around third grade books. There is a lot more text, the pictures are fewer, there are more text features, and the books are not always well set-up as far as clarity of main idea and purpose. Helping our children manage this is essential. In high school, 80% of their reading will be in non-fiction. How can you help?

**WHEN YOUR CHILD IS SELECTING A BOOK**

- **Encourage** your child to pick out non-fiction books. It is perfectly all right if they are easy!!!! In fact, when I want to learn something quickly about a topic, I will often go to the children’s section.
- **Let them decide what interests them.**
- **Remember WHY they chose the book.** This book is something of interest to them. Your child will be reading this book, gleaning the main ideas, and will pull out the things that interest them. They are reading this for fun and not to answer a quiz. As long as they can tell you something about what they are reading, it is a good fit book. Reading this way will expand their interests, will give them some knowledge on a subject area, will help them decide if they want to explore it further, will teach them new words, will expose them to photographs about things they cannot see in person, and will expose them to charts, maps, graphs and other text features. It is FUN and FASCINATING... so keep it light and fun.
- **Encourage a variety of non-fiction books:**
  - Fact books where they have lots of captions and short paragraphs about each one.
  - Biographies, history, science, how-to
  - Look for books with clear chapter titles, clear headings, and ideally with at least 3-5 paragraphs about each section.
  - Read the first part to make sure the writer is clear in what they are presenting. Unfortunately, there are a lot of poorly written non-fiction children’s books. It is helpful to choose non-fiction books with your child, ESPECIALLY if this is a difficult genre for them.
- **Before reading a section, look at the chapter title, all the headings, the photographs and text features, and read all the bold-faced words.** This perusal is CRITICAL and needs to become a HABIT for students. Previewing the section in this way CATAPULTS their understanding of what they are about to read. It gets them “set-up” to learn.
- **READ TOGETHER.** Savor the books together. Be fascinated ... together. Show them how to “sip” a book when you are reading non-fiction (see previous letter).
  - When you come to a good, rich paragraph, talk about what it said.
    - What was important or interesting?
    - Why was it important or interesting enough to merit being printed?
    - Is it life changing? Does it change the way we think about or act in the world?
    - Who else would like to know this?
- Extend their interest through a video, visit to a museum, or chatting with a neighbor.
When Your Child Has Assigned Reading

- **Learn what units of study are coming up in class.**
  - Front load your child’s understanding by watching age appropriate documentaries or reading biographies on this topic BEFORE they talk about it in class and WHILE they are talking about it in class. That way, your child will have something to contribute and share.

- **What is the purpose of the assigned reading?** Teachers usually have one of two purposes for assigning reading. Knowing the purpose will help you know how deeply your child should understand the information.
  - As an introduction to content that will be discussed fully in class. In this case, help them begin to be familiar with the main ideas and some vocabulary. As a parent helper:
    - Set aside a quiet time and place.
    - Tell them to read 1-2 pages (or whatever their personal stamina is for non-fiction) and that afterwards, you will ask them what were 3 important thing and some key words.
    - Follow-up. Make sure they are understanding the KEY ideas and not just interesting details.
    - Ask them what they found interesting and what they might share in class tomorrow.
  - As a review and to deepen knowledge. In this case, the topic will have been discussed deeply in class. Your child should be very familiar with the importance of the topic, key vocabulary, the main ideas, and some of the significant details. In this case, help them be automatic with their understanding.
    - Set aside a quiet time and place.
    - Tell them to read 1-2 pages maximum (or whatever their personal stamina is for non-fiction) and that afterwards, you will ask them to tell you everything you can remember about that part of the text. You will ask them about the pictures and the graphs as well.
    - Follow-up.
      - Make a star for each main idea they remember. Write down what they say and have them watch how you star it!!! This helps them understand the difference between the main idea and all the other things.
      - Make a check mark for each detail that goes under the main idea. AGAIN, write down what they say so they SEE how the detail is PART of the main idea.
      - Finally, put a tally mark for anything they remember that was in the text, that was just interesting, but was not part of a main idea.
      - For all of the above, you don’t have to SAY anything. Just writing down what they say and starring and checking it is extremely validating!!! Some students like to keep these notes. AND, you are modeling note-taking a well!
  - Knowing the main idea is KEY. When they understand the main idea of a paragraph, they remember more details. **If you can only focus on one thing, ask them about the main idea(s).**

When Reading Non-Fiction Is Difficult

- **Spend extra time in book selection.** The quality of non-fiction books is extremely varied.
  - Look at the Lexile level of a book that interests your child. This can sometimes be found on the book jacket or you can go to lexile.com and look it up. Lexile level is a measure of the difficulty of the words and the complexity of the text. Basically, as you go up the grade levels, the words get longer and the sentences get longer. You can find this by going to Lexile.com. Try to find a book that is within their Lexile level if they are going to be reading independently. If it is above their Lexile level and they really want to read it, read it together for a while to make sure they can manage it.
- Look at our Library webpage. You can search for books in our library and match the topic as well as the Lexile level. Mrs. D’Eliso also has lists of books that other students in their grade have found interesting.

- **Before reading a section, look at the chapter title, all the headings, the photographs and text features, and read all the bold-faced words.** This perusal is CRITICAL and needs to become a HABIT for students. Previewing the section in this way CATAPULTS their understanding of what they are about to read. It gets them “set-up” to learn.

- **Read together!** It is MORE THAN FINE for you to read important texts to them. Just read a paragraph and talk about it. I have never seen a student who did not become interested in a good topic when they understood what was important and interesting.

- **Front load with videos and easy picture books.**

- **Help them select books from the library that are more story-like.** Child friendly, well-written biographies and historical accounts lend themselves nicely to this. By using story-like non-fiction texts, your child can use their skills in understanding character, setting, cause, effect, problem and solution when reading non-fiction. (Students LOVE a good biography. Truly, people are AMAZING and INSPIRING!)

- **Talk a lot about the topic.**

- **Be encouraging and positive.** Reading non-fiction deeply can be difficult for many students.