

Strategies for Teaching With Non-Fiction Informational Texts

The following packet contains suggested activities for teaching with Non-fiction Informational Texts. Some activities may need to be adapted to meet the needs of your students. They can be used when teaching with a variety of texts such as books, stories, articles, short texts, etc.

The strategies in this packet correlate to one or more of the following Common Core instructional shifts:

Shifts in ELA/ Literacy		
Shift 1	PK-5, Balancing Informational & Literary Texts	Students read a true balance of informational and literary texts. Elementary school classrooms are, therefore, places where students access the world – science, social studies, the arts and literature – through text. At least 50% of what students read is informational.
Shift 4	Text-based Answers	Students have rich and rigorous conversations which are dependent on a common text. Teachers insist that classroom experiences stay deeply connected to the text on the page and that students develop habits for making evidentiary arguments both in conversation, as well as in writing to assess comprehension of a text.
Shift 5	Writing from Sources	Writing needs to emphasize use of evidence to inform or make an argument rather than the personal narrative and other forms of decontextualized prompts. While the narrative still has an important role, students develop skills through written arguments that respond to the ideas, events, facts, and arguments presented in the texts they read.
Shift 6	Academic Vocabulary	Students constantly build the vocabulary they need to access grade level complex texts. By focusing strategically on comprehension of pivotal and commonly found words (such as “discourse,” “generation,” “theory,” and “principled”) and less on esoteric literary terms (such as “onomatopoeia” or “homonym”), teachers constantly build students’ ability to access more complex texts across the content areas.

Table of Contents


Post-It Prioritizing	2
Evidence Based Questioning.....	2
Text Coding	2
Write Around (Silent Conversation)	3
3-2-1	3
Split Screen Notes.....	3-4
Visualizing Vocabulary.....	4
1-2-3-4.....	4
Poster Session.....	4
What? So What? Now What?	5
Wordsplash	5
Read, Cover, Remember, Retell (RCRR)	6
Key Words	6
Appendix	
Text Codes Reproducible.....	8
Split Screen Notes Reproducible.....	9-10
Wordsplash Reproducible.....	11
References	12

1. **Post-It Prioritizing:** Students should place a post-it note on each section or paragraph of text and write down the important information for each section. Depending on the length of the text, you can assign each group one section to read and write about. Have students share their work/ post-its with their group members. Then, hang up chart paper around the room with the various paragraph/section headings on each paper. Have the students walk around the room and add the important information they found for each section on the corresponding paper. Once all of the responses have been recorded/hung up, read the information on each paper aloud to the class. You could have the students walk around the room and read the information for themselves instead of reading it aloud.

2. **Evidence Based Questioning:** Create 3-5 Evidence Based Questions for the piece of text and have students locate the answers in the texts by either highlighting the words, putting a post-it note next to the answer, or by simply pointing to the answer in the text.

3. **Text Coding:** Have students use one, some, or all of the text codes listed below when reading a text. When they come across information below that relates to the code, they write the symbol next to the text it refers to. You could also have them use hand signals that you create for the codes if they are unable to write on the text or if you are reading the text aloud. After the students have coded their texts, they can compare and discuss their codes with a partner and then with the class. (See Appendix page 8 for reproducible.)

Text Codes

- √ I know that.
- X Something that contradicts what I know
- ?? Question, need clarification, or unsure
- !! New, surprising, exciting, fun
- ☆ Important, key, or vital
-  I can visualize that.
- ∞ I made a connection to something in my life, the world, or something I have read.
- ZZZ This is boring. I'm falling asleep.

4. **Write Around (Silent Conversation):** After reading the text, give students 2–3 minutes to respond to the text on a piece of paper. Then, have students pass their response to another group member who will then either respond to the text again or respond to what was written by another group member. After students have had a chance to respond to each of the group member’s papers, have them discuss their papers and responses.

5. **3–2–1:** After reading the text, have students list/discuss 3 things they learned, 2 things they found interesting, and 1 question they had. Another version is to have students list/discuss 3 things that were interesting, 2 things they’d like to know more about, and 1 big idea from the text.

6. **Split Screen Notes:** The teacher will read the text aloud to the class twice. The first time, the students will draw a picture or diagram or take notes about the text on their Split Screen Organizer. The left side of the organizer is for taking notes and the right side is for drawings (hence the term “split screen.”) The second time the teacher reads the text aloud, the students will continue to add drawings or notes to their organizer. Next, have the students meet in groups to discuss their drawings and notes. (See Appendix pages 9 and 10 for reproducible.)

Split Screen Notes Organizer – Example 1

Topic	Notes	Drawings
Newton’s 1 st Law of Motion		
Newton’s 2 nd Law of Motion		
Newton’s 3 rd Law of Motion		

Split Screen Notes Organizer – Example 2

Newton's 1 st Law of Motion	
Notes	Drawings

7. **Visualizing Vocabulary:** While reading the text, have students identify vocabulary words they feel are important to the text. For each word, have the students draw three or four pictures that represent the word and write a sentence explaining why the pictures are good examples of the word.
8. **1-2-3-4:** After reading the text, have students write a reflection of the reading using the 1-2-3-4 technique. Each section or paragraph of their response corresponds with the topics below. Then have students share their responses in pairs, groups, or with the whole class.

1-2-3-4

1. Big idea
 2. Important details
 3. Personal connections
 4. Questions you have
9. **Poster Session:** After reading the text, have the students choose a concept or idea from the text to be visualized on a poster. Students can use words or pictures to describe the concept. Then, hang up the posters around the room and allow the students walk around the room to view and discuss the posters.

10. **What? So What? Now What?:** After reading the text, have students write/share reflections based on the following:

What? – What did you learn?

So what? – Reflect upon the learning. How is it relevant or why is it important?

Now what? – Consider ways to extend the learning to other situations.

11. **Wordsplash:** Typically for Wordsplash, the teacher would read the text and choose key words or concepts to randomly write in a box. The students would then write a short paragraph using the words and predict how the words and concepts work together. Then, the students would read the text and compare and contrast their paragraphs with the text they read. Instead of using the activity for the students to make predictions, have the students choose key words or concepts (no more than 10) after they have read the text and write them randomly in a box. Then have the students exchange their papers with another student and write a paragraph using the words the other student chose. This activity is a great assessment tool to check for understanding of the text and allows the students to be the creators of the assessment. (See Appendix page 11 for reproducible.)

Wordsplash Example

Telescopes	Constellations
solar system	stars
planet	comet
	Orbit

Our solar system is made up of the planets, and they orbit the sun. The sun is a star. There are other stars that we can see, and they make up the constellations. We can see the _____ constellations and the planets with the use of powerful telescopes. We can also see comets with telescopes. _____


12. **Read, Cover, Remember, Retell (RCRR):** In partners, have students silently read a small portion of the text provided, about the size of his/her hand. Then have the students turn to their partner, cover up the text they read, and try to remember and retell what they just read. If they leave out any important information, their partner can fill in any missing details. They can then switch roles for the next section of text. When they have finished reading the entire text, they can write a summary of the entire reading and share them with the class.

13. **Key Words:** As students read the text, have them write down words they feel are most important from the text. They can write them on sticky notes or small sheets of paper so you can collect them. Make a list of the students' words. Discuss the value of each word and have the students explain why they choice the word to include in the list. Finally, have the students use the words to write a summary of the text.

Appendix

Name: _____

Text Codes

- √ I know that.
- X Something that contradicts what I know
- ?? Question, need clarification, or unsure
- !! New, surprising, exciting, fun
- ☆ Important, key, or vital
-  I can visualize that.
- ∞ I made a connection to something in my life, the world, or something I have read.

Name: _____

Split Screen Notes Organizer I

Topic	Notes	Drawings

Name: _____

Split Screen Notes Organizer 2

Notes	Drawings

References

Cattaraugus–Allegany BOCES Learning Resources Team

Cattaraugus–Allegany BOCES Professional Development Team

Strong, Richard W. *Teaching What Matters.*

Silver, Harvey F., Strong, Richard W., Perini, Matthew J., *Tools for Promoting Active, In-Depth Learning.*

