ENHANCING STUDENTS’ CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NONFICTION THROUGH THE UTILIZATION OF NONFICTION AUTHORS AND NONFICITON TEXT

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A Thesis Submitted to the University of North Carolina Wilmington in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education

Department of Elementary, Middle Level and Literacy Education

University of North Carolina Wilmington

2013

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This qualitative research study documented the significance of introducing elementary aged students to nonfiction text through the use of nonfiction author studies. Methods of data analysis included audio and video recorded conversations, teacher and researcher field notes, pre and post assessments and student artifacts. Themes that emerged from the data included students’ increased interest, response and understanding of nonfiction text as well as their understanding and utilization of nonfiction text features. Through the duration of the study, students increased in their reading, writing and visual representations of nonfiction and eventually viewed themselves as the authors and illustrators of nonfiction.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Suzy Boyko’s third grade class.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to the members of my committee - Dr. Schlichting, Dr. Fox and Dr. Walker, for their continued support and encouragement throughout the process of making this research and this paper a reality. I would also like to thank my co-researcher, Suzy Boyko for opening up her classroom and her students and for her guidance and mentorship throughout my graduate school experience.

Thank you to my ‘unofficial mentor and committee member’ for your love and support. You know who you are.

Thank you, to all others – friends and love ones for their encouragement
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INTRODUCTION

Overview

Children have a natural tendency to inquire and continually search for answers to their questions about the world around them. “Why is there a North and South Pole, but not an East and West Pole?” “Why can you not feed dogs human food? Or What will happen if I feed my dog chocolate?” “What are black holes?” “How can birds fly?” As an elementary teacher, I see the value and importance in supporting students’ quests for knowledge and understanding about their world with rich and engaging nonfiction literature. However, I have consistently found through classroom observations that nonfiction literature is often conspicuously absent, underrepresented or out of date in such a way that makes the genre uninteresting, uninviting and even inaccurate.

Vicki Cobb (n.d.), prolific author of children’s nonfiction literature, shares:

“...if you give kids boring, uninteresting books to read, then you’re going to kill two birds with one stone; the desire to learn and the desire to read. But there is an alternative that is overlooked and underutilized by most classroom teachers and that is what I would call... children’s nonfiction literature.” (Haley, N & Cobb, V., n.d).

While visiting multiple classrooms as both an undergraduate and graduate pre-service teacher, I grew concerned about students’ interest level in nonfiction literature and their abilities to read, interact with and comprehend this genre. Although students were exposed to books through classroom read-alouds and independent reading activities, I noticed a lack of teacher-led reading experiences with nonfiction literature. Current research has clearly and enthusiastically documented the critical need for students to possess the skills necessary to understand,
comprehend and use nonfiction and informational text in authentic and relevant ways (CCSS, 2010; Duke, 2000; Kletzien & Dreher, 2004; Moss, 2004). This emphasis is understandable given that the most frequent form of reading material that adults and students encounter and use in their daily lives is either nonfiction/informational text (Duke, 2007; Graves, 1994; Smith, 2000). When we complete daily tasks that include checking the newspaper for the weather forecast, consulting a cookbook, searching the internet for directions, or checking the dictionary for the spelling/definition of a word (to name a few), we are engaging in ‘referencing’ tasks that focus on interacting with primarily informational text (Duke 2007; Smith 2000).

Furthermore, as technology continues to advance so rapidly, adults as well as children are spending more time using the internet, with approximately 96% of websites containing primarily expository text (Duke, 2002). Considering our frequent engagement with nonfiction as young children and through adulthood, there is an apparent urgency for early exposure and interaction with this genre.

Statement of the Problem

Nonfiction literature should be considered an essential component in all classroom libraries for multiple reasons. Many students show a preference for nonfiction literature due to its realism paired with their natural desire and curiosity to learn about the world (Camp, 2000; Caswell & Duke 1998; Duke 2007; Stead & Hoyt, 2011). While still, for a large population of students, this genre may spark their motivation to start reading (Caswell & Duke, 1998). Despite the benefits of incorporating this genre into the classroom, nonfiction literature has been documented as being scarce or absent from many classroom libraries and instead a saturation of fiction literature is present (Coleman, 2007; Duke, 2000; Caswell & Duke, 1998; Kambrelis,
Duke (2000) discovered through extensive classroom observations that students are exposed to this genre of text for only 3.6 minutes per day on average. Children’s nonfiction author Penny Coleman also discusses the underrepresentation of nonfiction/informational text in classrooms based on her visits to speak to various groups of elementary school children. She recounts, “When I visit schools, or give speeches to, I am inevitably told that I am the first nonfiction author to visit or speak.” (Coleman, 2007).

Through my previous field work, teaching and ongoing informal observations in elementary school classrooms, I have encountered similar situations and experiences described by Penny Coleman and Nell Duke. I have observed on numerous occasions as students returned from the library with a plethora of nonfiction books to explore and read for pleasure. Many students would also bring in nonfiction from home to read and share in the classroom. It became apparent that students’ love of nonfiction literature compels them to seek out this genre on their own, which further escalates the need to address the imbalance of it in the classroom.

Based on these observations and experiences in classrooms, I wondered if students had opportunities to interact with this genre and its unique elements and text structures at other instructional times throughout the day. Many of my classroom observations proved this to be false. I found myself inquiring as to how this apparent ‘gap’ that exists in many classrooms might impact students’ literacy development as they mature into informed, 21st century citizens.

It has been suggested that teachers often overlook nonfiction literature as an integral part of their classroom libraries due to their own lack of familiarity and comfort with the genre and the content it contains (Donovan & Smoklin 2011, Yopp & Yopp, 2012). Many teachers often find nonfiction difficult to read aloud and therefore, choose to focus primarily on narrative text.
(Donovan & Smoklin, 2011). Yopp and Yopp (2012) conducted a study in which they asked teachers in preschool through third grade who were in attendance at a workshop to indicate the titles of books they had recently read aloud to their students. The teachers’ responses revealed that a surprising percentage of teacher-selected read-alouds in kindergarten through third grade are 77% fiction. Only approximately 8% of all read-alouds are nonfiction. Many teachers often develop the misconception that reading nonfiction is too difficult for their students and therefore gravitate towards the more ‘safe’ and predictable genre of fiction (Coleman, 2007). Other times, teachers are not aware of the vast amount of quality children’s nonfiction literature that is available to enhance and support their content (Palmer & Stewart, 2003). Although teachers’ comfort level with utilizing nonfiction literature in their classrooms may not be as strong compared to fiction, it is still vital for students to possess the skills to read, comprehend and use informational text regularly.

As a direct result of this genre’s underrepresentation in the classroom, I observed that students also struggled with the ability to demonstrate their understanding of nonfiction elements and text features in their own writing. Considering students’ abundant exposure to fiction literature, their struggle with writing nonfiction is understandable. Due to the reciprocal nature of reading and writing (Kamberelis, 1998), it has been suggested that students will choose to write the kinds of text that they are primarily exposed to (Duke & Bennet Armstead, 2003; Kamberelis, 1998). Coincidentally, research has also revealed that children are typically most comfortable with reading and writing narrative text (Graves, 1994; Jenkins, 1999). If teachers are exposing their students primarily to narrative text then it is likely that this is the only style of writing students will be comfortable with. This is a concern as an elementary teacher knowing that students will be interacting with this genre so frequently in their real world experiences. It
also proves an even greater demand to increase the representation of nonfiction text in the classroom. As a result of these findings, I developed a greater sense of urgency for exploring the ways in which utilizing and incorporating nonfiction literature into the classroom can directly influence students’ ability to read, write, respond and reflect on this genre.

Many students who are reading on grade level in third grade suddenly drop in their reading scores when they enter fourth grade; what they call the “fourth grade slump” (Chall, Jacobs & Baldwin, 1990; Eger, 2010). This discrepancy in scores can often be correlated to the sudden shift from an exposure to primarily narrative text in lower grade classrooms, to informational text in fourth grade and above (Chall, Jacobs & Baldwin 1990; Eger 2010). These claims clearly show that students are most comfortable with reading and comprehending fictional stories and that students require more exposure to nonfiction text prior to fourth grade. From these reported findings, it appears that when students are initially introduced to informational text, they experience somewhat of a “sensory overload” and struggle to read and comprehend the material. Additionally, the results suggest that fourth grade literacy achievement is negatively affected due to difficulties with comprehension when reading nonfiction text due to their insufficient exposure in prior grades. As an elementary teacher, my concerns intensified for students who were struggling with reading comprehension, potentially due to the lack of nonfiction text in their classroom. My inquiries emerged in the areas of effectively introducing students to nonfiction text in a way that transitions or eases them into the genre and alleviates this feeling of experiencing a ‘sensory overload’.

According to Calkins, Montgomery, Santman and Falk (1998), 50-85% of reading passages on standardized tests are already categorized as primarily informational text. However, in light of revisions in the state and national standards, including the new Common Core State
Standards (CCSS, 2010), a heavier emphasis is now being placed on exposing students in all grade levels to a more balanced representation of fictional and informational text in order to prepare them to be college and career ready (CCSS, 2010). This new mandate requires teachers to incorporate and integrate nonfiction and informational text into various aspects of their curriculum. Given this new emphasis on increasing informational text within the curriculum, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has increased the proportion of this genre throughout all grade levels on standardized assessments (CCSS, 2010). Considering the knowledge that exposure to this genre of text is seldom prior to fourth grade (or when students begin to take standardized tests), it seems evident that many students at this grade level will face difficulty interacting with the large quantity of passages that contain informational text on tests such as these. This claim additionally supports the need for earlier exposure to nonfiction literature and informational text.

Carol Jenkins (2006) conducted a study on a sample of 41 fifth graders and challenged them to name their favorite author. Of the 41 students, all but one named an author of fiction. The remaining student was able to recall the title of her favorite nonfiction book, but was unsuccessful in naming the author who wrote it. From these results, Jenkins deduced that some students fail to make the connection that nonfiction literature is written by authors in the same way that fiction is (Jenkins, 2006). After reading the findings from this research study, I felt committed to examining the impact of nonfiction authors’ craft in elementary classrooms.

From my personal observations and what I discovered conducting a literature review on the subject, I felt the need to further research the importance of providing students with regular exposure to nonfiction text in the classroom to familiarize them with the elements and features that it possesses. I hope to continue to contemplate how significantly this imbalance will impact
children’s literacy development and ultimately, his/her successful transition into literate 21st
century adults. I would like to use the related research findings along with my prior classroom
experiences as a crucial opportunity to explore the ways in which nonfiction authors can
potentially inform students’ critical analysis and interacting with nonfiction text.

Thesis Statement

Previous studies have confirmed the importance of regularly inviting nonfiction literature
into students’ literacy experiences at a young age in order to familiarize them with the unique
features and engaging elements that this genre possesses (Duke, 2000; Duke & Bennet-Armstead, 2003; Moss 2004; Pappas, 2006). When taking our society’s rapidly advancing
technology into consideration, it is evident that informational texts are becoming more prevalent
as they are integrated into our daily lives. The ability for students to read, comprehend and
utilize this genre is now an even more crucial skill that students must develop as they enter
adulthood in the 21st century. Furthermore, considering our nation’s adoption of the Common
Core, students’ interactions with nonfiction literature and information text has become
mandatory through curriculum integration (CCSS 2010).

The research clearly exists to support the integration of nonfiction literature and
information text in the classroom at all grade levels in order to further support and promote
students’ literacy development (Caswell & Duke, 1998; CCSS 2010; Duke, 2000; Duke 2002;
Smith, 2000; Stead & Hoyt, 2011). As a result of this, I began to question the ways in which the
authors of nonfiction literature in the classroom can inform students’ literacy development. This
motive for further exploration has brought me to my primary research question:
How can we enhance students’ understanding and critical analysis of nonfiction text through the utilization of nonfiction authors and nonfiction literature?

Additional sub-questions that I would like to explore throughout the course of the study include:

- How will nonfiction authors and text impact students’ conversations with their classroom teacher and their peers surrounding nonfiction?

- Will engaging in nonfiction author studies and nonfiction text impact students’ feelings about nonfiction and their awareness of nonfiction features and elements?

- How do nonfiction authors and nonfiction text impact students’ abilities to utilize nonfiction text features when they are reading and writing?

- How will nonfiction authors and nonfiction text impact students’ book choices?

Through this research, I hope to enhance my theoretical understanding and pedagogy in the areas related to this topic.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

**Defining the Essential Elements and Criteria of Nonfiction/Informational Text**

Numerous definitions of nonfiction/informational text exist. Some experts would argue that the terms should be defined separately, while others prefer to use them interchangeably. Most, however, would agree that the primary function of nonfiction/informational text is to convey actual information to its readers (Bradley & Donovan, 2010; Kletzien & Dreher 2004; Moss, 2004; Yopp & Yopp, 2012). Duke (2000) adds to this definition by including that informational text also contains definitional material that relates to the natural world or social world, making the reader more knowledgeable on the particular subject. Duke would also
suggest that informational text should be classified as a type of nonfiction (Duke, 2000; Duke & Bennet Armistead, 2003). Along with factual information, informational books typically engage the reader with maps, photographs, captions and labels while organizing the layout of the book with page numbers, an index and a table of contents (Duke, 2000; Pappas, 2006). In comparison, the term nonfiction has been described as literature that also contains a visually engaging component such as photographs or illustrations along with tables, diagrams and maps that have accurately displayed information along with text that is written to hold the reader’s interest (Gill, 2009; Jenkins & White, 2007).

The way I choose to define this genre of literature will heavily influence my study as well as the authors that I select for use in the classroom. With that being said, I have carefully considered the overlap in characteristics and attributes that make themselves present in the definitions of both informational and nonfiction text and have decided use the terms interchangeably throughout my research study.

The Evolution of Nonfiction Literature

Portalupi & Fletcher (2001) recall a trip to the library in which they stumbled upon the obscure and hidden nonfiction section with information books that were described as “Just dry, boring text” (p. 13). After conducting an informal survey of nonfiction children’s literature over the last two decades at the local public library, I found truth in this statement. My observations revealed much of the nonfiction literature written prior to the year 1995 closely resembled textbooks. I immediately noticed how earlier examples of this genre once presented small, dull (if any) photographs/illustrations, bland maps or unclear diagrams, and long paragraphs that somewhat lacked the literary elements necessary to engage and hold students’ interest. Perhaps,
teachers still view nonfiction text in the traditional ‘textbook-like’ way that it was written prior to the year 2000. Many teachers’ experiences with the more traditional style of nonfiction are likely contributing to the scarce or absent collection in their classrooms and are understandably, not seeing this genre’s value or relevance as an instructional tool for their classrooms.

Fortunately for young readers and classroom teachers today, nonfiction literature has evolved in recent years. Nonfiction text has emerged in ways that allow this genre to better capture and hold the attention of young readers (Gill, 2009; Livingston, Kurkjian, Young, Pringle, 2004; Portalupi & Fletcher, 2001). Gill (2009) describes the “explosion” of this genre’s availability for all age groups. The newly transformed genre has been described as almost ‘enchanted’ or a ‘goldmine’ with aesthetically enriching photographs and illustrations paired with clear, coherent, entertaining text and accurate information to enhance comprehension (Gill, 2009; Isaac, 2011; Livingston, Kurkjian, Young, Pringle, 2004).

Jim Murphy, Newbery Award winning nonfiction author who focuses on writing about important historical events, entertains his audience through strong emotions and the personal feelings of his subjects:

I began with a simple mission — to write books that were honest, informative and dramatically involving, and largely focused on the experiences and emotions of those who were actually in these conflicts. In other words, I wanted to avoid doing the sort of histories I grew up reading, what I call “my father’s history”: fact laden, formal texts that talked almost solely about important individuals making important decisions, discussed battles as if they were well-mannered chess matches, and, in effect, said that the
politicians and commanding generals (for our side, of course) did what was best for the country and its soldiers. (Murphy, 2009)

The Unique Genre of Nonfiction

Nonfiction literature may appear unfamiliar to students who are most accustomed to engaging with narrative text that is structured with a beginning, middle and end, characters, conflict/resolution, plot, setting etc. Instead, this genre is often considered unique because the reader does not typically have to follow the traditional, linear sequence of reading from beginning to end as with narrative text. Students often find this structure intriguing as they have the freedom to ‘skip around’ however they choose (Isaacs, 2011). Evidence of this nonlinear text structure can be seen in DK’s Eyewitness series, many of Mary Kay Carson’s books such as The Bat Scientists (2010) or Inside Hurricanes (2010) or in Sneed Collard’s A Whale Biologist at Work (2000). Rather than reading each page in sequence, readers may choose to reference the table of contents or index to quickly locate the information they are seeking or simply explore the illustrations and captions on the pages that appear most engaging to their interests.

Nonfiction text today also contains several pages of ‘back matter’, intended for utilization by adults or older readers as a means for ‘extension’ or further research beyond content presented in the book (Isaacs, 2011).

Identifying the Various Structural Elements of Nonfiction/Informational Text

“Finding the right structure is an organic process, that is, it grows out of the material.” (Coleman 2007)

As with authors of any genre, nonfiction authors intentionally craft their literature for a specific purpose and with a particular audience in mind. The information or topic he/she wishes
to address as well as their target audience will heavily influence the organizational structure that is chosen for a particular text (Kristo & Bamford, 2004). For example, an author of nonfiction may select a descriptive text structure to present general information followed by subtopics of more detailed information or characteristics of a subject which can be seen in Jim Arnosky’s ‘All About’ series such as All About Turkeys (1998), All About Owls (1999), All About Deer (1999), etc. Causal relationships may be best suited in a cause-effect or compare-contrast style as seen in Barbara Kerley’s, One World, One Day (2009) while the simple delivery of factual information might warrant a question-answer format as in Steve Jenkins’ How Many Ways Can You Catch a Fly? (2008) and How To Clean A Hippopotamus (2010). Another common text structure includes a problem-solution framework that describes a problem and offers possible solutions. An example of this can be seen in Ruby Bridges’ Through My Eyes (1999). For students in the upper elementary grades, the sequential or chronological structure may be selected for how-to or step by step books such as Nicola Davies’ One Tiny Turtle (2005) and Jim Arnosky’s Field Trips: Bug Hunting, Animal Tracking, Bird Watching and Shore Walking (2002). For younger children, nonfiction text typically contains large photographs or illustrations accompanied with labels such as Barbara Kerly’s A Little Peace (2007). Other times, fiction and nonfiction are blended into a “Narrative Nonfiction” or hybrid (Coleman, 2007; Isaacs, 2011) structure with a beginning, middle and end ‘storybook’ component such as The Magic School Bus series by Joanna Cole or in a biographical story such as Basketball Belles (2011) by Sue Macy. Understandably, in the case of a ‘blended’, chronological or biographical text, reading from beginning to end would likely be beneficial to ensure comprehension of the literature’s content.

Criteria for Selecting Quality Nonfiction Literature
As with any genre, when teachers are selecting from the vast array of nonfiction literature for use in their classrooms, certain criteria should be considered. First and foremost, a nonfiction text should be chosen based on the accuracy of the sources used to support the content within the book (Jenkins & White, 2007; Kristo & Bamford, 2004; Moss, 2004). With the evolution of more rich and engaging nonfiction literature, this genre now offers nonfiction text written by authors who are either experts in their fields, or they consult experts to ensure their delivery of factual content (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009; Gill, 2009; Isaacs, 2011). Author Dorothy Patent, who shares her expertise on topics related to animals holds a Ph.D in zoology, while Nicola Davies also bases the content for her books around her research observations as a zoologist. Seymour Simon credits his twenty-three years of teaching science to his success as a children’s author of more than 250 books on various science topics (http://www.seymoursimon.com/index.php/about_seymour_simon/faq/). Even Dr. Jane Goodall, well respected researcher and primatologist has written several children’s books to share her numerous years of observation and research with a much younger audience. Other authors such as Steve Jenkins, carefully and extensively research the topic that they have chosen to write and illustrate. On his personal website, Jenkins claims to study numerous images and take pages of notes to accurately describe an animal (Jenkins, n.d.). Mary Kay Carson admits to her readers that she travels widely in order to interview scientists before she begins writing. She tells her readers, “I always learn a lot when I research and write a book. This seems to be especially true about the history books I've written, since that's less my specialty than science” (Project Mayhem, 2011).

Secondly, teachers may choose to focus on the author’s style of writing; more specifically, their ability to stimulate their students’ curiosity and sense of inquiry through
eloquent language and visual information/appearance (Kristo & Bamford, 2004; Jenkins & White, 2007). Penny Coleman says, I spend a great deal of time on diction, finding just the right word to convey the meaning and rhythm.” (Coleman, 2007). Similarly, Seymour Simon instantly engages readers through vivid, descriptive and easy to understand language, as evidenced in his book Tornadoes (Simon, 1999). Simon describes the sounds of a quickly approaching tornado, “...like rushing air or a waterfall, and it turns into a roar as the tornado comes closer.” and illustrates the strength of a tornado as a powerful force that can, “...snap the trunk of a tree like a matchstick.” Young readers are drawn to his use of similes and metaphors to accurately represent his subject or topic.

Additionally, nonfiction literature should capture the reader’s attention with inimitable, interesting information, visually appealing photographs or illustrations, as well as diagrams and/or tables (Gill, 2009; Jenkins & White, 2007). In Steve Jenkins’ Looking Down (1995), he captures the reader’s attention solely with illustrations. Each illustration was carefully crafted and designed to provide the perspective of looking down on cities, towns, rivers, etc. from the view of an airplane. Many of Mary Kay Carson’s books include professional photographs taken by her husband (http://www.marykaycarson.com/About_Me.html). Sandra Markle also gives credit to some photos that her husband/professional photographer took for books such as Slippery, Slimy Baby Frogs (2006) while using professional photos from others to enhance the text on each page in her series on animal predators.

Other attributes to be considered when selecting quality nonfiction literature include the structure and layout of the book and the ease of navigating through the information (Kristo & Bamford, 2004). Jim Arnosky, a favorite children’s author and illustrator consistently includes a clearly labeled table of contents in many of his nonfiction books. In Creep and Flutter: The
Secret World of Insects and Spiders (2012), readers can look at the table of contents to locate a one page description of his/her favorite insect or spider. Arnosky often prints many of the illustrations on large fold-out pages that include additional ‘quick facts’ about the particular insect or spider. The table of contents in this book also displays an icon next to the pages that contain these fold-out illustrations to easily guide young readers to these pages.

The NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children is also a beneficial resource for teachers when considering quality children’s nonfiction literature. The criteria used to award nonfiction titles each year is similar to the criteria explained above - Accuracy, Organization, Design and Style (http://www.ncte.org/awards/orbispictus)

Teacher’s and Children’s Interactions with Nonfiction Text Structures

Researchers have discovered an increased motivation in students who read information books on topics that are of interest to them and how they may serve as a catalyst for some children’s literacy development (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Gill, 2009). However, unlike narrative text, Moss (2004) suggests that nonfiction literature demands a certain type of critical thinking and problem solving as a reader as it is structured differently than what students are used to experiencing. Author Penny Coleman describes the dedication and time commitment involved in writing a nonfiction book, “Creating a high-quality nonfiction book is not for the faint-hearted because it is a challenging, complex, time-consuming, and intense experience (Haley, N & Cobb, V., n.d.).”

In order to fully comprehend the concepts and ideas presented in a nonfiction text, students must first recognize and understand how to utilize the unique structures and features/elements of this genre. It is essential that teachers set aside instructional time to
explicitly teach the characteristics and structures of informational text through demonstration and discussion (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009; Duke, 2002; Moss, 2004; Webster 2011). It has often been suggested that teachers utilize read alouds as an effective strategy to introduce these complex features (Bradley & Donovan, 2010; Donovan & Smoklin, 2011; Graves, 1994; Moss 2004; Webster, 2011). Camp (2000) offers the strategy of selecting a fiction and nonfiction text on the same topic to read aloud. Also called ‘twin texts,’ this inquiry invitation allows students to explicitly compare and contrast the structural similarities and differences of the two genres. By starting with a fiction read-aloud, students develop their prior knowledge while engaging with the familiar structure of the genre. It also peaks their curiosity to explore the content more in depth, which leads to the introduction of the nonfiction text (Camp, 2000). Through the use of visual aids such as graphic organizers, students can begin to understand that nonfiction text is structured in a way requires different strategies and skills when reading.

Although some students show a preference for the narrative style of writing (Graves, 1994), it has been suggested that other students are already able to demonstrate and work with certain nonfiction features in their writing simply through various forms of genre exposure including read-alouds (Bradley & Donovan, 2010; Kamberelis, 1999)

Authors as Mentors: Bring Authors to Life in the Classroom Through the Use of Author Studies

Donald Graves (1989) suggests:

...today more than ever, we need more emphasis on learning from people who know things - in just about any way we can. The knowledge explosion is such that textbooks simply cannot deliver the full, rich store of information we need to function effectively in society. (p. 60)
Often, when a child’s interest is piqued by a particular genre, their attention will gravitate towards a certain author of that genre, and many elementary aged students can quickly name their favorite author (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins & White, 2007). Students’ attentiveness and curiosity about a particular author’s work and their writing process opens the door for teachers to introduce children’s literature through the use of author studies. Through the in-depth, comprehensive study of an author’s life as a reader, writer, illustrator and a person, students begin to develop an increased appreciation and respect his/her literature (Jenkins & White, 2007; Fox, Schlichting & Walker, 2008).

The authors of children’s literature have been identified as, “...children’s most natural and inviting teacher” (Fox, Schlichting & Walker, 2008 p. 1). By inviting students to further examine the life and work of an author, they begin to develop a more personal connection and a level of comfort and familiarity with the authors as real people who can then serve as their literacy mentors (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009; Schlichting & Fox, 2008). Students delight in knowing that their favorite authors have relatively similar lives to their own with hobbies, personal interests, families and friends (Jenkins, 2006; Schlichting & Fox, ). Immersing students in an author study elicits a shift in their perceptions of authors (Kotch & Zackman, 1995) “...from faceless and distant names to personal and available experts offering their wisdom about the craft of writing.” (p. 6).

Author studies are most often done as a whole class or in small groups by ‘immersing’ the students in the author’s craft. Guided and independent exploration takes place throughout the study by bringing in a broad text set by one author that offers literature on different readability levels. Also displayed around the room are easily accessible photos that ‘peek’ into the author’s personal life and quotes from the author, providing inspiration and insight into his/her life
Teachers are encouraged to allow ample time for their students to interact with the author’s website as many authors maintain ‘kid-friendly’ websites that feature biographical stories, video and audio clips of interviews or the author reading aloud. Many authors also offer extension activities on their websites for teachers and students that aide in bringing the books to life.

Engaging students in author studies invites the characters and the content of the literature to enter students’ stories, play and ordinary conversations (Cairney, 1990). Whether in a small group or as a whole class, the students essentially become the experts on a particular author when they are given the opportunity to reflect on and respond to the author’s craft and the literary elements and features that are common throughout his/her books (Kotch & Zackman, 1995). Students often develop a bond as a classroom community of literate individuals as they partake and share in the experience of delving into an author’s vast collection of work (Schlichting & Fox).

Bringing the Authors of Nonfiction into the Classroom

When students first think of nonfiction, they often don’t immediately associate the genre with a particular author, but rather as an isolated text (Schlichting & Fox, 2008). However, inviting nonfiction authors into the classroom can be especially beneficial for bringing more complex text features to life. Through exploration of a nonfiction author’s work, students learn to understand the importance and purpose of utilizing different text features when looking at writing nonfiction from an author’s perspective.

In order to familiarize students with the text features and structures present throughout an author’s books, it is essential to incorporate his/her work into various aspects of reading,
writing and other activities throughout the day (Kristo & Bamford, 2004). This ‘immersion’ is crucial in helping students to be successful with reading and comprehending nonfiction text and beginning to write nonfiction independently (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009; Portalupi & Fletcher, 2001).

Curriculum integration can be skillfully achieved through the utilization of nonfiction author studies as teachers walk their students simultaneously through the study of an author and the content of their literature (Jenkins, 2006; Kotch & Zackman, 1995). Authors of nonfiction literature often place a focus on developing the reader’s understanding of a specific subject related to science, history, math or other people, places and cultures. Teachers may choose to align a nonfiction author study with an integrated science or social studies unit in order to enhance cross-curricular connections. Nonfiction author studies are also beneficial for stimulating and further exploring students’ inquiries about specific topics or subjects (Schlichting & Fox, 2008).

Supporting Students’ Writing Using Nonfiction Text

Often times, nonfiction writing happens unintentionally when students share information on topics that they are especially familiar with (Portalupi & Fletcher, 2001). The natural ‘shift’ to nonfiction writing also occurs when students can see the impact of their literacy development beyond their own classroom (Graves, 1989). Engaging students in authentic literacy activities that are meaningful and purposeful in a real-world context is one strategy for developing this level of awareness (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, Tower, 2006). Graves (1994) suggests beginning with an invitation to write a personal narrative (p. 305). More in-depth examples of authentic and purposeful writing activities include writing a brochure about a topic to include in a local
museum or other area of the community, writing a set of instructions for someone to follow, or writing an information book for students in younger grades within the school (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, Tower, 2006). However, the expectation that students will delve further into writing examples of more developed pieces of nonfiction such as these requires the classroom teacher to provide a vast array of examples for students to hear as read-alouds and to engage with through independent exploration (Duke, 2000; Kletizen & Dreher, 2004).

Due to the complex text features and various organizational structures that encompass nonfiction literature, nonfiction writing demands explicit instructional time in the same way that nonfiction reading does (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009; Duke, 2002; Kristo & Bamford, 2004; Moss, 2004; Webster 2011). Furthermore, before teachers can expect students to write nonfiction, teachers must encourage their students to read nonfiction and partake in personal response with the text before any other form of response can be expected (Jenkins & White, 2007). Students can reflect and respond in ways such as journaling or discussing in small groups. These acts of personal response aide in familiarizing students with the genre, increasing comprehension and may also serve as the ‘gateway’ to inviting students to try writing nonfiction on their own (Jenkins & White, 2007).

Considering the more recent demand for students’ increased exposure to nonfiction text, it is crucial that we prepare them with the skills to read, write and comprehend this genre at a young age. More importantly, we must integrate this genre into their school day in order to allow for more frequent interaction, engagement and familiarity with nonfiction. One way to bring this genre into the classroom is through the use of nonfiction author studies. By bringing nonfiction authors into the classroom who may share their expertise, tips and tricks in writing
and illustrating, students can learn to take ‘cues’ from these literacy mentors as they learn how to interact with this unique genre.

METHODS

Overview

In this chapter, I provide the rationale for choosing a qualitative study with a specific focus on the Naturalistic Inquiry framework. I also explain my data collection and analysis methods used throughout the study and address issues of trustworthiness.

Naturalistic Inquiry

Qualitative research allows for exploration through an ‘inquiry’ approach. The qualitative researcher seeks answers to the questions that are related to processes and how experience is created in comparison to quantitative research where emphasis is placed on variables with regards to causal relationships (Denzien & Lincoln, 2005). Research questions are developed as the study unfolds and takes shape over time (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005) and methods of data collection are more flexible, internal, and subjectively analyzed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bodgen & Biklen, 2003). A qualitative study may not offer the researcher immediate and clearly specified end-results, as this research approach allows for more ‘open-ended discovery’ (Hubbard & Power, 2003).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that theory emerges from the inquiry being explored with regard to the specific methodological paradigm (p. 232). Naturalistic inquiries are not explicitly designed prior to the start of a study, but do require theory to be logically consistent with past research. For the purposes of my study, I believe it was important to take a naturalistic approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) as it allowed flexibility within the
methodology. I found that earlier components of the study influenced later decisions that impacted the direction of the research. As a result of this, I chose a qualitative approach with a focus in naturalistic inquiry.

When examining how authors of nonfiction impact students’ reading, writing and literacy development, the role of a participant observer seemed most appropriate for this study. By assuming this role, I immersed myself in the context of the classroom environment. I routinely spent time engaging with the students during snack, lunch and choice time (one hour block for student-selected learning centers). My established rapport with the students allowed me to engage in conversations, learning activities and conduct periods of extensive observation while documenting field notes. As a participant observer, I conducted audio and video recordings while the students engaged in conversations with Ms. Boyko and their peers during free choice reading, snack, journaling and other activities throughout the day. In doing so, I was able to gain insight into the students’ natural interactions with nonfiction text.

Some participation and interaction with the students took place during instructional time as authors were introduced during read-alouds and related activities. I also video recorded these interactions. All audio and video recordings were transcribed for discourse analysis purposes. This data allowed me to develop a clearer focus of the students’ perceptions and awareness of nonfiction literature.

Setting

When considering the most appropriate school and classroom setting to conduct this study, it was of critical importance to select a teacher who would agree to serve as a co-researcher, mentor and collaborator throughout the research process. Ms. Boyko, a third grade
teacher at an inquiry-based charter school in southeastern, North Carolina, enthusiastically agreed to assume these roles and offered her classroom for this study. Compared to other public schools in this region, this school is a K-8 public charter with a focus on student inquiry and the promotion of students’ critical thinking through an integrated curriculum with opportunities for hands-on learning experiences. Admission to this school is based on a random drawing of lottery numbers to establish enrollment and waiting lists for each grade level.

The school practices a ‘looping’ method with their students; therefore, Ms. Boyko’s current third grade students were her second grade students the previous school year. Upon meeting with her initially, I learned that she had previously engaged her students in multiple author studies using fiction literature, one nonfiction author study on Seymour Simon and several genre studies surrounding specific themes; therefore her students were already familiar with the idea of what an author study entailed. Given that I would be conducting my research in Ms. Boyko’s class during specific blocks of time three days each week, it was possible that I may miss valuable conversations and spontaneous comments that would help identify and demonstrate the ways that students make connections with nonfiction authors or nonfiction text. She and I agreed that as my co-researcher, she would be prepared to keep a field notebook in order to record any valuable conversations, interactions, or observations that took place and share them with me upon my return to the classroom. Throughout the study, she also conducted read-alouds using nonfiction literature from my most current author study when I was not present. During these whole-group engagements when I was not available to visit the classroom, she videotaped her interactions with the students.

Participants
The third grade students in Ms. Boyko’s class were between the ages of eight and ten years old. The class consisted of twenty-two students including ten girls and twelve boys. Permission was granted from the school’s principal to conduct this study. All students were granted permission from their parents/guardians in order to participate in the study. In addition, each student also gave their consent to participate in the study and was assigned a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Fall Reading Interview

On the second day of school, Ms. Boyko administered a Fall Reading Interview that she had designed for the purpose of better understanding her students’ reading habits at home. This ten-question fill in the blank survey, asked students to share their current reading practices and preferences. For the purposes of my data collection and analysis, I obtained copies of the Fall Reading Interview due to the nature of question 4: What books have you read recently? and question 8: What genres do you prefer to read?. All remaining questions on the survey that addressed reading habits such as, How often do you read at home? or How do you feel when you’re reading out loud?, were irrelevant to the nature of the study and were not used in the data analysis.

Pre-survey and Post-survey

In order to compare students’ responses regarding their perceptions of reading and writing nonfiction, as well as their awareness of nonfiction text and nonfiction authors, I administered an identical survey at the beginning and again at the end of the study (Appendix A).
Both surveys contained six open-ended questions asking students to share their knowledge of nonfiction text.

Pre T-Chart and Post T-Chart

For the purpose of additional data collection, I also asked the students to complete a T-Chart (Appendix B) at the beginning and again at the end of the study. On the column titled Fiction, the students wrote their perceptions of what defined a book as fiction including elements, structures, book titles and/or authors. On the column titled Nonfiction, the students wrote their definitions of nonfiction.

Field Notebooks

Throughout this research study, three field notebooks were maintained. The first notebook was maintained by Ms. Boyko which she kept on her desk to record information regarding the number of nonfiction books read by the students during centers and during transition times throughout the day. She also maintained notes regarding verbal and written connections the students made between nonfiction authors and nonfiction literature primarily during my absence from the classroom.

Upon beginning the first author study, I introduced a second field notebook entitled, Author Study Connections Notebook. I discussed with the students how they would be able to record their own notes and connections regarding nonfiction authors/literature using this notebook. I explained to them, “Sometimes I may not be able to come to your class. If Ms. Boyko is busy and I’m not in the classroom, but you have something to share about our author studies or about a nonfiction book, you can write your comments in the Author Study Connections Notebook and I will read them when I come back to visit.”
I also maintained a third field notebook during my classroom observation periods in which I documented notes and comments from the students’ choice time interactions and whole group or small group lessons regarding the following:

- Students’ interactions and comments with their peers and Ms. Boyko involving nonfiction literature and the connections made with nonfiction authors and books.

- The number of nonfiction books versus fiction books being read at reading centers or during transition times.

- Evidence of students sharing their opinion regarding nonfiction literature or their preference of particular author.

- Evidence of students identifying or utilizing nonfiction literature or nonfiction text features.

The field notebooks were utilized as I reviewed and compared emerging themes.

Choice Time Interactions Observations

Twice weekly for one hour, the students engaged in ‘choice time’. During this time, the students chose from various math, science and literacy centers, as well as a technology center. I utilized these two hours each week to either ‘kid-watch’ and observe the students’ conversations with one another at the reading center, or to interact with the students and engage in conversation with them myself. Each day, I placed an audio recorder at the technology center to record students’ conversations as they explored the authors’ websites. A second recorder was always with me as I circulated around the classroom and talked to students at various centers.

Audio Recordings and Video Recordings
In order to capture and document the students’ comments, connections and interactions regarding nonfiction literature and nonfiction authors, all lessons were either audio recorded or video recorded and transcribed for discourse analysis. Video recordings were transcribed for verbal and nonverbal interactions and then coded for Constant Comparison of emerging themes.

Biweekly Journal Entries and Student Artifacts

The students maintained writing journals throughout the year. Twice weekly, they write about a topic of their choice which must be a true event that has either already happened or will happen sometime in the future. Three times throughout the study (at the beginning, towards the middle, and again at the end of the study), I reviewed the students’ journals to gain insight into their styles of writing and their preferred topics.

During each activity that students engaged in throughout the study, I collected samples of their work. Artifacts that I collected included journal entries, Nonfiction Text Feature Scavenger Hunt worksheets, Nonfiction Text Feature Detectives worksheets, Venn Diagram charts, Letters to the Authors, Nature Sketches, Biography Posters, three student-made nonfiction books, and all Jim Arnosky inspired illustrations. Examples of the above mentioned artifacts are described in further detail in the following section. Samples of data are discussed throughout the Results section of the paper.

DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE
Setting the Stage: Students’ perceptions of fiction and nonfiction

Prior to the start of this research, I obtained copies of Ms. Boyko’s Fall Reading Interview (explained above). I used this data to obtain an idea of what genres the students were reading before study began. The bottom of the questionnaire invited the students to circle each genre/type of book that they enjoyed reading (chapter books, nonfiction, fiction picture books, poetry and magazines). This information was an additional indicator of the genres that the students preferred reading, therefore, I obtained a copy from each student in the class to utilize for further data analysis.

As explained above, in order to better understand the students’ current familiarities with nonfiction text, I began by obtaining a baseline of their current knowledge of nonfiction books and nonfiction authors. I administered a six question pre-survey to all students as a way to determine their comfort level with reading and writing nonfiction text (Appendix A). I also used this data to determine any changes in students’ awareness of particular authors of nonfiction or nonfiction books and to analyze any differences in the way they defined and perceived this genre. At the conclusion of the study, a post-survey was given to compare the students’ responses.

Setting the Stage: Fiction vs. Nonfiction T-Chart

Following the completion of the pre-survey, I engaged the students in a two-day exploration in which we defined the differences between fiction and nonfiction literature. To begin, the students were given a T-chart with Fiction and Nonfiction headings printed at the top (Appendix B). They were asked to share their current familiarities and understandings of the elements that define fiction and nonfiction literature. I also gave the students permission to write
authors, topics and books that were considered fiction or nonfiction. The students had fifteen minutes to complete the survey. Immediately following the completion of the T-chart, the students came together as a group and orally shared what they wrote as we engaged in a class discussion. This data was used to evaluate how students defined fiction and nonfiction compared from the beginning of the study to the end.

Setting the Stage: Read-Aloud of a Fiction Book and a Nonfiction Book

To further compare the differences between the elements of fiction and nonfiction, I read aloud one example of each. To begin, I selected a fiction and a nonfiction book that incorporated similar themes. To investigate the elements of fiction, I selected The Cat at Night by Dahlov Ipcar (2009). As the cat in this story walks through the pitch dark night, he encounters the shadows of animals and objects that only he can see with his ‘cat eyes’. At the end of the story, I asked the students the following questions:

• If we read the pages out of order, would the story still make sense? Or is it important to understand that there is a beginning, middle and end?

• Is everything that happened in the story true? Could this all happen in real life?

• Can cats really play tricks on people they way this one did?

• What is main purpose? Why someone would read this story?

The following day, I introduced a nonfiction book on a similar topic, Eyewitness: Cats (2004). After reminding them of our discussion the previous day, the students and I sat around the carpet in a circle. As I turned each page, we engaged in an inquiry discussion in which I asked them to ponder questions such as:
• What is a Table of Contents? How is this helpful in a nonfiction book?

• Wow! There’s a lot to look at on this page! Is there a certain order that we have to read this book? Where do I have to start?

• Why is there an index at the back of this book? How can readers use this?

• What do you notice about the captions and labels? Why are they helpful?

• If we opened the book and turned to any page, would it still make sense? Is there a beginning, middle and end here?

• What is main purpose for reading this book?

Nonfiction Explorers

Following this discussion, I invited the students to return to the tables as I gathered every nonfiction book from the shelves in their classroom library. I asked them to do a picture walk through the stack of books at their table. As they looked through each book, I asked them to revisit the nonfiction section of their T-Charts to add any additional elements/features they discovered through our two-day exploration of the genre.

Setting the Stage: Bones Read-Aloud

Ms. Boyko and I consistently agreed on the importance of aligning her curriculum with the students’ current topics and units of study with this research. Therefore, upon learning that the students’ upcoming science unit was the human body, I immediately utilized this opportunity to present them with a preview of an upcoming author who would be introduced later in the study and to expose them to a nonfiction text related their inquiry unit of study. Using a
projector and document camera, I was able to magnify Steve Jenkins’ Bones (2010) onto the whiteboard at the front of the room. As a means to preview the book, I used a technique known as a picture walk, in which we viewed each page and read some of text but not in entirety. Through reading the enlarged captions and labels in the book, the students made comparisons among their human bones with those of other animals.

To complete our fiction versus nonfiction comparison, the students and I created a poster titled Nonfiction that listed some of the features/elements we had discussed throughout our recent explorations. The poster was displayed in the classroom for the students to visit during the remainder of the study.

Biography Study

In an attempt to align the students’ current study of writing personal narratives, Ms. Boyko and I agreed that it would be beneficial to begin our study of nonfiction with a biography study. Considering the topics that our two chosen nonfiction authors (Steve Jenkins and Jim Arnosky) write about, our biography study was also utilized as a way to avoid creating misconceptions that nonfiction literature only consists of science or animal topics. Ms. Boyko began the biography study by selected the book Houdini (2007) by Kathleen Krull to read aloud. She created a chart with three columns on the board titled: 1) What We Know, 2) New Things We Learned, 3) Connections. The students shared what they already knew about Houdini and his life. As she began to read Houdini, the students were prompted to think of questions they had or personal connections they were making with the biography. After finishing the read-aloud the students shared new facts and personal connections to complete the other two sections of the
This lesson was used primarily as way to familiarize the students with thinking critically about nonfiction text and making personal connections with the genre.

Partner Review of Biographies and Personal Narratives

To continue our study of biographies, Ms. Boyko and I selected four biographies or personal narratives and brought multiple copies of each book into the classroom. Each book was carefully considered and chosen based on the anticipated community, personal or author connections that students may make. Table 1 below shows the biographies that were used during this part of the study.

Table 1: Books Used During the Biography Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First to Fly: How Wilbur and Orville Wright Invented the Airplane</td>
<td>Peter Busby</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chimpanzees I Love</td>
<td>Jane Goodall</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt in His Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of a Dream</td>
<td>Deloris Jordan &amp; Rosalyn M. Jordan</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After providing a short description of each book, the students were paired randomly with a partner and invited to choose one of the four biographies. A smaller version of the three column chart completed by the students the previous day was distributed. As a pair, they began by writing what they already knew about their heroic figure portrayed in the book they had selected. Some pairs chose to alternate reading pages in their book while others offered to read
the entire book to their partner. While they read, I circulated throughout the classroom and met with each pair to discuss the events occurring in their biography, questions they had, and connections they were making. After the pair finished reading their biography, they worked as a team to write the new facts they learned as well as connections they made to the book. To conclude the lesson, we met as a whole group in order to give the students an opportunity to share what they wrote.

Nonfiction Poster From Biographies

As a way to extend the students’ critical analysis of biographical literature, I engaged them in an activity in which the partnered students created a ‘nonfiction poster’. This activity was also utilized as a way give the students a first-hand experience of writing nonfiction. To begin the lesson, we gathered as a group on the rug to discuss the details of the nonfiction poster that they would be creating. I asked the students, “If our poster is going to be nonfiction, what do you think we might include on it?” I also asked, “If someone came to visit our classroom and had never read your book before, what text features might help them to understand your biography better?” As we brainstormed, the students offered suggestions. They met with their partners again and gathered art supplies, such as construction paper, markers and crayons to create an accurate representation of their biography. The posters were displayed around the room for several weeks for the students to enjoy during the study.

Nonfiction Rubric

To enhance students’ critical analysis of nonfiction literature further, I introduced students to the NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children. I explained the purpose of the award and brought in several examples of nonfiction literature that had won
the award in past years for the students to read independently. Ms. Boyko and I designed a ‘kid-friendly’ rubric adapted from the criteria used to award the Orbis Pictus Award for outstanding nonfiction. The students met with their partners once more with the purpose of rating their book of choice in the areas of Accuracy, Organization, Design, and Style with a “check-plus,” “check,” or “check-minus”. I circulated around the room and observed the students discussing and debating the criteria and then eventually come to agreeable decisions in scoring their biographies.

This short, yet informative biography study was utilized as a way to initially introduce the students to the idea of critically analyzing nonfiction text, develop questioning skills with nonfiction, discover personal connections with nonfiction authors and understand the scope of nonfiction topics as well as interact with nonfiction text features.

Nonfiction Author Studies - Steve Jenkins and Jim Arnosky

Introduction to Steve Jenkins - PowerPoint and Books

When introducing our first nonfiction author to the students, we selected Steve Jenkins for several reasons, including his visually appealing collage illustrations, his ability to creatively incorporate unusual, yet accurate facts about animals and science, and his use of captions, labels, and other text features. In addition, several of Steve Jenkins’ books addressed topics and themes the students were studying in other subject areas. During a previous activity in which students were asked to write on a dry erase board their favorite nonfiction topic to read about, most students responded with their preference in reading about animals (as seen in Figure 1), thus student interest also heavily affected my decision to introduce Steve Jenkins books in the classroom.
Based on the congruency between the content of his books paired with the students’ interests, Steve Jenkins seemed to be an ideal selection for the first author study of this research. Throughout our author study, I chose to emphasize and focus on the following elements and text features commonly found in Steve Jenkins’ books:

- Use of collage to illustrate - he often ‘rips’ or ‘tears’ newspaper or other types of paper to create a furry or hairy texture
• Use of making the text on the page move around the shape of the featured animal

• Use of captions and labels to share facts about animals

• Use of actual size when illustrating

In order to introduce the students to Steve Jenkins and familiarize them with his books, I asked the students to recall the book Bones (2010) and the picture walk with this text from earlier in the study. Once students expressed that they remembered the experience, I placed a sample text set on the ledge of the dry erase board and paused as students examined the front covers from their seats on the rug. After a moment of brief observation, I asked the students to share what they thought they could already learn from Steve Jenkins and his books, just by looking at the covers. As the students shared their responses I recorded their ideas on the board.

When planning this activity, I predicted that the students would have several questions about Steve Jenkins’ life and who he was as a person. For this reason, I prepared and shared with the students a PowerPoint presentation that shared his biographical information, including where he was born, where he lived as a child, some of his favorite hobbies as a child, where he currently resides, and his children’s names and ages.

As stated previously, Ms. Boyko’s natural classroom setting involves a period of choice time for one hour, twice-weekly in which the students participate in teacher designed math and literacy centers of their choice. I incorporated Steve Jenkins into these centers by ‘bookmarking’ his website on the four computers at the technology center. I modeled to the whole class how to click on each tab along the left-hand side of screen in order to watch video trailers, view his slideshows, and how to click on his list of books to read ‘inside-tips’ on the making of each book. I encouraged the students to obtain the corresponding book and bring it to the computer.
with them as they were clicking on the electronic version on the book for ease of following along with the text on the computer screen and also for purpose of enhancing the text to technology experience.

When concluding our first day of introducing the Steve Jenkins author study, I read Animals in Flight (2001) aloud. As I read, I paused and asked students to identify specific text features that we had discussed in previous lessons such as captions and labels. At the close of this lesson, I prompted a student-led discussion with the goal for them to share their initial opinions of Steve Jenkins after hearing one of his books read aloud by giving a thumbs-up or thumbs-down gesture.

Animals in Flight - Connection to Forces and Motion

As stated earlier, Ms. Boyko and I collaborated frequently to ensure that our author studies were aligned with the curriculum being taught throughout other content areas. The students began a new science inquiry unit about forces and motion around the same time that we began our first author study. As a way to incorporate our previous read-aloud of Animals in Flight (2001) into this unit, Ms. Boyko utilized this book to visually demonstrate the concepts of forces and motion. During inquiry time, a teaching block reserved for inquiry-based learning activities often correlating with the current unit of study, the students heard several excerpts from Animals in Flight read-aloud a second time by their teacher. She used the captions and labels to help her students gain a better understanding of how birds use their wings to fly, and how this can be connected to certain principles of forces and motion. After reading Animals in Flight a second time and discussing laws of forces and motion, the students illustrated and decorated posters to demonstrate their understanding of this inquiry concept.
Text Feature Scavenger Hunt with Steve Jenkins

A few days after beginning the Steve Jenkins author study, we came together as a whole group again to further discuss text features that Steve Jenkins uses throughout his books. I prompted the students to consider this concept by asking, “Did you know that Steve Jenkins actually uses certain text features on purpose to help you read and understand his books better?” After explaining this more thoroughly, I provided each student with a Nonfiction Text Feature Scavenger Hunt activity (Appendix C) and a Steve Jenkins book. The Nonfiction Scavenger Hunt sheet listed text features including captions labels, bold headings, italics, colored print, bibliography, etc. The students went to their tables and began their ‘scavenger hunt’ by searching through their book and circling each text feature they discovered. To conclude the activity, the students reconvened back on the rug as a whole class with their books and papers to share their text feature findings as a result of the activity. Each student had the opportunity to share a text feature that Steve Jenkins included in their book. As the students shared this information, he/she opened their book to the page where it was used in order to show their classmates. Each student was also encouraged to clarify why they thought Steve Jenkins used this particular text feature in his book. This activity generated a class discussion as students began to discover that their Steve Jenkins book shared commonalities in their use of text features with other classmates’ books. I observed when one student was sharing, other students began to hold up their books and display similar text features. As the students shared common text features used by Steve Jenkins and why they were important to the readers of his books, I generated a list on chart paper to display in the room.

Ms. Boyko’s Kookaburra Read-Aloud
At the end of one school day during our Steve Jenkins author study, Ms. Boyko engaged her students in a read-aloud of I See a Kookaburra (2005). As she read aloud, she paused and asked the students questions in order to prompt them to make connections with other books written by Steve Jenkins. This read-aloud and prompting generated a class discussion involving similarities among certain animals that Steve Jenkins talked about in two or more books as well as other nonfiction books students have read, such as reference books and field guides. After the read-aloud, she led the students in singing the Kookaburra song.

Animal Research with Steve Jenkins

After several days of reading and interacting with Steve Jenkins’ books, our author study began to transform as students became more curious about his writing and illustrating process. I shared numerous quotations by Steve Jenkins and transcribed them in the Author Study Connections Notebook including,

I use multiple sources for my initial research — I have a lot of books, I have a library of photographs. I have other illustrations. I use images on the Internet. And, I use my own observations. Sometimes I go to museums and take photos or draw. But, I’d say books are probably the single source that I rely on the most.” and “I have the feeling often, that book ideas have chosen me rather than the other way around. (Teachingbooks.net, 2005).

As the author study progressed, each student was invited to select an animal of their choice; an animal they already had some prior knowledge of but still had questions they wanted to research. On their note-taking sheets, the students indicated which animal they had selected by writing their choice at the top of the page. Underneath, the students shared facts that they already knew about their chosen animal as well as two or three questions they could research.
For two weeks, we continuously referred back to Steve Jenkins’ quotation (above) regarding his research process to inform the students’ research process and spent time engaging in the activities explained below.

Computer Lab and Nonfiction Book Research

Since Steve Jenkins utilizes and relies on books and the internet as his primary sources of information while writing and illustrating, the students also spent time researching in the computer lab and looking through nonfiction books. We started by spending one day in the computer lab studying how their animals look because Steve Jenkins stresses the importance of creating accurate illustrations by using images from the internet. I provided students access to the National Geographic Kids website where they were able to search for their animal and view a slideshow of photographs with captions. Each student was given a Describing Wheel where they wrote physical features and attributes of their animal in order to allow for ease of accurately collaging/illustrating their animal later.

After the students had a better sense of how their animal looks and how to illustrate it with detail, they spent two days looking through nonfiction books. I brought in a variety of nonfiction sources including:

• Nonfiction picture books
• Animal dictionaries on a wide range of different animals
• Several of Steve Jenkins books that included the students’ animals of choice
• Other students also brought in supplemental resources, including magazines and animal fact cards from their homes.
As the students read and studied their resources, they wrote notes on paper to record facts that stood out as interesting to them. This activity not only allowed the students to research an animal in a similar way that Steve Jenkins would, but it also invited them to explore and interact with other forms of nonfiction and text features.

Steve Jenkins Writing and Illustrating

Once students had spent time researching their animal using a variety of nonfiction resources, they designed their own nonfiction book page that would accurately depict their chosen animal. Using Steve Jenkins’ Move (2006) as a model, I engaged the students in a picture walk to remind them of his use of collage illustrations and his design and layout preferences. The next step in the process began with the students making collage illustrations. They were encouraged to take all of these elements into consideration, including their Describing Wheels used during their computer lab research, while accurately designing their page. Some students chose to rip and tear their paper to create texture, while others carefully and tediously traced their animals from computer images.

The next two lessons involved the students planning the text and layout of their page. After their illustrations were completed, they began to plan which facts they wanted to share with readers and how the text would look on their page. Using their planning sheet and their favorite Steve Jenkins book as a model, each student independently made decisions to use captions, labels, bold print, italics, and other features commonly used by Steve Jenkins. They each carefully designed a final draft of their book page and submitted it to me for publication.

After the students completed their animal nonfiction book page, they drew a Picture Glossary - a smaller version of their illustration drawn with pencil inside a small square box.
Below their illustrations, they also wrote a caption to share additional facts about their chosen animal. This entire process and project was completed over the course of about two weeks.

To conclude our Steve Jenkins author study, the students and I compiled their book pages to create a published class book. I utilized the Author Study Connections Notebook as a way for the students to suggest titles and a dedication for our class book. After compiling a picture glossary and book page from each student, I used an online storybook making website to scan their work onto the computer and publish their book. Ms. Boyko guided the class in a vote for the title and dedication, which was decided with consensus as Animals of the World: Facts and Pictures with a dedication to Steve Jenkins and all the animals around the world. After the book arrived in the mail, it became a permanent addition to the classroom library.

Author Study: Jim Arnosky Self-Discovery

For our second author study, we chose Jim Arnosky. This decision was made because of his creative use of incorporating journal entries and sketches from his field notebooks, an activity the students also enjoyed. As a naturalist, Jim Arnosky researches animals by observing them in their natural habitats. He takes notes, videotapes, photographs, and sketches animals for years before he writes his books. He explains:

Everything comes from what I see – either through my eyes, a camera, or a video camera – or where I identify a lack of information. I want to know not only what lives where I live, but also where my readers live (Jenkins, 2007).

He has written over 100 fiction and nonfiction children’s books. Due to the students’ obvious interest in delving more into the world of animal nonfiction, I selected Jim Arnosky as the second author to bring to the classroom.
To begin this author study, I gathered as many of Arnosky’s nonfiction books as were available and brought them to the classroom. To reveal our second author and his books to the students, I invited them to sit on the rug as a whole group. As I shared the author’s name with the students, I passed around two photographs of him - one standing on his boat, and the other standing in the desert. As the photos circulated around the room, I asked the students to share what they have already learned about this new author simply by looking at photos of him. The students shared their thoughts and asked questions while I recorded them on the board for the next activity.

After the photos were circulated, I gave students the opportunity to once again become Nonfiction Explorers with Jim Arnosky’s books. After modeling a picture walk for them, they returned to their tables as I placed stacks of books in the center. For 15 minutes, they simply looked through his books. The questions generated by the students remained on the board for them to reference while participating in this activity.

At the end of our fifteen-minute Nonfiction Explorers activity, we gathered back on the rug. I placed a piece of chart paper on the board with the two photographs of Jim Arnosky (passed around previously) at the top. The students were then invited to share what they had learned about the new author just from looking at his books. As the students offered information, I recorded their ideas on the chart paper for the students to reference throughout the author study. At the close of the lesson, I displayed the chart on the wall, closest to the book basket in the classroom library that contained all of Jim Arnosky’s books.

All About Turkeys Read-Aloud
The following lesson took place one week before students had their Thanksgiving break. As a way to introduce one of Arnosky’s books to the students, while taking into account the time of year, I chose to read aloud, All About Turkeys (1998). Before we began, I asked students if any additional information should be added to the poster hanging in the classroom library. I recorded their new thoughts on a sticky note to transfer onto the poster after the lesson. As I read-aloud, we paused and discussed ‘tricky’ vocabulary and reviewed text features such as captions, labels, diagrams and maps. We also defined Jim Arnosky as a naturalist, talked about the meaning of the word and how it applies to his research, writing and illustrating process.

Turkey Video and Sketching

The lesson following our All About Turkeys read-aloud took place two days later. We began by orally reviewing facts the students learned about turkeys that they had not previously known. To continue our study of this book and to further explore his research and illustration process for this book, we watched a video created by his daughter called, Drawing a Turkey. In this video, Jim Arnosky’s daughter films him walking around in his snowshoes around his old snow-covered Vermont barn in search of turkeys. Arnosky shares some of his favorite hobbies with his readers and gives them a tour of his favorite drawing location. Toward end the video, he demonstrates how he sketches a turkey. In the background of the video, the students could hear Jim Arnosky’s Turkey Song that he plays on the guitar.

After watching the video, I reviewed the steps that Jim Arnosky shared regarding how to sketch a turkey and wrote the steps on the board for the students to reference later. Ms. Boyko and I planned ahead to ‘merge’ our lessons for this day. Earlier, the students had written letters to their family members to wish them Happy Thanksgiving. Using the steps that Jim Arnosky
shared for sketching a turkey, I gave each student a sheet of paper and a pencil and encouraged them to practice sketching their own turkey. Unlike Jim Arnosky’s turkey sketch, we took our sketches one step further and colored them with colored pencils. The students’ drawings then became the cover for their Thanksgiving cards with their letters pasted inside.

Crocodile Safari Read-Aloud

When the students returned from their break, I selected Crocodile Safari (2009) as the next read-aloud. In this book, Arnosky writes in a journal format for his readers in order to take them on the journey with him to the Everglades swamps in search of crocodiles. From the beginning, Arnosky shares with his readers that he and his wife went to the Everglades in search of alligators and found crocodiles instead. Throughout this read-aloud, we discussed tricky vocabulary, journaling techniques (including the date, time, and tide at the corner of each entry), and new facts that Arnosky learned about crocodiles from his observations.

Crocodile Safari Video

Two days later was a Thursday, a day that I was typically not scheduled to visit the classroom. As a way to bring closure the school day, Ms. Boyko decided to show the video included with the book. In this video, Jim Arnosky and his wife ride through the swamps of the Everglades in their boat in search of crocodiles in order to sketch and take videos and photos - highlighting their naturalistic techniques. The video includes a song written by Jim Arnosky and a lesson on sketching crocodiles.

Rainbow Pond Sketching
To bring his research and observation process to life, Ms. Boyko and I scheduled a day out in the field, allowing the students to sketch wildlife. Earlier in the day, Ms. Boyko used a projector and document camera to preview a book about how to nature sketch, including shading techniques, creating perspective, and labeling drawings. When I arrived, I reminded the students of Arnosky’s research process, specifically using Crocodile Safari as a way to refresh their memories. I asked the students questions such as, When Jim Arnosky went out into the swamp to look for alligators, what happened? One of my objectives for this lesson was to introduce them to the idea that naturalists like Jim Arnosky are faced with unexpected surprises and encounters, as they would be when they were sketching outside. To prepare them for our outside adventure, we shared suggestions for nature and animals to sketch as I recorded them on the board. For 30 minutes, the students visited Rainbow Pond, a pond directly behind the classroom and sketched with clipboards, paper and pencils. Teachers also had field guides available to help students identify species of insects and amphibians.

When we came back inside, the students sat on the rug in a circle and held up their drawings for their classmates to see. I allowed them time to discuss any unexpected surprises that they encountered. Following the discussion, I gave the students a journal prompt: How was our experience of sketching outside similar or different to Jim Arnosky? For the next 15 minutes, the students compared and contrasted their experience to Jim Arnosky. I collected these journal entries and used them in my data analysis and coding.

Text Features Detectives

After the students became more familiar with Jim Arnosky as a person, a writer, an illustrator and a naturalist, I utilized their level of ‘expertise’ to engage them in a Nonfiction Text
Features Detectives activity. Similar to the activity completed during our Steve Jenkins author study, the students looked through Jim Arnsoky’s books for text features. However, since I had built the foundation of identifying and defining nonfiction text features through our previous author study, I was able to extend this activity and have the students make self-discoveries of these nonfiction text features rather than having the students simply circle the terms on their paper. After drawing a large version of the chart on the board, I modeled the activity for the students using Crocodile Safari. On each table, I placed a stack of Jim Arnosky’s books and asked them to be ‘detectives’ as they searched through at least four books. In the first column, they indicated the text feature, followed by the title of the book in which it was found. In the third column, they answered the question, “How can this text feature help you as a reader?”

Published Arnosky Book

During choice time on Wednesdays and Fridays, the independent reading center quickly transformed into a center that also included sketching and drawing, using Jim Arnsoky’s books as inspiration. The idea for this project started with a group of four girls who decided to draw different types of animals and compile them into a book. The categories were divided into: sea creatures, forest animals, and birds. After talking with the girls, we decided to invite other students to join the project (if they chose to) and publish their illustrations into a book similar to their Steve Jenkins inspired book.

MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE AUTHOR STUDIES

Venn Diagram

To wrap up our study of nonfiction authors, I wanted to bring Steve Jenkins back to the classroom in order to allow the students an opportunity to compare and contrast both authors.
On large pieces of poster paper, I drew a Venn Diagram on each. I brainstormed with the students and encouraged them to think about differences and similarities among Steve Jenkins’ and Jim Arnosky’s biographical information, their writing and research styles, their books, and illustrations. For 20 minutes, the students worked in groups of three or four and spread out on the floor or at tables with markers and filled out their Venn Diagrams. Upon completion of the Venn Diagrams, I displayed them around the room for the remaining days of the study.

Letters to the Authors

As a final activity, I gave the students a writing prompt: If you could write to one of our nonfiction authors - Steve Jenkins or Jim Arnosky - what would you tell them? After briefly reminding them of how a letter is formatted, we brainstormed as a group to generate ideas for the students to write about. The following topics were listed as suggestions for the students to include in their letter, however the author and content of the letter was student self-selected:

- Favorite books the authors have written

- Books published by the students

- Activities we’ve done and books we’ve read

- What are your (the authors) favorite books you’ve written?

- (To Jim Arnosky) Do you know Steve Jenkins?

- Can you write a book about (specific requests from several students for books on certain animals)?
After the students composed their letters, I brought them back together on the rug as a whole group in order to obtain their permission to send the letters to their chosen author. Along with the student letters, we also sent electronic links to the student-published books inspired by the authors.

Final Discussion, Post-Survey and T-Chart

As a final whole group activity to conclude the study, I drew a T-Chart on the dry erase board with ‘Likes nonfiction’ on the left side and ‘Does not like nonfiction’ on the right. As the students arrived to the classroom, they ‘signed in’ by using their magnetic name cards to indicate their current opinions of nonfiction. To begin the discussion, I erased the current date on the board and invited the students to ‘travel back in time’ to the first day of our nonfiction study. I wrote the date 9-4-2012 on the board and then began to pick up the students’ name cards one at a time and move them to the appropriate side according to their initial feelings and perceptions of nonfiction at the beginning of the study. After I moved their names, I asked them if they would like to move their name back to where they placed it that morning when they arrived. As the students raised their hands, I called on them to come up to the board and move their name to the category that represents how they currently feel about nonfiction. When each student who wanted to move their name did so, I asked them to share their reasons for making this decision with the class. I video recorded this activity and all discussion that took place as a result of it.

Wrapping Up

To conclude the study and in order to compare the students’ responses to the pre-survey, I administered a six question post-survey (Appendix A) about the students’ perceptions and awareness of nonfiction text. The questions were identical to those given on the pre-survey. I
compared the students’ previous responses to their most current ones to enhance my understanding of their changed opinions, perceptions and awareness of nonfiction.

DATA ANALYSIS

The below table summarizes the data collection and analysis methods I implemented for this study:

Table 2: Data Analysis Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Tool</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Reading Interview</td>
<td>Student responses to question #’s 4 and 8 only</td>
<td>Listed students who mentioned nonfiction books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Utilized check mark next to nonfiction to allow students who were absent to participate in final discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre and Post-survey</td>
<td>Student responses</td>
<td>Coding used to define and support emerging themes/trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre and Post T-Chart</td>
<td>Student Responses</td>
<td>Coding used to define and support emerging themes/trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notebooks</td>
<td>Researcher Field Notebook</td>
<td>Coding used to support emerging themes/trends</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teacher Field Notebook</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Author Study Connections Notebook (Student responses)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Researcher field notes</td>
<td>Discourse analysis to identify students’ interactions with nonfiction literature/authors and conversations with one another</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audiotape</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Videotape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event/Tool</td>
<td>Data Collection Method</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Discussion to Define the Features of Nonfiction vs. Fiction</td>
<td>Audiotape, Videotape</td>
<td>Transcriptions coded for trends in student discourse - used to identify students’ prior knowledge of the structures of nonfiction and fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ participation in Author Studies and Biography Book Study</td>
<td>Audio tape, Video Tape, Student Artifacts, Field notes</td>
<td>Transcriptions coded for trends in student discourse and response to literature/author. Student artifacts coded to support emerging themes/trends; Field notes coded to support emerging themes/trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Artifacts Journal Entries</td>
<td>Student responses</td>
<td>Continuously reviewed students’ free writing entries for evidence of mentor authors’ craft in writing or use of nonfiction text features, as well as mention of nonfiction authors and titles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fall Reading Interview

As stated above, I only found questions 4 and 8 on Ms. Boyko’s fall reading interview to be relevant to this study. To analyze the responses to question 4: What books have you read recently? I read each of the students’ responses to determine what genre they were currently reading for pleasure. Often times, I had to use the internet to search for book titles that I was unfamiliar with to determine the appropriate genre in which to categorize the book. After reading all student responses, I generated a written list of all students who mentioned reading a nonfiction book.
I used question 8: What kinds of texts do you like to read? only to determine three students’ opinions of reading nonfiction. On the day that the pre-survey was administered, three students were absent and therefore, were unable to complete it. By the time these students returned to school, I had already begun introducing nonfiction text and engaging the students in activities surrounding nonfiction, therefore their pre-survey responses would not have been reliable. In an effort to include these students and allow them to participate in our Final Discussion activity in which the students moved their name cards on the board to indicate their current opinions of the genre, I used this data to determine their perceptions towards reading nonfiction at the beginning of the study.

Pre-survey and Post-survey

I analyzed students’ pre-survey and post-survey data in two ways. I began by making a spreadsheet document with each question listed across a row at the top. Along the left side, a column listed each student’s name twice, for example, “Collin Pre” and “Collin Post”. I then typed all students’ pre responses and post responses to all six questions in the corresponding boxes underneath each question. By creating this spreadsheet, I was able to notice common phrases and words used by the students. I was also able to compare the students’ pre responses to their post responses to clearly see their changes in opinions and preferences. I then created tally marks to indicate the frequency of specific responses. For example, I tallied the number of students who responded “no” that they do not have a favorite nonfiction author and the number of students that used the word “true” or “real” to define nonfiction on their pre-survey. I also used the same process for the students’ post-survey responses to compare the difference in responses.
Pre T-Chart and Post T-Chart

To analyze pre T-chart and post T-Chart responses, I used a process that was similar to the way I analyzed the pre-survey and post-survey responses. I created a spreadsheet with a row at the top labeled “Before (9-4-2012)” and “After (12-4-2012)”. Along the left hand side, I typed each student’s name. Inside each box next to the students’ names, I typed their responses. To indicate which responses were fiction and nonfiction, I used the symbol “/”. For example, Mason’s responses were, “Fake/science, animals and space”. Therefore, I was able to see that Mason identified fiction as fake and listed the words science, animals and space to define nonfiction. This spreadsheet was a helpful tool to clearly see common phrases and words used by students. I created tally marks for the pre T-Charts and post T-Charts to indicate how many students listed nonfiction or fiction books and also to show how many students used the words “true” and “real” to define nonfiction. By having the students’ pre responses and post responses side by side, I was able to make notes about the quality of their responses. For example, I was able to see that on Taylor’s post-survey, he described why someone would utilize a nonfiction book for a project, but only listed words such as “plants” and “animals” on his pre-survey.

Methods of Coding

The qualitative researcher often considers coding to be “…integral to the process of data analysis.” (Givens Eds, 2008). Initially, open coding of ‘raw’ audio and video transcripts is done to identify emerging themes and ideas. Then, all transcripts are reviewed again through selective coding to further adjust, refine and define themes (Givens Eds, 2008).

Field Notebooks
As stated above, three field notebooks were maintained throughout the duration of this research study. I analyzed all three notebooks in a similar fashion. Using my research questions as a guide, I chronologically read all entries made in each notebook and used open coding using a color coding strategy to code the entries for discourse analysis and to look for patterns or themes that were naturally emerging. Discourse analysis is defined as a method of looking for social and contextual patterns in language (Givens Eds., 2008). In terms of this study, I looked for patterns in the students’ speech as they engaged with nonfiction text and conversed with one another or myself about nonfiction authors (Givens Eds., 2008).

Next, I compared all field notebook entries to other sources of data including transcripts, pre-survey and post-survey data, and student artifacts/journals. Using selective coding, I then read all field notebook entries again to further refine my emerging trends and create more defined categories.

Observation Periods

All observation periods during this research study were recorded in my researcher field notebook. During these blocks of time, I specifically looked to document students’ interactions with nonfiction text and their conversations with one another. As stated above, all entries were coded for discourse analysis.

Audio and Video Recordings

Similar to the field notebook entries, all audio and video recordings were transcribed and coded for trends in student discourse. In order to reduce the data, all irrelevant conversations were eliminated from the analysis procedures. For example, audio recorded conversations about students looking up music videos on YouTube and jokes told at after school programs, among
others, were excluded, which left me with conversations that centered solely around nonfiction text and nonfiction authors.

I initially read all audio and video transcripts chronologically without using any coding methods for preliminary understandings. The second time I read through my transcripts, I used an open coding method with color codes to define my emerging trends. After reading my transcripts the second time, I created a spreadsheet on the computer using the same color coding method. I entered all coded conversations into the spreadsheet according to the appropriate color coded trend. If a conversation encompassed more than one trend I included the conversation in multiple columns. All coded conversations were numbered on the spreadsheet in order to easily refer back to them in the full context of the setting. Each recording also had its own number and letter to identify it and allow for ease in referring back to the actual recorded conversation throughout the analysis process. After entering all transcript data on my spreadsheet, I then used selective coding to further define my categories. By having all transcript data placed onto a color coded spreadsheet on the computer, I was able to easily move and categorize conversations as needed. I also compared all other data to my audio and video recordings to check for comparisons of emerging trends.

Student Artifacts and Journal Entries

As students engaged in various activities centered around nonfiction text and our nonfiction author studies, I collected student work and artifacts for the purposes of supporting and enhancing my emerging trends. Using the trends that emerged as a result of coding my field notebooks and my audio and video transcripts, I also coded student artifacts in a similar way, using the same color coding system. All student responses were coded for student discourse.
I also periodically collected students’ journal entries. As stated above, the students write in their journals twice weekly on true events that have occurred or will occur sometime in the future. When I review students’ journals, I looked for evidence of the students’ use of nonfiction text features or their use of a nonfiction author’s particular writing style. After collecting all relevant journal entries, I coded the students’ writing according to the same color coding system for student discourse.

**Constant Comparison Method**

The constant comparison method involves careful analysis and categorization of data through the process of coding, integrating and testing the data against emerging themes in order for further refinement (Hubbard & Power, 2003). I consistently referred to this method when analyzing and coding all collected data to ensure that all themes and patterns were categorized accurately and appropriately.

After carefully analyzing all data through methods of open-coding and selecting coding, three themes were generated. Through subsequent analysis of each initial theme, sub-themes were derived.

**Member Checking**

One method used for addressing the trustworthiness and validity of my study included the implementation of a member check procedure. According to the SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research (Givens Eds., 2008) member checking provides the research participants an opportunity to verify that their voices and actions were appropriately and accurately represented. I did this by requesting feedback from my co-researcher while reading and coding audio and video transcripts as I identified themes from this study. I also solicited her feedback and
approval as I wrote sections of my methodology and results to ensure that I was accurately portraying her classroom, her students, and the events of the study.

Another form of member checking that I employed throughout this study involved the informal conversations I had with the students. During my choice time interactions, I often asked them questions such as, “Did you know that you said you didn’t like nonfiction on your pre-survey? What do you think of it now?” or “You couldn’t name a nonfiction author before our author studies, do you think you can now?” By enlisting the input and involvement from the actual participants in this portion of the data analysis procedure, I was able to obtain a better understanding of the themes that emerged from the data.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I justified the use of a qualitative study methodology with a focus on Naturalistic Inquiry. I also identified my methods of data collection and discussed data analysis methods. This section also addressed steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and validity such as Member Checking. In the next chapter, I plan to discuss the findings of my data analysis procedures.

RESULTS

Overview

In this chapter, I will share the three themes that I have defined as a result of this research study. Each theme is supported with evidence from a combination of sources including student artifacts, responses to pre and post-surveys, responses to pre and post T-Charts, audio and video recordings and field notes. I will als58o present data that demonstrates the ways in
which the students interacted with nonfiction text and nonfiction authors throughout the study, and how their familiarity with this genre developed during the course of the study.

Pre-survey

Prior to implementing this study, I surveyed students’ knowledge of nonfiction text and nonfiction authors. The following results clearly document how the third grade students in this study grew in their awareness, understanding, and utilization of nonfiction text and nonfiction authors. A sample pre-survey and post-survey can be found in Appendix A.

Pre-survey

Students’ initial responses to defining fiction and nonfiction showed very little elaboration of elements or text features that encompass either genre. Many students were unable to give detailed explanations when asked to describe nonfiction text. Mason and Ellie’s pre-surveys shown in Figure 2 are representative samples of the students’ responses.
As evidenced by the above figures, both students responded to questions 1 and 2 by defining nonfiction as real or true without any further elaboration. Out of 19 students (3 were absent on the day this survey was administered), 18 provided responses similar to those seen above.

When asked to indicate their opinions and perceptions of reading and writing nonfiction, many students shared their dislike for the genre with comments such as:

“I like them so, so. Not really. Sometimes they’re scary.” (Cassie)

“I think that they are boring but it is just not my thing. It is not what I like. I like series chapter books.” (Maddie)

“I don’t always like to read nonfiction.” (Emma)

In total, twelve students responded with positive opinions towards reading nonfiction and seven students responded negatively towards reading nonfiction.

A larger number of students initially responded positively to writing nonfiction. Only four students shared their dislike for it. However, the nature of students’ responses reveal a clear misconception they have. Several students believe that nonfiction writing is solely in the form of
personal narratives. At the beginning of this research study, the students were learning how to write personal narrative stories in Writer’s Workshop. Also, in their journals, the students are required to write about true events that actually happened or will happen. When taking this into consideration, it became apparent that many of the students who responded positively to writing nonfiction on their pre-survey did so based solely on the perception that nonfiction writing means writing a personal narrative story. Some examples of responses included:

- “Yes, I like them because I have so many good true stories!” (Mary)

- “I’m writing one now. It’s about the time I got my spacer on and writing them is also kinda fun.” (Ellie)

- “Yes because I like to write about my family.” (Henry)

- “Yes! Because I like to write (what) has happen in my life.” (Emma)

When asked to name a favorite nonfiction author or book, very few students were able to do so. 15 students either responded no, or left the spaces blank, choosing not to answer the questions. Only four students were able to mention nonfiction books or authors.

The pre-survey data suggests that many students either do not enjoy interacting with this genre, or have not had enough experience with reading and writing nonfiction to provide an accurate opinion.

Post-survey

Compared to the results provided on the pre-survey, the students’ post-survey responses confirm an increase in their ability to elaborate when defining nonfiction, sharing their perceptions of reading and writing nonfiction and naming their favorite books and authors.
Mason and Lacie’s post-survey responses shown in Figure 3 represent the type of feedback received by students when asked to define fiction and nonfiction at the conclusion of the study.

As seen above, both Mason and Lacie are able to provide further details regarding the structural elements and text features in nonfiction as well as the purposes for reading a nonfiction book. Mason knows that nonfiction has true facts that may include topics
surrounding history or nature while Lacie knows that nonfiction is a helpful resource when learning about “real things” such as animals. Mason also understands that the structures of fiction and nonfiction text differ when he shares his response to question 2, “Nonfiction is more like separate facts and stories are something that you have to read from front to back and it is something made up.” Lacie, mentions the nonfiction text features that make nonfiction different from fiction. She says, “Nonfiction is different because it is real and it doesn’t just tell you about a story. It has captions and labels and other things.” Compared to the students’ pre-survey responses, their ability to elaborate on the details and structure of a nonfiction text is much more apparent.

The post-survey data clearly documents an increase in the number of students sharing their positive opinions towards reading and writing nonfiction. Table 3 below highlights the drastic differences in students’ perceptions of reading nonfiction from the beginning of the study compared to the close of the study.

Table 3: Students’ responses to question 3 on the pre-survey and post-survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student Responses to question 3: What is your opinion of reading nonfiction books? Do you like to read them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellie Pre</td>
<td>I don’t always like to read nonfiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie Post</td>
<td>Jim Arnosky made me realize that I liked nonfiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassie Pre</td>
<td>I like them so so. Not really. Sometimes they’re scary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassie Post</td>
<td>I like nonfiction books because I get research from them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Pre</td>
<td>I like them but I like fiction better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Post</td>
<td>I like nonfiction books. I think they are good to learn from and do projects from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise Pre</td>
<td>I don’t like it because I like Magic Tree House and stuff like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise Post</td>
<td>I love nonfiction but I do like stories too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddie Pre</td>
<td>I think that they are boring but it is just not my thing is is not what I like. I like series chapter books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddie Post</td>
<td>I do like nonfiction cause they have a good use like you can learn stuff in them and about animals. Me and my friends have even been inspired by one.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ellie originally claimed, “I don’t always like to read nonfiction.” before the study. Her post-survey response now indicates, “Jim Arnosky made me realize that I liked nonfiction.” Cassie changed her opinion from, “I like them so-so. Not really. I think they’re scary.” on her pre-survey to, “I like nonfiction books because I get research from them.” on her post-survey. Maddie began our study thinking, “I think that they are boring but it is just not my thing. It is not what I like. I like series chapter books.” At the close of the study, she says, “I do like nonfiction cause they have a good use like you can learn stuff in them about animals. Me and my friends have even been inspired to write one.”
Students’ exposure to nonfiction text and nonfiction authors has eliminated the previous misconception that nonfiction writing was solely personal narrative stories. This is evident as seen in the students’ comments below:

• “I like to write about nonfiction because it might help someone learn something.” (Jake)

• “Yes because I like to write about animals. And it is Awesome to me!” (Lacie)

• “Yes because people can know more about that thing.” (Ryan)

Twenty-one students shared a more positive opinion of reading and writing nonfiction; while only one student indicated that her opinion of nonfiction did not change. In total, the post-survey results show that 1 student still does not like nonfiction, 20 students like nonfiction and 1 student indicated that her opinion is “so-so.” When reflecting back on the number of students who responded positively towards nonfiction on their pre-surveys (12 students), it is evident that engaging in nonfiction Author Studies and exposing students to nonfiction text has significantly impacted students’ perceptions of this genre.

As a result of conducting this study, the students’ post-survey responses also revealed an increase in their awareness of nonfiction text and nonfiction authors. The quotations below represent the students’ responses when asked to name their favorite nonfiction author:

• “Jim Arnosky is my favorite author because he inspired me.” (Cassie)

• “My favorite author is Jim Arnosky because I like that he writes nonfiction and that he draws cool pictures. And he does captions and labels to his pictures.” (Grace)

• “My favorite author is Jim Arnosky because he inspired me.” (Henry)
• “My favorite author is Steve Jenkins because he writes about lots of animals.” (Shaun)

• “Yes I do [have a favorite nonfiction author] it is Steve Jenkins. He is awesome.” (Nate)

In addition to sharing their favorite nonfiction authors, students’ were also more able to generate titles of their favorite nonfiction books.

• “It is Arnosky’s Ark because it has so many beautiful illustrations and I made a deer from it. I really like it.” (Lacie)

• “My favorite nonfiction book is Crocodile Safari because I am really interested in Crocodiles.” (Mason)

• “Yes, Never Smile at a Monkey is my favorite because it tells you what not to do with animals.” (Shaun)

• “Yes my favorite nonfiction book is Drawing from Nature because it helps you learn how to draw like really well!” (Maddie)

It is also critical to note that the students are not only identifying their favorite nonfiction authors and nonfiction books, but they are able to justify their reasons for naming them. By exposing the students to a range of nonfiction books and different nonfiction authors, this has evidently impacted their awareness and perceptions of this genre, and therefore students were able to later identify their favorite nonfiction author or book.

The table below provides a summary of all pre-survey and post-survey responses given by the students.

Table 4: Summary of all students’ responses on pre-surveys and post-surveys
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: What is nonfiction?</th>
<th>Question 2: What makes nonfiction books different from fiction (stories)?</th>
<th>Question 3: What is your opinion of reading nonfiction books? Do you like to read them?</th>
<th>Question 4: Do you have a favorite nonfiction author?</th>
<th>Question 5: Do you have a favorite nonfiction book?</th>
<th>Question 6: Do you like to write nonfiction?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Pre-survey Responses</td>
<td>18 students used words such as “real” or “true” to describe nonfiction with no further elaboration.</td>
<td>16 students indicated that nonfiction is true and fiction is not true without any further elaboration.</td>
<td>13 students said they liked to read nonfiction and 6 said they did not.</td>
<td>4 students have a favorite nonfiction author and 11 do not.</td>
<td>4 students have a favorite nonfiction book or topic and 11 do not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Post-survey Responses</td>
<td>Some elaboration with inclusion of text features, or the purpose for reading fiction vs. nonfiction.</td>
<td>More elaboration on the structures and features of both genres.</td>
<td>18 students said they liked nonfiction, 1 student said she did not like nonfiction, and 1 said she feels “so-so” about it.</td>
<td>16 students named Jim Arnosky, 2 named Steve Jenkins, and 4 said they still do not have a favorite author</td>
<td>12 students named a favorite nonfiction book, 4 did not have a favorite nonfiction book, and the 4 “like them all” or “can’t choose”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to further ascertain students’ understanding of nonfiction, I administered a T-Chart at the beginning of the study. This tool provided immediate insight into students’
comfort level, understanding, and background knowledge of nonfiction text and nonfiction authors.

Pre T-Chart

The most significant data was reflected in the pre and post T-Charts completed by the three following students: Katie, Ellie and Cassie (see Figure 4).
Katie writes, “fiction is a story that’s not real. For an example of fiction is like: a Mexican fox that can talk to the sun.” For nonfiction, she says, “Nonfiction is the opposite of fiction. It’s real. For example of nonfiction is like: ” Katie was unable to elaborate and share examples of nonfiction in the same way that she could share examples of fiction, which revealed that she has had little experience interacting with this genre. Ellie’s responses were similar. To describe fiction, she listed, “not real, Three Little Pigs, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and Matilda.” When she moved to the nonfiction column, she was unable to write anything beyond nonfiction is “real.” Ellie’s response may also reveal her lack of experience with nonfiction, thus resulting in her inability to elaborate with examples of books that are considered nonfiction. Cassie was able to name several examples of books and authors when

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Something is not real or fake.</td>
<td>Something that is real like I know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Bugs going to school.</td>
<td>Lucy, Sam, Zoe, and Kly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Wars, aliens, or maybe even monsters. Here are some books that are Fiction. The Three Little Pigs Thars a mouse that the mouse. A mouse under my bed. Dairy of a wimpy kid.</td>
<td>Here are some things that are real. Space, outside Connor, Lucy, Maggie Me, Boy Ko, Me, Gray Tate, Marc, monkey.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
asked to describe fiction. However, she was only able to associate nonfiction with real people. She lists her friends, her teacher and her classmates rather than naming books and authors. Katie, Ellie, and Cassie’s responses illustrate the typical responses received by the students. Many students were able to elaborate when describing fiction, but were unable to do the same for nonfiction. No students mentioned authors who write nonfiction on their pre T-Chart.

Post T-Chart

At the conclusion of the study, the students completed the T-Chart a second time. Compared to their original responses, the students were more specific in their abilities to name fiction and nonfiction elements, text features, books, and authors. Figure 5 shows Katie, Ellie, and Cassie’s post T-Chart responses.

![T-Chart example]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Real</td>
<td>Nonfiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Caracters are Fiction</td>
<td>I Really Like Nonfiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Arposky writes about Nonfiction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Jinkins wrote about Nonfiction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>things that are not real:</td>
<td>things that are real like:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fake stuff like...</td>
<td>Alligators, Birds,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monsters,</td>
<td>Crocodiles, Pandas, and dogs. Here are some real life Authors that write about nonfiction:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink owls, witches,</td>
<td>Jim Arno, KY, Steve Jekens, Seymou, Simon and Gail Gibb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flying bros, and Micky mouse, here are some fiction Authors...</td>
<td>and Sue Mac-Donald.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Katie, Ellie and Cassie’s post T-Charts
Katie identifies text features commonly found in nonfiction such as captions and labels. She also lists her definitions of nonfiction, “It is real. It tells you facts. It teaches you stuff. It’s true. It usually has labels.” Ellie names Jim Arnosky and Steve Jenkins when asked to describe nonfiction. She also shares her belief that she thinks more people like nonfiction than they do fiction. This opinion may be based on her classmates’ opinions of nonfiction. Cassie demonstrates an awareness that she has begun to seek out other authors who also write nonfiction in addition to those we have studied. Besides identifying Jim Arnosky and Steve Jenkins, Cassie names authors who were not mentioned during this research study, including Seymour Simon and Gail Gibbons. Her response shows the student’s motivation to seek out other authors of nonfiction for further exploration of this genre.

The data from the pre T-Charts and post T-Charts suggest a heightened sense of awareness for nonfiction authors and books as well as nonfiction text features, thus supporting the idea for increased exposure to this genre through the use of nonfiction author studies.

The pre and post-survey results show that students have made growth in the areas of naming nonfiction authors and books and identifying nonfiction text features. The data is also informative in revealing how students’ perceptions towards reading and writing nonfiction changed over the course of the study.

Class Discussion

On the final day of the study, the students ‘signed in’ by walking to the dry erase board with a T-Chart drawn on it. They placed a magnetic index card with their name printed in the column that represented their perceptions towards nonfiction. Surprisingly, twenty students placed their name cards under the category of “Likes Nonfiction” as seen by Table 5 below.
Table 5: Number of students who like and do not like nonfiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likes Nonfiction</th>
<th>Does Not Like Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I moved their names to reflect the way the chart would have looked on September 4th (according to their pre-survey responses) the students began to yell each other’s names out as if in shock to see their friends’ names in the column that indicated they used to dislike nonfiction.

Once I finished moving their names, I allowed the students a moment to observe the chart which displayed only 13 students liking nonfiction and 9 students not liking nonfiction. After a brief moment, I said, “Okay, raise your hand if you are on the ‘does not like nonfiction’ column and you would like to move your name back over.” Immediately, hands were raised with requests to move their names from no back to yes. Some students yelled out, “Of course!” One, by one, as the students walked to the board to move their names, they shared why they like nonfiction now and did not before. The following are samples of their insightful comments:

• “I think I like nonfiction because I like Jim Arnosky’s books. I like his illustrations and I like that he actually goes out into the wild.” (Ellie)

• “Cause nonfiction is more useful for projects than fiction. Cause in nonfiction you can get facts.” (Elise)

• “Cause I like to learn about animals and nonfiction books give me a lot of information about them. And Jim Arnoksy really helped me like them, like nonfiction.” (Max)
• “Because I use nonfiction books to help with projects and I read fiction just for fun.” (Ryan)

• “It’s cause Jim Arnosky inspired me to make the book.” (Cassie)

After the students finished moving their names from ‘does not like’ to ‘like’, I asked, “Who else would like to move their name?” Grace, who was originally on the ‘likes nonfiction column’ requested to move her name to the ‘does not like nonfiction column’. She then shared her reason for doing so, “When I read fiction books, they always just inspire me to like play a fun game or make stuff.” Teagan chose to keep her name in on the ‘does not like’ column for similar reasons, as she explained, “because fiction is kind of like imagination and magic.” However, I found it interesting to note that the two girls who claimed to dislike nonfiction were the same students who independently co-authored a nonfiction book titled Gila Monsters during the research study. After making this comment to the girls, Grace made the decision to place her name down the middle indicating that her opinion was “so-so.” The final discussion T-Chart is represented numerically in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Final T-Chart responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likes Nonfiction</th>
<th>“So-So”</th>
<th>Does Not Like Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our final discussion proved to be one of the most informative conversations in this research study. The students’ comments were evidence of their increased interest and response to nonfiction text and nonfiction authors. Their comments also shared insight into the students’ abilities to think more critically about their perceptions of this genre.
After careful examination and analysis of the data, the following three themes emerged based on multiple sources of data gathered throughout the study. Each initial theme is presented below with various sub-themes that include further evidence of support.

• Nonfiction Author Studies can bring nonfiction to life for students and can significantly impact their interest, responses, and understanding of nonfiction text.

  Students respond more enthusiastically to reading and writing nonfiction

  Students have a better understanding of nonfiction text and a heightened sense of awareness for the genre

• Exploring nonfiction literature with students can: 1) increase their awareness of nonfiction text features, 2) enhance their understanding of how/why authors would use them in nonfiction literature and 3) enable students to identify and discover the text features of nonfiction on their own.

  • Students are able to identify nonfiction text features more easily

  • They understand that authors intentionally use nonfiction text features in their writing

  • Students independently identify and discover nonfiction text features

• Nonfiction authors can inspire, encourage, and challenge young students to explore nonfiction in their own reading, writing, and visual representation

  • Students demonstrate an increased motivation to try writing like the authors

  • Students developed an interest in creating visual representations like the authors we’ve studied
The following section presents data that will document each theme discussed above.

Theme 1 – Nonfiction Author Studies can bring nonfiction to life for students and can significantly impact their interest, responses and understanding of nonfiction text

After analyzing the pre data and post data, I was cognizant of the fact that I was working with a number of students who had negative opinions towards reading and writing nonfiction and who were unfamiliar with nonfiction authors/books. However, through careful selection of authors who intentionally craft their books in ways that pull readers in and keep them engaged longer, the students’ perceptions and understanding of the genre began to change. Continuously throughout this study, I observed students as they increasingly became more familiar with reading, writing, and understanding nonfiction text. The conversations and artifacts documented below are evidence of the impact that exposure to nonfiction authors and nonfiction text had on students’ comfort level and interest in the genre.

Students responded more enthusiastically to reading and writing nonfiction

The Author Study Connections Notebook proved to be an informative resource in revealing the students’ developing interests for nonfiction text and nonfiction authors. They began to respond more positively to the genre with entries such as Elise and Teagan’s seen in Figure 6 below.
Elise and Teagan’s entries are concrete examples of students’ developing interests in reading nonfiction text and interacting with nonfiction authors. As the study progressed, I found that exposing students to nonfiction text changed their perceptions and definitions of nonfiction text. Evidence of this was documented in an audio recorded conversation during choice time one morning. Elise and Emma were reading Jim Arnosky’s Wild Ponies: A One
Whole Day Book. As I approached them on the rug, I noticed that Elise was reading the book to Emma. I asked:

Me: “Which one is this?”

Elise: “Wild Ponies”

Me: “Wild Ponies. What do you think of it?”

Elise: “It’s pretty good. I mean. I thought it was going to be really bad but then Emma really wanted me to read it and so I’m reading it to her.”

Emma: “Cause I really love horses.”

Me: “You researched a horse for Steve Jenkins. So, why did you think it was not gonna be that good?”

Elise: “Because I mean, I like big chapter books and when I read the first page, I said oh, it’s a rhyming book, this is gonna be oh, little kid rhyming book. But it’s actually kind of educational. I really like how he paints and draws. I like how he like, “we do this…” and …”

Emma: It’s the perfect book for me because I like horses. Every book is good for me if it has horses in it.”

Even though Elise and Emma were originally expecting a rhyming book for much younger children, they were pleasantly surprised by the content and the way in which it was presented, even finding it educational. By providing ample time for the students to simply explore nonfiction and engage in conversation with their peers, this allowed the content of the books to peak their curiosity and heighten their sense of inquiry for this genre, thus changing their perceptions towards reading nonfiction.
As the students became more familiar with nonfiction authors, they began to see these experts as their friends and mentors, which aided in their developing interest in writing nonfiction. In the students’ letters to their chosen nonfiction author (Steve Jenkins or Jim Arnosky) shown in Figure 7, there is clear evidence of their desire to offer their appreciation for the authors’ craft and to share their own attempts at writing nonfiction.

Figure 7: Shaun and Mason’s letters to the authors

Shaun and Mason’s letters demonstrate students’ enthusiasm for interacting with nonfiction authors, as well as reading and writing nonfiction.
Students had a better understanding of nonfiction text and a heightened sense of awareness for the genre.

As the study progressed, and exposure to the genre became more frequent, the students became experts in understanding how to read nonfiction text. Emma’s audio recorded comment provides documentation that the students are aware of their improvements in interacting with nonfiction. During our final discussion, Emma says, “I thought it was boring before (nonfiction) and I kinda just looked at the pictures. And yeah, now I know about it more now.”

Emma is honest when she says that she didn’t understand how to read nonfiction before, so she simply looked at the pictures. However, now that she has developed more familiarity with the genre through frequent exposure, she no longer finds it boring and feels more comfortable reading nonfiction.

As the students continued to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the genre, they began making certain connections between the two authors’ books and other nonfiction books. Around the time of our initial introduction to Steve Jenkins, Collin decided to test the accuracy of Steve Jenkins’ illustrations. While reading a nonfiction book from a book basket in the classroom, he discovered actual photographs of a vampire squid and a hatched fish and instantly made the connection that Steve Jenkins also wrote about these animals. After realizing that Elise and Gabe were reading Down Down Down, (the book that contained the vampire squid and hatchet fish), he approached them and had the following conversation with them:

Collin: Do you remember when I showed you the picture of the vampire squid?
Me: Yes.

Nonverbally, he points to a photograph in the book that has a vampire squid in it.
Me: Oh Really? Interesting! So compare that (referring to the photograph) to Steve Jenkins’ illustration.

Collin: It’s pretty close. Oh wait, I have the hatchet fish too.

Me: (Talking to Elise and Gabe) Connor found a real picture of a vampire squid and Steve Jenkins has an illustration of a vampire squid.

Collin: And there’s the hatchet fish

Me: Oh wow...

Collin: And if you flip to the back of this there’s a vampire squid drawing.

Me: So when we compare that picture to Steve Jenkins’ illustration, how accurate...

Collin and Elise: Quite accurate.

Me: I would say quite accurate, so do you think he had to do a lot of research there?

Collin: Uh huh

Elise: Oh yeah...

Collin: Do you see the hatchet fish? Here’s the real fish.

Me: They look very similar. Wow, great observation Collin.

Collin recognized the importance of accuracy in nonfiction books. I noticed many students were making explicit connections and observations between nonfiction authors and books and other nonfiction books in the classroom, thus demonstrating their heightened sense of awareness for this genre. This is also reflected in Max’s Author Study Connections Notebook entry when he writes the comment seen in Figure 8.
Max has become the expert on both of these prolific authors through his extensive study of their literature. In doing this, he has developed an interest and awareness in the subjects the authors write about, which has also allowed him to make connections among their books’ similarities.

Similarly, Trent made a connection between Steve Jenkins’ book Cats and Dogs, and a book that he was reading at home. One side of Trent’s book contained facts about wolves and the other contained cartoon illustrations with a story that recounted a recent children’s movie. Trent brought the book to school in order to share that he had made a connection to Steve Jenkins’ book Cats and Dogs which is structured similarly. One side contains facts about cats and the other side is about dogs. Photographs of Trent’s book can be seen below in Figure 9.
Trent took his expertise of nonfiction and Steve Jenkins’ books home with him, thus resulting in making a connection to the structural similarities between these two books.

Theme 2 – Exploring nonfiction literature with students can: 1) increase their awareness of nonfiction text features, 2) enhance their understanding of how/why authors would use them in nonfiction text and 3) enable students to identify and discover the text features of nonfiction on their own.

Throughout the duration of the study, I observed and recorded evidence of the students’ awareness and utilization of nonfiction text features. The students became more familiar with nonfiction text features and began to understand the authors’ purposes for using them when writing nonfiction.

Students’ increased awareness of nonfiction text features

In order to assist students with identifying and understanding nonfiction text features, I engaged them in two activities: the Nonfiction Text Features Scavenger Hunt and the Nonfiction Text Features Detectives Activity (explained in further detail in Chapter 3) in which the students practiced identifying nonfiction text features in the authors’ books. The data
proves these activities were a beneficial way to increase students’ comfort level with complex text features. Documented conversations and comments, such as Maddie’s and Ellie’s seen below, capture students identifying various text features in nonfiction books.

“And I found captions. This book, it shows you what the drawing is and teaches you how to draw nature. It’s so awesome!” (Maddie)

“Trumpet, trumpet is really weird. Jim Arnosky, he put labels next to this fish. It’s a good thing because it would have just been a weird looking fish.” (Ellie)

Maddie and Ellie are demonstrating their ability to identify text features and understand their importance in nonfiction text.

The students’ abilities to identify text features extended beyond the nonfiction authors’ books. As the study continued, they became aware of text features located elsewhere and began to identify them. One morning upon my arrival, Ellie shared with me that she had brought in family photos that contained white sticky labels on them. She identified them as captions and made a connection to those found in nonfiction books. Figure 19 shows another classmate’s entry in The Author Study Connections Notebook, who was also intrigued by Ellie’s connection.

Figure 10: Lacie and Ellie’s pictures with captions
Exploring nonfiction text can enhance students’ understanding of how and why authors use nonfiction text features.

Through frequent exposure to nonfiction text features, the students emerged as the experts of text feature identification. They began to demonstrate their understanding that authors intentionally use specific nonfiction text features when crafting their books. Mason’s Nonfiction Text Feature Detectives worksheet, shown below in Figure 11, represents the students’ knowledge of this concept.

![Figure 11: Mason’s Nonfiction Text Feature Detectives Activity](image)

Mason indicated that italics are helpful to readers of nonfiction because, “It is a different type of font that means it is talking about something specific.” Mason is aware that authors of nonfiction utilize nonfiction text features for specific purposes in order to help their readers.

Similarly, I captured audio and video recorded comments and conversations throughout the study that also support students’ understanding of intentional uses of nonfiction text features. Examples of students’ comments are shown below:
• “I know what the back of the page is for. If you don’t know a lot about the book then you can go there and look.” (Mary)

• “Like on that, on the book about birds....Animals in Flight um, he (Steve Jenkins) put a caption and you would start wondering what bird is that so he put a caption down.” (Lacie)

Mary knows that Steve Jenkins often includes what we identified as a Picture Glossary in the back of his books in order to provide readers with additional information about each of the animals presented in the book. Additionally, Lacie is aware that a caption is appropriate on the page of Steve Jenkins’ Animals in Flight in order to aid the reader when identifying a particular illustration.

Students are able to identify and discover the text features of nonfiction on their own

Through independent exploration of both authors, the students began to identify and make their own self-discoveries of other nonfiction text features. Coincidentally, Steve Jenkins and Jim Arnosky both utilize actual size illustrations and large, fold-out pages as a common features in their books. The students instantly made this connection and wrote entires in The Author Study Connections Notebook seen below in Figure 12.
He likes to write about animals. Uses great detail.

CAMP 11-13-12
Steve Jenkins puts actual size
and size does
Jim Almasky.

In the Book Wild Trax
they are life size
tracks. Just like Steve
Jankowski.
Figure 12: Students’ Connections to Steve Jenkins and Jim Arnosky’s use of actual size

On the same day, I captured Max and Gabe sharing a similar connection.

• “Um, he’s sort of like Steve Jenkins...Cause he uses actual size stuff and labels.”

• “Also this is a connection that Steve Jenkins and Jim Arnosky do real size.”

In the comments above, it is apparent that a number of students were able to make connections between the two authors and their use of similar text features.

Other self-discoveries were documented through conversations with Gabe, a quiet, yet reflective student who often brought nonfiction books to me in order to share various text features that he had discovered. On two separate occasions, I recorded conversations the following conversations.

Gabe: “So this is... it shows... (he’s pointing to the ruler on the page)

Me: “It shows you where he is, or exactly where the submarine is.”
Gabe: “Yeah, it’s all the way down.”

Gabe: “And this…[pointing to an illustration] it says 27 inches and I saw this [pointing to the ruler on the back cover of the page] and it’s about 27 inches.”

Gabe noticed two rulers, one displayed in Down Down Down and another shown in Prehistoric Actual Size. Gabe’s comments reflect his ability to discover nonfiction fiction text features and his knowledge that Steve Jenkins intentionally uses these rulers to help the reader visualize the sizes of animals. His comments also demonstrate his critical analysis of nonfiction text.

While exploring Jim Arnosky’s books during choice time, Trent made a similar discovery in his All About series. He noticed that Jim Arnosky takes one illustration and stretches it across three pages at the beginning of each book. When Trent observed this, he made the following entry in the Author Study Connections notebook.

![Trent’s Author Study Connections Notebook entry](image)

Figure 13: Trent’s Author Study Connections Notebook entry

Trent’s knowledge of Jim Arnoksy’s books was such that he developed an awareness of this unique feature, thus resulting in his discovery that this only occurs in Arnosky’s All About
series. His discovery further supports that the students have become experts in the critical analysis of nonfiction text.

Theme 3 – Nonfiction authors inspire, encourage and challenge young students to explore nonfiction in their own reading, writing and visual representation

During both nonfiction author studies, I provided the students with numerous opportunities to try writing and illustrating like the authors we studied. While exploring Steve Jenkins, we carefully explored his writing and illustration process. Although we engaged in these activities as a whole class, I left much of the decision making up to the students; what text features to add (if any), how to illustrate their animal, what pieces of information were most interesting to add (etc). The data presented below suggests the students saw themselves as authors of nonfiction.

Students demonstrate an increased motivation to try writing like the authors we’ve studied

Through the duration of the Steve Jenkins author study, the students collaborated with one another to compile a nonfiction book that contained pages of animal facts and illustrations research by the students. The nonfiction book pages displayed in Figures 14 through 17 below provide clear evidence that the students have taken on the role of nonfiction authors and illustrators with the mentorship of Steve Jenkins.
Trent does not label his page this way, but his scorpion was illustrated at actual size. Also, he changed the color of the text in order to emphasize to his readers that scorpions lived so long ago - 550 million years. Both features are commonly found in Steve Jenkins’ books.

Lacie spent hours tearing and ripping paper to collage her bearded dragon the way Steve Jenkins would. She also makes her words move in the shapes of the hills and the bearded dragons head, another feature commonly found in Steve Jenkins’ books. The first letter of ‘Some’ is a block letter which can be seen in many fiction and nonfiction books.
Figure 16: Henry’s nonfiction book page

Henry wants to be clear to his readers that he’s included a caption on his page in the same way that Steve Jenkins would. He labels the text ‘caption.’

Figure 17: Nate’s nonfiction book page

Nate included labels on his page, another common nonfiction text feature. He also chose to make the words move with the shapes of the waves in the ocean which is seen often in Steve Jenkins’ books.
Through extensive exploration of Steve Jenkins’ books, the students were able to model the author’s craft when designing this nonfiction book. From his research process to his writing and illustration process, the students consulted Steve Jenkins at each step in order to successfully publish the book Animals of the World: Facts and Pictures.

Two students, Teagan and Grace, responded to our Author Studies by creating a nonfiction book of their own. I observed on numerous occasions as the two girls obtained Jim Arnosky’s Watching Desert Wildlife (2002) from the book basket, found sheets of paper and pencils, and began taking notes from the book. Upon learning that they were researching to write a book about Gila monsters, I interviewed them. The follow conversation was recorded:

Me: “Okay, tell me about your project. What exactly are you doing?”
Teagan: “We’re writing facts about them (Gila monsters). Maybe we’ll make a book. Like you know…”
Grace: “We’re studying the Gila monster and we’re gonna, um, make a project out of clay.”
Teagan: “Or paint. We’re gonna do it ourselves and make a Teagan and Grace research or a Grace and Teagan research.”
Me: “And so you’re using mostly Jim Arnosky’s books to help you with that?”
Both: “Yeah”
Grace: “Yea because…”
Teagan: “Because he has a lot of lizard facts.”
Me: “Oh, okay. So, where did you get the idea to do this project?”
Grace: “Um, we were reading about the um, the Gila monster.”
Teagan: “Yea and we thought it was cool.”
Grace: “And we thought it was really cool. So, we decided to research about it.”
Teagan: “So yea.”

Me: “And did our Steve Jenkins project have any inspiration for this?”

Both: “Yea.”

Teagan: “Kind of.”

Grace: “Yea we um, like the idea of making the project out of paper so…”

Teagan: “And animals.”

Grace: “Yea so we thought we would do it again…”

Overall, the duration of their project lasted approximately two weeks. When the girls had a final draft written, I assisted them with typing their notes and obtaining clip art illustrations. Their finished product was published and titled: *Gila Monsters.*

Although both girls are still reserved about their opinions towards nonfiction (according to their final discussion and post-survey responses), their exposure to nonfiction authors evidently impacted their perceptions towards reading and writing nonfiction. Their dedication to independently crafting and publishing a nonfiction book shows that nonfictions authors can serve as literacy mentors for young children.

Students developed an interest in creating visual representation like the authors we’ve studied

As we transitioned into the author study on Jim Arnosky, the students engaged in what Ms. Boyko defined as an “inquiry extension.” Using Jim Arnosky as an inspiration and a model, the students took on the roles of nonfiction illustrators without any prompting or direction from me or Ms. Boyko. During choice time, four girls (Ellie, Maddie, Cassie, and Lacie) collaborated for several weeks to design their own book of illustrations. Each girl chose a different type of animal to focus on—(sea creatures, forest animals etc). Over time, other students became
interested in the project, and the number of illustrators working on this project increased to more than half the class. As the project evolved, I encouraged the students to include captions, labels and other nonfiction text features. Samples of the students’ visual representations of Jim Arnosky can be seen in Collin’s and Cassie’s illustrations below.

![Collin and Cassie's nonfiction illustrations](image)

Collin shows evidence of using captions, labels, and actual size illustrations while Cassie included a label that outlined the shape of her wood duck’s head (features which can be found in both Jim Arnosky’s and Steve Jenkins’ books). Cassie also illustrated her wood duck in pencil, as was modeled by Jim Arnosky in several sketching demonstration videos seen by the students.
The students decided to compile their drawings and submit them for publication. They titled their book Amazing, Radical, Awesome Animals! When asked to share their thoughts on having published books, the students replied with the following comments:

“It’s awesome. I like it because um, we’re like Jim Arnosky and we have two of our own books.” (Elise)

“We’re like little Jim Arnosky’s.” (Lacie)

“We’re kind of like his little minions.” (Maddie)

Their published books are evidence of their willingness, desire and motivation to assume the roles of their favorite authors and illustrators of nonfiction, which can be directly contributed to engaging in nonfiction author studies.

The students also demonstrated their visual representation of nonfiction through nature sketching. While studying Jim Arnosky, we learned that as a naturalist, he researches animals by observing and sketching in nature. In order to experience this first-hand, Ms Boyko and I took the students out to the pond behind the school to observe and sketch nature. The below nature sketches done by the students reflect their understanding of Jim Arnosky’s research and illustrations. See Figure 19 below:
Evidence of text feature utilization is found in the students’ use of a ‘snapshot’ of the day in the top corners of their papers including the time, date, weather, and the moon phase. They also utilized a common strategy in the same way that Jim Arnosky would when he does not immediately see the animals he is looking for. It was cold during our sketching session, therefore we saw very few animals. Both students drew the animals’ habitats and carefully labeled their surroundings as they sketched.

After our nature sketching, the students returned to the classroom to reflect in their journals about the experience. The students’ journal entries shown in Figure 20 paint an accurate picture of their opinions.

Figure 19: Students’ nature journals

My drawing is almost like Jim Arnosky because I went in to nature and drew.
Like their mentor authors, the students developed an intentional process for writing and illustrating nonfiction. I often interviewed the students about their research, writing and illustration processes. They shared the following comments with me:
• “I’m taking notes and then I’m gonna do the illustrations from the notes.” (Gabe)
• “We’re writing facts about them (Gila monsters). Maybe we’ll make a book.” (Grace and Teagan)
• “For every picture that I draw, I’m gonna write what they are.” (Ellie)
• “I’m gonna try to write everything (begins pointing to text features on the page) like I’m gonna write that, and that, maybe that.” (Collin)
• “I’m trying to draw an impression of his bird. I’m trying to make it just like him [Jim Arnosky].” (Elise)

These comments offer powerful insight as they reveal the students’ understanding that authors have a plan when researching, writing, and illustrating their books. Students began to take on greater ownership as they developed their own plan of action when writing.

As the students continued to study and critically analyze our nonfiction authors’ writing and illustrating processes, they began to take cues and tips from them as a way of informing their own reading, writing and visual representation. Over time, the students became the nonfiction authors, illustrators, researchers, and naturalists, and also saw themselves in these roles.

Ongoing Informal Observations in the Classroom; The Study Continues

Although the formal data collection phase of the study has concluded, I have returned to the classroom on several occasions to observe and assist Ms. Boyko with lessons that involved writing and inquiry. Several times, I found evidence that the students have continued to think about our nonfiction authors and make connections with nonfiction text. Around Valentine’s Day, which also coincided with the 100th day of school, the students completed a writing activity that required each student to write something that they enjoyed learning about on a pink heart. Ms. Boyko challenged the students to come together as a class and make 100 hearts that each
displayed a different subject or topic that they liked to learn about in school. After finishing all 100, they would be displayed on a board in the classroom in the shape of the number 100. Upon looking more closely at these hearts, I found the following entries shown in Figure 21.

![Students' entries on their pink hearts](image)

Figure 21: Students’ entries on their pink hearts

From these pink paper hearts, one can clearly see that the students enjoyed their experiences with nonfiction text and nonfiction authors.

On another visit to the classroom, Collin shared with me that he was writing his own nature journal, inspired by Jim Arnosky in Writer’s Workshop. I documented his writing with the photos below in Figure 22.
Collin demonstrates his understanding of writing a nature guide like Jim Arnosky by only writing about animals that he has actually observed in the wild. Collin evidently has continued to view himself as a nonfiction author, illustrator, and naturalist. The nonfiction authors have sparked an interest in the students. On the same day, Collin approached me and informed me that he was writing a second letter to Jim Arnosky.
Collin’s letter not only shows his love for Jim Arnosky and an appreciation for his work, it also reveals that he finds similarities between Jim Arnosky’s interests and his own. Collin truly identifies with this author in such a way that he has become the author.

From these additional visits to the classroom, I learned the significant impact that our nonfiction authors had on one student’s interest, response, and understanding of nonfiction text. I also began to realize the depth of the students’ engagement with the genre and their continued commitment to read, write, and interact with nonfiction.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the themes and sub-themes that emerged as a result of this study and provided evidence that supported these themes. I found that engaging students in nonfiction Author Studies increased their interest, response, and understanding of nonfiction text.
and nonfiction text features. It also motivated students to explore nonfiction writing and illustrating, ultimately transforming them into the authors and illustrators of nonfiction.

**DISCUSSION**

In this qualitative study, I researched and explored the impact that nonfiction authors and nonfiction text has on students’ critical analysis and understanding of nonfiction text including their perceptions and awareness of the genre, as well as their understanding and utilization of nonfiction text features. I also intentionally analyzed students’ conversations and interactions with their peers as they engaged in discussion of nonfiction books, authors and topics with the goal of further capturing their evolving opinions and perceptions towards nonfiction text/authors. My critical analysis of pre and post data, students’ conversations, researcher notebooks, and student artifacts revealed three significant themes, each with subthemes. They are presented below:

1. **Nonfiction Author Studies bring nonfiction to life for students and significantly impact their interest, responses, and understanding of nonfiction text.**
   
   1. After engaging in Author Studies, students respond more enthusiastically to reading and writing nonfiction

   2. After engaging in Author Studies, students have a better understanding of nonfiction text and a heightened sense of awareness of the genre

2. **Exploring nonfiction literature with students: 1) increases their awareness of nonfiction text features, 2) enhances their understanding of how and why authors intentionally use these**
features in their nonfiction literature, and 3) enables them to identify and discover the text features of nonfiction on their own.

3. Nonfiction authors inspire, encourage, and challenge young students to explore nonfiction through their own reading, writing, and visual representation

3. After learning about nonfiction authors, students demonstrate an increased interest and motivation to try writing like the authors they studied

4. After learning about nonfiction authors, students develop an interest in creating detailed visual representations like the authors they studied

The findings from this research study clearly present the multiple benefits associated with engaging students in nonfiction author studies and exposing them to nonfiction text. Each artifact offers significant insight into the numerous advantages associated with utilizing nonfiction authors and nonfiction text in the elementary classroom.

The first theme revealed that young students are able to engage in critical analysis of nonfiction as seen through their conversations and interactions with one another. Throughout this study, students carefully consulted and questioned the authors’ writing and illustrating processes. The students perceived the authors as mentors and fellow writing partners who could offer them guidance and support, and who could provide them with authentic examples of nonfiction text features embedded in their authentic, engaging picture books. As I observed students, I documented their conversations with one another and noted how they referred to their mentor author before making decisions when writing and illustrating. In one conversation Teagan asked:
Teagan: “Can I put sunglasses on my cheetah?”

Me: “Well…”

Teagan: (interrupting my thought) “Well, Steve Jenkins probably wouldn’t do that.”

Teagan knows that Steve Jenkins strives to produce accurate illustrations that are real-life representations of the animal itself. Steve Jenkins wouldn’t put sunglasses on a cheetah, because this is not accurate, nor does it represent the real-life behaviors of a cheetah. She quickly changed her mind based on her knowledge of Steve Jenkins’ books and his illustrations. As noted in Figure 24 below, Teagan has utilized several of Steve Jenkins’ text features, including collage, caption, and text placement to create a more realistic illustration about a cheetah.

Figure 24: Teagan’s Cheetah

It was through conversations such as these that I began to truly understand the abilities that my students had acquired as a direct result of this study. I also gained further insight into the power of using nonfiction books and authors as well as the many valuable and authentic learning opportunities that they presented.

The second theme revealed students enhanced interest, understanding and ability to identify nonfiction text features as evidenced in many of the entries documented in The Author
Study Connection’s Notebook as well as audio and video recorded conversations. Engaging in Author Studies allowed the students to make personal connections with the authors, thus resulting in increased motivation to explore their work further. Students were better able to define nonfiction and list many purposes for reading nonfiction. This is evidenced in Collin’s T-Chart where he defines nonfiction as, “Like a teacher without a teacher.” Students were also able to identify their favorite nonfiction authors, name their favorite nonfiction books and give their reasons for making these choices, as evidenced by their Post T-Charts and Post surveys. In one example, Grace shared that her favorite nonfiction author was Jim Arnosky because, “I like the way he writes nonfiction and he does captions and labels to his pictures. Students were also more likely to self-select nonfiction texts during free-choice reading time as a result of these personal connections to the authors.

The third theme revealed the numerous ways that nonfiction authors inspire, encourage, and challenge young students to explore nonfiction through their own reading, writing, and visual representation. This was reflected in the conversations and interactions between students, and the diverse artifacts I collected including the nonfiction books crafted and published by the students and student sketches. All artifacts clearly demonstrated how students’ were able to identify and discuss how and why authors make the intentional decisions they make when crafting their nonfiction books to include specific literary elements, text features and structural designs to enhance their texts.

As the study progressed, I was consistently surprised by the direction in which the students took this study. As discussed in Chapter 3, the students guided this study based on their interests, connections and perceptions towards nonfiction. Ultimately, the results revealed that students actually became authors of nonfiction texts by mirroring many of the authors’ styles of
writing and illustrating, processes of researching topics and the expert ways that nonfiction authors construct their books. The students collaborated on and co-authored nonfiction books in the same way that their favorite authors did. They carefully researched their topics using a variety of nonfiction resources such as internet sites, nonfiction texts and observing nature. The students closely “consulted” with Steve Jenkins and Jim Arnosky when creating and illustrating their own books by immersing themselves in text sets by each author. In the book covers presented in Figure 25 below, Grace and Teagan wrote the book entitled Gila Monsters and Amazing, Radical, Awesome Animals! was a collaborative effort by several students.

Figure 25: Student-authored book covers

Implications

Based on the level of enthusiasm I observed among the students when they were interacting with nonfiction text and nonfiction authors, I would suggest that teachers do more with nonfiction text and create frequent opportunities for their students to engage with this genre. Although students had access to nonfiction text in their classroom prior to participating in this study, this genre had not been ‘brought to life’ through the in-depth study of nonfiction authors. By increasing student’s understanding of an author’s writing and illustrating processes and the
intentional decisions they make when including nonfiction text features. The students came to know the authors as mentors and real people who significantly impacted their understanding of nonfiction and their comfort with reading and writing this genre. Based on this study, I strongly suggest that the representation of nonfiction text should be more equally balanced in classroom libraries.

One unexpected finding of this study was the realization that nonfiction meets students where they are, regardless of their academic abilities. On numerous occasions, I observed as groups of students from various academic skill levels came together during independent reading times to explore, discuss and critique nonfiction text together. I found that this genre naturally invites students to explore any number of topics that interest them, which can increase their motivation to read, write and explore nonfiction more carefully.

All teachers strive to create a classroom community of learners who respect and value one another’s ideas and opinions. Through the duration of this study, the students began offering suggestions to one another in their conversations surrounding their writing and illustrations of nonfiction. During choice time, the following conversation was documented between Lacie, Mary and Emma:

Mary: “What should the background be?”
Me: “A shadow of him flying away?”
Mary: “Emma, what should the background be?”
Emma: “I think it should be on its back.”
Lacie: “It should also be eating something.”
Lacie, Emma and Mary know that Steve Jenkins and Jim Arnosky often collaborate with others when researching and writing their books. The girls have chosen to do the same and consulted one another for suggestions when crafting their own illustrations. It is clear from the above conversation that exploring nonfiction authors and nonfiction text as a class strengthened the students’ feelings that they were an integral part of our learning community and had valuable insight to offer to their peers.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a result of this study, I discovered the importance of my role as a teacher-researcher in the elementary classroom. The methods through which I documented students’ conversations and connections to nonfiction authors/text were similar in nature to those routinely utilized by classroom teachers to inform their decision making regarding curriculum, planning and teaching. This enlightened understanding will forever impact my pedagogy, my curricular decisions and my theoretical beliefs. With this in mind, the following paragraphs are recommendations for teachers to further research in their classrooms.

The primary focus of this study was not specifically looking at students’ abilities to write nonfiction. However, this theme began to emerge as a result of engaging in nonfiction author studies, even in my shorter time frame of a semester-long study. The students took on the tasks of nature sketching, researching like the authors and collaborating with one another to write and illustrate their own books. I would suggest conducting a research study over an entire school year, specifically focusing on students’ writing of nonfiction as a result of immersing students in the genre of nonfiction through nonfiction author studies, would offer substantive data to support the explicit connection.
The students and I extensively explored two prolific authors of nonfiction who primarily share their expertise on science-related topics. In order to avoid creating any misconceptions that nonfiction is associated only with science, we also delved into the critical analysis of biographies at the beginning of the study. Although insightful for the students, this biography study was relatively short and only four biographies were explored in great detail. I recommend a year-long study that involves a more balanced selection of authors who write on topics related to science, social studies and other subject areas.

Nonfiction author studies invite science, social studies and other curriculum concepts into the classroom in the form of expert and experienced authors who extensively research their topics before crafting their literature (Jenkins, 2006; Kotch & Zackman, 1995). Areas for future research might include the implications that author studies have on teachers’ integration of concepts across the curriculum and the students’ connections to these concepts as a result of delving into the authors’ work.

Final Thoughts

As an elementary teacher, I now understand the powerful implications that result from engaging students in an extensive, in-depth study of nonfiction and nonfiction Author Studies. The implications that resulted from inviting students to participate in this study have forever transformed my theoretical beliefs and pedagogical practices. I will make more informed decisions when introducing nonfiction to my future students. I have gained valuable insight into the conscious effort that teachers must make in order to ensure the accurate and appropriate representation of nonfiction in their classroom libraries. Additionally, I recognize the influential nature of bringing this genre to life for students through the use of nonfiction author studies. In
closing, inviting students to understand and critically analyze nonfiction broadened their perspectives of how nonfiction is defined, how to interact with it, how it can significantly impact their reading writing and visual representation

LITERATURE CITED


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Children’s Literature Cited


Appendix A

Name __________________________

Nonfiction Survey

1. What is nonfiction?
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

2. What makes nonfiction books different from stories?
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

3. What is your opinion of reading nonfiction books? Do you like to read them? Why or why not?
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

4. Do you have a favorite nonfiction author? If you said yes, tell why he/she is your favorite.
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

5. Do you have a favorite nonfiction book? If you said yes, tell why that book is your favorite.
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

6. Do you like to write nonfiction? If you said yes, why do you like it? If you said no, why don’t you like it?
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________


## Fiction vs. Nonfiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Name: ___________________________  Date: ___________________________
Appendix C

Nonfiction Text Features Scavenger Hunt: Steve Jenkins’ Books

Title of Book: Hottest coldest highest deepest

Bibliography
- Bold Print
- Captions
- Colored Print
- Diagrams
- Graphs
- Illustrations

Index
- Italic Print
- Labels
- Maps
- Picture Glossary
- Table Contents
- Text that changes size, color and shape