

Trade Books in the Content Classroom

Books are the characters of civilization. Without books,
history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled,
thought and speculation at a standstill.

—BARBARA TUCHMAN

According to *The Literacy Dictionary* (Harris & Hodges, 1995), “trade books” are books published for sale to the general public, as compared to “textbooks,” which are used solely for instructional purposes. Many children’s trade books present topics relating to content areas. Math facts and concepts can be better understood through literature. Biographies, both in picture book and longer form, can lead to better understanding of the subject’s purpose, feelings, accomplishments, and contributions to society. Nonfiction trade books can give relevant information and also serve as a model for reports. Social studies and science trade books, as well as fiction, provide quality literature along with opportunities for reading and strengthening the language arts skills. For older students, fiction and historical fiction novels can be used to whet the appetite for significant events in history or explain a scientific theory or fact. And a better understanding and appreciation of art, music, and drama can be gained through literature.

Danielson and LaBonty (1994) list the value of using trade books in the classroom: Vocabulary and concepts are learned more efficiently and effectively, literature generates interest in the real world, literature provides models for writing while it nurtures the imagination, and literature allows students to enjoy reading while they learn. Trade books offer better coverage of topics, go deeper than the survey of information most common in textbooks, and can be easier for students to read (Vacca & Vacca, 1996). An added value of using literature in the content areas is that it is particularly useful for teaching children who are deemed

at risk. Textbooks, if available, are often far above the reading level of many children in the classroom, making them nearly useless for these students. Good trade books are available on nearly any topic and at every reading level.

Textbooks vs. Trade Books

While there are many excellent textbooks for students, one of the biggest disadvantages of using textbooks in content areas is that they are written for one specific reading level. We all know that within a particular grade level, students exhibit a wide range of reading abilities. The density of dates, names, and places make social studies texts difficult to read (Beck & McKeown, 1991; Beck, McKeown, & Gromoll, 1989) and respond to (Person & Cullinan, 1992). Though textbooks have long dominated science instruction, children reaching the upper elementary grades often have a difficult time comprehending these texts (Armbruster & Anderson, 1988; Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997; Casteel & Isom, 1994). And Walpole's (1998/1999) study indicated that newly published science basals' layout of text on pages, designed to be more eye-catching, caused confusion for child readers.

Many content area textbooks are written by experts in the field who use specialized vocabulary terms and concepts that are not reader-friendly (Miller, 1997). The amount of information and sheer volume of technical vocabulary can be overwhelming obstacles to student comprehension (Gunning, 2003). Both the writing style and format can make textbooks cumbersome (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001). The terseness of some textbooks, coupled with their cursory treatment of multiple topics, abbreviates or ignores the high drama and seductive detail that draw children to a historical period (Roser & Keehn, 2002).

And, unfortunately, sometimes textbooks are just unappealing to students, especially struggling readers. In grades 3 through 5, where there is more emphasis on content area subjects and more widespread use of textbooks, the reading ability gap widens. Using trade books makes it possible to have books at different readability levels available in the same classroom; the teacher may choose more difficult ones for a read-aloud, and students are given a choice. Struggling readers often find informational trade books more appealing because the content is mature, often even at a primer level. There are many accurate, colorful informational trade books written at easier reading levels that may appeal to these readers. And remember that every student does not have to read the same book at the same time.

Another disadvantage of textbooks in content area subjects is that they are almost always outdated. Most school districts adopt new texts every five to eight years. In our rapidly changing world, there are virtually no subject areas where a text that is at least three years old can have the most up-to-date, accurate information. Also, with the current emphasis on basics in American schools, money in the elementary school budget is often not allocated to content textbooks. If a school does have content area texts, there are rarely enough for each student to have one. Most often, there is a “classroom set” that must be shared with all classes in each grade level, which does not allow for access or use at all times. And few modern textbooks for children treat the humanities: music, dance, drama, and visual arts.

I am not saying that there is no value in using content area textbooks in the elementary school. If they are available, they often are the best way to introduce a subject or concept. But teachers need to be aware of their disadvantages, especially for beginning and struggling readers, and find ways to utilize both textbooks and trade books in order to give students maximum opportunities for learning.

Nor am I saying that trade books are always the answer. Trade books are not designed to cover a body of knowledge whose parameters are defined by curricula (Sebesta, 1989). For instance, *Frogs* (Gibbons, 1993) does not explain all life cycles, but it does give pertinent information about frogs, including their physical characteristics, reproductive cycle, and habitat. In the primary grades, it often is more effective to introduce several books about different species for the study of life cycles. And, of course, if a textbook is available, it can be the introduction to life cycles, with selected trade books used to reinforce and further study.

Trade books may also present a particular point of view, whereas quality textbooks strive to maintain an unbiased and objective account. This subjective point of view or bias is not a disadvantage but, rather, a means to show many perspectives of an issue or situation. For older students, *Yankee Girl* (Rodman, 2004) does not fully explore racism and civil rights in the American South, but it does look at events in Mississippi during 1964 through the eyes of a 12-year-old girl. Reading this book independently, or as a class read-aloud, offers a better understanding after reading a few paragraphs in the textbook.

Mathematics is one area where a text and/or curriculum series should certainly be used as the foundation, but there are many trade books that can enhance and further explain the concepts and skills being studied. *The Hershey's Kisses Addition Book* (Pallotta, 2001) is an excellent way to reinforce addition facts

using candy that most children are familiar with. For older students, *Sir Cumference and the First Round Table* (Neuschwander, 1997) uses a fanciful tale of King Arthur and Camelot to explain geometric shapes. But this book cannot be fully appreciated if the reader doesn't have a basic understanding of geometry. In the other content areas, if you have access to quality textbooks, by all means, use them when they are appropriate. But be sure to supplement with trade books for group and independent reading, as read-alouds, for additional study, and to accommodate the different reading abilities in your classroom (see Appendix for ways to obtain trade books for the classroom).

Trade Books as Read-Alouds

Read-alouds often function as the foundation for the curriculum. And there is little that can compare to reading aloud to establish a motivation for further reading. Often, books that children are interested in are far too difficult for them to read independently. If they are not read aloud, the child will not experience them. As Sebesta (1989) points out, "Trade books serendipitous to a curricular topic can make the difference between a passive reader who quits when the bell rings and an active, lifelong, self-motivated reader/learner" (p. 114).

Trade books in the content area will most often be used for guided reading and as writing models—within the literacy block. They should be part of the classroom library and put in interest centers. But they should also be used as read-alouds. You can use trade book read-alouds to motivate students to read and to build their topical knowledge about a specific subject (Hoffman, Roser, & Battle, 1993). The read-alouds model fluent oral reading and animation and expression, and strategic use of book discussions can occur before, during, and after the reading. They also provide opportunities for students to ask questions about related subjects. British educators MacLure (1988) and Barnes (1992) found that read-alouds led to an improvement in language expression throughout all curriculum subjects. Expert teachers use read-alouds to coincide with a unit of study and connect to what has occurred in the classroom during the day (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). For instance, in third grade, when life cycles are part of the science curriculum, your students may better understand their study of owl pellets and the substances hidden within each pellet when you include *Poppy* (Avi, 1995) as a read-aloud.

Informational trade books as read-alouds promote much interaction centered on meaning seeking, too. Roser and Keehn (2002) examined the kinds of

inquiries children accomplish in a cross-curricular unit involving various kinds of texts. Fourth-grade students relied on biography, historical fiction, and informational trade books to enter and give complexity to a historical period within the universal themes of human rights, courage, ethics, and sacrifice. Teachers introduced the unit by reading aloud one chapter per day of a biography. Students were given brief introductions to three pieces of historical fiction, all within the same period, with each child choosing one of the three books to read and forming book clubs for discussion purposes. Children then met as a whole group, discussing questions and observations based on the read-aloud and their reading. There was an increase (on pre- and post-assessments) in children's accurate notions about this period of history; further, their misconceptions were reduced by half. There was an increasing willingness to work together, to sustain talk, to support ideas with evidence, and to acknowledge and build on others' talk. And some children continued to read on the subject after the unit was concluded. Therefore, choosing content area trade books to read aloud may not only increase children's knowledge about a topic but may also motivate them by activating curiosity.

Magazines and newspaper articles also can be used as read-alouds. It is a well-established fact that listening comprehension is typically better than reading comprehension, which provides another reason for reading aloud within the content area. Because time for reading aloud in the classroom is often difficult to find and sometimes to justify, teachers must carefully choose books that will meet the needs of both the curriculum and the students.

Trade Books for Reading Instruction

Nonfiction trade books also should be used for independent, group, and guided reading. These books can provide students with authentic reading experiences that connect with their lives and expand background knowledge needed to understand core content area concepts. They also can assist in building vocabulary by introducing technical words not often found in fiction. And most importantly, using nonfiction trade books for reading instruction can help students develop critical reading skills and strategies while extending content area knowledge. Basal reading anthologies now contain more nonfiction than ever before, and many publishing companies are producing affordable paperback sets of nonfiction readers suitable for guided reading and research.

Content area books also can be used in literature circles. Chappel (1998) adapted a strategy—literature circles—for science that she originally used for

reading instruction. If students are already familiar with this strategy, they learn that it can be used in another setting. She used topics and issues from the science curriculum to integrate reading, writing, and science, putting emphasis on generating questions that lead to further study. After a short lesson and experimentation, the students listed conclusions and further questions. Then science-related trade books were made available. Students then formed groups, read their book, and developed questions about the book. After discussion, one member of each group explained their book to the rest of the class.

Picture Books in the Content Areas

The use of picture books to introduce and reinforce content areas is becoming increasingly popular in elementary school classrooms. By presenting information in a pleasing format, combining pictures and texts, picture books can present complex ideas and make content learning easier. Some of the most exciting picture books present topics relating to history, geography, and science (Tiedt, 2000). Picture books can create a response in readers that powerfully represents the events or topic, often through quality illustrations or photographs that add understanding to the information presented. For example, in *Iditarod: The Great Race to Nome* (Schultz & Sherwonit, 1993), although the text describes the origin and history of the race, the stunning photographs provide a visual reinforcement of the danger racers encounter and the bond between humans and dogs. Because of their shorter length, picture books can be read fairly quickly as both guided and independent reading, as well as read-alouds, to build on prior knowledge of the subject and connect to previous learning and/or textbook passages. They can be used as models for writing and contribute new information for class discussions. The illustrations and stories in picture books help students connect to the material on a more personal level, which adds to their involvement in learning and understanding of the content. And the interesting visuals in picture books encourage both reluctant readers and English-language learners.

Picture books are gaining popularity with older students, as well as younger ones. Albright and Vardell (2003) note that recent picture books treat complex subjects in a more complicated way that makes them “appropriate for older, more ‘sophisticated’ readers” (p. 21). It is important for educators, students, and parents to realize that picture books are not only for the very young. In fact, there are many picture books that are not even appropriate for younger students because of the subject, amount of text, and presentation of complex concepts. *A Prairie*

Alphabet (Bannatyne-Cugnet, 1992) is indeed for younger children because of its alphabet format and simple text; yet *Pearl Harbor Warriors* (Nicholson, 2001) has a more sophisticated format and text, intended for ages 10 and older.

Informational Trade Books in the Content Areas

The Literacy Dictionary (Harris & Hodges, 1995) defines an “information book” as a nonfiction book of facts and concepts about a subject or subjects. Traditionally, primary teachers refer to “informational books” and upper-grade teachers to “nonfiction,” but recently that has changed; the two terms generally mean the same to most people and are used interchangeably. Informational text can be narrative, expository, or a combination of the two (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004). Many informational trade books for young children are presented in story or narrative format. Information is conveyed, but authors choose a story format that they feel will be more appealing to the reader. These books contain the story elements of character, setting, plot, and resolution. Examples of narrative-informational text include *Eliza and the Dragonfly* (Rinehart, 2004), a story with factual information about dragonflies, and *But No Candy* (Houston, 1992), a fictionalized account of the candy shortage during World War II. Many biographies for children also are written in narrative form, such as *Brave Harriet* (Moss, 2001), the story of the first woman to fly across the English Channel.

Expository-informational books do not include story elements. They are characterized as reports, using expository text structures such as cause–effect, compare–contrast, sequence, and description. Expository-informational books explain the natural and social world, including animals, places, and cultural groups. Examples are *Beacons of Light* (Gibbons, 1990) and *The Wright Brothers* (Freedman, 1991). Expository-informational books also serve as excellent models for student writing.

Many informational trade books combine both narrative and expository writing and are called *mixed text*. The Magic School Bus series by Joanna Cole is an example of this. The story is imaginary, but it is supported by facts in boxes, charts, reports, and illustrations. Another example is *The Popcorn Book* (dePaola, 1978), a story of brothers making popcorn. Facts about popcorn appear in speech bubbles as one brother reads from an encyclopedia.

Although all three of these types of informational books have a place in the classroom library, the majority of the books used for content area instruction should contain factual information and expository writing. Kletzien and

Dreher (2004) recommend that at least half the classroom library contain informational books, with narrative-informational or mixed-text books making up no more than a third of that number. Moss (2003) notes,

About half the classroom library collection should be devoted to engaging informational books and biographies, and this percentage should increase as children move through the grades. Some books should be pertinent to classroom topics of study, while others should have a broader appeal. Students can use these books for voluntary reading, inquiry study, reference, or browsing. (p. 63)

Teaching Children to Read Informational Trade Books

Pairing fiction and nonfiction (especially informational) books is a popular way of introducing young children to concepts and content area texts. Camp (2000) calls this pairing of texts “teaching with Twin Texts” (p. 400). One of her suggestions is to pair *The Foot Book* (Dr. Seuss, 1968) with *What Neat Feet!* (Machotka, 1991). In fact, some publishing companies are producing twin-text sets. Sundance (2002) offers Little Reader Twin Texts, pairing fiction and nonfiction texts by topics, which support the following curriculum strands: life science, earth science, physical science, citizenship, America, people and places, math, and self-awareness. For older students, you might want to use *Snowflake Bentley* (Martin, 1998), a biography in narrative form that tells the story of Wilson Bentley, who spent his life finding a way to photograph snowflakes, with *Snow Crystals* (Bentley & Humphreys, 1962), which explains the fundamentals of crystallography and contains Bentley’s actual photographs.

Because narrative is the most common type of literature used with very young children, most students know the parts of a book or story and know their functions (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). However, it is important to realize that because most informational books are written differently from narrative books, children must be taught to read them differently. Narrative books are meant to be read from beginning to end, but many informational books can be read one page, section, or chapter at a time because there is no story line. Often, one page may give the information that is sought. (The exception, of course, would be informational books about life cycles.)

Most informational trade books have common features, such as tables of contents, headings and subheadings in bold and larger print, glossaries, and indexes. Many also have charts, graphs, maps, and diagrams, which can present a great deal of information in a small amount of space. They provide visuals so read-

ers can get information that would take much longer to read and understand if presented in text only. But students must be taught how to exploit all these features. I once heard a representative from a publishing company speak about teaching children how to read informational trade books. She told about working with a group of children who were all excellent readers and high achievers. She prepared them for reading by posing a few questions and then had the students read a short chapter in an informational book. When they were finished, there were a few unanswered questions. She assured the students that they would find the information in the text. Again, they could not find it. Some became argumentative and frustrated. These children were used to reading narrative text and had completely overlooked captions under illustrations, maps, and diagrams.

Read-alouds with big books, with class sets of books, or in a small-group setting are excellent ways to introduce children to the features of informational books. Or you could reproduce selected pages and place them on an overhead projector, then model the conventions that will help children use search features effectively and point out words in boldface and captions. Certainly all informational trade books, especially those for very young children, do not have all these features—and they are much simpler in some—but most have at least a table of contents and a glossary. When choosing books to use for content area instruction, it is important that some include search features.

Children need direct instruction in strategies for comprehending informational books, including modeling a strategy and providing guided practice, feedback, and time for independent practice (Flood & Lapp, 1991). The essence of this instruction is to help students understand how expository texts work differently from more familiar narrative texts and to give children the tools they need to create mental structures for understanding the texts (Greeno & Hall, 1997).

You can teach students to preview nonfiction by using a strategy called THIEVES (Manz, 2002): T stands for title, H for heading, I for introduction, E for every first sentence in a paragraph, V for visuals and vocabulary, E for end-of-chapter questions, and S for summary (see Figure 1). This mnemonic teaches children to gather the important facts in a book, chapter, passage, or article, and then read for additional information. You can demonstrate the activity until children are able to use it on their own. The acronym can be posted on the wall or each child can have a bookmark or card with the information.

K-W-L, a strategy developed by Donna Ogle (1986), is especially useful for identifying purposes for reading informational text. Create three columns on a

page labeled What I **Know**, What I **Want** to Learn, and What I **Learned** and Still Need to Learn. Select a topic, then have students fill in the first two columns (What I Know and What I Want to Learn) prior to reading the selection (see Figure 2). Students should be reminded to look at special features, as well as text, when they read. After reading, students can fill in the third column (What I Learned). If there are still unanswered questions, provide additional resources.

FIGURE 1. THIEVES—A Strategy for Previewing Nonfiction

- T—Title
- H—Headings
- I—Introduction
- E—Every first sentence in a paragraph
- V—Visuals and vocabulary
- E—End-of-chapter questions
- S—Summary

Reprinted from Manz, S.L. (2002). A strategy for previewing textbooks: Teaching readers to become THIEVES. *The Reading Teacher*, 55, 434–435.

FIGURE 2. K-W-L Chart

K-W-L strategy sheet

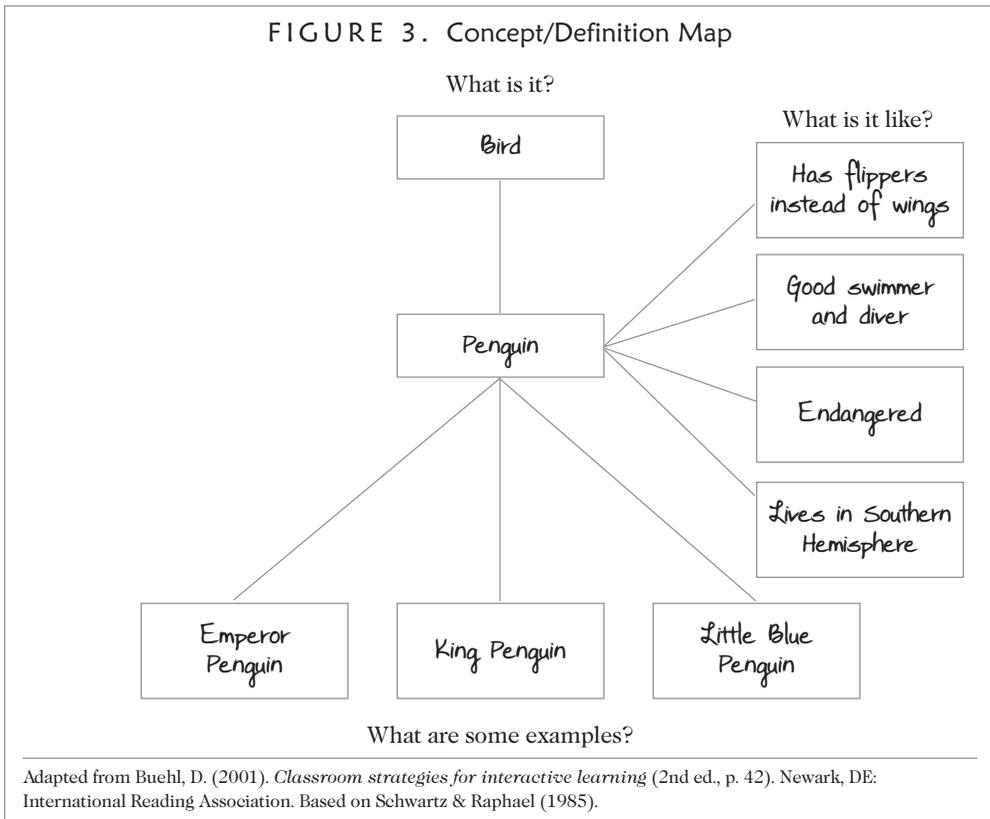
1. K —What I know	W —What I want to find out	L —What I learned and still need to learn
2. Categories of information we expect to use		
A.	E.	
B.	F.	
C.	G.	
D.		

Reprinted from Ogle, D. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *The Reading Teacher*, 39, 564–570.

Concept/definition mapping (Schwartz & Raphael, 1985) is a strategy that helps enrich student understanding of a word or concept in all content areas (see Figure 3). This graphic organizer focuses attention on the key components of a definition and encourages integration of personal knowledge. The key word or concept goes in the middle box. In the box labeled “What is it?” write the category; list properties in the boxes under “What is it like?”; and give examples in the bottom boxes.

Gregg and Sekeres (2006) offer a set of iterative strategies to support children’s reading of expository text:

- Preview the organizational pattern for a variety of visual markers that denote important information (font, boldface, type, captions, diagrams, charts, or glossaries).



- Summarize the information.
- Transform the text into a visual (map, picture, diagram, or web).
- Formulate questions about the content when previewing and reading.

Activities that invite children to revisit texts aid in their understanding. Even relatively accomplished readers may not be able to get meaning from the first or second reading. For this reason, it is advisable to encourage multiple readings and provide activities that encourage children to revisit texts to aid comprehension.

Selecting Trade Books

Teachers in grades 3 through 5 are often concerned with finding books appropriate for the reading levels of *all* their students, while primary grade teachers tend to be more concerned with the developmental appropriateness of the books for their students. But there are certainly other criteria to use in selecting informational trade books for content area instruction. Moss, Leone, and DiPillo (1997) identified “five A’s” for selecting good nonfiction books for students: the **author-ity** of the author, the **accuracy** of the text content, the **appropriateness** of the book for its audience, the literary **artistry**, and the **appearance** of the book. Further, Kletzien and Dreher (2004) suggest several aspects to consider when making book choices: accurate content, appealing design and format, engaging writing style, and good organization. They also have developed a guide to help teachers evaluate informational trade books (see Figure 4). Further considerations for selection of books are the concepts presented, amount of information presented, and suitability of texts (readability and appeal).

As an example, let’s look at the book *Recycle! A Handbook for Kids* (Gibbons, 1992). The cover is colorful, shows children recycling items, and has a subtitle that indicates child appeal. If you are not familiar with an author, you often can find his or her qualifications and background on the book jacket or at the end of the book. Sometimes authors list subject experts who have assisted them, or they will print sources of information as well. On the dedication page of *Recycle!* the author thanks a state recycling public outreach coordinator. This is a further indication of credibility and accuracy. Because this is a picture book, there are no chapters, but there are sections with headings. Simple, colorful illustrations take up most of each page. Pages contain information (such as definitions, labels, instructions, and cut-away views), but they are not too cluttered;

FIGURE 4. Guide for Choosing Informational Books

Name of Book _____ Type of Book _____

Characteristic	Notes	Possible Instruction
Content Accuracy		
Author's and illustrator's qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experts in field • "Insiders" (if multicultural book) • Award-winning 		
References used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultants who are experts • Print sources 		
Information current <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copyright date recent (if important) • Information up to date 		
Distinguishes between fact and theory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear what is believed and what is known 		
Text and illustrations clear		
Stereotypes not used in text or illustration		
Design		
Illustrations appropriate for content		
Illustrations well placed on page		
Clear about where to begin reading		
Illustrations labeled and explained		
Captions clear and informative		
Relative sizes indicated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlargements noted 		
Style		
Lively, engaging language		
Accurate terminology used		
Appropriate for children's level		
Generalizations and concepts given (not just a collection of facts)		
Enthusiasm for topic evident		
Organization		
Informational book characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pagination, table of contents, index, glossary, additional reading list 		
Headings and subheadings		
Clear pattern of organization		

Reprinted from Kletzien, S.B., & Dreher, M.J. (2004). *Informational text in K-3 classrooms: Helping children read and write*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

too many elements with not enough white space may cause vital information to be overlooked. The text on each page is relatively short (3–4 lines), making it appropriate for most grade levels in the elementary school. Key words, as well as uncommon vocabulary, are printed in boldface, and the most difficult are accompanied by a pronunciation key. At the end, there are two pages of interesting facts presented as pictures and vignettes titled “Can You Believe...?” The final page presents practical ways to recycle. Added endorsements appear on the book’s back cover. There is a recommendation by *Booklist*, and the book has been named an NSTA–CBC Outstanding Science Trade Book for Children and an NCSS–CBC Notable Children’s Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies. Upon examination, it is clear that this is a book that would certainly be useful in a study of the earth, environment, or Earth Day. As with most of Gibbons’s books, it can be used in grades 1 through 3 but also is appropriate for fourth or fifth graders who read below grade level.

Now let’s look at another book, *The Very Quiet Cricket* (Carle, 1990). Although Carle is a well-known and respected author/illustrator, his books are known more for their stories and illustrations than for informational content. This book has beautiful, colorful illustrations and certainly has child appeal—but only for very young children. There is no information about Carle’s qualifications or expertise to write about crickets, but the illustrations certainly indicate that he has observed insects. This is a story with a small amount of information interspersed, so there are none of the search features one would expect in an informational book, but the title page gives a few facts about crickets. Although the illustrations are outstanding, the large scale of the insects and their ability to talk can be misleading to some young children. There is no doubt that this is an excellent book and can be found in many kindergarten and first-grade classrooms, but it would not be a good source of factual information about crickets or as a model for research and report writing. It would be useful, however, as an introduction or a supplement to a study of insects. Students could then compare it with an expository-informational book.

Students need to be taught how to select nonfiction trade books, especially if they are looking for specific information. For very young children or those who are unfamiliar with expository text, you should select a group of appropriate books and then give students a choice from that group. But, as children mature and become capable of choosing their own books for specific content, they need to be taught how to choose expository texts for themselves. When students rec-

ognize features such as the page numbers, table of contents, index, and glossary, it may become relatively easy for them to determine whether the information they are looking for is contained in a specific book. As mentioned, you can demonstrate on an overhead projector how to use these common features to find the desired information. Guided practice can then occur before students use this skill independently. Teach, also, that a book’s publication date can be important for certain subjects where the most current information will be the most accurate. Often this knowledge is termed *library skills* in textbooks, workbook pages, and skill sheets. So, if you teach from a series that includes information-finding or library skills, you can occasionally use some of the included lessons or skill sheets to teach these skills to your students. Your school librarian also may be a useful resource in providing lessons on finding information.

Students might also use Questions to Monitor Information Searches (see Figure 5) as a guide to selecting expository books. Part of evaluation involves children deciding whether the information makes sense based on what they set out to

FIGURE 5. Questions to Monitor Information Searches

Question	Yes	No
What information do I need?		
Does this book (or website or magazine) have search features that would help me find what I want to know?		
Is the information that I need located here?		
Does the information I have located make sense?		
Is there anything in this book (or website or magazine) to help me decide if the information is correct?		
Does this information relate to things I already know?		
Do I have all the information that I need to answer my question? If not, I should continue searching.		

Reprinted from Kletzien, S.B., & Dreher, M.J. (2004). *Informational text in K–3 classrooms: Helping children read and write*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association; adapted from Dreher (1992).

find (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004). Using these questions can help students determine if the information can be found in their book or if they need to look further.

Let's look at some examples of how students might look at a book to determine if it has the desired information. You can demonstrate these examples as well. If a second or third grader is looking for specific information on bighorn sheep, she might choose *Faces in the Mountains* (Hirschi, 1997) because there is a photograph of a Bighorn sheep on the cover. However, the book jacket only contains information about watching wildlife in the mountains, and there is no table of contents or page numbers. The student must begin skimming through the pages, which contain photographs of a bear, marmot, hare, and weasel, before finding two pages with bighorn and Dall sheep. But there is very little information in the sparse text. The following pages feature moose, beaver, deer, fox, coyote, and several types of birds. The final pages are titled "Mountain Facts," but there are only two sentences about sheep; there is no index. This book would not be a good resource for a report on sheep. But if the child is interested in mountain animals, this would be a good choice for perusing.

Intended for grades 1 through 3, *Face-to-Face With the Cat* (Frattini, 2003) has no table of contents but has sections (two numbered pages) with headings, featuring photographs and text. Although there is no index, the last page features questions about cats, listing the page number where the answer can be found. A quick scan of the headings and the questions at the end can help a student discern whether he or she will find what they are looking for in this book. This book would be a good resource for general information about cats or for reports.

If a fifth-grade student is looking for information on U.S. or Texas history, he might choose *Inside the Alamo* (Murphy, 2003). This book has a table of contents, bibliography, index, and a notes section. Most pages include a brief vignette that explains an italicized word in the text. There are one-page biographies interspersed throughout, as well as photographs, maps, and reproductions of documents. This book offers a wealth of information, although it may appear overwhelming to some students unless they have good information searching skills.

Dorling Kindersley Eyewitness books are well-known for providing information and color photographs in a format that appeals to all ages. The *Question & Answer Book* (Farndon, 1993) is no exception. There is a table of contents, but it is quite simplistic, and the book is divided into three sections: What Do You Know About Nature? When Did It Happen? and Who Invented It? However, specific questions are listed, page numbers are given, and there is an index. This

book is appealing to students because of the intriguing and unusual topics and photographs, but the information is so brief that it is unlikely to provide adequate information for a report or research project. But it has proven to be a favorite for acquiring general knowledge and for pleasure reading.

When choosing books to use for content area study, you must make sure these books contain the kind of information you wish students to learn. Select books that communicate messages about content and connect to concepts in the curriculum (such as electricity or body systems) or to particular units of study (such as civil rights; measurement; or state, province, or country history). There are also numerous sources to help you identify good informational trade books (see Appendix).

Many professional organizations give suggested titles to use in content areas (see Appendix for a list of professional organizations' contact information). Do an Internet search for possible titles. Ask colleagues if they have books or lists that you might borrow. Consider building your own database of all the books you own, or all the books that would be appropriate for your classroom, with *subject area* as one of the fields. As you build your collection and knowledge of trade books, this database will make it relatively easy to access a list of books for any topic. When choosing a read-aloud, think about current or upcoming content area to be studied and make your selection accordingly. Your students will benefit from your careful selection of books, and they also will learn more about content areas.

Conclusion

Although children's literature has long been used in teaching language arts, it is gaining popularity in other subject areas as well. Because the majority of time in the school day is devoted to literacy and mathematics, content area subjects must often be addressed during that time frame. Trade books can be used as read-alouds, as a supplement to textbooks, or exclusively for content area instruction. In order to use informational trade books effectively in the content area classroom, you must understand the different types of informational trade books available, know how to select appropriate ones, and teach children to use this genre's special features to gain information.