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The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focus on the integration of literacy and content-area instruction; many of the CCSS guidelines are devoted to reading standards for informational texts, and with each ascending grade level, the standards become more rigorous. For example, with prompting and support, kindergarten students should be able to identify the main topic of an informational text and retell key details. By second grade, though, students should be able to use this skill while reading texts with multiple paragraphs.

Although this aspect of the standards may be commonly known, there is another aspect that is less well known. The CCSS also advocate for building background knowledge through extensive reading; the guidelines state that “within a grade level, there should be an adequate number of titles on a single topic that would allow children to study that topic for a sustained period.” More than ever, educators will need to choose texts for instruction based on a particular theme or topic and, at the same time, choose a wide variety of texts that can be accessed by students in multiple ways.

One way to do this is to create a content area—a related text set composed of trade books for reading aloud as well as for small-group study or independent reading. The following bibliography is an example of a possible text set for a life-science unit on the characteristics, life cycles, and habitats of a particular organism—the bee. Included are informational books and fictional titles that incorporate facts about bees. These books have been chosen because they offer rigorous content for learning and can still be read aloud easily to young listeners. In addition, there are books suggested for young students to read in small groups with support or independently. The power of these texts multiplies when they are read as a collection, offering a deeper understanding of the bee and the role it plays in our everyday lives.

Informational Books for Reading Aloud

The following informational books accurately describe various aspects of the bee’s existence as well as humans’ reliance on bees in the past and present. The content of each page is clearly focused on a subtopic, and the text can easily be read aloud. The illustrations and photographs support and extend the authors’ ideas and introduce some features of informational texts, such as diagrams and labels. In addition to making excellent read-alouds, these titles can also be used together as a classroom text set for independent browsing, reading, and researching, examining both the written text and the photographs or illustrations.

The Bumblebee Queen. By April Pulley Sayre. Illus. by Patricia J. Wynne. 2005. 32p. Charlesbridge, paper, \$7.95 (9781570913631). 595.79. Gr. 1–3.

After hibernating underground for the winter, the bumblebee queen seeks nectar and a location for a hive. Then she goes about creating storage for food, laying eggs, bringing food to the larvae, and laying more eggs until worker bees are born to help her. Frequently, books about bees focus on the queen’s work of laying eggs, but Sayre’s lyrical text and Wynne’s informative illustrations add depth to our understanding of this bee’s role in the life of the colony.

The Buzz on Bees: Why Are They Disappearing? By Shelley Rotner and Anne Woodhull. Illus. by Shelley Rotner. 2010. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (9780823422470). 638. Gr. 1–3.

The close-up photos and easy-to-read text reveal the importance of bees in the pollination of plants that affect our everyday lives. Young students will learn that bees even play a part in the production of blue jeans! The authors detail the colony-collapse disorder, which led to the mysterious disappearance of one-third of honeybees in the U.S., and pose steps that even the youngest listeners can take to help save bees.

Honeybees. By Deborah Heiligman. Illus. by Carla Golembe. 2002. 32p. National Geographic, paper, \$6.95 (9781426301575). 595.79. K–Gr. 3.

In child-friendly language, this Jump into Science title describes the life of the worker bee, from the early stages as an egg to the later stages as a forager bee. Heiligman distinguishes the many jobs of the worker bee with intriguing details and bee-specific terminology. For example, the nurse bees feed the larvae royal jelly and beebread. Golembe’s illustrations extend the text by including informational-text features like labels and diagrams.

In the Trees, Honey Bees. By Lori Mortensen. Illus. by Cris Arbo. 2009. 32p. Dawn, \$16.95 (9781584691143); paper, \$8.95 (9781584691150). 595.79. PreS–Gr. 3.

Each two-page spread in this book includes short rhyming phrases followed by informational text that supports the central idea in the rhyme. Mortensen describes the work of the different types of bees in a colony, and Arbo’s illustrations provide close-up views of the bees at their tasks. Domain-specific vocabulary words, such as propolis or bee glue, are embedded in the text and in appended facts, increasing the rigor of the content for young listeners.

What If There Were No Bees? A Book about the Grassland Ecosystem. By Suzanne Slade. Illus. by Carol Schwartz. 2010. 24p. Picture Window, lib. ed., \$25.99 (9781404860193); paper, \$8.95 (9781404863941). 577.4. PreS–Gr. 3.

This picture book explores the critical role that honeybees

play in the grassland ecosystem with simple language and vivid artwork. Schwartz's illustrations use black silhouettes to emphasize the devastating impact on plants and animals if honeybees were to disappear. The helpful, appended features include a topical map highlighting the location of grasslands across six continents.

Fiction for Reading Aloud

Each of these books incorporates facts about bees into a fictional narrative or poetic verse. During an interactive read-aloud with the teacher, students can identify the facts about bees (and beekeeping) that they have learned from the informational books read aloud as well as the fictional elements of the story. These books also could be left in the classroom library for students to browse alone or with a partner.

The Beeman. By Laurie Krebs. Illus. by Valeria Cis. 2008. 40p. Barefoot, \$16.99 (9781846861468); paper, \$8.99 (9781846862601). PreS–Gr. 2.

In this story, a grandson follows his grandfather through a season of beekeeping. The poetic-verse text is filled with facts about bees, and the author incorporates specific vocabulary to describe both the bees and the practice of beekeeping. The full-page illustrations clearly support the ideas in the text, and there is additional information about the insects at the end of the book.

The Bee Tree. By Patricia Polacco. Illus. by the author. 1993. 32p. Philomel, \$16.99 (9780399219658); paper, \$7.99 (9780698116962). K–Gr. 3.

When Mary Ellen and Grampa chase after a group of bees to find their honey, several friends and neighbors join them. Although the focus of this story is how the collection of sweet honey does not come easily—just like learning to read does not—Polacco has also incorporated bee facts into the story. These facts include the long distances field bees fly and the use of smoke to mask the pheromones bees release when danger is nearby.

The Honeybee Man. By Lela Nargi. Illus. by Kyrsten Brooker. 2011. 40p. Random/Schwartz & Wade, \$17.99 (9780375849800); lib. ed., \$20.99 (9780375956959). K–Gr. 3.

Inspired by real beekeepers, the author and illustrator tell the story of Fred, who keeps beehives on the rooftop of his apartment building in Brooklyn. The text and illustrations accurately portray the work of a beekeeper and the flight of the bees to different sources of nectar. The author's note, with additional facts about honeybees, could easily be read aloud to young students, and there are detailed illustrations on the book's endpapers that extend the learning further.

Jam & Honey. By Melita Morales. Illus. by Laura J. Bryant. 2011. 32p. Tricycle, \$15.99 (9781582462998); lib. ed., \$18.99 (9781582463902). PreS.

A young girl collecting berries and a bee seeking nectar sense danger when they come face-to-face. Still, the two manage to coexist safely and then head on their separate ways. Told in rhyming verse from the alternating perspectives of the girl and then the bee, Morales' text captures the sense of fear a child might feel around bees and offers another point of view for young listeners to consider.

These Bees Count! By Alison Formento. Illus. by Sarah Snow. 2012. 32p. Albert Whitman, \$16.99 (9780807578681). PreS–Gr. 2.

In this sequel to *This Tree Counts!* (2010), Mr. Tate's class takes a field trip to Busy Bee Farm. Wearing protective suits, the children learn about bees and visit their hives. Written from the bees' point of view, the picture book's fanciful center section includes a little counting practice, with numbers from 1 to 10. With a light, informative narrative and pleasant digital-collage artwork, this picture book offers an engaging introduction to bees.

Read-Alone Books for Young Students

Young readers will be excited to pick up these books filled with intriguing photographs of bees and their business. The text and images in these books support emergent, early, and transitional readers in developing background knowledge about bees and learning bee-specific vocabulary while also stretching their ability to read strategically.

Bees. By Suzanne Slade. 2008. 24p. illus. Rosen/PowerKids, lib. ed., \$21.25 (9781404238220); e-book, \$21.25 (9781435845282). 595.79. PreS–Gr. 2.

For children starting to read longer texts on their own, this *Under the Microscope: Backyard Bugs* series title is accessible and informational. There are at least two paragraphs of text on each two-page spread, and the print size is large, making the text easy to follow. Several of the full-page photos have clearly labeled features as well as insets, which offer zoomed-in views of such elements as the bee's stinger and pollen basket. Additional information is provided in the captions.

A Bee's Life Cycle. By Ruth Thomson. 2010. 24p. illus. Rosen/PowerKids, lib. ed., \$21.25 (9781615322169); paper, \$8.25 (9781615322206). 595.79. PreS–Gr. 2.

Similar to *The Bumblebee Queen* but with simpler text, this *Let's Look at Life Cycles* series title describes the work of the queen bee and the life cycle of the bumblebee. Each two-page spread has three to six sentences describing one particular subtopic, like the bumblebee's "eggs." The photographs

extend the text with close-up views of the subtopic, and there are some additional features, including captions, that are easily accessible.

Buzz, Bee, Buzz! By Dana Meachen Rau. 2008. 24p. illus. Marshall Cavendish, lib. ed., \$22.79 (9780761426486). 595.79. PreS–Gr. 2.

Emergent readers learn simple facts about bees in this *Bookworms: Go, Critter, Go!* series title. On the left side of each two-page spread is a three- to five-word sentence in a large font that is easy for children to follow. Young readers can use the photographs as support for figuring out unfamiliar words.

Honey Bees. By Colleen Sexton. 2007. 24p. illus. Bellwether, \$21.95 (9781600140525). 595.79. PreS–Gr. 2.

This *Blastoff! Readers: World of Insects* series title describes in clear language the physical characteristics of honeybees and how the bees pollinate flowers and drink nectar to make honey. Although there are only a few sentences on each page, this text is more difficult because of the bee-specific terminology

and use of multisyllabic words. The bright, close-up photographs, with labels that match the bolded words in the text, offer some extra support for the reader.

How Bees Make Honey. By Emily C. Dawson. 2011. 24p. illus. Amicus, \$24.25 (9781607530121). 638. PreS–Gr. 2.

In this *Our Animal World* series title, early readers can follow bees from flower to hive as they engage in the honey-making process. Each two-page spread has a full-page photo with a clearly labeled feature, like “Cell” or “Honeycomb.” The labeled item also appears in the text on the opposite page. A picture glossary at the end of the book reinforces vocabulary introduced in the text.

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Common Core Connections

The following are suggestions for implementing the Common Core State Standards with the books recommended in this article.

In the Classroom: Read aloud *The Bumblebee Queen*, by April Pulley Sayer, stopping at key points to ask the students to share one fact that they have learned about the bumblebee queen. At the end of the read-aloud, ask the students to talk with a partner about five facts that they have learned. Encourage the students to keep track of the facts, using their fingers to count as they share.

Common Core Connections

- **R.I.K.2.** With prompting and support, identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.
- **R.I.1.2.** Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.

In the Classroom: Read aloud *In the Trees, Honey Bees*, by Lori Mortensen. Then return to specific pages and engage students in a conversation about how the pictures illustrate the text. Pass out other books about bees and ask small groups to discuss the connections between the text and the illustrations or photographs.

Common Core Connections

- **R.I.K.7.** With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear.
- **R.I.1.7.** Use the illustrations and details in a text to describe its key ideas.

In the Classroom: Using *A Bee's Life Cycle*, by Ruth Thomson, ask students to locate specific features that are common in informational titles, such as labels or captions, and share a fact that they learned as they read

or looked at a particular feature. Ask each student to create an original page for a book on bees using a feature, such as a labeled diagram, that was highlighted during the conversation.

Common Core Connections

- **R.I.1.5.** Know and use various text features to locate key facts or information in a text.

In the Classroom: Read aloud Suzanne Slade's *What If There Were No Bees?* Engage students in a conversation about the author's main idea and supporting reasons. Ask students to draw a picture of one example of what might happen if there were no bees and to write an explanation of their drawings to share in small groups.

Common Core Connections

- **R.I.1.8.** Identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.
- **R.I.2.8.** Describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text.

In the Classroom: After reading several nonfiction books about bees, read aloud Laurie Krebs' *The Beeman* and Lela Nargi's *The Honeybee Man*. Ask students to identify facts about bees and beekeeping that were included in the texts. Use a Venn diagram on a large sheet of paper to keep track of the students' points, identifying the differences and similarities between the books.

Common Core Connections

- **R.I.1.9.** Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic.
- **R.I.2.9.** Compare and contrast the most important points presented by two texts on the same topic.