

Book Links

UNPACKING A STANDARD:
SERIES NONFICTION AND THE COMMON CORE
BY JULIE GREEN

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The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have increased demand for high-quality informational titles for youth—as well as the need for explicit instruction on how to read and write nonfiction. Tony Stead's *Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K–3* (2002) includes excellent strategies for sharing informational books with young students, and some of his ideas are incorporated into the suggestions below, all of which will help teachers implement standards RI.1.2–RI.6.2. with recent series nonfiction titles. For more Common Core–related resources, including an archive of Unpacking a Standard columns, visit our new CCSS home page at www.booklistonline.com/commoncore.

RI.1.2. Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.

Green. By Daniel Nunn. 2012. 24p. illus. Raintree, \$25.32 (9781432957469); paper, \$8.95 (9781432957551). 535.6. K–Gr. 3.

This *Colors All around Us* series title is a rhyming exploration of all things green in a young child's life. Print out pictures of the 12 green items that are listed by name throughout the book. As you read each item from the book, hand a picture of that item to a student who will stand at the front of the room. By the end of the book, there should be 12 children standing with their pictures. Next, ask the standing students to retell what they remember of the book's text and images using the pictures as prompts.

A Cool Caper. By Martha E. H. Rustad. 2011. 24p. illus. Capstone, lib. ed., \$24.65 (9781429644983). 598.47. K–Gr. 3.

The *Zoo Animal Mysteries* titles begin by giving facts and partial photographs about a variety of animals. As each volume continues, readers are given more information so that by the end they can identify the mystery animal. After reading through this title, have students use the clues to try to identify the animal and state the evidential facts they used to come to that conclusion. Then have students create their own informational texts about an animal of their choice, modeling the approach in these books. They must first identify their

main topic and then research the supporting details. When they write the text, however, they will give the details first and reveal the main topic at the conclusion.

Exploring Spring. By Terri DeGezelle. 2012. 24p. illus. Capstone, paper, \$6.95 (9781429679107); lib., ed., \$24.65 (9781429676977). 508.2. K–Gr. 3.

Titles in the colorful, enticing *Exploring the Seasons* series follow a very simple format: a heading appears at the top of each page, followed by text with bolded words that are defined in an appended glossary. Because there aren't many other text features to clutter pages and confuse readers, it makes a good introduction to nonfiction books. Have students look at the cover and make predictions about what the book will be about. Then, as a class, choose a question that students would like to have answered about that topic. Together with students, read through the table of contents and choose a page on which they think their answer might be found. Turn to that page and read the heading and the information below it. Has the question been answered? Record the information found. Continue to do this until the book has been finished. Compile the recorded information and make a final determination about the main idea of the book, using the recorded information as the evidence.

RI.4.2. Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Life in the Desert. By Jen Green. 2010. 32p. illus. Gareth Stevens, lib. ed., \$26 (9781433934209). 591.754. Gr. 3–4.

Assign different chapters in this *Nature in Focus* series title to small groups of students. Have the student groups read through the chapters and then write down what they think the author's main idea is. Next, have students go back through the text and record evidence from the chapter to support their assertion. Ask each group to present its chapter and main idea using the supporting evidence. Do all of the chapters' main ideas make sense when put together? Are any of the main ideas too broad or too specific?

Labrador Retrievers. By Charles George and Linda George. 2010. 32p. illus. Children's Press, paper, \$8.95 (9780531249338); lib. ed., \$26 (9780531232446). 636.752. K–Gr. 3.

Ask students to pretend that they are convincing their families to get a Labrador dog. In order to do this, however, they must get a good summary of the facts and create a presentation. As they read through this title in the *Top Dogs* series, students should record text details and use that information to create the summary. Then they will present that summary as a persuasive presentation (a video, a Microsoft Photo Story, etc.) about why their family should get a lab.

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Do I Need It? Or Do I Want It? Making Budget Choices. By Jennifer S. Larson. 2010. 32p. illus. Lerner, paper, \$7.95 (9780761356646); lib. ed., \$25.26 (9780761339144). 332.024. K–Gr. 2.

While written in simple language suitable for early-elementary students, the titles in the Exploring Economics series will work well with a slightly older audience, who may more easily tackle the concepts. This volume explains how to create and maintain a budget. In this activity, based on Tony Stead’s “re-telling web,” students divide into pairs and read one chapter. Next, students record the main ideas and key words found throughout the chapter without using full sentences. Students will then use this “web” of notes as prompts to retell the chapter in their own words to their partner, who will determine if information is missing. Afterward, students reverse roles and repeat the exercise. Still working in pairs, the students create a shared summary based on their retellings.

RI.6.2. Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

Who Wrote the U.S. Constitution? And Other Questions about the Constitutional Convention of 1787. By Candice Ransom. 2011. 48p. illus. Lerner, paper, \$9.95 (9780761361268); lib. ed., \$30.60 (9781580136693). 320. Gr. 3–6.

As in other books in the Six Questions of American History series, this volume’s title poses a question. Tell students that their mission is to answer the title question: they must keep track of the factual evidence from the text and present their findings to the class as a summary. Students could also do some extended, additional research on the individuals who wrote the Constitution. The teacher could then stage a signing of the Constitution, where students dress up and act as the delegates, based on the information that they found about these historic figures in the volume’s text.

Freaky-Strange Buildings. By Michael Sandler. 2012. 24p. illus. Bearport, lib. ed., \$22.61 (9781617723056); e-book, \$29.28 (9781617723414). 720. Gr. 1–5.

This title in the So Big Compared to What? series is filled with interesting facts about exotic buildings around the world. Place sticky notes to conceal the main text on each page. Then have student pairs determine how much information they can glean from pictures, captions, and fact boxes on a single spread. Next, ask students to determine the main idea of the pages based on what they’ve noticed. Finally, have them remove the sticky notes and read the page to see if their main idea has changed.

Think like a Scientist at the Beach. By Dana Meachen Rau. 2012. 32p. illus. Cherry Lake, \$19.95 (9781610801683); e-book, \$19.95 (9781610801768). 551.45. Gr. 3–6.

In this Science Explorer Junior series title, Rau begins with tips on how to ask questions about everyday locations and perform experiments, before delving into specific inquiries about the beach, factual information about the questions asked, and experiments for readers to try on their own. Have student groups select an experiment and prepare to perform it by reading through the book and recording the information from it that they will need to actually “think like a scientist.” After the experiment, have the students record their own step-by-step instructions for carrying out the activity. Give the summaries to another class to carry out. Have that class report back if the students’ instructions gave sufficient information for someone who has not previously read *Think like a Scientist at the Beach*.

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