

# Introduction

**Non-fiction:** prose writing that is informative or factual rather than fictional.

## Why Non-fiction?

Non-fiction texts open up the whole world for children. For some, what they see in books may be their only experience of what lies outside their local area, while for others these books may build on the foundations of their awareness of what is going on in the world. When children see familiar issues presented in what they read, their minds are engaged and they are able to think carefully about what they know and believe.

Non-fiction texts are all around us. Every day, young people encounter written news, internet articles, magazines, game instructions, leaflets and recipes, as well as the many high quality non-fiction books available. To positively engage with these texts, children must learn to identify purpose, point of view and bias. They need to understand the language and text structures of various types of non-fiction and be able to identify fact versus opinion.

We are living in an information-rich, fast-paced, scientific world. Developing solid general knowledge and an understanding of current events is key to becoming a contributing member of society who is thoughtful and aware. Reading non-fiction will help children to develop the core knowledge they need and broaden their understanding of what is going on in their local area, nationally and internationally – in the past, present and into the future. Technical vocabulary is incredibly important as children encounter information about a whole host of modern issues.

Non-fiction is fantastic for children because it is so empowering. Often less threatening than fiction, children can dip into a non-fiction book for a few minutes and fully understand what they have read. There is no need to remember the plot or characters. The stand-alone nature of non-fiction gives more immediate success and return on effort. As a result, young readers come away feeling they have learned something new and wanting to go back for more. Often the font, print size and spacing make non-fiction books more accessible for children with reading or vision difficulties. Different coloured panels allow text to stand out which can make the entire reading experience easier.

Choosing non-fiction is a part of the **Reading for Pleasure** initiative led by **The Open University** and the **UK Literacy Association**. There is a growing buzz about books in schools that excites young readers and encourages them to try something new. Non-fiction is just as valid and valuable as fiction in this choice and should be encouraged. There is so much high quality non-fiction available: from Buster Book's graphic novel style *A Day in the Life series* to What on Earth Books' fascinating *Amazing series* to Britannica Books' wonderful compendiums like *Listified: Britannica's 300 lists that will blow your mind*. When children find a topic that interests them, there is endless enjoyment to be found exploring it through books. Non-fiction books can also be very social as children read them together and share what they've discovered. Non-fiction provides the stimulus for high quality book chat and an invaluable enthusiasm for reading.

The majority of recently published non-fiction books are incredibly appealing. In this case, you really can judge a book by its cover. Heavily illustrated with bright and engaging images, readers are immediately pulled in. Rather than potentially off-putting full pages of text, the information is often broken up into manageable chunks and the reader's eyes are drawn around the page. Layout and illustrations work together to aid children's understanding of the whole text.

One of the greatest strengths of non-fiction is the skills it develops in readers.

*Who? What? When? Where? Why? How can I find out more?*

The ability to question is finely tuned as children analyse what they are reading. They develop enquiry – discovering further questions and gaining depth of understanding. Through this questioning, children also learn to be analytical about the sources of their information.

*What is the source? Can I trust it? Is there bias or untruth in what I've read?*

This is an essential skill for all readers as we have access to information from all kinds of sources and must never blindly trust that what we've read is truth.

Reading non-fiction and using it for research comes with its own set of reading strategies. Children learn to skim and scan the text for specific pieces of information. This efficiency of reading gives children control over how they use the text and teaches them to look for keywords and phrases linked to what they want to know.

Reading and writing go hand in hand as key components of the primary English curriculum. Children are regularly asked to write non-fiction texts with the expectation that they understand the features of each text type and can use the correct tone and vocabulary choices. Reading non-fiction provides the model they need to write effectively. Children will come to recognise and understand the common features of each text type and be able to use them successfully in their own writing.

In recent years, we have seen a number of changes to the Key Stage 2 English Curriculum, the Key Stage 2 Reading Test Framework and in the overall expectations for pupils. In non-fiction, there is a focus on higher level vocabulary and inference – an expectation that children will be able to immerse themselves in a text and really get to grips with nuances of the language. Quality non-fiction allows young readers to experience a wide range of texts and explore so many different aspects of our world.

By the end of Year 4, children are expected to have many skills linked to reading. These objectives from the National Curriculum outline just some of the links to non-fiction:

Pupils should be taught to develop positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:

- listening to and discussing a wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks
- reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes
- increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including fairy stories, myths and legends, and retelling some of these orally
- identifying themes and conventions in a wide range of books
- discussing words and phrases that capture the reader's interest and imagination

Pupils should understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by:

- checking that the text makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and explaining the meaning of words in context
- asking questions to improve their understanding of a text
- drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
- predicting what might happen from details stated and implied
- identifying main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph and summarising these
- identifying how language, structure, and presentation contribute to meaning
- retrieving and recording information from non-fiction
- participating in discussion about both books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, taking turns and listening to what others say

In this book, children in Key Stage 2 are exposed to a variety of non-fiction texts. They are given opportunities to tackle more complex vocabulary, build inference skills, develop endurance for longer passages and practise each of the eight reading content domain question types.

### Features of Non-fiction Text Types:

<b>Recount</b>
Purpose – to retell events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• events written in chronological order</li><li>• introductory paragraph with key facts (who, what, when, where)</li><li>• closing statement</li><li>• past tense</li><li>• first or third person</li><li>• specific names of people and places</li><li>• time conjunctions</li></ul>
<b>Biography</b>
Purpose – to recount a person's life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• introductory paragraph with a statement about why this person is important and key facts</li><li>• include important/relevant facts about the person's life</li><li>• include key influences in the person's life</li><li>• closing statement about their legacy/how they will be remembered</li><li>• details written in chronological order</li><li>• third person</li><li>• past tense</li></ul>