

A Journal for Middle and Junior High School Science Teachers **GREGORY GRAMBO** 

## A Fresh Approach To Book Reports

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## A fresh approach to book reports

When you ask students to read a book, most will go directly to the fiction section of the library. Ask them to do research, and they'll head for the nonfiction section. Middle school students are still at an age when reading a nonfiction book from cover to cover may be a new experience. But assigning a nonfiction book report with a lot of options and new approaches can help students realize that the truth can be even more interesting than fiction.

Begin the project with a trip to the school library or local library (give out permission slips and remind students to bring their library cards). At the library, help students choose books appropriate to their reading level. Ask each student to read aloud a randomly chosen paragraph so that you can assess the books they choose. This can also be done in small groups so students do not have to read aloud before the entire class. If a student hesitates or stumbles on many of the words, the book will be too frustrating. On the other hand, if a student breezes through the paragraph, the book may be too easy.

Since a nonfiction book is not a story and does not flow like a fiction book, the traditional "summarize the plot" report format does not suffice. Instead, ask students to relate new ideas discovered while reading the book or outdated information contained in the book. Have students choose a new title for the book and ask them what they might add or omit from their book to make it more enjoyable. See Figure 1 for possible information to include in the book reports.

Because students naturally tend to wait until the last minute, ask students to keep a daily log of their reading, including the date, number of pages read, and a short description

of what they have read. Students can summarize their daily logs to help them describe what the book is about in their reports.

Keep an open mind and provide a variety of options for the book report format. Not all students learn material at the same rate or in the same way. Likewise, not all students can present information in the same way. Possibilities include drawing comic strips or constructing word-search,

crossword, or jumble puzzles to build vocabulary skills. Nontraditional report formats will help students to grow intellectually and creatively, and your students may even start heading for that nonfiction section for their leisure reading as well.

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