

# Smart Strategies for Nonfiction

## What Students Should Know About Nonfiction Text

5WH: Never read nonfiction text without it!(my apologies to American Express).

Nonfiction text types students will read are Informational and Narrative Nonfiction. Informational selections are structured in two ways: with and without headings. Biographical text is read much like a narrative selection- a character has a problem or is trying to solve a problem, has challenges, overcomes the challenges. The one additional element to biography is that the character's accomplishment is an important aspect of the text that students should pay attention to.

Nonfiction topics and biographical text are often unfamiliar to students. In addition, titles and headings are frequently written in vague or abstract ways that only make sense after reading the text.

Students will encounter nonfiction text taken from historical events, technology, diverse cultures, various sciences, medicine, animals, and important people. Students will have limited or no background for many of these texts. Accordingly, they must build background as they read. The 5WH strategy helps them to build background and identify the important details to hold on to.

Unfamiliar topics and tricky titles/headings often cause students to be confused and anxious. Struggling readers, in particular, shut down quickly. Students must be taught not to give up; rather, they should learn that somewhere in the text they will find an explanation of the topic. I call this part of the text the "Jump-Out" that will be explained below.

In this paper we will look at a strategy that works effectively for informational and biographical text: 5WH-Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. The strategy is used to convert the title and headings in a selection to 5WH questions. Questioning the text reveals the important details that lead to understanding the text. Accumulating the details helps students interpret the text at a deeper level that leads to understanding.

The 5WH strategy has proven to be helpful for identifying key details and directing readers focus on important understandings. This strategy guides students to learn to ask pertinent questions that helps them find and analyze evidence in the text when reading.

## Before Reading Protocol

Before converting a title or heading to a question, students must first search for clues such as photos, illustrations, and other text features. For example, a selection that I use is entitled *The Story Behind the Crunch* which is meaningless or vague at best. However, when students examine the two photographs and the text box included in the selection they learn that the selection is about potato chips. They have immediately built necessary background knowledge that enables them to convert the title to: *What is The Story Behind The Potato Chip?* The result is that they can now begin reading with a better understanding about the topic of the selection.

To begin, students must be taught two important strategies: NOTICING the text type; and, also NOTICE, and ANALYZE the type of IMPORTANT DETAILS they will encounter. Not every detail is important with some inserted in the text to make the text more interesting. Details such as these are often distractors to students.

### Narrative Nonfiction

Narrative or literacy nonfiction(NNF) may include all or some of the following details: early life of the character, details that provide insights into character's traits such as perseverance, challenges the character encountered, how the character overcame the challenges and the character's accomplishments.

### Informational Text

When reading about a topic-not a person- such as an invention or a medical discovery students should be taught how to look for details that explain how and why it works, and why people need it, or engage with it.

## During Reading:

1. Convert the title and headings into 5WH questions.
2. Next, teach students to read to find the "Jump Out"(as noted, the Jump Out is/are the important detail(s) that answer the question that was asked).
3. For historical events, inventions, and other important events, teach students to notice how it began, how it changed, and how it is today.

# INSTRUCTIONAL MOVES and Tips for Nonfiction

- Begin by having students look for clues in the title, graphics, and text features before starting to read. Many titles are vague or misleading.
- Apply **WHAT** or **WHO** for changing the title to a question. The other Ws or H typically do not work as well or make sense.
- For people, animals, and insects the **WHO** question typically works well; for converting the title whereas for other topics **WHAT** seems to work most often.
- The next step after the title has been converted to a question, is to search for the “**Jump\_Out.**” The Jump-Out is the information that defines/describes the topic. Every selection has a Jump-Out which is commonly found in one sentence or paragraph. When students understand this, they are less stressed and are able to read for understanding.
- Nonfiction requires identifying, cumulating(collecting) and holding on to key details. Teach short note taking skills-one word or a short phrase to help the student answer the question they posed.. (I am not a big fan of underlining because the underlined words are not the students words. Trying to hold on to something that is written in language the reader may not use often results in forgetting or confusion).
- Teach students that when the topic of the selection involves something that happened in the past, that they must notice and note **HOW or WHY** the event happened; or, if it was an invention why and how it came about.
- When the topic centers on a culture, people, or animals, the reader must notice and note the reasons why the people or animals acted or did things in the manner described in the selection. Asking **What** was important about the traditions, actions or behaviors. leads to understanding.
- If the topic involves science, technology, or medicine, students must notice and note the reasons **Why** it was important and how it benefited or contributed to society.
- Teach that when reading nonfiction the reader’s job is to locate and **hold on to** the Jump Out details and avoid holding on to details that do not answer the 5WH question.

## Finding the Jump Out:

1. Sometimes the Jump Out will be found in one sentence... but the always.
2. Sometimes the Jump Out is found in a paragraph...but not always.
3. Sometimes the Jump Out is found by reading more than one paragraph...but not always.

Teach students that the Jump Out may in some cases require reading the entire section, collecting the important details from each paragraph and synthesizing these into one idea of concept.

## **For historical event or invention Look For these “Jump Outs.”**

1. Look for When did it begin.
2. Look for Why did it begin.
3. Look for How it began
4. Look for How did it change over time.
5. Look for How it is today.
6. Look For Who was the important person(s)
7. Look for What challenges or difficult problems, if any, encountered.
8. Look for how was/were the problem(s) solved

## **LOOK FORS: ABOUT A PERSON NARRATIVE NONFICTION/BIOGRAPHY**

For narrative nonfiction selections students should read the piece like reading a narrative text looking especially at the person’s **actions, interactions with others, feeling, motives, and any changes**. One important additional “look for” to notice when reading about a person is what was **accomplished**.

Teach students to notice these details because STAAR questions commonly ask about these text details.

### **LOOK FORS**

1. Look for what time in the life of the person did the selection begin.
2. What motivated the person to do the what they did
3. What challenges or problems they encountered
4. How they overcame the problem or challenge
5. What was their accomplishment

## Help with STAAR Assessments

On assessments like the STAAR Reading Test, each type of nonfiction has its own particular way of posing questions that differ slightly. Students should be taught to identify the type of nonfiction and know how to respond to the questions that accompany each type of text.

Students should expect to be asked about the main purpose of a SECTION or the entire SELECTION. A frequent question is, “What is the main reason the author wrote the selection?” Another common question is “Why did the author include information in paragraph or section \_\_\_\_\_?” “Which question shows...?” “In paragraph \_\_\_\_\_ what does...?” “In which part of the selection would the reader find information about \_\_\_\_\_?” Questions about a person’s accomplishments or how they gave back as a result of their success should be expected.

Preparing students to anticipate these types of questions will help them know what to attend to when reading. Of course, there will likely be detail and summary questions.

Additionally, the vocabulary of the questions should be taught. Words commonly found include INFER, CONCLUDE(conclusion), SUGGEST(suggesting), DESCRIBES, AND CONVEY

### STAAR SMARTS LOOK FORS: ABOUT EVENTS OR INVENTIONS

If you notice that the selection was about and historical event or invention Look For these “Jump Outs.”

1. Look for When did it begin.
2. Look for Why did it begin.
3. Look for How it began
4. Look for How did it change over time.
5. Look for How it is today.
6. Look For Who was the important person(s)
7. Look for What challenges or difficult problems, if any, encountered.

8. Look for how was/were the problem(s) solved

#### LOOK FORS: ABOUT A PERSON

##### NARRATIVE NONFICTION/BIOGRAPHY

For example, typical NNF questions on the STAAR Reading Test OFTEN are about how the person got started in their vocation or their early life, the challenges /problems they faced and overcame, what character traits helped them succeed, and the character's accomplishments. The text often informs the reader how the person gives back to society as a result of their success.

For narrative nonfiction selections students should read them like narrative text looking especially at the person's **actions, interactions with others, feeling, motives, and any changes**. One important additional "look for" to notice when reading about a person is what was **accomplished**. STAAR questions commonly ask about these elements.

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#### LOOK FORS

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