

## Before You Begin – Read This!

### Begin with a definition

Sharing books with children is a primary focus of most preschool classrooms. Including information books as part of this sharing will be the focus for the curriculum guides that follow.

In order for everyone to have a common understanding of what is meant by informational books, the following definition is offered:

**Informational books** – A type of non-fiction that uses both text and illustrations to convey meaning about the physical, biological, or social world.

Informational books provide both facts and explain processes.

Illustrations are realistic and can include photographs, diagrams, charts, graphs, labels and captions.

Books used in some of the guides may not exactly meet this formal definition of informational books. However, the text in the books and the activities in the guides give children hands-on experiences that support the definition as well as Learning Goals in the Science and Technology and the Social Studies Domains in the *Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards: Birth through 60 months*. For example, in the guide titled “Building with Blocks” the three featured books, *Block City*, *When I Build with Blocks*, and *Changes, Changes*, do not meet the formal definition of informational books. However, they do support the following:

**Domain: Science and Technology**

**Domain Component: ST3.2 KNOWLEDGE OF SCIENCE CONTENT**

**Learning Goal: ST3.2 Uses tools and engineering practices to explore and solve problems**

**Strands:** Knowledge and use of tools and Engineering practices and thinking

### Support for informational books

The following can be found in the *Arkansas Child Development and Early Learning Standards: Birth through 60 months* (2016)

**Domain: Emergent Literacy**

**Domain Component: EL1.1 ENGAGEMENT IN LITERACY EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDING OF STORIES AND BOOKS**

**Learning Goal: EL1.1 Shows interest in literacy experiences**

**Strand:** Variety of Interests

**Indicator:** Shows interest in an increasing variety of types of stories and texts

(e.g., picture books, informational texts, rhymes, and poetry, illustrated biographies, folk and fairy tales)

In the Pre-K ELLA Trainer Manual (2013), informational books are listed as one of the types of books that are commonly used to read aloud with children

In **ALL ABOUT THE ECERS-R** categories of books that should be accessible to children include factual information and nature and science.

In the book, *So Much More than the ABCs* (2013), an entire chapter is devoted to sharing informational books with preschoolers. One of the authors, Judith A. Schickedanz, is a nationally recognized authority in the field of early literacy. In addition to this book, many college textbooks used in literature classes include informational books as one of the categories of literature.

### **Reasons for including informational books in the preschool classroom**

Informational books support children's learning in so many ways. Almost all preschool children find the content of informational books interesting. Because of this, having access to information books can positively affect a child's interest in books and in reading, which is related to a child's reading success. Vocabulary development is also supported because informational books contain many technical words with clear explanations and realistic illustrations.

As children are involved with informational books, they are helped to acquire knowledge. They are encouraged to think, to express curiosity and to seek answers to questions they may have.

Informational books can also be used to help children better understand the content of a story book. A good example of such a story is *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell which is one of the books included in the topic of study, Birds, found in **Adventures in Learning**. By pairing *Owl Babies* with the informational book, *Owls* by Gail Gibbons, children can better understand that baby owls are called owlets and are dependent on their parents to hunt and bring food to them.

### **Criteria for determining if a book can be classified as informational**

Suggested criteria for determining if a book can be classed as informational include:

- Is written in a simple language with realistic illustrations that support the text
- Is visually attractive to children
- May have a table of contents, an index and a glossary
- May contain technical words with clear explanations
- Has a focus on factual content or a process that pertains to living things and the natural, physical and social world

## **Topics found in informational books**

- Living things (Science component of STEM)
- Nature and the environment (Science component of STEM)
- Physical objects (Science component of STEM)
- Tools, technology and engineering practices (Technology and Engineering component of STEM)
- Family and culture (Social Studies)
- Geography (Social Studies)

## **Strategies for using the guides and the informational books in the preschool classroom**

- Select guides that are appropriate for your children's level of understanding and interests.
- Integrate the guides into existing curriculum.
- Use the guides as the primary curriculum, adding additional activities as needed.
- Use the guides in conjunction with a storybook as previously noted with *Owl Babies* and *Owls*.
- Use the guides in response to something children might ask during the reading of a storybook or in response to something in which a child or children show an interest and express curiosity and a desire to know more about.
- Read the informational book in its entirety or read only selected parts or show the pictures and read limited text.
- Read the book to introduce a small group experience or to support activities in learning centers.
- Place informational books in the Library Center or other areas of the classroom such as the Discovery Center.
- Combine all of these strategies.

In addition to informational books, informational magazines such as *Ranger Rick, Jr.*, published by the National Wildlife Association, are sometimes useful resources to support children's interests and curiosity.

Many of the strategies listed here will be incorporated into curriculum guides using informational books. You are encouraged to use your own creativity in making informational books a part of your preschool curriculum.

### **A word of caution**

**Informational books are not intended to replace other types of books.** They are intended to be an addition to and expansion of the preschool curriculum. So continue to read, read, read storybooks to children.