

Weaving Readers Theatre and nonfiction into the curriculum

Young, a former elementary teacher who has used Readers Theatre, currently teaches children's literature and language arts courses at Washington State University. Vardell is on the Reading and Language Arts faculty at the University of Texas-Arlington.

The students were listening intently as their classmates read a Readers Theatre adaptation of Joanna Cole's *The Magic School Bus Lost in the Solar System*. At this point, Ms. Frizzle and her class have left Mars in their school bus:

- All: Thousands of asteroids were spinning around us.
- Shirley: The area between the inner and the outer planets is called the asteroid belt. It is filled with thousands and thousands of asteroids.
- Florrie: Asteroids are chunks of rock and metal in orbit around the Sun. Scientists think they are building blocks of a planet that never formed.
- All: All at once, we heard the tinkling of broken glass. One of our tail-lights had been hit by an asteroid.
- Narrator: Ms. Frizzle put the bus on autopilot and went out to take a look. She kept on talking about asteroids over the bus radio.
- Ms. Frizzle: The largest asteroid is only $\frac{1}{3}$ the size of our moon. Most asteroids are the size of houses or smaller.
- Tim: I wish she'd come inside.
- Narrator: Suddenly there was a snap. Ms. Frizzle's tether line had broken! Without warning, the rockets fired up, and the bus zoomed away! The autopilot was malfunctioning.
- Ms. Frizzle: Kids, I'll meet you later...later...later (her voice grows fainter).
- Arnold: Come in, Ms. Frizzle. Do you read me?

(Adapted from *The Magic School Bus Lost in the Solar System* by Joanna Cole. Copyright © 1990 by Joanna Cole. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.)



Many concept books and informational books lend themselves well to Readers Theatre. Photo by Michael Siluk

The book and script go on to tell of the remainder of the field trip through the solar system and the class's eventual return to earth. In the process, students are introduced to information about the planets in a fresh and appealing manner. They seldom encounter the same kind of information in textbooks with such enthusiasm.

Reading content area textbooks can often be tedious. Yet, many students enjoy reading nonfiction literature. Nonfiction literature today includes all kinds of books whose primary purpose is to share information. Factual books about dinosaurs, insects, cars, biographies of heroes and contemporary celebrities, and even books that weave facts into a storylike narrative (e.g., Tomie dePaola's *The Popcorn Book*) are increasingly popular with young readers. Some readers even prefer such nonfiction over fiction. "How to" books on various crafts, experiments, and hobbies captivate child readers, just as they do adults. Nonfiction writers manage to bring to life the same content that can be cold and clinical in textbooks. Their books reflect the authors' individual interests,

viewpoints, and concerns in contrast to the cautious collaboration leading to textbook content and adoption. Nonfiction authors' talents and skills shape their writing. Students often respond to this nonfiction exactly as they do to a wonderful novel or picture book. After reading *Buffalo Hunt* one fifth grader exclaimed, "I want to read another book by Russell Freedman." What an excellent opportunity this can be to link reading for pleasure with reading for information in the content areas.

The increased amount of reading required in the content areas often contributes to what has been referred to as the "fourth-grade slump" in learning (Chall, 1983)—a time when student progress seems to plateau or drop. This problem is partially due to the structure of the content area textbooks themselves. Students who are used to reading fictional narratives find textbooks difficult to read. It has been suggested that basals in the primary grades should contain more quality nonfiction to make such a transition easier (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Another problem, however, is that text-

books are often poorly written and difficult for students to understand (Tomlinson, Tunnell, & Richgels, 1992; Tyson & Woodward, 1989). Both teachers and students who may be excited about a topic find themselves disappointed when they encounter it in a textbook. We suggest a focus on topical nonfiction literature as an alternative source of meaningful content. Further, we suggest Readers Theatre as an innovative, exciting approach to content reading and study.

Benefits of nonfiction trade books in the content areas

Teachers can use an abundant variety of available nonfiction trade books to supplement or substitute for select areas of content treated in textbooks. A number of benefits can be gained by incorporating nonfiction literature into content study (Brozo & Tomlinson, 1986; Holmes & Ammon, 1985; Mathison, 1989). First, an impressive variety of topics is often available. This diversity in tradebooks is important since the range of readability, so restricted in textbooks, is an impediment for many students. Thus, an array of trade books can provide a better range of reading levels than textbooks. Second, trade books are often more appealing than textbooks. The inviting format, illustrations, and writing style of trade books attract students. Since these books reflect the voice and style of an author with a

nally, trade books enable students to read material as up-to-date and accurate as possible.

By combining Readers Theatre with nonfiction trade books in the content areas, teachers can incorporate content reading and learning with the dynamic and interactive process of Readers Theatre. Students can retain more information, find greater enjoyment in reading content, and be more actively involved in their learning than in a textbook-based content curriculum.

We define Readers Theatre as a presentation of text that is expressively and dramatically read aloud by two or more readers. Our definition is similar to conceptions of Readers Theatre offered by others (Coger & White, 1982; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988; Sloyer, 1982) who place the primary emphasis on reading as opposed to memorization, action, props, or costumes. The intent is for the readers to read in such a way that they paint an image of the events and actions in the minds of the audience (Moffett & Wagner, 1992). Nevertheless, our use of Readers Theatre differs somewhat from the norm in that the material used is different. Whereas narrative story and poetry are usually the suggested text for Readers Theatre, we are suggesting that teachers also use Readers Theatre as the medium for bringing nonfiction into the curriculum.

Benefits of Readers Theatre

There are numerous benefits for students in Readers Theatre. One student, who was involved in a summer Readers Theatre project, explained: "It is like reading aloud and being in a play, but a lot more fun!" Equally important, students can improve their reading ability and attitudes toward reading through participating in Readers Theatre because of the repetition of exposure to the material (Wagner, 1991). Readers have the opportunity to practice oral reading and engage in reading the text several times as they prepare their performance (Busching, 1981). Therefore, students can develop larger sight-word vocabularies, increased reading rate, and improved reading fluency (Johnson & Louis, 1990). As readers learn how to use their voices to alter their delivery, tone, pitch, and volume, the quality and expressiveness of their oral reading also improves. Additionally, comprehension may improve since the reading experience is one of dramatic participation

Nonfiction writers manage to bring to life the same content that can be cold and clinical in textbooks.

passion for the subject, comprehension and motivation can be enhanced. Third, nonfiction trade books allow students to study topics in greater depth than do textbooks. Many books on the same topic can be gathered; students can synthesize information, compare viewpoints, and construct semantic maps. Fi-

with the focus on interpretation rather than performance (Johnson & Louis, 1990; Sloyer, 1982; Swanson, 1988).

The audience also benefits from Readers Theatre. Listening to Readers Theatre performances can be enjoyable and entertaining as the audience is exposed to many voices and many texts. Since characterization and content are conveyed by the readers and the narrator rather than by costumes, action, and props, the audience listens critically and appreciatively. The text "comes alive" through oral interpretation; thus, both listening skills and comprehension are practiced (Coger & White, 1982; Norton, 1989).

Adapting the script

Both teachers and students can select non-fiction books or excerpts to adapt to Readers Theatre scripts if they relate to individual interest areas or the content subject matter to be studied. Some books are more adaptable than others to Readers Theatre. Informational books with dialogue work beautifully (for example, the Magic School Bus series, the photo-essay books of Joan Anderson, or the "Dinosaur" books by Marc Brown). It is not necessary to use the entire text for the script; excerpts can be chosen. In addition, many shorter informational picture books, which are generally viewed as most appropriate for the primary grades, can be very effective across the grades because their simplicity and focus make it easier to absorb new and unfamiliar information (e.g., the science books by Seymour Simon, such as *Whales*, *Oceans*, or *Deserts*).

Guidelines for adapting scripts

Once a teacher has developed a script and the students have had the experience of participating in Readers Theatre, students can also participate with teachers in the adaptation process. When the students are familiar with Readers Theatre, the teacher can lead them through the following script development steps, modeling the decision making that occurs at each interval. Students can work in pairs or small groups to develop sections of the script, rehearsing as they go.

1. Provide students with the opportunity to read or skim a potential book or excerpt beforehand; or the teacher or student who chose the book can give a brief "booktalk," which

provides background information. It helps to begin the scripting process with familiar material.

2. Choose a portion of the text that is particularly interesting and contains the desired content. It may be only a few pages. The entire text of a typical picture book is only 2-5 typed pages without illustrations.

3. Reproduce the selected portion of the text.

4. Delete lines that are less critical to the topic, such as those not critical to the development of the script, those peripheral to the main actions, those that represent complex imagery or figurative language that is difficult to express, or those that simply state that a character is speaking (Cox, 1988; Swanson, 1988). This is *not* a new approach to "round robin reading" where each student simply prepares to read the next paragraph aloud. Readers Theatre strives to weave a coherent whole—a narrative, a sequence of events—told in many voices. Some portions of the text can be omitted.

5. Decide how to divide the parts for the readers. Naturally, dialogue can be assigned to appropriate characters (Swanson, 1988). In other text, it may be necessary to rewrite the text as dialogue or with multiple narrators. Converting third-person point of view to the first person ("I" or "we") can create an effective narration in many cases. There are a number of creative possibilities for dividing the text.

6. Add a "prologue" to introduce the script in storylike fashion. If necessary, a postscript may be added to bring closure to the script.

7. Label the readers' parts by placing each reader's name in the left-hand margin, followed by a colon.

8. Provide time for all readers to read over their parts (at least silently), and if time allows, perform the Readers Theatre twice. The first run through, readers are still working on their timing and expressiveness. An additional incentive for a second more polished reading is to audiotape the final version for further listening pleasure, or to perform the script for another audience (peers, principal, parents, etc.).

Typing the script is not necessary. Students can often cut and paste the speaking parts from the reproduced script. The speak-

ing parts can be added to the student-written narration, prologue, and epilogue and pasted on a sheet of paper to "construct" the script. The completed script can be field tested by asking others to read it aloud. Sometimes listening to the script makes it easier to add voice directions, revise narration, etc. (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988; Swanson, 1988). When students are satisfied with the script, copies can be made for each of the participants.

Student participation in the development of the script involves critical reading and revising. Though the entire process can take 2 weeks or more to complete, students learn along the way, as well as in the final performance of the Readers Theatre script. When the process is complete, students are often interested in going beyond the excerpt to read the

When the process is complete, students are often interested in going beyond the excerpt to read the rest of the book or another book by the same author.

rest of the book or another book by the same author. This exposure to new information also provides a kind of scaffolding into the content that can lead to further reading on the subject. Now that they've performed *The Magic School Bus Lost in the Solar System*, students feel better prepared to read more about the planets, stars, and space exploration in other books. In addition, each script adaptation is a unique experience as new material is handled in increasingly creative and collaborative ways. Students may begin by simply breaking the text into parts, but as they gain experience with Readers Theatre, they may enjoy elaborating on the text (creating their own Magic School Bus adventure, for example), or synthesizing two or more texts together into one script and adapting the text into an altogether new creation (like a news report or documentary). In the figure, we illustrate how a script, "Sojourner Truth," was adapted from Ina

Chang's (1991) book, *A Separate Battle: Women and the Civil War*.

Adaptations for primary-grade students

Children in the middle grades and beyond are generally able to follow the steps outlined above once they've learned the ropes. But even primary-grade students can participate in Readers Theatre. Their participatory reading is very similar to joining in on a song's refrain or reading a poem chorally. Many simple concept books and informational books with minimal text lend themselves to Readers Theatre adaptation. For example, Eric Carle's books, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *A House for a Hermit Crab*, or *The Very Quiet Cricket*, contain both science content in a story frame and repetitive lines that can serve as script for student participation. Children often naturally join in anyway when they begin to discern the repetitive pattern! Sentence strips with the key lines written on them, rather than full-blown scripts, and visual cues (such as a hand cupped around the ear) can prompt individual children when their turns come. Once the students have heard the book read aloud and are familiar with the story, the teacher can read it aloud again as students, individually or in groups, wait their turns to read/say their lines as they occur in the text. Other useful titles that use story narrative to integrate informational content for younger children include *Is Your Mama a Llama?* and *Is This a House for a Hermit Crab?*, as well as many of the non-fiction concept books of Ann Morris, Donald Crews, Ron Hirschi, Lois Ehlert, and Bruce McMillan. As students gain familiarity with this kind of participatory reading, they can also suggest books of their own.

Readers Theatre across the curriculum

A variety of nonfiction books can be used to enhance all the content areas across the curriculum. Informational books come in all kinds of "packages" nowadays, from biographies and autobiographies (like *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* and *Bill Peet*) to photographic essays and interviews (like *The American Family Farm* or *Families*), from simple concept books to factual books with rhyming text (like *Planting a Rainbow* or *The Reason for a Flower*). Even many alphabet or counting books now use their letter or number frame-

Example of adaptation for Readers Theatre

Original text

Grimké and other women who joined the abolitionist movement in the decades before the Civil War faced opposition from many sides. Not only was their cause unpopular, but the women were called indecent and unladylike for expressing their views in public.

Among the women abolitionists, few were so bold as Sojourner Truth, a former slave. Tall and muscular, with a commanding voice and lightening wit, Truth was at her best before an unfriendly crowd. At a women's rights rally in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, the first women to speak were constantly interrupted by men who insisted that females were inferior. A crowd of boys jeered from the balcony. When Sojourner Truth rose from her seat, and the unruly members of the audience saw that a six-foot-tall black woman was approaching the stage, they hissed loudly.

Standing at the podium, Truth fixed her gaze on one of the men who had interrupted the meeting. "That man over there," she said in a strong voice, "says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped *me* into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gave me any best place. And aren't I a woman?" She pushed the sleeve of her gray dress up to her shoulder. "Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me. And aren't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well. And aren't I a woman?" By now, her voice was thundering through the hall. "I have borne thirteen children and seen them most all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard. And aren't I a woman?" When Truth was finished, the audience erupted into loud cheers.

(From *A Separate Battle: Women and the Civil War* by Ina Chang. Copyright © 1991 by Laing Communications, Inc. Used by permission of Lodestar Books, an affiliate of Dutton Children's Books, a division of Penguin USA Inc.

Readers Theatre adaptation

Sojourner Truth

- Narrator 1: Women who joined the abolitionist or anti-slavery movement in the decades before the Civil War faced opposition from many sides.
- Man #1: It's indecent for ladies to speak in public like this!
- Man #2: A woman's place is in the home!
- Narrator 2: Among the women abolitionists, few were so bold as the former slave, Sojourner Truth.
- Narrator 1: Sojourner Truth was at her best before an unfriendly crowd. At a women's rights rally in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, the first women to speak were constantly interrupted by men who insisted that females were inferior.
- Man #3: Women can't do nothing! They need men to help them do everything!
- Boys: Boo! Boo! Go home!
- Narrator 1: Truth fixed her gaze on one of the men who had interrupted the meeting and spoke in a strong voice.
- Sojourner: That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped *me* into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gave me any best place. And aren't I a woman?
- Narrator 2: She pushed the sleeve of her gray dress up to her shoulder.
- Sojourner: Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me. And aren't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well. And aren't I a woman?
- Sojourner: I have borne thirteen children and seen them most all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard. And aren't I a woman?
- All: (applaud and loudly cheer)

work as a means of gathering and organizing information (like *ABCedar* and *Ten Little Rabbits*). Contemporary authors are experimenting with all kinds of innovative formats for nonfiction that beg for classroom sharing. The 1992 winner of the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children, given annually by the National Council of Teachers of English, was a book focusing entirely on Charles Lindbergh's historic 33½ hour flight from New York to Paris, *Flight*, by Robert Burleigh.

Choosing appropriate nonfiction titles for Readers Theatre begins with finding books related to the subject matter (library/resource media specialists are tremendously helpful here), then continues with a careful selection of a book with interesting, informative text (or portions of text) written in a lively way. If it is interesting enough to show a friend or colleague, contains excerpts that read well aloud, and has received positive reviews from critics and kids, it may be an appropriate choice. *Adventuring With Books* (Monson, 1985) and

Eyeopeners (Kobrin, 1988) are two sources that offer helpful listings of nonfiction literature organized in content categories. Following, we offer a few suggested titles and a few sample script excerpts that lend themselves to the Readers Theatre format in major content areas of the curriculum.

Health

Children are interested in their bodies and how they develop, and Joanna Cole's *The Magic School Bus Inside the Human Body* provides readers with a good understanding of how bodies function. Cole uses a school teacher, Ms. Frizzle, to take a class on an imaginary field trip inside the body of a fellow student. The digestive and circulatory systems are vividly portrayed in this book. Like *The Magic School Bus Lost in the Solar System*, the very format of the book, with narration, speech balloons, and mock student reports lends itself to script adaptation.

Illness and disease, death and divorce are issues of special concern to students and their friends who are experiencing these life traumas. Krementz introduces students to children who share their own real life experiences in the books *How It Feels to Fight for Your Life*, *How It Feels When Parents Divorce*, and *How It Feels When a Parent Dies*. Based on interviews with children, these books are real, personal, and powerful. The health curriculum often also has an affective component that focuses on helping students feel good about themselves. Many nonfiction books feature topics such as divorce, illness, death, and feelings. Two examples are *Feelings* by Aliko and *Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families* by Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown. (See also *Dinosaurs, Beware! A Safety Guide* by Marc Brown and Stephen Krensky and *Dinosaurs Alive and Well! A Guide to Good Health* by Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown.) Here is a portion of a script based on *Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families*.

Narrator 1:	When your parents divorce, it's natural to feel
Dinosaur 1:	sad
Dinosaur 2:	angry
Dinosaur 3:	afraid
Dinosaur 4:	confused
Dinosaur 5:	ashamed
Dinosaur 6:	guilty
Dinosaur 7:	relieved

Dinosaur 8:	worried about who will take care of you.
Narrator 2:	The bad feelings won't last forever, and there is plenty you can do to help yourself feel better.
Narrator 1:	It helps to talk about these feelings and to let them show.

(Copyright © 1986 by Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown. Originally published by Atlantic Monthly Press.)

The script consists of actual excerpts with the only modification being the assigning of parts. Such text helps children realize that there is a range of emotions that children of divorced parents experience and that such emotions are normal. Books like *Dinosaurs Divorce* enable children whose parents are divorcing to identify with others who have similar problems. Moreover, children whose parents are not divorcing may become more empathetic to their peers whose parents are.

Math

Nonfiction authors can skillfully present complex concepts in comprehensible fashion in mathematics (Stewig, 1988). David M. Schwartz's *How Much Is a Million?* is such a book. Schwartz introduces students to the concepts of millions, billions, and trillions.

Narrator:	Let Marvelossissimo the Mathematical Magician guide you into the world of large numbers. You'll sail past one hundred thousand stars and see towers of children reaching out towards Saturn's rings.
Marvelossissimo:	If one million kids climbed onto one another's shoulders, they would be...
Group 1:	Taller than the tallest buildings,
Groups 1 and 2:	Higher than the highest mountains,
Groups 1, 2, and 3:	And farther up than airplanes can fly.
Marvelossissimo:	If you wanted to count from one to one million...
Reader 1:	It would take about 23 days.
Marvelossissimo:	If a goldfish bowl were big enough for a million goldfish...
Reader 2:	It would be large enough to hold a whale.

(Readers Theatre adaptation of brief text excerpt from *How Much Is a Million?* by David M. Schwartz. Copyright © 1985 by David M. Schwartz. Reprinted by permission of Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, a division of William Morrow & Company, Inc.)

In this script, the narrator's introduction is from the book jacket. Other than dividing the

text into parts, there is no modification of the author's work.

Teachers can use *If You Made a Million*, another of Schwartz's books, as a follow-up on the subject of money. Other math books that can be adapted are Anno and Anno's *Anno's Mysterious Multiplying Jar* and Burns's *This Book Is About Time* and *The I Hate Mathematics! Book*. For additional related titles, see *Children's Mathematics: A Critical Bibliography* by Margaret Matthias.

Science

Christy Ellingson, a seventh-grade teacher at Park Middle School in Kennewick, Washington, adapted Goodman's *A Kid's Guide to How to Save the Planet* into a Readers Theatre script by creating a radio call-in show hosted by Earthman Jack and other DJs. What an exciting way for students to celebrate Earth Day 1993!

- Earthman Jack: Good morning people of our planet. It is Earth Day 1993 and my buddies and I have a message for you. Please lend us your ears as the bright sunshine soaks in on our bright sunny Earth.
- All DJs:
DJ #1: Your planet's in trouble! Unless you've been asleep for, oh say, the past several years, you know that the Earth is in trouble. Turn on the TV. You see pictures of garbage or dead dolphins washing onto a beach. Open the newspaper. You read that scientists predict the Earth is getting hotter. Towns all over the country are having a hard time figuring out where to stash their trash. The tropical rain forests are being burned at an incredible rate. They might even disappear in our lifetime.
- DJ #2: Today, we want all of you out there in Earthland to call in and tell us about how our planet works and what we can do to keep it working properly.
- DJ #3: Let's hear from you now! Our number is 1-800-5K EARTH.
- Earthman Jack: Let's go to line one with Mary in Seattle.
- Mary: Am I on now?
- DJ #2: Yes, Mary, go ahead.
- Mary: Oh! I think the newest and maybe the worst environmental threat is something invisible. It's not a poison. It's not radioactive. In fact, it's as ordinary as the weather. It hardly sounds dangerous. Maybe it even sounds like fun. Here's the problem: Over the next century

the Earth will grow warmer. Possibly in as few as 30 or 40 years, the climate may be an average of 8 degrees warmer than it is today!

DJ #3: Awwright! Let's head for the beach!

Earthman Jack: Not so fast. Even a small change in the temperature could cause major problems. Several summers in the 80s were the warmest recorded in this century.

DJ #1: Scientists believe that those summers could become normal in the next century. What could cause such a climate change?

(Adapted from *A Kid's Guide to How to Save the Planet*. Reprinted by permission.)

Of all the sample scripts included in this article, this script represents the most manipulation and rewriting. Facts from an informational book were incorporated and written in dialogue form for the radio talk show script.

There are many books available for studying ecosystems. Some samples are Arnosky's *In the Forest*, Wiewandt's *The Hidden Life of the Desert*, and Silverstein and Silverstein's *Life in a Tidal Pool*.

Joanna Cole's other Magic School Bus books effectively combine science content and humor. These books fit beautifully in the science curriculum: *The Magic School Bus at the Waterworks* and *The Magic School Bus Inside the Earth*.

Dinosaurs are a topic of interest to many students across the elementary grades. Fortunately, many well-written books address this topic, including Lauber's *The News about Dinosaurs*, Lasky's *Dinosaur Dig*, and Gibbons's *Prehistoric Animals*.

Many other excellent nonfiction authors known for their science writing have written books that lend themselves beautifully to Readers Theatre script adaptation. Investigate the works of Franklyn Branley, Millicent Selsam, and Jean Craighead George, among others. For additional suggested titles, consult the annual listing of "Outstanding Science Trade Books for Children" published every spring in *Science and Children*. See also the excellent reference, *Science Books for Children: Suggestions from Booklist* (Wilms, 1985).

Social studies

Nonfiction books dealing with social

studies concepts and topics are often easy to adapt to Readers Theatre scripts since dialogue and narration are frequently present in these books. One book that lends itself well to Readers Theatre and gives students an understanding of both the conditions of the Mayflower passengers and the account of the first Thanksgiving is Joan Anderson's *The First Thanksgiving Feast*. An excerpt from the middle of the book follows:

- Susannah Winslow: 'Twas not so pleasant spending sixty-six days aboard that tiny ship, the Mayflower. We never knew if we would reach our destination. 'Twas most comforting that God gave us once again the sight of land. How grateful we were when we set foot on solid ground.
- Isaac Allerton: I had hoped that the Mayflower would take us farther south. But due to tides and currents and the lateness of the year, we found ourselves here. I was most fearful because of tales about the ill feelings the Indians did have for the white man. This 'thievish harbor' was said to be heavily populated with Indians. But I and the other members of our search party found no one to fear.
- John Alden: I was in the search party that stumbled upon a hill of sand under which was a great basket. It was full to the brim with fair kernels of Indian corn. After giving the matter prayerful consideration, we filled a kettle with the kernels and took it aboard the Mayflower. We thought we would pay the Indians for their corn when at last we met up with them.
- Peter Browne: Thanks be to God that we found fields already cleared for planting. Imagine the hours of labor it would have taken to cut down trees, pull out stumps, and carry away rocks. We would not have been able to plant a single seed until late summer, and that would have done us hardly any good. Cleared fields assured us of a goodly harvest.
- Myles Standish: I will never forget that cold March day when the Indian named Samoset suddenly appeared in our street. We

were taken by surprise, and I had not time to even grab my musket. But he greeted us with, "Welcome, welcome, Englishmen." We invited him to stay the night, and we finally learned why there were cleared fields. The Indians who did live here had died in a plague, which left our Plymouth area empty. Our fear of Indians did diminish that night.

(From the book *The First Thanksgiving Feast* by Joan Anderson, published by Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin Company. Copyright © 1984. Reprinted by permission.)

Other Joan Anderson books also fit nicely into the social studies curriculum: *Christmas on the Prairie*; *Christopher Columbus: From Vision to Voyage*; *From Map to Museum: Uncovering Mysteries of the Past*; *The Glorious Fourth at Prairietown*; *Pioneer Children of Appalachia*; *Seventeen Eighty-Seven*; *Spanish Pioneers of the Southwest*; and *A Williamsburg Household*.

Elementary students have an enduring interest in Native Americans. Newbery Medal winner Russell Freedman has written three books that present students with the Native Americans' view of history: *Buffalo Hunt*, *Indian Chiefs*, and *An Indian Winter*. Other relevant titles include *Totem Pole* and *Pueblo Storyteller* by Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith, and Marcia Keegan's *Pueblo Boy: Growing Up in Two Worlds*. The works by Hoyt-Goldsmith and Keegan present contemporary perspectives of Native Americans.

Biographies and autobiographies make an important contribution to social studies since textbooks often reduce historical events and persons' lives to a brief factual recounting. History comes to life when students encounter the personal sides of the people in history (Fritz, 1981). Jean Fritz is successful in adding this dimension to history in her books using well-researched, authentic details in books such as these: *The Great Little Madison*; *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?*; *Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?*; *George Washington's Breakfast*; *Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May?*; *Where Do You Think You're Going, Christopher Columbus?*; and *Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams?*

Many available biographies span the lives of a variety of important people. The follow-

ing are examples: Sills's *Inspirations: Stories about Women Artists*, Faber's *Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the World*, and Freedman's *Lincoln: A Photobiography* and *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*. David Adler has written several biographies for younger students in the primary grades, including *A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.*

For additional social studies titles, consult the annual list of "Notable Children's Trade Books in the Field of Social Studies" published every spring in *Social Education*.

Conclusion

Teachers can select from a variety of inviting nonfiction books available in all the content areas. Children can bring their own favorites on topics of special interest. There are many, many excellent new books to choose from, with many more published every year. As students and teachers choose nonfiction books for classroom use, both can participate in the development and performance of Readers Theatre scripts.

Using nonfiction books as legitimate literature for reading and learning in the content areas is an interesting, lively way to share up-to-date information. Experiencing this literature through Readers Theatre is an option that gives the words on the page a voice, and the students in the classroom an active role in internalizing and interpreting new knowledge. Through the multiple modes of silently reading, attentively listening, and orally performing the script, students engage in a literacy event. When they also participate in choosing the literature and developing the scripts, their learning is expanded. Their participation in the process and performance of Readers Theatre becomes not only a means of reading and learning content, but also a source of personal pride and accomplishment.

References

- Anderson, R.C., Hiebert, E.H., Scott, J.A., & Wilkinson, I.A.G. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading*. Washington, DC: The National Institute of Education.
- Brozo, W.G., & Tomlinson, C.M. (1986). Literature: The key to lively content courses. *The Reading Teacher*, 40, 288-293.
- Busching, B.A. (1981). Readers theatre: An education for language and life. *Language Arts*, 58, 330-337.
- Chall, J.S. (1983). *Stages of reading development*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Coger, L.I., & White, M.R. (1982). *Readers theatre handbook: A dramatic approach to literature*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Cox, C. (1988). *Teaching language arts*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Fritz, J. (1981). The very truth. In B. Hearne & M. Kaye (Eds.), *Celebrating children's books* (pp. 81-86). New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Harste, J.C., Short, K.G., & Burke, C. (1988). *Creating classrooms for authors*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Holmes, B.C., & Ammon, R.I. (1985). Teaching content with trade books: A strategy. *Childhood Education*, 61, 366-370.
- Johnson, T.D., & Louis, D.R. (1990). *Bringing it all together: A program for literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kobrin, B. (1988). *Eyeopeners: How to choose and use children's books about real people, places, and things*. New York: Penguin.
- Mathison, C. (1989). Stimulating and sustaining interest in content area reading. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 28, 76-83.
- Matthias, M. (1979). *Children's mathematics: A critical bibliography*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Moffett, J., & Wagner, B.J. (1992). *Student centered language arts, K-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Monson, D. (1985). *Adventuring with books*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Norton, D.E. (1989). *The effective teaching of the language arts*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Sloyer, S. (1982). *Readers theatre: Story dramatization in the classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Stewig, J.W. (1988). *Children and literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Swanson, C.C. (1988). Reading and writing readers' theatre scripts. *Australian Reading Association: Reading around series*, 1, 1-4.
- Tomlinson, C.M., Tunnell, M.O., & Richgels, D.J. (1992). It's more than a matter of fact: Why textbooks need trade books. In M.O. Tunnell & R. Ammon (Eds.), *The story of ourselves: Teaching history through children's literature*. (pp. 51-62). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Tyson, H., & Woodward, A. (1989). Why students aren't learning very much from textbooks. *Educational Leadership*, 47(3), 14-17.
- Wagner, B.J. (1991). Imaginative expression. In J. Flood, J.M. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J.R. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 787-804). New York: Macmillan.
- Wilms, D.M. (1985). *Science books for children: Selections from Booklist*. Chicago: American Library Association.

References for children's literature cited

- Adler, D.A. (1989). *A picture book of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Holiday House.
- Aliki. (1986). *Feelings*. New York: Morrow Junior Books.
- Anderson, G. (1989). *The American family farm*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Anderson, J. (1984). *The first Thanksgiving feast*. New York: Clarion.
- Anderson, J. (1985). *Christmas on the prairie*. New York: Clarion.
- Anderson, J. (1986). *The glorious fourth at Prairietown*. New York: Morrow Junior Books.
- Anderson, J. (1986). *Pioneer children of Appalachia*. New York: Ticknor & Fields.
- Anderson, J. (1987). *Seventeen eighty-seven*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Anderson, J. (1988). *From map to museum: Uncovering mysteries of the past*. New York: Morrow Junior Books.
- Anderson, J. (1988). *A Williamsburg household*. New York: Ticknor & Fields.

- Anderson, J. (1989). *Spanish pioneers of the southwest*. New York: Dutton.
- Anderson, J. (1991). *Christopher Columbus: From vision to voyage*. New York: Dial.
- Anno, M., & Anno, M. (1983). *Anno's mysterious multiplying jar*. New York: Philomel.
- Arnosky, J. (1989). *In the forest*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Bare, C.S. (1990). *Elephants on the beach*. New York: Cobblehill Books/Dutton.
- Brown, L.K., & Brown, M. (1986). *Dinosaurs divorce: A guide for changing families*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Brown, L.K., & Brown, M. (1990). *Dinosaurs alive and well! A guide to good health*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Brown, M., & Krensky, S. (1982). *Dinosaurs, beware! A safety guide*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Burleigh, R. (1991). *Flight*. New York: Philomel.
- Burns, M. (1975). *The I hate mathematics! book*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Burns, M. (1978). *This book is about time*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Carle, E. (1969). *The very hungry caterpillar*. New York: Philomel.
- Carle, E. (1987). *A house for a hermit crab*. New York: Picture Book Studio.
- Carle, E. (1990). *The very quiet cricket*. New York: Picture Book Studio.
- Chang, I. (1991). *A separate battle: Women and the Civil War*. New York: LoDESTAR.
- Cole, J. (1986). *The magic school bus at the water works*. New York: Scholastic.
- Cole, J. (1987). *The magic school bus inside the earth*. New York: Scholastic.
- Cole, J. (1989). *The magic school bus inside the human body*. New York: Scholastic.
- Cole, J. (1990). *The magic school bus lost in the solar system*. New York: Scholastic.
- dePaola, T. (1978). *The popcorn book*. New York: Holiday House.
- Ehlert, L. (1988). *Planting a rainbow*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Faber, D. (1985). *Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the world*. New York: Viking/Kestrel.
- Freedman, R. (1987). *Indian chiefs*. New York: Holiday House.
- Freedman, R. (1987). *Lincoln: A photobiography*. New York: Clarion.
- Freedman, R. (1988). *Buffalo hunt*. New York: Holiday House.
- Freedman, R. (1990). *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*. New York: Clarion.
- Freedman, R. (1992). *An Indian winter*. New York: Holiday House.
- Fritz, J. (1969). *George Washington's breakfast*. New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan.
- Fritz, J. (1973). *And then what happened, Paul Revere?* New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan.
- Fritz, J. (1974). *Why don't you get a horse, Sam Adams?* New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan.
- Fritz, J. (1975). *Where was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May?* New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan.
- Fritz, J. (1981). *Where do you think you are going, Christopher Columbus?* New York: Putnam.
- Fritz, J. (1982). *Can't you make them behave, King George?* New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan.
- Fritz, J. (1989). *The great little Madison*. New York: Putnam.
- Gibbons, G. (1988). *Prehistoric animals*. New York: Holiday House.
- Goodman, B. (1990). *A kid's guide to how to save the planet*. New York: Avon Books.
- Grossman, V. (1991). *Ten little rabbits*. San Francisco: Chronicle.
- Guarino, D. (1989). *Is your mama a llama?* New York: Scholastic.
- Heller, R. (1983). *The reason for a flower*. New York: Grosset.
- Hoyt-Goldsmith, D. (1990). *Totem pole*. New York: Holiday House.
- Hoyt-Goldsmith, D. (1991). *Pueblo storyteller*. New York: Holiday House.
- Jennes, A. (1990). *Families*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Keegan, M. (1991). *Pueblo boy: Growing up in two worlds*. New York: Dutton.
- Krementz, J. (1984). *How it feels when parents divorce*. New York: Knopf.
- Krementz, J. (1988). *How it feels when a parent dies*. New York: Knopf.
- Krementz, J. (1990). *How it feels to fight for your life*. Boston: Joy Street Books/Little, Brown.
- Lauber, P. (1989). *The news about dinosaurs*. New York: Bradbury.
- Lyon, G.E. (1989). *ABCedar*. New York: Orchard.
- McDonald, M. (1990). *Is this a house for a hermit crab?* New York: Orchard.
- Peet, B. (1989). *Bill Peet: An autobiography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Schwartz, D.M. (1985). *How much is a million?* New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Schwartz, D.M. (1990). *If you made a million*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Silverstein, A., & Silverstein, V. (1990). *Life in a tidal pool*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Simon, S. (1989). *Whales*. New York: Crowell.
- Simon, S. (1990). *Deserts*. New York: Morrow.
- Simon, S. (1990). *Oceans*. New York: Morrow.
- Wiewandt, T. (1990). *The hidden life of the desert*. New York: Crown.