

Junk Food, Pirates and UFOs: Nonfiction Books They Will Want to Read

Presented by Kate Houston Mitchoff & Jackie Partch,
Multnomah County Library School Corps
kateho@multcolib.org jacquelp@multcolib.org 503.988.6004

Oregon Library Association Conference
April 17, 2008

Great Nonfiction Books (in the order booktalked)

Davies, Nicola. Extreme Animals: The Toughest Creatures on Earth. Candlewick, 2006.

Lindop, Laurie. Cave Sleuths. Twenty-First Century Books, 2006.

Newcomb, Rain. The Master Spy Handbook. Lark Books, 2005.

Goodman, Susan E. The Truth about Poop. Viking, 2004.

Montgomery, Sy. The Tarantula Scientist. Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

Chandra, Deborah. George Washington's Teeth. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003.

Adkins, Jan. What if You Met a Pirate? Roaring Brook Press, 2004.

Thimmesh, Catherine. Team Moon: How 400,000 People Landed Apollo 11 on the Moon. Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Fleischman, John. Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story about Brain Science. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Alexander, Sally Hobart. Do You Remember the Color Blue? And Other Questions Kids Ask about Blindness. Viking, 2000.

Cobb, Vicki. Junk Food (Where's the Science Here? Series). Millbrook Press, 2006.

Singer, Marilyn. What Stinks? Darby Creek, 2006.

Resources

This Presentation's Handouts, Booktalks and Resources
Find them on Northwest Central <http://www.nwcentral.org/?q=node/857>

Multnomah County Library School Corps
<http://www.multcolib.org/schoolcorps/>

Gotta Read This! New Books to Connect with Curriculum
<http://www.multcolib.org/schoolcorps/gotta.html>

Articles/Books about Non-fiction for Children

Aronson, Marc. "Originality in Nonfiction." School Library Journal. Jan 2006, 42-43.

Baxter, Kathleen. Gotcha for Guys! Nonfiction Books to Get Boys Excited about Reading. Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited, 2007.

Baxter, Kathleen. Gotcha! Nonfiction Booktalks to Get Kids Excited about Reading. Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited, 1999.

Baxter, Kathleen. "Nonfiction Can Change a Life." CSLA Journal. Fall 2007, 23-24.

Carter, Betty. "A Universe of Information: The Future of Nonfiction," Horn Book. Nov/Dec 2000, 697-707.

Cooper, Irene. "The Booklist Interview: James Giblin," Booklist. June 1 & 15, 2003, 1794.

Dreher, Mariam Jean. "Motivating Children to Read More Nonfiction." The Reading Teacher. December 1998/January 1999, 414-417.

Duke, Nell K. "The Case for Informational Text." Educational Leadership. March 2004, 40-44.

Freedman, Russell. "Bring 'Em Back Alive!" School Library Journal. March 1994, 138-141.

Giblin, James Cross. "More than Just the Fact: A Hundred Years of Children's Nonfiction," Horn Book. Jul/Aug 2000, 413-424.

Horning, Kathleen T. "Books of Information." From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books. New York: HarperCollins, 1997, 22-45.

Hunt, John. "Where Do All the Prizes Go? Thoughts on the State of Informational Books." Horn Book. July/August 2005, 439-445.

Lindsay, Nina. "If Only...!" A Librarian Looks at How Even Great Books Fall Short," School Library Journal. July 2001, 34-35.

Loertscher, David. "Nonfiction Texts and Achievement." Teacher Librarian. October 2007, 37.

Meltzer, Milton. "Where Do All the Prizes Go?: A Case for Nonfiction." Horn Book. February 1976.
http://www.hbook.com/magazine/articles/1970s/feb76_meltzer.asp

Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw. "Science Books for Children: An Endangered Species?" Horn Book. May/June 1998, 309-314.

Pringle, Laurence. "Nonfiction Rising." The Reading Teacher. March 2004, 588.

Sutton, Roger. An Interview with Russell Freedman," Horn Book. Nov/Dec 2002, 695-704.

Vent, Cheryl T. and Julie A. Ray. "There is More to Reading than Fiction!: Enticing Elementary Students to Read Nonfiction Books." Teacher Librarian. April 2007, 42-44.

The Booktalks (alphabetical by author)

Adkins, Jan. What if You Met a Pirate? Roaring Brook Press, 2004.

What Makes It Great: Entertaining text, intriguing diagrams

Booktalk: When you think of a pirate, you probably think of a guy like this, right? (Show p. 2-3). This is what pirates look like in books & movies.

But a real pirate probably looked more like this guy. (Show p. 4-5). And this book will tell you all about the real pirate's life.

Here are just a few of the amazing (and sometimes downright disgusting) facts you'll learn:

- "Pirates smelled. A lot. They never took baths (which weren't considered healthy), they sweated a lot, and they probably owned only two or three pieces of (unwashed) clothing." p. 5
- There is no record of pirates ever making someone walk the plank. p. 21
- Forget boots or wooden legs—most pirates worked barefoot, since it was easier to climb into the rigging of the ship that way. Below deck, they might wear felt slippers. p. 5
- There were no bathrooms aboard a pirate ship. When nature called, they went to the front of the ship where they perched over the water on a bench with holes, called the seat of ease.

For many other fascinating facts about pirates, read What if You Met a Pirate? by Jan Adkins.

Alexander, Sally Hobart. Do You Remember the Color Blue? And Other Questions Kids Ask about Blindness. Viking, 2000.

What Makes It Great: Unusual, intriguing topic; humorous text

Booktalk: Have you ever wondered what it's like to be blind?

Maybe you've closed your eyes and tried to walk around your house without running into things.

But have you ever thought about...

How blind people can tell the time?

How they can cook dinner?

How they can write a check?

Or how they know that their clothes match?

Sally Hobart Alexander, an author of several books for children has been blind since she was 23. And in this book, Do You Remember the Color Blue and Other Questions Kids Ask about Blindness, she answers all of these questions and many more.

Bishop, Nic. Nic Bishop Spiders. Scholastic Nonfiction, 2007.

What Makes It Great: Bishop captures animals in such active but natural movements, that the reader can almost reach out and touch the animal.

Booktalk: Yu-ech! They're creepy-crawly, hairy-scary and who wants to read about spiders anyways?

You will, when you see these pictures.

[Show P. 16] Look at this pretty green spider. Do you know why it's covered with hairs? Think about what you do when someone pulls your ponytail, or ruffles your hair. It's a good warning system, isn't it - letting you know someone's there. The spider's hairs sense touch, vibration and sounds that same way. A spider's hair can also help it tell where the walls are when it crawls into a narrow passage.

[Show p. 19] Did you know as a spider grows it has to molt its whole skin? That's like when you slide your shirt off over your head, turning it inside out. Only it's harder for a spider – it has to molt ALL it's skin, even the skin covering its eyes and the inside of its mouth! Here's a tarantula pulling its old skin off of its legs. The new skin is damp and soft, but by the next day it will harden up.

[Show p 26] Check out the eyeballs on this spider! It has 6 – the 2 big ones in front are like binoculars, to find its prey. The smaller ones to the sides help it figure out how far it needs to jump.

Hey, up close this spider is kind of cute!

Borden, Louise. The Journey that Saved Curious George. The True War-Time Escape of Margaret and H.A. Rey. Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

What Makes It Great: The adventure touches on greater world events without pushing the history on youth. Kids learn while traveling along their escape.

Booktalk: Do you all know who Curious George is?

Well, what if I told you that he might never have existed.... If it weren't for authors Margaret and H. A. Rey's fantastic escape from the Nazi's invasion of Paris.

What is so interesting about that, you might wonder? Some people escaped the Nazis by hiding out, others by boat. Well, the Reys escaped by bicycle.

Yes, I said bicycle. That might not sound so fantastical. But how far do you think they had to travel on bike to safety? What perils did they experience along the way? Find out by reading...

Bredeson, Carmen. After the Last Dog Died: The True-life, Hair-raising Adventure of Douglas Mawson and His 1991-1914 Antarctic Expedition. National Geographic, 2003.

What Makes It Great: The great book layout and chilling photographs take in readers and make them ask "Did this REALLY happen?"

Booktalk: Read first paragraph on pg 46: "The night before he set out, Mawson's feet felt peculiar. He had not had his socks off for several days, so he decided to take a look. When he peeled the last pair of socks off, the soles of both feet came off in two solid pieces. The skin underneath was raw and bloody. He spread cream all over his feet and tied the soles back on with bandages. Then he put on six pairs of socks to act as cushions." The year is 1911 and Douglas Mawson and his crew set out to explore Antarctica, also known as the South Pole. The expedition does not end until 1914, after spending two dark, harsh winters at the bottom of the world. After the Last the Dog Dies chronicles the journey of a group of men and dogs, fighting the elements for a chance at survival.

Capuzzo, Michael. Close to Shore: The Terrifying Shark Attack of 1916. Crown, 2003.

What Makes It Great: Readers will question if this book is a true story as the events that unfold seem made up to today's youth.

Booktalk: Read p. 1-2.

The young man's name was Charles Vansant, and in the summer of 1916, the last place he should be was alone in the water off the coast of New Jersey. What Charles didn't know was a great white shark had gotten caught up in a current off the coast of Florida and had been carried up the coast to New Jersey. The current moved so quickly that the shark was unable to hunt for days, and now it was very hungry. And Charles would be its first meal....

At first people couldn't believe Charles had been attacked by a shark. Things like that just didn't happen in New Jersey. But after 5 more attacks, it was clear that the attacker was indeed a great white shark...

Chandra, Deborah. George Washington's Teeth. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003.

What Makes It Great: Takes a unique perspective to unfold the life and experiences of George Washington in a fun and accessible manner.

Booktalk: Everyone knows who George Washington is, don't you? Yes, he was our first president! But do you know anything about his teeth? You might have heard that he had wooden teeth. But did you know he had many more problems with his teeth – so severe that he pretty much lost them all? Have any of you ever had a toothache? Can you imagine what it felt like to have 7 or 8 teeth ache? Well, George did. He went into battles with aching teeth. Did you know he only had 2 real teeth when he was elected president? Well, he did! And he had many sets of false teeth throughout his life – and one set is on display at the Smithsonian Museum! (show picture) If you want to learn more about George and his teeth, this is the book for you!

Chin, Karen. Dino Dung: The Scoop on Fossil Feces. Random House, 2005.

What Makes It Great: intriguing subject that introduces science, lively text

Booktalk: In 1820, William Buckley was looking for fossils in a cave in England. He found bones from ancient hyenas, elephants, and hippopotami. Then he found something he couldn't identify—some strange white blobs about the size of a cherry. They were as hard as rocks, but they didn't seem to be rocks.

Could they be bones? No, Buckley was sure they were not bones. Were they some other kind of fossil?

Buckley looked around the cave, and from the bones he saw there, it appeared the hyenas had used the cave to eat other animals...could the white blobs be fossilized hyena poop, otherwise known as feces?

To find out, Buckley studied the poop of modern hyenas, which was very similar. William Buckley was the first person to discover fossilized feces!

Strangely enough, scientists still spend a lot of time studying fossil feces. Why? Dr. Karen Chin, a paleontologist, will explain in [Dino Dung: The Scoop on Fossil Feces](#).

Cobb, Vicki. Junk Food (Where's the Science Here? Series). Millbrook Press, 2006.

What Makes It Great: The author captures the bizarre story behind the food kids eat every day and will make them think about what they put in their mouths.

Booktalk: What is your favorite type of junk food to eat?

Can you believe that junk food is related to science? No kidding!

For example, can anyone guess how hot the temperature needs to be for popcorn to pop?
Answer: 450 degrees, p. 11

Does anyone know why a can of diet soda weighs less than a can of regular soda?
Answer: the sugar used to sweeten the regular soda weighs more than the artificial sweetener used to sweeten the diet soda, p. 36

Why are potato chip bags lined with foil?
Answer: to make sure light doesn't come through and spoil the chips

Learn more scientific facts about your favorite foods, plus lots of fun experiments to try in [Junk Food](#) by Vicki Cobb, part of the *Where's the Science Here?* series.

Davies, Nicola. Extreme Animals: The Toughest Creatures on Earth. Candlewick, 2006.

What Makes It Great: Unusual size, humorous text and cartoon-style illustrations, intriguing facts

Booktalk: Imagine that you were going to the North Pole, where the temperature averages about -20 °F on a winter day. What kind of clothes would you have to wear?

[Show picture on p. 8-9.]

If you weren't dressed like this, your bare flesh would freeze solid in 60 seconds!

So how do all the animals that live in polar climates survive? They have all adapted to the cold weather.

- Underneath their white fur, polar bears have black skin! That way, they can absorb more of the sun's heat, just like you do when you wear black clothes.
- Emperor penguins' feathers are more than an inch thick. Their feather coat is such a good insulator that the temperature difference between the outside and inside of their body can be 140 °F!

And you won't just learn about animals that live in cold climates. You'll also read about spiders that can live more than a year and a half without eating, and about trees that are more than five thousand years old.

And, when you get to the very end of the book, you'll learn about the toughest, most extreme animal on Earth!

Dendy, Leslie and Mel Boring. Guinea Pig Scientists: Bold Self-Experimenters in Science and Medicine. Henry Holt, 2005.

What Makes It Great: Stories will grip young readers' interest while also explaining the scientific method.

Booktalk: How many of you have done a science experiment before? What were you trying to learn in your experiment?

Sometimes scientists are trying to learn about how something affects the human body. It can be difficult to find people to participate in experiments like these—would you want to volunteer for a research project if you thought it might make you sick, or hurt, or even kill you?

This book introduces you to several scientists who risked their own lives in order to learn more about the human body. We call them “guinea pig scientists.”

You'll meet:

- Dr. George Fordyce, who wanted to learn about how the human body could tolerate hot temperatures. He and his friends heated up a room to 260 degrees (hotter than boiling water) and went inside to see if they could stand the heat.
- Colonel John Paul Stapp, who was interested in how traveling at high speeds affects the body. He became a human crash-test dummy by designing a high speed sled that could make his body travel at more than 600 miles an hour—and then stop in less than 2 seconds.
- Stefania Follini was interested in human sleep cycles. Why do we get tired around the same time each day? Does it have to do with light and darkness? She lived in a cave, where it was completely dark, for 131 days to find out.
- And many more brave scientists who subjected themselves to diseases, radiation, and other dangerous situations so that we could learn more about how our bodies work!

Fleischman, John. *Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story about Brain Science*. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

What Makes It Great: A single, unbelievable personal account makes brain science not only palatable but downright exciting!

Booktalk: The moment that made Phineas Gage famous came at about 4:30 pm on September 13, 1848. Phineas was the foreman of a group of railroad workers who were blasting a path for the railroad track out of granite. This was a complicated process. First they had to drill a hole in the granite, and then Phineas' assistant had to fill the bottom of the hole with gunpowder, a fuse and some sand. Then they could light the fuse, run away, and wait for the explosion. Once the granite was blown into small pieces, it was hauled away, and they would start all over again. Phineas and his assistant had done it thousands of times.

But on this day, something was different. Something must have distracted one of them, because no one remembered to put the sand in the hole. Phineas was carrying his tamping iron, a pole that was more than 3 feet long and sharp on the end like a spear. And somehow, when Phineas wasn't paying attention, the end of the tamping iron fell down into the hole. Without the sand as a barrier, the metal rod was like a bullet inside a gun. The rod shot 30 feet in the air...but first it went through Phineas' head. (Show picture on p. 7).

Surprisingly, Phineas did not seem to be seriously injured. He got up, rode on a wagon through town, and sat down to wait for the doctor to arrive from a neighboring town. Meanwhile, he told everyone what had happened to him.

Though the story about Phineas' accident is gruesome, it's not the gore that is the reason medical students still learn about Phineas Gage. The reason he's famous is that, while he survived the accident, to those who knew him, he seemed like a different person afterwards. Somehow the rod that had traveled through his brain had changed his personality. Scientists in the 1840s didn't know much about how the brain worked, and Phineas became a sort of living experiment for them.

To find out what they learned from studying him, read [Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story about Brain Science](#).

Freedman, Russell. *The Voice that Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights*. Clarion, 2004.

What Makes It Great: The personal and courageous story of one person can easily help readers better understand a historic era and its human rights events.

Booktalk: How would you feel if you had a gift, but you weren't allowed to use it, at least, in certain places? Say, for example, you're really great at baseball, but were told you couldn't play at PGE Park? Or that you were a really fabulous actor, but couldn't perform at the Civic Auditorium or the Portland Center for the Performing Arts? Or that you were brilliant at painting, but couldn't show your work in Portland galleries? How would that make you feel? What would you do about it?

“Marian Anderson had been applauded by many of the crowned heads of Europe. She had been welcomed at the White House, where she sang for the president and first lady, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. She had performed before appreciative audiences in concert halls across the United States. But because she was African American, she had been denied the right to sing at Constitution Hall, Washington [D.C.]’s largest and finest auditorium.” p. 3
Well some people were pretty upset about this – how could one of America’s most talented singers not be allowed to sing at the best place in the capital of the United States? - and they decided to take action. But Marian Anderson’s story is much more than the story of the Constitution Hall controversy. Find out how she went from singing for 25 cents a song as a young girl in Philadelphia to performing before 75,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. in a concert that moved someone to write “I have never heard such a voice” in *The Voice that Challenged a Nation* by Russell Freedman

George, Jean Craighead. How to Talk to Your Dog. HarperCollins, 2000.

What Makes It Great: Conversational style, interesting mix of photographs and illustrations, match of text to illustrations,

Booktalk: How many of you have a dog?

Do you think your dog understand what you say to him? Do you understand what your dog is trying to tell you?

Here are some questions:

True or False: To say hello to your dog, sniff toward his nose. (True—p. 4)

True or False: To tell your dog you love him, stare at him. (False—a stare is a threat—p. 20)

True or False: If you lie on your back, and show your dog your belly, you are telling him, “I am your humble servant.” (True—p. 10).

What does your dog mean when his tail looks like this? (p. 14)

Or when he makes this face? (p. 15)

To find out more about how to understand your dog and communicate with him, read How to Talk to Your Dog by Jean Craighead George.

Goldstone, Bruce. Great Estimations. Holt, 2006.

What Makes It Great: The visual explanation can easily help readers better understand math concepts, even if they don’t have the vocabulary to explain it.

Booktalk: When you look at a picture of a crowded beach, or a jammed-full jelly bean jar, can you guess how many people or candies you see? How do you make a guess about a ga-zillion things? This book helps you train your eye to see what tens, hundreds and thousands look like. Then, and this is the good part, it shows you a page full of something, and you have to make your own estimates. For example, look at these cherries (page 10-11). Here’s 10 cherries, and here’s 100 cherries. So how many would you guess is in this little green box? (Answer: around 80).

The book teaches you how break down a big picture, like this penguin colony (p. 26-27) into smaller boxes, then multiply the number of boxes times the average amount of penguins in a box. So if there’s 100 boxes, times 12 penguins, it equals 1200 penguins.

Further along in the book are pages where you have to make estimates, without hints, using the skills you’ve picked up earlier (show pages 22-23). So now that you know all this, can you estimate how many pages are in this book? (Flip through it)

Goodman, Susan E. The Truth about Poop. Viking, 2004.

What Makes It Great: A socially taboo subject can actually teach something!

Booktalk: What miracle substance is used for heating, making bricks for house walls, a baby bottom wiper and has even been used to cure everything from dandruff to deafness?

Did you guess poop?

Poop, that thing we don’t like to talk about, is actually pretty amazing. Animals use it for all sorts of purposes. Did you know that ponies can find their moms with it? A bug called a jaeger uses its poop as weapon. And the naked mole-rat uses it like a secret password.

Turns out, animals aren’t the only ones that have found good uses for poop. In Alaska, there are actually poop artists who dry and paint moose droppings. You can pick some up at the Moose Dropping Festival. Cow chips come in handy when you want to join in a game of brown Frisbee at the world championship in Oklahoma.

Read about these and other amazing facts in The Truth about Poop by Susan Goodman.

Kramer, Stephen. Hidden Worlds: Through a Scientist's Microscope. Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

What Makes It Great: The microscope photographs illustrate to readers that our visible world is only a small piece of what actually exists.

Booktalk: What is the smallest thing you have ever seen? One piece of sand? A small piece of lint or dirt floating in the air?

This book lets you see really small things close up in a microscope. How many of you have ever seen something through a microscope?

What did you see?

Here are just a few things that this book shows you. Can you guess what these things are?

P6 butterfly wings

P10 red blood cells

P17 Pollen

P31 a dust mite

P45 Dog flea on dog hair

Levin, Karen. Hana's Suitcase: A True Story. Albert Whitman, 2003.

What Makes It Great: A classroom assignment led to real discovery and the unearthing of a true story not heard before.

Booktalk: The suitcase sits all alone in a glass cabinet inside a little museum in Tokyo, Japan. Thousands of Japanese children have to look at it in the 2 years it has been there. Why is this suitcase so special?

In 1998, a woman named Fumiko Ishioka started working at the museum, which is called the Tokyo Holocaust Center. The purpose of the museum was to teach Japanese children about the Holocaust, in which Adolph Hitler and the Nazis tried to eliminate Jews from Germany and the other countries they occupied. Fumiko thought that perhaps children could better understand what happened in the Holocaust if they had some physical objects that they could touch. She wrote to many museums around the world, and finally one sent her a package with some children's clothing and a suitcase.

[Show the picture of the suitcase on p. 3.]

On the suitcase was a girl's name, Hanna Brady, a date of birth, and the word *Waisenkind*, which means orphan in German. The children who came to visit the museum were very curious about Hana Brady. Where had she been traveling to with the suitcase? What did she pack in it? Why was she an orphan? And what happened to her during the Holocaust?

Read Hana's Suitcase to discover how Fumiko and the Japanese children found the answers to their questions.

Lindop, Laurie. Cave Sleuths. Twenty-First Century Books, 2006.

What Makes It Great: Adventure and passion can be a part of one's job.

Booktalk: The Agony. The Squeeze. The Grim Crawl of Death. Where are these places? Are they places you'd want to go? If you want to be a spelunker, a person who explores caves, you better not be afraid of small spaces. Like the Devil's Pinch, in West Virginia, where cavers have to crawl along a rocky slit 20 feet long, but only 7-10 inches high! One caver had to remove his pants, in order to slip through! (Picture on p. 13)

Why would people go through such scary passageways? In order to observe things most humans never see, like rubbery gray stalactites called "snottites," because they looked like snot (p. 31) or soda straws, amazing skinny formations that hang from cave ceilings [p. 20].

Or maybe they go to make amazing discoveries; like that some caves weren't carved by underground rivers, but by sulfuric acid dissolving the limestone. Even more exciting, was the discovery of a cave dripping with sulfuric acid that melts through scientists' clothing and skin. Somehow, miraculously, it supports living creatures and microbes, that don't depend on sunlight, and come from completely new ecosystems. In yet another cave, rock-eating microbes were found that could give us clues to possible life on Mars.

Even if the idea of small, dark spaces scares you silly, this book lets you squeeze your brain inside caves and learn about these awesome underground discoveries.

Montgomery, Sy. The Tarantula Scientist. Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

What Makes It Great: Amazing, high-quality photographs; engaging text

Booktalk: From p. 1, “Sam Marshall is lying on his belly in the rainforest, his freckled face just inches from a fist-sized hole in the dirt. He turns on his headlamp. He gently pokes a twig into the tunnel and wiggles it. “Come out!” he says into the hole. “I want to meet you!”

Who is Sam trying to meet? A Goliath birdeater tarantula, the biggest spider on Earth!

A spider big enough to cover your whole face!

A spider that can weigh as much as five mice!

(Show pictures on p. 9 & 10).

Sam was always fascinated with animals. When he was a kid, he had lizards, gerbils, frogs, snakes and even insects as pets. At age 13, he saw his first tarantula, and he soon added one to his collection.

Sam didn't do very well in school—until in college he finally got to do a project on tarantulas. Then he found out he loved science almost as much as he did the tarantulas.

In this book, you can travel to South America with Sam to see what he learns about the Goliath birdeater tarantulas, as well as his spider lab at work, where more than 500 tarantulas live! Find out what it's like to be a Tarantula Scientist!

Newcomb, Rain. The Master Spy Handbook. Lark Books, 2005.

What Makes It Great: Creative layout, activities to try

Booktalk: So imagine you're just hanging out in your hammock, and Master Spy O sends you a message in the ice cube in your lemonade, demanding you help him write a book for kids about how to be a master spy. Here it is: fifty spy techniques Agent O used to thwart the horrendous villain Felicia. This handbook includes secret codes, rubber band messages, a matchbox spy kit, invisible ink, how to make a padded disguise so you look 50 pounds heavier, and how to conjure a telescope out of paper and a marble. But maybe you don't need to fend off major villains. No problem, spy techniques like how to tell if someone's been snooping in your room, or how to tail someone, will work great on your brothers and sisters too.

Oppenheim, Joanne. Dear Miss Breed. Scholastic, 2006.

What Makes It Great: In-depth research including primary sources and oral history

Booktalk: What would you do if you felt one of your friends was being treated unfairly? Would you speak up or stay quiet?

That was the question Clara Breed faced during World War II. As children's librarian at the San Diego Public Library, Miss Breed befriended many of the children who lived in the neighborhood, including many Japanese American kids and teens.

Then, on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor. Life changed almost instantly for Miss Breed's young Japanese American friends. Some of their relatives were immediately arrested and held as prisoners, even though there was no proof that they were spies.

Many of the Japanese American youth were U.S. citizens and were surprised when they were told they would be forced to leave their homes to live in detention centers. They hadn't done anything wrong.

First Miss Breed's friends were forced to live in an assembly center at Santa Anita racetrack in California. Their families had to live in the same dirty stalls where the horses had lived! While there wasn't much Miss Breed could do to help them, she wrote letters to them regularly and tried to visit and send packages with special treats. She even wrote letters and articles to try to stop prejudice against Japanese Americans.

If accommodations at the race track seemed bad, things got even worse when the kids and their families were sent to the permanent camp in Poston, Arizona. There they lived in the desert, complete with dust storms and scorching heat. The barracks where they lived were infested with snakes, ants, and even scorpions! Miss Breed's friend Louise Ogawa wrote to her: Read P.S. on page 115.

Read Dear Miss Breed to learn more about the relationship between this dedicated librarian and her friends.

Paulsen, Gary. How Angel Peterson Got His Name: And Other Outrageous Tales about Extreme Sports. Wendy Lamb Books, 2003.

What Makes It Great: Humorous stories with appeal to middle schoolers,

Booktalk: Ok. Before I tell you about this book, I have to start with a warning. Do not try this stuff at home. In fact, there will be a lot of things that you're going to read about in this book that might sound appealing, that might sound exciting, that might even sound like fun. But don't be fooled - the crazy stunts that you're going to read about in this book could get you seriously injured and possibly even kill you.

So what are these crazy stunts? Well it all starts when a 12 year old boy who lives in a little northern Minnesota town forty or so years ago reads an article called, "Fools Who Shoot the Falls" which describes several men who tried to achieve fame by going over Niagara Falls in a barrel. Though almost all of them died, it seemed like a pretty cool idea.

(Read from last paragraph of page viii "and so I found an old wooden pickle barrel" through the end of page ix, "and I would gain fame only as the first boy stupid enough to down himself in a barrel.")

Miraculously, the barrel is caught up in the current and lifted to the edge of the dam, dropped off the edge to fall the twelve feet to the river below where it hits a sharp rock, breaks into pieces, and leaves our hero stunned and with a bloody nose, but still alive.

Think that's the end of the crazy stunts? Of course not! So what does he try next? You'll have to read the book to find out. But I will say, did you know that you can hang glide with an army surplus kite? Or that you can break the world speed record on skis with the help of a little rope and a friend's car? Read Gary Paulsen's How Angel Peterson Got His Name and Other Outrageous Tales About Extreme Sports.

Schyffert, Bea Uusma. The Man Who Went to the Far Side of the Moon: The Story of Apollo 11 Astronaut Michael Collins. Chronicle Books, 2003.

What Makes It Great: Unusual, scrapbook-style layout; intriguing details that appeal to kids, a different take on a familiar subject

Booktalk: A very important event happened on July 20, 1969. Does anyone know what it was? (If not, give hints...it had to do with space...astronauts...the moon, etc.)

July 20, 1969 was the first time a person had ever walked on the moon. The people we usually hear about are Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, the two men who walked on the moon. But who was flying the spacecraft around the moon while Neil and Buzz explored? That was Michael Collins.

In this book you'll learn a lot about Michael, Neil, Buzz, and what it's like to be an astronaut. Let's take a true/false quiz to see how much you know already.

True or False: The interior of the spacecraft was about the size of the inside of a car.

(True: p. 29)

True or False: The spacecraft is made of about 1 million parts.

(False: p. 29. "It is made of two million pieces. This means that even if 99.9 percent of all the components were working, there would still be 2,000 broken pieces.")

True or False: When they brush their teeth, the astronauts have to swallow the toothpaste.

(True: p. 37—there's no place to spit it out.)

True or False: Michael eats freeze-dried frosted flakes for breakfast.

(True: p. 65)

True or False: The temperature on the moon is -250°F in the shade and +250°F in the sun.

(True: p. 52)

True or False: The spacecraft has a bathroom.

(False: p. 31: "Once every 24 hours they must empty their urine-collecting devices through a vent in the capsule wall.")

Sidman, Joyce. The Song of the Water Boatman and Other Pond Poems. Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

What Makes It Great: Striking woodcut illustrations, combination of poetry and informational text

Booktalk: Have you ever been to a pond before? What kinds of plants and animals did you see there?

This book is full of poems and information about the creatures that live in ponds. See if you can guess which plants/animals these poems are written about:

Read any or all of these poems and have the students guess what plant/animal the poem is about:

- “Spring Splashdown”
- “The Season’s Campaign”
- “Into the Mud”

Singer, Marilyn. What Stinks? Darby Creek, 2006.

What Makes It Great: Appealing topic, engaging cover art, attractive layout, humorous text, high-quality photos, extensive bibliography and glossary

Booktalk: Plug your nose before you read this book! You’ll learn all about stinky stuff from nature. Let’s take a quiz to see how much you know already:

1. Who has the smelliest feet (p. 9)?
 - a. A dog
 - b. A rhino
 - c. You

The answer is a rhino—rhinos are mostly solitary animals, but they do share watering holes, where they drink, bathe...and poop! All the rhinos poop in one big heap, and then each drags its hind feet through the pile, tracking the odor through its range as a type of fence. Yuck!

2. Which of these birds is most likely to barf in your face (p. 15)?
 - a. Vulture
 - b. Robin
 - c. Pelican
 - d. Fulmar
 - e. Hawk
 - f. Swan

The fulmar can spit up a nasty oil from its stomach to defend themselves from mammals or other birds. Baby fulmar chicks can spit the oil up to one foot away. Adults can spit up to five feet! Read What Stinks? to find out many more fascinating (and stinky!) facts.

Tanaka, Shelley. Mummies: The Newest, Coolest and Creepiest from Around the World. Abrams, 2005.

What Makes It Great: Great layout and strong photographs make this topic immediate and interesting to readers.

Booktalk: Not all mummies are wrapped in bandages, moldering to dust in Egyptian sarcophagi. This book will open your eyes to amazing mummy discoveries from around the world. The peat bog mummies of northwestern Europe were found with their throats slit, and their bodies pinned into the bog with heavy stones. Were they killed because they were criminals, or as ritual sacrifices for some ancient religion? DNA samples have proven some modern residents of Washington DC, are related to an ancient Incan mummy of a little girl. And some Buddhist monks actually mummified themselves...WHILE THEY WERE STILL ALIVE! (Picture on p. 35) They followed a very restricted diet and drank a special tea that both dehydrated and poisoned them. The monk would meditate and gradually slow his body’s life forces. Some monks even sat surrounded by a circle of candles, to mummify their flesh even more. After reading this book, mummies may always be a dry topic, but they will never seem boring again!

Thimmesh, Catherine. Team Moon: How 400,000 People Landed Apollo 11 on the Moon. Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

What Makes It Great: Everyone talks about the men who landed on the moon, but the preparation and people who helped make it happen are the true backbone of this story. The flowing narrative captures the fear and unknown while the photographs and book layout emphasize the vast expansive of the mission.

Booktalk: How many people does it take to get you to school in the morning? It SHOULD take only one...you, but maybe you’re brothers and sisters have to wake you up, your parents have to make you breakfast and the bus driver has to drive you to school. It takes a lot! So imagine all the people it would take to land men on the moon for the first time.

This is the behind the scenes story of all the work it took to land Apollo 11 on the moon, July 20-21, 1969. Not only did NASA have to get the rocket into the sky (show p. 14), they had to troubleshoot whatever problems arose, from thousands of miles away. For example, 33,500 feet from the moon, alarms started to sound in the space capsule. It was a 1202, an executive overflow, which meant the computer had too much to do. These alarms were supposed to test the software, not go off during the flight. Should they land? Should they stop the mission? What would you do?

And then there's the alien environment.

For an astronaut, everything you need to live: oxygen, pressure, ventilation, water to recool your body, and recycled oxygen, is monitored and provided by a big pack on your back, the Portable Life Support System, or PLSS. While the astronauts explored the moon, it was up to NASA engineers back on Earth to keep them alive. (Show picture p. 46-47).

And oh yeah...they couldn't just stay on the moon! NASA had to bring the astronauts back, and bring them back alive. Read this exciting adventure of how men traveled to the Moon, through the combined genius of skilled people back on Earth.

Walker, Sally M. Fossil Fish Found Alive: Discovering the Coelacanth. Carolrhoda Books, 2002.

What Makes It Great: Shows how scientists work as detectives, appealing layout

Booktalk: One day in 1938 in South Africa, Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer was looking through a pile of fish. As a museum curator, she was in charge of finding plant and animal specimens to display in the museum. And in this pile of fish, she found something she'd never seen before. She described it as (p. 6): "'the most beautiful fish I had ever seen.' Its color was 'an iridescent blue with shades of red, green and brown, with white spots. It was just one five feet long.'" But the strangest thing about the fish was its scales. They were hard, almost like armor. Neither Courtenay-Latimer nor the crewman on the boat had ever seen anything like it.

Courtenay-Latimer took the fish back to museum. Though she looked in many guidebooks, she couldn't find anything like it. But those armor-like scales seemed familiar; where had she heard about them? Then she remembered. As a student, she had learned about extinct fish that had hard, spiny scales. But this couldn't be one of those fish: they had appeared on earth almost 300 million years before the dinosaurs. Scientists said they were extinct.

But the scientists were wrong. When Courtenay-Latimer contacted a fish expert, he confirmed that her fish was a coelacanth, a fish that had first appeared on earth 510 million years ago and was thought to be extinct.

How did they confirm its identity? Were there more coelacanths off the coast of South Africa? To find out read Fossil Fish Found Alive: Discovering the Coelacanth.

Woodford, Chris. Cool Stuff and How It Works. Dorling Kindersley, 2005.

What Makes It Great: Readers will enjoy reading this book piece by piece, flipping back and forth between chapters and pages. It's great for a traditionally challenged reader.

Booktalk: OK, so you use the Internet everyday, check your reflection in a mirror, drive a car, and hey, you can even light a match...but there's a catch. Can you explain how these things work? Everyday we use hundreds of simple to complex technologies, but most of us don't have a clue why they do what they do. Luckily, this book is full of fascinating explanations about how all kinds of things work, from the common-place to the astounding.

For example, here's how a match works: When a match is struck, friction between glass powder in the match tip and the striker on the box set off a series of reactions that eventually set fire to the match head, and then to the wood.

How about a pet translator...ever wished you knew what your dog or cat was saying to you? The Meowlingual or Bowlingual lets you know the secret thoughts of your furry friend. (p.31) Or how about a virtual keyboard? If you're cell phone buttons are too tiny to type long messages, try this...it's a keyboard made entirely of light, that's projected onto any flat surface. (p. 174) Whether the technology is ordinary or extraordinary, this book of explanations will amaze you.