Look at Topics Through a Writer’s Eyes

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, teachers will:

• Launch the informational report unit of study.
• Establish themselves as informational report writing mentors by sharing papers they researched as a student and facts they know about nonfiction topics that interest them.
• Model how to talk about nonfiction topics.

Students will:

• Choose a topic and discuss what they know about it and how they might go about researching or learning more.
• Share what they know about a topic and discuss their ideas about the process of researching a topic with the whole class.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• If possible, a research report you wrote as a student (such as an excerpt from a thesis, dissertation, or shorter research paper) or a nonfiction text you wrote more recently that required research
• Chart paper and markers
• Self-stick notes
• Interactive whiteboard resources

1. Focus

Introduce Informational Report Writing

Display a research paper you wrote as a student. Use the sample think-aloud below as a model of how to talk to students about a topic you learned about while writing an informational report. You may wish to share with students a variety of resources that you used to find information on your topic.

Sample think-aloud. Say: When I was a student, I wrote many papers. Some were informational reports, such as this one. I only knew a little bit about the planet Mars before I studied it and wrote a report. I read other reports to learn more about it. I looked at many different sources, including books, magazine articles, and articles from space organizations that I found on the Internet. I was also lucky and had the chance to talk with a scientist who was an expert on Mars. Through this research, I learned many facts that I could share. For example, Mars is much smaller than Earth. It is a cold desert. It has seasons and polar areas as on Earth. It also has giant mountains and canyons. I became so interested in Mars that I kept reading and talking about it with others long after writing my report. All of us read informational reports to learn about topics, and we all share information by writing informational reports.

Say: In informational reports, writers write about nonfiction topics they have researched. For the next several weeks, we are going to read, write, and share information about topics as we learn to write informational reports. We will learn about the importance of researching our facts and using different types of sources, the value of organizing concepts, and the usefulness of including charts and other graphic features to support the text in an informational report.

Introduce the Purpose and Audience for Informational Reports

Say: The main purpose of informational reports is to inform readers about nonfiction topics. When I write an informational report, I think, “Who will read this?” I think of my audience as people who don’t know anything about my topic. I try to write in a way that grabs my readers’ attention from the start. I want to support the information I present with accurate facts, data, graphics such as diagrams and charts, and expert evidence. Learning to write a strong informational report will help you not only when you need to write a report for school but also whenever you want to share information with others clearly.
2. Rehearse

Practice Talking About Nonfiction Topics

 Invite students to work with partners. All students should choose topics they find interesting and know something about and tell their partners facts they know about the topics. Ask students to tell where they found the information about their topics. Students should be prepared to retell the facts about the topics their partners presented.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Nonfiction Topics with the Class

 Invite volunteers to retell facts about the topics their partners shared with them. Ask them to tell what sources their partners had for facts. Use one or more of the following questions to engage students in a discussion about the exercise.

Presenter
• Why did you choose this topic?
• How easy or hard was it to talk about the topic? Why do you think it was easy/hard?
• How did you feel as you shared information with your partner about the topic?

Listener
• What topic did your partner choose to tell you about?
• What did you learn?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that informational reports provide information to readers about nonfiction topics. To write a report, we research the facts, and we write in a way that makes it easy for readers to follow.

Ask students to write one or more paragraphs providing a topic sentence and facts and details about any nonfiction topic they know about. They might want to use the topic they discussed with their partner during the mini-lesson.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud their informational paragraphs. Reinforce the concept that informational reports give factual information.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Meet with beginning ELs one on one while other students work with partners in “Practice Talking About Nonfiction Topics.” Encourage them to describe their topics in any way they can—with words or gestures or by drawing or pointing to pictures. Expand on their ideas with simple sentences. Use self-stick notes to label images of key content vocabulary in pictures.

Intermediate
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner practice. Write simple sentence frames on chart paper and model how students can use them to talk about topics. For example:

My topic is ______.
I know ______ and ______.

Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: inform/informar; informational/informativo(a); topic/el tópico.