Integrating Informational Experiences in Primary Grades

Danielle Hach
Elementary Education
Honors Capstone
May 1, 2009
A topic of debate that has been circulated around the education world for some time now is the issue of nonfiction literature. Research has shown that there is a scarcity of nonfiction in primary grade curriculum. There is ongoing discussion about the benefits of informational text. In my capstone project I am going to review the literature on the benefits and feasibility of using informational text in integrated primary instruction. In addition, I will use my findings to develop an integrated unit on wolves. I will produce lessons for this unit that include informational text and reflect effective instructional practice.
An Overview of a Year in 3rd Grade

Essential Questions

How are creatures dependent on one another?
How do creatures interact with their environment/habitat?
What impact do humans have on animals and other humans?
What myths are present about specific groups?
How did they come to be?
Why are these myths in place?
## Bibliography of Children's Books about Wolves


Unit on Wolves

Essential Questions:

What are the characteristics of wolves?

What is a wolf's life cycle?

How are the species of wolves different and similar?

What impact have humans had on wolves?

Why does our world need wolves?

Lessons:

Introduction lesson with KWL

Vocabulary visit

Compare/contrast species of wolves

Graphic organizer

Guided writing

Inquiry project - newspaper article
I. Type of Lesson: Introduction on Wolves Unit for 3rd Grade

II. Rationale

Students need to be read aloud to and especially be exposed to nonfiction literature. "Children must see, hear, read, and write informational texts before they have any hope of reading and writing them well" (Duke, 2000, pg. 7). Students should be encouraged to think and have a desire to learn more about a topic.

III. Objectives and Assessment Plan:

Standard: 12.A.2a Describe simple life cycles of plants and animals, and the similarities and differences in their offspring.
Standard: 12.B.2a Describe relationships among various organisms in their environments (e.g., predator/prey, parasite/host, food chains and food webs).
Standard: 12.B.2b Identify physical features of plants and animals that help them live in different environments (e.g., specialized teeth for eating certain foods, thorns for protection, insulation for cold temperature).

Objective #1: Students will be able to describe the characteristics of a wolf and the life cycle to the extent of their knowledge.

Assessment Plan: The teacher will assess the students understanding by observing and listening to their responses.

IV. Materials

A. Bookffext
   - Wolves by Lynn Stone

B. Supplies
   - White chart paper
   - Markers

" Procedures

A. Introduction
   "Today class we are going to be starting a new unit in science. We will be learning about wolves."

B. Lesson Steps
   1. Explain KWL chart
   2. Fill out know and want columns on chart paper from students' responses.
   3. Read aloud the book Wolves to the class
   4. Ask the students to try and define the unfamiliar vocabulary while reading

C. Conclusions
   Ask the students what new information they learned from listening to the book. Encourage the students to think back on the KWL chart throughout the unit and see if they can answer the questions that the class had. The class will fill out the learn column when the unit is finished.

Resources


I. Type of Lesson: Vocabulary Visit on Wolves Unit for 3rd Grade

II. Rationale
Students need to be familiar with and define many words. They need to be exposed to these words several times to understand the meaning more clearly. Students need to be read aloud informational books.

"Children must see, hear, read, and write informational texts before they have any hope of reading and writing them well" (Duke, 2000, pg. 7).

III. Objectives and Assessment Plan:
Standard: 12.A.2a Describe simple life cycles of plants and animals and the similarities and differences in their offspring.
Standard: 12.B.2a Describe relationships among various organisms in their environments (e.g., predator/prey, parasite/host, food chains and food webs).
Standard: 12.B.2b Identify physical features of plants and animals that help them live in different environments (e.g., specialized teeth for eating certain foods, thorns for protection, insulation for cold temperature).

Objective #1: Students will write the words that they think of when they look at the pictures and be able to associate and connect them with others.
Assessment Plan: The teacher will observe the students' ability to come up with words and be able to plausibly argue why the word should be associated with a certain picture.

IV. Materials
A. Book/Text
   Wolves by Gail Gibbons
B. Supplies
   Poster board with wolf pictures on it
   Paper and pencils
   Sticky notes

V. Procedures
A. Introduction
   "We are continuing our unit on wolves today. I want you to think of the first words that come to mind when you think of wolves. Let's hear some of them and try to think why you think of those words."

B. Lesson Steps
   1. Show students the poster with various pictures of wolves and their habitat.
   2. Tell the students to look closely at the pictures and to get out a piece of paper and write down as many words as they can think of pertaining to wolves.
   3. Ask the students to raise their hands and share the words they came up with that they think would be good to put by the pictures. What words should go to which picture and why?
   4. Teacher writes the words down on a sticky note and puts them by the pictures that the students choose.
I. Type of Lesson: Compare/contrast species on Wolves Unit for 3rd Grade

II. Rationale
Students need to be able to in groups with their peers. They need to understand what team work is and how to divide the work evenly. "Children must see, hear, read, and write informational texts before they have any hope of reading and writing them well" (Duke, 2000, pg. 7).

III. Objectives and Assessment Plan:
Standard: 12.A.2a Describe simple life cycles of plants and animals and the similarities and differences in their offspring.
Standard: 12.B.2a Describe relationships among various organisms in their environments (e.g., predator/prey, parasite/host, food chains and food webs).
Standard: 12.B.2b Identify physical features of plants and animals that help them live in different environments (e.g., specialized teeth for eating certain foods, thorns for protection, insulation for cold temperature).
Objective #1: Students will be able to define and make personal connections to words that are chosen from a passage.
Assessment Plan: The rubric will be used to assess how students did on this assignment.

IV. Materials
A. Book/Text
Artie Wolves
Ethiopian Wolves
Gray Wolves
Red Wolves
B. Supplies
Multiple trade books on wolves
Computers

V. Procedures
A. Introduction
"Are there different types of wolves? What are they? We are going to be learning about the different species of wolves."
B. Lesson Steps
1. Students get together with their tables and each table is given a different wolf.
2. They will be given the rubric and instructed to research their type of wolf and to make sure they have all the components on the rubric.
3. Students divide up the different elements that they need to include in their presentation and look through the trade books.
4. The teacher rotates two people from each group to research on the Internet and circulates around the room to answer questions.
5. Students research for the whole class period and the next day they present their findings to the class.
6. Each student fills out a Venn Diagram about each of the species.
C. Conclusions
What were some of the similarities and differences in the species of wolves?
I. Type of Lesson: Graphic Organizer on Wolves Unit for 3rd Grade

II. Rationale
Students need to understand the characteristics of animals and what they need to survive. Students need to be read aloud to. "Children must see, hear, read, and write informational texts before they have any hope of reading and writing them well" (Duke, 2000, pg. 7).

III. Objectives and Assessment Plan:
Standard: 12.A.2a Describe simple life cycles of plants and animals and the similarities and differences in their offspring.
Standard: 12.B.2a Describe relationships among various organisms in their environments (e.g., predator/prey, parasite/host, food chains and food webs).
Standard: 12.B.2b Identify physical features of plants and animals that help them live in different environments (e.g., specialized teeth for eating certain foods, thorns for protection, insulation for cold temperature).
Objective #1: Students will create a graphic organizer to display a wolf's lifestyle.
Assessment Plan: The worksheet will be graded on accuracy.

IV. Materials
A. Book/Text
Wolf
B. Supplies
Paper and pencils
Worksheet

V. Procedures
A. Introduction
"Who can tell me something about wolves?"
B. Lesson Steps
1. Read Wolf
2. Ask the students throughout the book to recall where wolves live, what they eat, what they look like and how they act.
3. Pass out the worksheet to the students and instruct them to fill in the graphic organizer according to what they heard in the story.
4. Also let the students know that they may use the nonfiction books about wolves to help them.
C. Conclusions
Have volunteers share what they discovered for each section of the organizer.

Resources


I. Type of Lesson: Guided Writing on Wolves Unit for 3rd Grade

II. Rationale
Students need to be aware of the functions of nature and how it affects them. "Children must see, hear, read, and write informational texts, before they have any hope of reading and writing them well" (Duke, 2000, pg. 7).

III. Objectives and Assessment Plan:
Standard: 12.A.2a Describe simple life cycles of plants and animals and the similarities and differences in their offspring.
Standard: 12.B.2a Describe relationships among various organisms in their environments (e.g., predator/prey, parasite/host, food chains and food webs).
Standard: 12.B.2b Identify physical features of plants and animals that help them live in different environments (e.g., specialized teeth for eating certain foods, thorns for protection, insulation for cold temperature).
Standard: 3.C.1a Write for a variety of purposes including description, information, explanation, persuasion, and narration.
Objective #1: Students will write about why they think wolves are important to our society.
Assessment Plan: The paper will be assessed with a rubric.

IV. Materials
A. Book/Text
Wolf/sland
B. Supplies
Paper and pencils

V. Procedures
A. Introduction
"Do you think that wolves can affect your life? Why or why not?"
B. Lesson Steps
1. Read Wolf/sland
2. Ask the students throughout the book what they think will happen next
3. Ask why they think these things are happening
4. Ask what happened in the book when the wolves left and what happened when they came back. What did you notice? How did this make you feel?
5. Have students get out a piece of paper and write what happened to the other animals when the wolves left and what happened when they came back. Make sure to include how you felt and what you think would happen today if there were no more wolves left.
C. Conclusions
Have volunteers share what they think might happen without wolves.

Resources

I. Type of Lesson: Inquiry lesson on Wolves Unit for 3rd Grade

II. Rationale
Students need to be aware of the endangered animals in their world and how it affects them. They need to be able to use a variety of technology and reference nonfiction literature. "Children must see, hear, read, and write informational texts before they have any hope of reading and writing them well" (Duke, 2000, pg. 7).

III. Objectives and Assessment Plan:

- **Standard: 12.A.2a** Describe simple life cycles of plants and animals and the similarities and differences in their offspring.
- **Standard: 12.B.2a** Describe relationships among various organisms in their environments (e.g., predator/prey, parasite/host, food chains and food webs).
- **Standard: 12.B.2b** Identify physical features of plants and animals that help them live in different environments (e.g., specialized teeth for eating certain foods, thorns for protection, insulation for cold temperature).
- **Standard: 3.C.1a** Write for a variety of purposes including description, information, explanation, persuasion, and narration.

Objective #1: Students will research the ways wolves are vital to our planet through the Internet and books. They will create a newspaper article about why wolves are beneficial to our society, how we could save them, or why we should save them.

Assessment Plan: The newspaper article will be assessed with a rubric.

IV. Materials

A. Book/Text
   - *Once a Wolf*
   - Nonfiction children's books about wolves

B. Technology
   - Computer lab
   - PowerPoint projection

V. Procedures

A. Introduction
   Ask students what they have learned about wolves during this unit. Finish filling in the learn column of the KWL chart.

B. Lesson Steps
   1. Read aloud *Once a Wolf* to the whole class.
   2. Ask questions about the book:
      a. Why are wolves so hated and feared?
      b. Why do you think there are only a few wolves left?
      c. How are wolves beneficial to the world?
   3. Teacher shows PowerPoint presentation to the class and explains that red wolves are highly endangered and they are only about 200 left. They do not live many places so it is hard to repopulate them.
Red Wolves

- A smaller and more slender version of its cousin, the gray wolf, also known as the timber wolf.
- They have larger ears than gray wolves.
- Their coat is primarily gray or black with a reddish cast for which it is named after.

Endangered Animals

- Animals that are in danger of going extinct or having no more of them left.
- The Endangered Species Act of 1973 was passed to protect animals that were becoming extinct because of economic growth and development.

Red Wolves and Coyotes

- Red wolves are larger than coyotes.
- Coyotes tend to have larger ears and bushier tails.
- Wolves howl and coyotes give short yips.
Appearance

- They are about 2 feet high and about 4 feet long.
- They weigh around 50-80 lbs.
- They have pointed ears and usually gold eyes, but there have been some wolves who have had green or blue eyes.
- They can live for about 7 years in the wild and 15 years in captivity.

Diet

- They usually eat rabbits, rodents, birds, and other small animals.
- They also have been known to eat insects, berries and occasionally larger prey if available, like deer.
- They hunt alone or in small packs to catch their prey.

Habitat

- They primarily live in the southeastern portion of the United States.
- They prefer warm, moist, and densely vegetated areas.
- However, they are present in pine forests, bottom land hardwood forests, coastal prairies, and marshes.

Social Life

- Wolves live in packs that consist of about 3-5 wolves.
- Red wolves have generally smaller packs than gray wolves.
- There is a hierarchy in the pack of dominant and subordinate wolves that helps it function as a unit.
- The leaders of the pack are called alphas: the alpha male and the alpha female.
Communication

- Wolves communicate through body language and howls.
- The whole pack will give a variety of sounds to communicate to other packs and the rest of the animal kingdom.
- These communications help to establish order and stability within the pack.

Pups

- Wolf babies are called pups and they drink their mother's milk.
- 8 pups can be born in a litter.
- They are born in the early spring both blind and deaf.
- After about 2 weeks they can see, hear, and they begin to walk around.
- At 2 months they can start to eat meat.
- They love to play and are very curious.

Only a few left

- Wolves have been hunted and trapped for over 500 years.
- Hunters have killed them from airplanes and on foot.
- This is happening even to this day.
- They are only about 200 red wolves left.
- There used to be thousands.
- Not many pure red wolves exist today because they have bred with coyotes as a result of their numbers being so scarce.

False Thinking

- Many people have believed and still believe to this day that wolves attack humans regularly.
- Wolves pose no threat what so ever to humans.
- They only attack when their family, home, or themselves are threatened.
- They are shy and afraid of humans.
What is being done?

- Their homes have been severely diminished because of deforestation and urbanization by humans.
- Many have had to be put into captivity to increase their numbers by breeding them.
- Reserves have been made to help the population expand.

Essential in Nature

- Wolves hunt the sick, dying, and old prey first. This helps to keep over population to a minimum in species.
- Disease can spread to humans from deer, moose, etc.
- Wolves decrease this possibility from happening.
- They are an necessity in our world.
- They help create the balance that is within nature.

Sources
It is well known by educators, administrators, and all others in the education world that reading aloud to students is one of the most important things to do in a classroom. Many experts assert that it is essential that children hear and see language to better understand it (Duke, 2000). They also gain much more knowledge on a variety of topics. Research has shown that informational texts are rarely if ever read aloud or used in the primary grades. This needs to be changed because there are so many benefits for reading nonfiction to younger students; it increases students' comprehension, test scores and many other useful skills. There are many ways to incorporate nonfiction into the curriculum and everyday teaching. The use of informational text in primary grades support children's ability to integrate literacy in the content areas.

Research has clearly discovered a minimal supply of informational texts in the primary grades. "Results of this study reveal an overall scarcity of informational text in these first-grade classrooms. There was little informational text among displayed print, in classroom libraries, and in classroom written language activities" (Duke, 2000, pg. 212). An average of 3.6 minutes a day are spent with informational texts in the primary grades and it is even less in low-socioeconomic-status schools. Most educators feel that these texts are too difficult for students to understand and they should not be used in primary grades (Duke, 2000). This is not the case at all. A study was done in a first-grade classroom and it was discovered that "continued low levels of achievement in informational reading and writing should not be attributed solely to the difficulty of these forms of text. Rather, there is now greater reason to hypothesize that students perform poorly with informational text at least in part because they have insufficient experience with it" (Duke, 2000, pg. 221). They believe that the children would not be interested in these books and therefore not learn. However, children love to hear and read nonfiction books.
These texts get students using many different skills to help them throughout their life. They practice their questioning and thinking skills. These books promote and encourage the students to learn more. It engages and motivates them to get them more interested in the topic. They get to experience many different elements of the world that they wouldn't normally get to see in their everyday life. Students are also given experience in different language, vocabulary, and organization. Informational books provide ways of understanding and relating concepts and ideas as well as formal examinations of students' everyday experiences and scientific phenomena (Saul, 2004).

The majority of reading in tests and in their adulthood is nonfiction. "Studies have long shown that the majority of the reading and writing adults do is nonfiction" (Venezky, 1982). Children are going to be required to read and write about informational text when they get older and they need to have the exposure at a young age.

Implications for Teaching

There are many ways in which informational text can be incorporated into the classroom. Reading aloud to students is one of the most important strategies teachers can use. It must be included in students' education. Researchers studied kindergarten-aged children's knowledge of information books before and after they had been exposed to a substantial number of texts in this genre. "Children's pretend readings of unfamiliar, wordless information book after three months of exposure to information books reflected greater knowledge of several features characteristic of the information book genre, such as the use of timeless present tense verb constructions and generic noun structures" (Duke, 2000, pg. 206). As a result of being read aloud to on a regular basis, these students reproduced informational text features in pretend reading context. Reading
purposes for reading could include: reading a novel for relaxation, escape or entertainment, reading news articles for the latest news about an event of interest, reading fliers to see which music group is appearing in town, and reading health procedures to manage one’s health. Authentic purposes for writing would include: writing a newspaper article to inform a reader about the latest news, composing a health brochure to help a reader follow appropriate procedures, and composing a greeting card to facilitate social bonding (Duke, 2004). All these methods are effective ways to relate the curriculum to students’ lives and get them to become more motivated to learn.

A study was conducted on whether authentic teaching affected students’ learning. Students in classrooms with more authentic reading and writing of science informational and procedural texts had higher literacy growth than those with less authenticity (Duke, 2004). The researchers concluded that “the degree to which children in second and third grade are involved in authentic literacy events with informational and procedural texts in science is impressively related to their degree of growth in their abilities to both comprehend and produce such texts” (Duke, 2004, pg. 41).

Language is one of the most important concepts that children learn. They must be able to speak, write, and understand the language in order to be successful. Many theorists and teachers believe that it is best learned through a combination of experience and explicit instruction (Duke, 2004). The study showed that explicit teaching was better for growth. Language is not one-dimensional, but multidimensional, and therefore students should experience many different forms of it. Informational texts are one of the most vital literature that they need to have exposure to. All the other forms of literature should be implemented as well in the curriculum.
References


Personal Reflection

I chose to research and create a unit on wolves because they are animals that I am very interested in. They hold a special place in my heart and I knew that I would never get tired of learning more about them. I wanted to research more and create lessons about these animals because I would love to implement this unit when I teach. My belief is that these animals are very misunderstood and criticized. For so long wolves have been hunted and killed in massive quantities. They have nearly become extinct from all the hunters. They are beautiful, graceful animals that are essential to our planet.

For my capstone project I needed to come up with a topic that I could incorporate my findings into. I needed a theme that I could implement different subject areas and skills. Since my project was about nonfiction texts, I thought that a science theme would work well. I love animals, so I thought I would choose an animal. Wolves are my favorite animal and so that is how I decided to create my unit on them.

There are so many aspects of this project that I will use in my future career as a teacher. As a pre-service teacher I now understand that reading aloud to students is extremely vital to a child’s education. I will have a classroom library filled with nonfiction books, incorporate informational texts into my teaching and use the strategies I have learned to better implement these texts. My students will use their questioning and thinking skills to help them comprehend information.