Nonfiction in Motion

Connecting Preschoolers with Nonfiction Books through Movement

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Chicago 2016 www.alastore.ala.org **Julie Dietzel-Glair** is a freelance writer and library consultant. She is the author of *Books in Motion: Connecting Preschoolers with Books through Art, Games, Movement, Music, Playacting, and Props* and the coauthor of *Get Real with Storytime: 52 Weeks of Early Literacy Programming with Nonfiction and Poetry.* She uses her years of experience as a children's librarian and assistant children's services coordinator to provide training sessions for librarians and other early literacy providers. She is active in the Association for Library Service to Children.

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introduction

Storytime is a magical experience for everyone involved. The combination of picture books, rhymes, and songs brings a smile to the face of a child and joy to the heart of every early literacy provider. Storytime is also the foundation for library service to preschool children and their parents. It is the perfect way to showcase quality books and model the five practices for early literacy. This book is designed to make storytime even more special by recommending nonfiction titles suitable for a preschool crowd and movements to enhance the experience of listening to those books.

Fiction picture books can make us smile, laugh, cry, and think. They can bring us to worlds stranger than the depths of our imagination. They can evoke a strong sense of nostalgia for adults who see a childhood favorite on a library shelf. It's no wonder that these books are the cornerstone of storytime. But what about nonfiction titles? Do they have a place in storytime? Yes, they do! They bring knowledge and information about the real world. They feed the desire for facts and photographs. Like fiction picture books, they can bring us to new worlds; while these worlds are real, some can still seem stranger than our imagination.



It is important to remember that informational reading can also be fun. Scatter a few nonfiction books in your storytime planning and help plant the seeds for a lifelong love of reading in kids who prefer fact over fiction. Including nonfiction books in storytime is especially important because of their appeal to boys who want books with "true stuff." As boys grow up, if they have developed of love of reading, you will often find them reading nonfiction.

Just adding nonfiction books to storytime can be enough, but I propose taking the excitement up a notch by adding movement while you read the book to a group. Including movement, art, music, or props is a simple way to touch on different learning styles in storytime. Some kids enjoy sitting quietly while a book is read to them, but many kids feel the need to move. Just think about the number of adults you know who doodle or fidget in a business meeting—and they've had years of practice in learning how to sit still and listen. Let's connect with those kinesthetic learners or musical preschoolers by supporting their learning style while introducing them to books. As an added bonus, you will feel a renewed excitement for your programs as you play with and explore nonfiction books with your storytime crowd.

About This Book

This book follows a similar format to *Books in Motion: Connecting Preschoolers with Books through Art, Games, Movement, Music, Playacting, and Props* (ALA Neal-Schuman, 2013); however, I incorporated a few key changes. *Books in Motion* features five hundred titles suitable for preschoolers. A majority of the books highlighted in *Books in Motion* are fiction titles; all were found in the picture book section of a public library. *Nonfiction in Motion* features two hundred titles suitable for preschoolers. Every title in this book is cataloged as nonfiction by the Library of Congress.

You may wonder why there are fewer titles. Simply put, the quality of nonfiction titles for children has come a long way, especially with the advent of awards like the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal, sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children. However, they still cannot compete in quantity with the sheer number of amazing fiction picture books published each year.

In *Books in Motion*, each title was filed under one of six different movement styles (art, games, movement, music, playacting, and props) to correspond with the suggested action. In *Nonfiction in Motion*, most of the entries

boast two or three different suggested movements; they could not be classified under one movement style. Therefore, the books are grouped under five general topics. In chapter 1, "Animals," you will find everything from the cute and cuddly to the small and creepy. There are books about specific animals, like brown bears, beetles, or bumblebees. There are also books that feature many different animals and animal behavior. Chapter 2, "Concepts," features books about the alphabet, colors, counting and math, emotions, the five senses, and opposites. Every kid loves big trucks and construction equipment and, chapter 3, "Construction and Things That Go," has them all. You'll also find bicycles, helicopters, and trains. (Don't miss the explosions.) Chapter 4, "Science," boasts informational books about environmental science, food and how it grows, plants, space travel, and weather. You'll also find dinosaurs and eggs in this chapter; they could have been placed in "Animals," but they either no longer exist or aren't quite animals yet. "The World around Us" is the last chapter. Here you will find things in a child's everyday life as well as things to broaden their knowledge of the world. Topics include family, health and exercise, manners, music and dance, and occupations.

All the entries list identifying information for the nonfiction title; a brief summary of the book; and one, two, or more suggested movement activities (actions) that can be done while reading the book to preschool children. The goal of the multiple suggestions is to give you options—it is not expected or recommended that you do all the suggested movement activities for a book in a single storytime. However, you may wish to repeat the book the following week in order to try something else. You will also find occasional extension activities that can be done at the end of storytime to enhance the children's enjoyment of the topic.

Nonfiction in Motion concludes with an appendix of ten outlines for art projects. Refer to this section when a movement suggestion recommends a specific coloring sheet. You will also a find an index by author, an index by storytime subject, and an index by title. The storytime subject index provides ideas under general storytime themes. You will find titles that go beyond a specific topic but may fit with your storytime idea. For example, a book titled *Fireflies* is included under the "Bedtime" theme; the recommended book is not about bedtime, but is about an animal that is frequently spotted close to a child's bedtime.

The nonfiction section of libraries includes factual books, poetry, folklore, and fairy tales. There are many wonderful poetry books, folklore, and fairy tale options available for children; however, the purpose of *Nonfiction in* *Motion* is a focus on facts. It is geared to help attract kids who like "true stuff" to storytime and books. Also, in hopes that the books will still be available for purchase or easily located on a library shelf, all the titles in this book were published in 2005 or later. Special consideration was given to accuracy in factual information presented in the highlighted titles at the time this book was written. I apologize if any scientific breakthroughs are made in the future that falsify information provided in these books.

Incorporating the Five Practices

Keep the five practices for early literacy in your mind whenever you are planning a program for preschoolers. Most early literacy providers include the acts of talking, writing, reading, playing, and singing in programs automatically. Help caregivers include these practices at home by mentioning them and providing tips.

For example, encourage parents to engage children in conversation while reading books with them; this helps children learn to understand and speak words. With nonfiction books, a caregiver can discuss with their child what page they liked best in the book and why. Encourage caregivers to incorporate what they learn in books throughout their day. For example, if they read a book about construction equipment with their child and then pass a building site later that day or week, they can talk about the cranes and bulldozers.

The practice of writing does not mean formulating an essay in one of those little blue books. Writing for preschoolers involves strengthening the muscles in the hands by scribbling with a crayon. Writing also includes increased letter recognition through tracing letters in the sand or on paper. Alphabet books with clear, uncluttered letters are wonderful nonfiction books that can be used for tracing letters by little fingers.

The simple act of reading builds a child's vocabulary; many people don't realize just how rich of a vocabulary is included in children's books. When kids have an interest in a particular topic (dinosaurs, reptiles, weather), non-fiction books are filled with topic specific vocabulary words. Remember that no one thinks twice about teaching kids dinosaur names, and those are very difficult words. Give an explanation using other words if a child is confused about particular vocabulary, but don't feel that you need to water down the text of a nonfiction book.

Playing helps children think symbolically. Pretend along with books to help kids put their thoughts into action. Even very young children like to talk about what they are going to be when they grow up. Books about particular occupations allow kids to pretend to have that job for a little while.

Lastly, singing allows kids to hear words at a different tempo than they hear them in conversation. An added benefit is the repetition inherent in songs, which boosts understanding and memory. Create your own versions of common songs based on nonfiction information. You'll find a few examples in the text of this book.

Helpful Tips to Keep in Mind

The following are some tips on nonfiction books for preschoolers and ways to use them to create a successful movement-filled storytime.

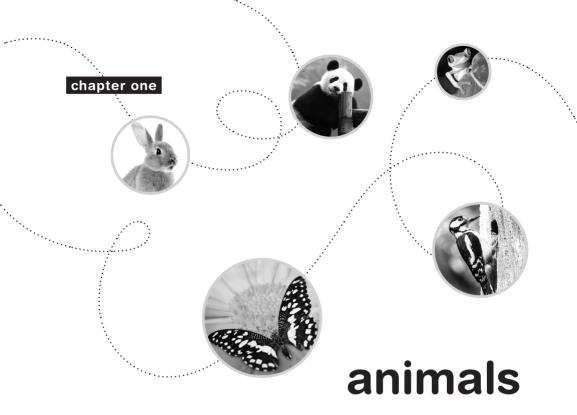
- Some books will require more time when you add movement. This may mean that a storytime will have three books instead of four or five. Remember that the key is a positive and meaningful interaction with a book. It is okay if some books take longer than you are accustomed to.
- You do not have to make a big production out of every book. Some books will work best with very simple or minimal movements. Remember that what seems basic to adults may be a completely new experience for a child.
- Add the amount of movement that you think works best with a particular book and for your group. This means that some books will have movement on every page. It also means that some books will involve movement on only one or two pages. Do what feels natural, but also be flexible on the day of the program. I have had plans for particular movements with a book and then had participants spontaneously create another idea for the book. It's a great learning experience for everyone involved.
- Read the amount of text that makes sense for the kids in your storytime. Choose that amount based on the ages and interest level of your kids. You do not need to read every single word of text in a nonfiction book. Many nonfiction books for children offer general information in a large font and detailed information in a smaller font. Read just the large font

when sharing the book with a large crowd. The detailed information can be enjoyed later by a parent and child who are excited about the topic. For books that don't provide the ease of multiple font sizes, mark interesting sentences to be read with a Post-it note.

- Use different voices or inflection as you read a nonfiction book in storytime. Kids are already interested in learning about frogs, but it can be much more fun to say "ribbit" like a croaking frog than to read it like basic text.
- Be sure to model movements, activities, and art projects whenever possible. Preschool children are often looking for guidance in how to interact with the books. However, keep in mind that there are times when it can be fun to say "Act like a lion" and see what the kids come up with. The action suggestions in this book provide both instructions for activities and prompts for you to use with participants (including caregivers and yourself).
- Try to get the adults involved in the action too. There are many reasons why this is important. One, it helps strengthen the bond between a parent and a child. Two, parents can assist younger preschoolers who may have difficulty with some of the movements, especially when working with crayons. Three, it is always best to learn something by doing it. Once a parent has danced along with a book, he may think to repeat that action with another book at home.
- Be ready to adjust activities based on your storytime group. There will be days when everyone will calmly cooperate with movement. There will be days that it seems like an entire troop of monkeys has replaced your storytime crowd. Add more structure (like moving for a count of three, then finding stillness before moving to the next page) to keep everyone on track. Or let storytime run wild! It's really up to you.
- Keep in mind that the success of a movement or book may simply be related to the temperament of the storytime crowd that particular day. I have done back-to-back storytimes where a book was a huge hit in the first storytime and a huge failure in the second. If you really like an idea and it does not work the first time, try again another day.
- After storytime, take notes about the types of movement and activities that worked best with your group. Look for other ways to use those same types of movements with other books.
- If possible, put out extra copies of all the books read in storytime so that families can check out their favorites. Consider including other books

on the same nonfiction topic, even some on a higher reading level. You have already sparked their interest in the topic, and families may wish to delve deeper into the information with an excited child.

- You may already be reading nonfiction to your storytime without realizing it. Many libraries catalog some nonfiction books with their picture books because they believe the particular books will be found by families better in that section. Take a quick glance at the Library of Congress cataloging information on the copyright page. Does it say "fiction" or "literature?" (For example, "dogs—fiction" or "dogs—literature") If it says "literature," it is a nonfiction title.
- Don't forget about nonfiction beginning-to-read titles. Many of them have clear, fun photographs or illustrations and a simple text. Reading these books in storytime is a great introduction to a potential reading source for a new reader.
- Some "simple" nonfiction books are much more than they seem. A simple counting book may also be providing information about the traits or routines of an animal. A great example of this is *One Wolf Howls* by Scotti Cohn. It counts from 1 to 12, it includes the months of the year, and it gives information about what wolves typically do during each month.
- If your budget allows funds for props, consider purchasing juggling scarves for storytime. They are extremely versatile in what they can represent in storytime—a blanket, a dog's tail, a hat, the blades of a helicopter, or a leaf falling from a tree. You will notice many ideas for using juggling scarves throughout this book.
- Use books that you like. This applies to any books that you choose for storytime whether they be fiction or nonfiction.
- Remember that storytime is all about fun. Kids who learn to love books will become good readers. The love of reading is a central building block for lifelong literacy.



Alinsky, Shelby. Sleep, Bear!

Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2015.

Summary: The bear is very hungry when he wakes up from his winter hibernation. Travel with him through spring, summer, and fall as he eats and eats and eats.

Action: Act out the book with the bear:

- Stretch as if you have just woken up from a long nap.
- Pretend to eat berries. Wipe the berry juice off your face.
- Pretend to eat bugs. Ewww!
- Pretend to eat grass.
- Pretend to eat more bugs and more grass.
- Pretend to eat a slippery, wiggly fish.
- Curl back down to hibernate again.

Action: Give everyone plastic toy bugs before beginning the book. Keep a bear puppet or stuffed animal with you while you read. Whenever the bear eats bugs, ask the kids to come up and feed your bear. If you are using a puppet, you can pretend to eat the bugs out of their hands.



Alinsky, Shelby. Slither, Snake!

Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2015.

- **Summary:** This "pre-reader" beginning-to-read book introduces kids to eyelash tree vipers, western diamondback rattlesnakes, Arizona mountain king snakes, king cobras, sedge vipers, and boa constrictors. The text is quite simple, with captions naming the species of snake.
- Action: The words "Slither, snake!" appear multiple times in the text. Slither along with the snakes by standing with your feet together and your arms down by your sides. Then wiggle your body like a snake.
- **Action:** Add a prop to this book by giving everyone a juggling scarf or piece of ribbon or yarn that they can pretend is a snake. Have them slither/ wiggle it on the floor along with the book.

Arndt, Ingo. Best Foot Forward: Exploring Feet, Flippers, and Claws.

New York: Holiday House, 2013.

- **Summary:** Can you figure out the animal based on a picture of its foot? Play the guessing game, then learn a little about the animal.
- **Action:** As you read about each animal in the book, pretend to walk like that animal.
 - Try walking on all fours like a tiger.
 - Pretend to climb high up in a tree like a gecko.
 - Waddle like a duck.
 - Move slowly like a tortoise.
 - Bounce like a kangaroo.
 - Snap your claws like a lobster.
- **Action:** Add a little fun to the suspense of figuring out each animal. As you turn the page to reveal the animal, ask everyone to create a drumroll by slapping their hands on the floor.

Bader, Bonnie. Pup-Pup-Puppies.

New York: Penguin Young Readers, 2014.

- **Summary:** This beginning-to-read book shows different types of puppies and gives very basic information about how to care for one.
- **Action:** You'll find the words "puppy" and "puppies" multiple times in this book. Encourage everyone to bark or to hold up a die-cut dog every time they hear one of those words.

Action: Give everyone a die-cut dog at the end of the book so they can take it for a walk.

Baines, Becky. A Den Is a Bed for a Bear: A Book about Hibernation.

Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2008.

- **Summary:** Where do bears sleep? And for how long? The combination of photographs and line drawings gives this title a scrapbook feel. The small trim size will make this book attractive to kids who want to look through it on their own after seeing it in storytime.
- **Action:** Give every child a juggling scarf or other piece of fabric. They can pretend that the scarf is a blanket and curl up in their "den" for the first part of the book. When you get to the page when "winter is over," throw off the blankets to simulate leaving the den.
- **Action:** Ask everyone to bring in their favorite stuffed bear (or give everyone a piece of felt in the shape of a bear). Place a large box at the front of the room and ask everyone to place their bear in the "cave" to hibernate. You may wish to place a blanket over the opening or close the box to make it dark and cozy for the bears. When "winter is over," pause so everyone can retrieve their bear from the cave.

Barner, Bob. Animal Baths.

San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011.

- **Summary:** Monkeys groom their hair and pigs wallow in mud. But did you know that shrimp clean an eel's teeth? Barner's classic illustrations add lots of color to information about how animals bathe.
- **Action:** Give everyone a juggling scarf or piece of fabric that they can pretend is a washcloth (or other cleaning instrument) throughout the book:
 - Monkey: Rub the scarf on your hair.
 - Elephant: Pretend the scarf is your trunk and spray water on your ears.
 - Duck: Flap the scarf like wet feathers you are trying to dry off.
 - Eel: Pretend to use the scarf to clean your teeth. (Ask the kids to not put the scarves in their mouths. However, you may still want to wash the scarves after this storytime.)
 - Pig: Lay the scarf on the ground. Pretend it is mud and roll around on it.

- Manatee: Hold the scarf in your hand and have it "swim" toward you like a fish.
- Bat: Hold the scarf upside down as if it is a bat.
- Bear: Try to rub your back with the scarf.
- Shark: Pretend the scarf is a fish again and have it pick pretend dirt off of your body.
- Giraffe: Hold the scarf in the middle and flap the ends up and down like a bird's wings. Have it gently fly toward your neck.
- Person: Rub the scarf all over your body to get clean.

Barner, Bob. Bears! Bears! Bears!

San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010.

- **Summary:** Learn about the eight species of bears through one sentence each. The simplicity of this book makes it ideal for the youngest preschooler.
- **Action:** There is something very satisfying about growling at the top of your lungs. Encourage everyone to "*Grrr!*" like a bear at the end of each page.
- Action: Teach everyone the sign for "bear" in American Sign Language. (Signing Savvy, www.signingsavvy.com, is a wonderful resource for learning specific signs.) Ask everyone to do the sign every time you say "bear" or "bears." Listen carefully; there is only one page where neither word appears.

Barton, Bethany. I'm Trying to Love Spiders.

New York: Viking, 2015.

- **Summary:** A hilarious look at spiders and all the cool things they can do. Unfortunately, the narrator is also terrified of spiders and can't seem to stop squishing them. When a swarm of bugs takes over the book, the narrator finally accepts that spiders are good. Cockroaches, however, are a different story.
- **Action:** Give everyone a die-cut spider before beginning the book. Whenever the narrator squishes the spider in the book, squish the spider in front of you. The narrator always seems to use her hand to splat the spider; for extra silliness, you can try using other body parts, such as your foot, elbow, or stomach.

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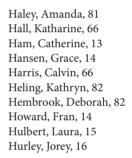
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