

FOLLOW THE Text Signposts

Use nonfiction features to guide learning



goals & assessment

WE WANT STUDENTS TO:

- identify features and describe their purposes—how they help us understand information, concepts, and ideas.
- gain accurate information from features as they encountered them in their reading.
- understand how text and visual features complement each other.

why & what

When we encounter a compelling photograph or a map filled with fascinating detail, the power of visuals to enhance learning and understanding comes through loud and clear. Nonfiction is full of these features, which other genres don't have. The purpose of this lesson is to help kids learn to identify such features and think about how they enhance our understanding of text information. When trying to understand a complicated process like photosynthesis or what happens during a lightning strike, a picture or diagram can provide us with accurate information that complements the text. In addition, titles, headings, framed text, and fonts help us navigate information-laden books and articles. In this lesson, we teach kids to pay careful attention to the factual information they can learn from nonfiction features. Then the kids construct their own *Feature/Purpose* chart and discuss how features support their understanding.

when & how

CONNECT & ENGAGE

- Invite the children to explore a range of captivating text.
- Notice two kinds of features, visual and text, and think about how they aid comprehension.
- List features we notice in books.

MODEL

- Co-construct a *Feature/Purpose* chart by listing different features and jotting down the purpose of each one.
- Instruct kids to keep track of features on their own *Feature/Purpose* chart.
- Discuss the idea of accuracy and how important it is to understanding nonfiction.
- Add new features and their purposes as you continue to read.
- Model how to use italicized text to gain accurate information and record it on a *Post-it*.

GUIDE

- Ask kids to work with you to notice features, determine their purposes, and focus on gaining accurate information.

PRACTICE INDEPENDENTLY

- Have kids work independently and to read books and articles. They find features and record their purposes on their own *Feature/Purpose* charts.

SHARE THE LEARNING

- Invite partners to share with the whole group what they learned about how particular features support understanding.

Text Matters

Stephen Kramer's book *Lightning* (also used in Lesson 5) is chock-full of interesting features that enhance learning. As we read about many different kinds of lightning or seek to understand where lightning strikes and why, visual features like photographs, illustrations, maps, and diagrams bring this complicated information to life. Kramer makes good use of such features as titles, headings, and the table of contents to organize the information in a clear, logical format. When students read nonfiction, they gain accurate information from a variety of features and the text.



resources & materials

LESSON TEXT

Lightning, by Stephen Kramer (Lerner Publishing Group, 1992) [Available in the *Trade Book Pack*. Page 37 available in the *Source Book of Short Text*.]

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

Nonfiction books and magazine articles on a variety of subjects, all with a variety of features.

CLASSROOM SUPPLIES

- 2 Anchor Charts: 1 entitled *Nonfiction Features* and 1 with two columns labeled *Feature* and *Purpose*
- Overhead transparency of map on page 37

STUDENT SUPPLIES

- Clipboard with *Feature/Purpose* chart [See *Strategy Cluster 1* page XX or the CD-ROM.]
- Pencil and *Post-its*

Invite the children to explore a range of captivating text.

Give kids a chance to look through the books together, talk about what they notice, and perhaps respond with “Look at this!” or “Wow, I never knew that before!” When text is this captivating, kids need a chance to react and respond first; then they can settle down and participate in the lesson.

Notice two kinds of features, visual and text, and think about how they aid comprehension.

List features we notice in books.

As kids read their books and articles, they notice features and add these to our Anchor Chart.

CONNECT & ENGAGE

Let’s take a look at these great nonfiction books! Grab one that looks interesting. We’re going to spend a few minutes looking through them and see what we notice about all the nonfiction features. I’ve got one called *Lightning*. Look at these amazing photographs of lightning strikes—I never knew there were so many kinds of lightning! And I always thought lightning was just one big bolt, but here’s a photo that labels different parts of the bolt—like the *upward streamer* and the *downward leader*. I’ve already learned some information from this photograph and, guess what? What I now know about lightning bolts is more accurate thanks to these photographs.

Nonfiction features are really like signposts—they signal us to pay attention and then they provide us with lots of interesting information. I think it’s helpful to make a distinction between two kinds of features, visual features and text features. Visual features are illustrations, photographs, maps, and diagrams—you know the old saying: “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Often, visual features enhance concepts and ideas and give us important information that we might not understand from just reading the words.

Text features include things like headings or the table of contents. These features help organize the text so that we can navigate through all the information. Headings break the text into sections and give us advance notice of what’s coming up in our reading. Different kinds of fonts, like bold or italic, signal “Pay attention to me. I’m important!” And often text and visual features work together. We often rely on words, like labels or a caption, to accurately explain or describe a photograph or illustration. And an illustration can help us understand a long, wordy description or explanation.

Take a minute and look through a book or article you’ve chosen and we’ll make a list of features we noticed.



MODEL

Right now, I’m going to share some of the features I notice in this book—*Lightning*. We’ve already started listing some of the ones you noticed. I’m going to begin putting some of them up here on our *Feature/Purpose* Anchor Chart. We’ll describe the purpose of each feature—how it guides our reading and helps us understand the information. As we investigate more features, we’ll co-construct our Anchor Chart up here.

I’d like you to list the features and their purposes on your own copy of our chart. I’m also going to read really carefully to make sure the information I’m getting from the features is accurate.

Now let’s talk about this idea of *accurate information* for a minute. It’s really important that we understand what this means as we read nonfiction. Turn and talk with someone near you about what you think “accurate” means. [*Kids discuss this word, coming up with synonyms like right and correct.*]

You are on the right track—when we talk about accurate information, this is information that is factually correct. It means we’ve got our facts straight! As we read nonfiction and learn from all these features, we want to make sure the information we gather is accurate. And this is often why we read nonfiction in the first place—to explore interesting, factually accurate information about all these cool topics.

And speaking of cool topics, since I’m into learning about lightning, as we read, I’ll write some of this accurate information I’m finding on a Post-it so I can keep track of it and keep my facts straight!

On our feature chart we mentioned titles. It’s one of the first features on our list and it’s certainly one of the most important. I’d say the purpose of a title is to tell us what we’ll be reading about, so I’ll write that here, in the *Purpose* column. And photographs. As I look through this book, I notice that the photographs show me exactly what lightning looks like, so I’ll write that under the *Purpose* column of the chart, next to the word *photograph*.

If we take a look at the table of contents for this book, it tells us what topics are in the book and on what page the information is located.

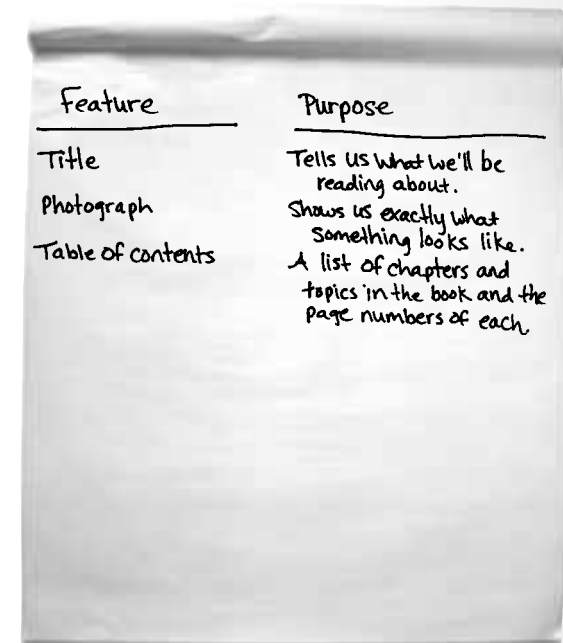
We can begin to use this feature, the table of contents, to understand more about lightning. The table of contents really guides our reading, so I’ll skim the list of chapters to see what I want to read first. Let’s see . . . here’s a chapter called “What Is Lightning?” I really want to read that at some point because I don’t understand lightning very well. I’ve always thought of lightning as a giant spark, but I know physical phenomena are tough to understand, so I bet I’ve got some inaccurate information. This chapter would probably be helpful and add to my understanding of how lightning works. [*I continue to look through the table of contents, locating another part of the book I want to read.*]

Here’s a chapter that looks interesting—especially because we live in a place with lots of thunderstorms and lightning. It’s called “Safety in a Thunderstorm.” Since storms come up so quickly around here, I’m thinking this chapter could help us learn how to avoid being struck by lightning. Definitely in the useful category when we are hiking in the mountains, or when kids are playing soccer and we see those clouds start to gather! So let’s see what it says. The table of contents tells me to turn to page 43.

Instruct kids to keep track of the features on their own Feature/Purpose chart.

Discuss the idea of accuracy and how important it is to understanding nonfiction.

Add new features and their purposes as you continue to read.



Model how to use italicized text to gain accurate information and record it on a Post-it.

Hmm, this is interesting. On this page, I see a sentence that says “If you are ever caught outside during a thunderstorm, here are some things to remember:” And right here I see another text feature that’s really helpful. The words that tell us what to do or what not to do if we’re caught outside in a storm are in italics. By using this special font, the author is saying “Pay attention to this information—it’s important!” I’m going to read these suggestions and if you want to list one or two of them on a Post-it so you remember what to do, go ahead. This is where accuracy is crucial, so that we don’t get hurt. We want to make sure we do the right thing to stay safe in the middle of a storm!

Ask kids to work with you to notice features, determine their purposes, and focus on gaining accurate information.

What’s a thunderstorm day?
“a day on which thunder can be heard” p. 36

GUIDE

Now let’s work together to notice and list some of the other features we find. Here’s an interesting visual feature. It’s a map, but it’s a particular kind of map. I’ll put it up here on the overhead. Take a look at it and then turn and talk with someone near you about what we can learn from this map. What information does it give us?

Georgina: There’s a title—that tells us what it’s about.

Exactly. What does the title tell you it’s about?

Georgina: It says “The Average Number of Thunderstorm Days in a Year.”

Sarah: What’s a thunderstorm day? That’s pretty weird!

That’s a really good question. Before we can figure out what the map’s about, we have to know what a thunderstorm day is. So let’s figure it out . . . anybody have an idea? I’m going to write Sarah’s question on a Post-it, because it’s one we want to find an answer to.

Jeremy: Probably a day when there is a thunderstorm.

Good guess. I was thinking the same thing. When I read the title, my inner voice said “I’m confused.” Since the title doesn’t give me enough information, I looked in the text for some more information. I found this sentence: “A thunderstorm day is a day on which thunder can be heard—no matter whether thunder is heard once or a hundred times.” So it’s a day when there is some thunder—maybe a lot, maybe a little. That’s a slightly different meaning than how many thunderstorms there are. I’m going to write what it is on the Post-it, under Sarah’s question.

Thad: I see a key—over on the left. It shows how many thunderstorm days there are. It starts with zero, one, or two and goes up to over 200.

Luke: The colors on the key match the colors on the map, and that tells you how many days of thunderstorms there are in a particular place.

Great observations, you two. The key is an important feature to add to our *Feature/Purpose* chart. We could say a map key tells us how to interpret or understand information on a map, OK? It’s really important to use it if we’re going to get accurate information from the map.

Sonia: When there is thunder, that probably means there is lightning.

Good idea, Sonia, tying the information on the map back to the topic we’re reading about—lightning. Let’s write that thought down on a Post-it.

I’m curious. Does anyone see a pattern on the map? Do certain places in the world have more thunderstorm days than other places?

Pedro: It looks like there aren’t many storms up in the Arctic where it’s cold. The key says there are zero, one, or two thunderstorm days a year there.

Interesting observation. Anything else?

Lorena: There are a lot of storms in the middle of Africa, and some in South America, where the color is really dark. I see the Equator; there are more storms in places closer to the Equator.

Thanks for that information, Lorena, it’s really important. And you might think some more about why that is, and why there are so few storms up in the Arctic, as Pedro noticed. Let’s go back to Sonia’s point. I’m wondering, how does all this relate to lightning? Turn and talk about what we learn from the map and the map key. *[As kids come back to share, they suggest that knowing where there are thunderstorms may tell us something about how much lightning there is in various places around the world. I then explain that the map is called a distribution map—it shows us the location and frequency of storms and lightning as well. We add “distribution map” and its purpose to our chart.]*

Where there’s thunder, that probably means there’s lightning, too.

Feature	Purpose
Title	Tells us what we’ll be reading about.
Photograph	Shows us exactly what something looks like.
Table of contents	A list of chapters and topics in the book and the page numbers of each.
Map Key	Tells us how to interpret information on a map.
Distribution Map	Shows location and frequency of information.

Kids need to process and discuss information they meet so they can understand it. Talking as a group about unfamiliar concepts and new information supports everyone to gain accurate information.

PRACTICE INDEPENDENTLY

I think you are ready to find features and think about their different purposes with your own texts. Remember to add your thinking about the purpose—how a particular feature helps you understand the information and write that down. I’ll also give you some Post-its so you can record some of the cool information

Have kids work independently and read books and articles. They find features and record their purposes on their own Feature/Purpose charts.

you are learning from the features. [As kids find features and list these on their Feature/Purpose charts, I confer with them. Then we come back together to share the features they've noticed, adding these to our Anchor Chart.]

SHARE THE LEARNING

It looks like some of you have found some new and useful features. You really had to figure out how the feature helps you understand the information. Tell us how you did that, OK?

Let's start with Eduardo and Tony; they figured out something really important.

Eduardo: We read a book about the digestive system, and it had answers to lots of questions, like "Why do we burp?" That's the one we read.

What's the feature you noticed?

Tony: We noticed that the arrows in the diagram showed the burp moves up and out your mouth. It's really air that you swallow when you eat. And the air comes back up to make you burp.

And the arrows?

Tony: So the arrows show how the air moves up from your stomach and then out your mouth!

So arrows are really helpful visual feature. If we didn't understand how a burp works, and that it's air that we swallow and that comes back up in the form of a burp, we sure understand that now! Let's add this feature to our chart—how about if we say arrows show movement on a diagram? And Tony and Eduardo could write down how a burp works on a Post-it because they know exactly how one works.

John: Hey, I have some arrows in a diagram, too. It's in the book on lightning.

Let's take a look, John. So what is the diagram about?

John: It tells me what happens when lightning hits the ground. I think the arrows show what happens, first, then second, then third.

It looks like the arrows have a different purpose on your page, John, than in Tony and Eduardo's book.

John: I think here it tells you to look at the first picture, then go to the next picture, and then the next one to figure out what happens during a lightning strike.

The arrows are guiding you to look at the diagrams in sequence, as you said, John. We learned that the same feature can have very different purposes, right? Let's record this on our chart—great thinking, you guys. Did anyone notice any other features?

Ramya: My page had a close-up.

Come up here and show us your page, Ramya. Tell us about this feature.

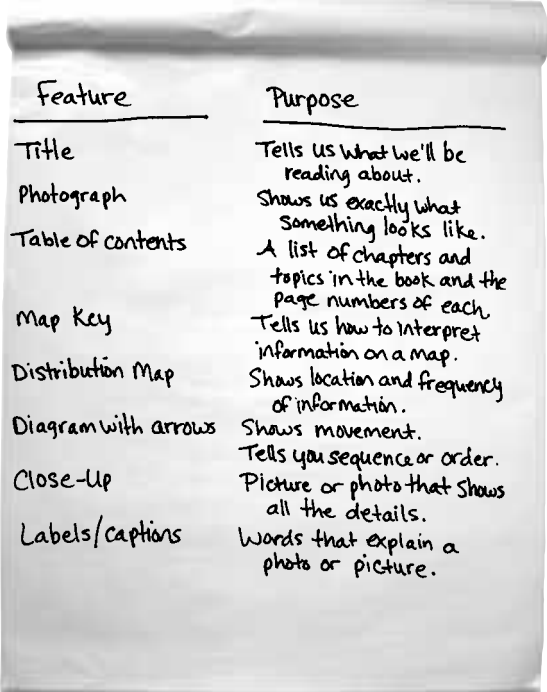
Ramya: It shows that coral isn't one animal; it's really lots of little animals. They are called polyps. And this is one polyp—I guess that's one animal. That's what the label says. I never knew this before.

Good thinking, Ramya! You used the close-up and the label to learn some important information about coral. You used both text features and visual features to figure out something that I've always found confusing, how coral is an animal that is really made up of lots of little animals. So a close-up is a picture or photo that shows us all the details in something. And the label and caption explained what was going on in the photograph. Let's add your features to our chart. And then you had a question, too, I see.

Ramya: Yeah, the caption said that coral gets sick and turns white when the water gets too warm. I wondered how warm it has to get before the coral turns white.

Often the minute we learn something, we have a question about it, just like Ramya did. That's a really good idea, to write your question right near the information, so you can keep it in mind. Notice all the features—a close-up, a label, and a caption—that worked together to help you learn all that information about coral!

You all did a great job today. We started with fairly obvious features like photographs and titles and made sure we understood how they helped us gain information. I'm excited that you found so many new and unusual features in the books you were reading. You were really on the lookout for features that we could learn from, and that's the whole idea when we read nonfiction. We're learning new information and the features support us to really understand it.



Feature	Purpose
Title	Tells us what we'll be reading about.
Photograph	Shows us exactly what something looks like.
Table of contents	A list of chapters and topics in the book and the page numbers of each.
Map Key	Tells us how to interpret information on a map.
Distribution Map	Shows location and frequency of information.
Diagram with arrows	Shows movement. Tells you sequence or order.
Close-Up	Picture or photo that shows all the details.
Labels/captions	Words that explain a photo or picture.

Sharing often involves reinforcing what kids have already learned, reiterating features they've identified, and supporting them to share their learning orally.

reflection & assessment



DID YOUR STUDENTS:

- identify features and describe their purposes—how they help us understand information, concepts, and ideas?
- gain accurate information from features as they encountered them in their reading?
- understand how text and visual features complement each other?

In this lesson, children were asked to notice and list nonfiction features and articulate how these features helped them better understand the information in the text. As I look through the kids' individual *Feature/Purpose* charts, I look for evidence that they have identified a variety of features and articulated their purposes. I also evaluate Daniel's Post-its, which demonstrate how we discussed information gained from photographs, captions, and a map in *Lightning*. To make sure kids are pulling out accurate information, we assess how well kids understand the information provided by particular text and visual features.

1



Lightning sensors, such as these, track the electrical charges of lightning strikes. Sensors are important for lightning research, building protection, and forest-fire prevention.

Computers are used to record the location of lightning strikes. This information helps experts track the movement of a storm so they can predict areas where lightning may soon strike. In the United States, sensors in 100 locations around the country are hooked up to a national computer network. Within three seconds of a lightning strike near a sensor, the strike shows up on the computer.




1 Daniel put complicated information into his own words, interpreting the map of lightning strikes across the United States. As kids encounter sophisticated information about complicated science topics such as lightning, we want to check for accuracy. Daniel accurately interprets the dots on the map and understood the purpose of the lightning sensors. His explanations might be helpful to other children who might have trouble understanding the complicated language in the captions.

↑
THESE ARE THE SENSORS THAT SEE WHERE THE LIGHTNING IS. THEY ARE ON THE WHITE POLES. THEY HAVE THEM ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY.

↑
THE DOTS ON THE MAP SHOW WHERE THE LIGHTNING IS. THAT MUST BE WHERE IT IS STORMY.


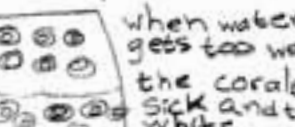

2 William's *Feature/Purpose* chart illustrates that he has a clear understanding of particular features, and his drawings add to his explanations.

2

William Feature	Nonfiction Features	Purpose
cut away 		A cut away helps us to see what is inside of a Volcano.
bold COLD		bold helps me know the word is important.
heading LAVA FLOWS		heading helps me know what the page is about.

3 Ramya creates a chart that accurately describes the purpose of the features she chose, and she merges her thinking with the information, she couldn't resist adding some interesting information. She adds a lingering question, too. Having read in the *TFK* article about coral turning white when the ocean gets too warm, she wonders how warm the ocean water has to get before this happens. She demonstrates a clear understanding of this information and is eager to investigate further.

3

Ramya Feature	Nonfiction Features	Purpose
close-ups 		Close-ups help us see more details. Coral is made of many little animals called polyps.
Caption  when water gets too warm the corals get sick and turn white.		Captions give information about the picture.
Labels  some hard coral look like branches or horns.		Labels tell about the picture.

I wonder how warm the water has to get before the coral turns white?

Text Signposts

Use nonfiction features to guide learning**Teaching Moves****CONNECT & ENGAGE**

Invite the children to explore a range of captivating text.

Notice two kinds of features, visual and text, and think about how they aid comprehension.

List features we notice in books.

Teaching Language

- Nonfiction features are really like signposts—they signal us to pay attention and then they provide us with lots of interesting information.
- It’s helpful to make a distinction between visual features and text features.
- Visual features include illustrations, photographs, maps and diagrams.

- Text features include headings and the table of contents—features that help organize the text. Headings break the text into sections and give us advance notice of what’s coming up. The table of contents gives us an overview of what’s in the book.

- Different kinds of fonts, like bold or italic, signal “Pay attention to me, I’m important!”
- Often text and visual features work together.
- We often rely on words, such as labels or a caption, to accurately explain or describe a photograph or illustration. On the other hand, an illustration can help us understand a long, wordy description or explanation.

MODEL

Co-construct a Feature/Purpose chart by listing different features and jotting down the purpose of each one.

Instruct kids to keep track of features on their own Feature/Purpose chart.

Discuss the idea of accuracy and how important it is to understanding nonfiction.

Add new features and their purposes as you continue to read.

Model how to use italicized text to gain accurate information and record it on a Post-it.

- Let’s describe the purpose of each feature—how it guides our reading and helps us understand the information.
- Let’s make sure we know what the word *accurate* means, as in *accurate information*. This is information that is factually correct. As we read nonfiction and learn from all these features, we want to make sure the information we gather is accurate; this is often why we read nonfiction in the first place—to explore interesting, accurate information about all these cool topics.
- I’m going to share what I know about some features and how they guide and support reading. Let’s start with the title—one of the first features you notice and certainly one of the most important. When I read the title, I have an idea of the big topic, or the big idea, I’ll be reading about.

- Photographs can also provide important information and show us exactly what something looks like.

- The table of contents functions like a short list of what’s in the book, which makes it a great overview. Here we can discover what topics are in the book and on what page. If we want some specific information, we can just turn to the page that deals with that topic.

Teaching Language**GUIDE**

- Let’s work together to notice and list some of the features.
- I’m confused about some of the information on this map. My inner voice said “I’m confused,” and the map title doesn’t tell me what I need to know. So I looked in the text for some more information. Sometimes we use the text to unlock the information we can get from a feature, to really make sure we understand.
- The key ... is an important feature—it tells us how to interpret or understand information on a map.
- Turn and talk about what we learn from the map and map keys.

PRACTICE INDEPENDENTLY

- Using your text, find features and think about their different purposes. Note how a particular feature helps you understand the information.
- Also, record some of the cool information you are learning from the features!

- Tell us about the features you found and used. Let’s add these features to our chart. As we review our Anchor Chart, notice all the features we used to learn about our topics!
- You found some new features—you really had to figure out how they helped you understand the information. Tell us how you did that.
- Visual features can help us when words can’t. The arrows show movement. Or arrows show a sequence or an order to the information.
- A picture combined with the text can clarify something we’re confused about. When we write a question next to the information, it reminds us to keep checking for more information.
- You’ve found so many new and interesting features in these books and learned so much from them. We’re learning new information and the features support us to really understand it!

DID YOUR STUDENTS:

- identify features and describe their purposes—how they help us understand information, concepts, and ideas?
- gain accurate information from features as they encountered them in their reading?
- understand how text and visual features complement each other?

Teaching Moves

Ask kids to work with you to notice features, determine their purposes, and focus on gaining accurate information.

Have kids work independently and read books and articles. They find features and record their purposes on their own Feature/Purpose charts.

Invite partners to share with the whole group what they learned about how particular features support understanding.

reflection & assessment