



Information books are an excellent way to engage children in reading for pleasure. Here are some avenues to making this happen in schools and libraries.

How can information books be used to get children reading?

Children will read what is enjoyable. They'll also read what they're into – so have lots of books which match interests (more about that later). But can information books be enjoyable to read? Well, the best ones certainly are!

What makes an enjoyable book? Those which are amazing, interesting (packed with juicy facts), funny, full of great pictures and appealingly designed, for a start. Of course, a good story is also enjoyable, but it can sometimes take a while to get into a story and that's the moment when a potential reader can be lost. The pages of uninterrupted text found in most novels are visually dull and this is where factual books have a great advantage.

Good information books are quick and easy to access and can be dipped in and out of. The text is often delivered in digestible chunks too, which suits many young readers.

Fiction is especially enjoyable when the story is gripping but the true-life stories found in factual books are probably the most gripping stories of all, because they are true!

How do I use my own books to get children reading?

As an author of factual books for children I visit lots of schools and libraries and my aim is to get children excited about reading. This is my formula for success, and it works:

1. **Enthusiasm** is just so powerful. I get children hooked into my books by saying how much I like writing them, how fascinating or amazing the subjects are, and how brilliantly illustrated and attractively designed they are. I mention the enthusiastic feedback I get: letters, messages and reviews. I enthuse about each title I present.
2. **Share some of the best bits.** If you've been to a food fair and you taste a free sample of something delicious then it's highly likely you're going to buy it! I always carefully match my reading to the audience.
3. **Interaction** goes well with factual books. I use mini-quizzes, fun challenges, games and jokes to bring the subject alive and make it enjoyable.

I also ensure that children buy into me as a person, so I plan my sessions carefully to ensure the audience are going to enjoy the time I'm with them. If they like you, they'll listen to what you say, and if you say that reading information books is fun, they'll believe you.

What are the positives of information books for children?

There are lots!

Most are visually rich

Good illustrated factual books are a graphical feast. This not only makes reading a more sensory experience but aids understanding. Colour, exciting designs, great illustrations and stunning photos are the norm for today's best information titles.

They're not linear

With the exception of some categories such as true stories, information books can be read in various ways. Children can dip in and out, or go straight to their favourite section, or browse the pictures to get drawn into the text. The reader is not dependent on remembering plot, characters or settings because the sections in factual books are often independent. This flexibility works well for today's generation of digital skimmers.

The text is varied

The way that text is presented in books can both help and hinder the young reader. Publishers and designers have become much better in recent years at increasing the digestibility of written information by using elements such as appealing typefaces, coloured panels and size of lettering. Text is often presented in chunks, which are easier for the less confident reader to take in, and other elements are often combined, such as lists, bullets, speech bubbles, captions and fact boxes to break up the 'wall of writing' effect that many children struggle with. It also looks more fun. I like my books to present a word buffet – and come on, who doesn't love a buffet?

The power of facts and true adventures

Young children often find it hard to separate truth and fiction. They often go through a stage of saying, "Is that *true*?" "Did that *really* happen?" Information books deal with facts and true things, giving children a certainty (unlike the internet, ha!) that what they are reading actually happened or is really the case. They are then often wowed by facts as they discover just how amazing the world is, and the universe beyond it.

True stories of real people doing amazing, adventurous or daring things stir children's imaginations just as great fiction does: *What would I do? Could I do that?* Knowing that these things really happened stirs children to ask questions: how, why, what... that lead to a desire to find out and to read more. And children love to share great factual content, making reading a social – and so even more enjoyable – activity.

Interactivity

Many information books contain elements which add variety to the reading experience: puzzles, quizzes, challenges, questions, things to spot, things to do, experiments to try.

Matching interests and hobbies

This is a key to drawing in many disengaged readers in my experience. The best libraries contain all kinds of fiction and factual books relating to the things which children are often into (depending on their age of course): dinosaurs, pets, monsters, football, superheroes, machines and vehicles, space, food, sports, wild animals, computers, music, digital games, technology, TV & film series, bikes and more. There are lots of good information books about all these things. Reading for pleasure should not be limited by the curriculum.

Diversity

Today's information books reflect both our diverse society and the incredible diversity of the wider world. Where factual books about people might have once featured mainly white males, for example, this is now no longer the case. There are information books which tackle every kind of important issue in society. This means that young people are much more likely to see themselves reflected in what they read.

The environment

Information books present reliable, accurate and age-appropriate information about climate change and the environment. They are an essential way to help children understand what's happening to our planet, why and what we can do to help.

How can librarians & teachers use information books to stimulate children's reading?

Having a really wide range of good quality factual books a great starting point, accepting that they are not the cheapest books to buy! Here are some tips for getting the most from them:

- **Books need advocates** – they don't sell themselves – so make sure you read factual books yourself, then you can recommend them with genuine enthusiasm
- **Display stunning books** – yes, that's obvious – but add little recommendation cards or notes to the display, written either by you or children (*I love this book because...*)
- **Avoid calling them non-fiction** – come on, it really is time to ditch what is surely the crustiest, least appealing label anywhere. We don't call tea non-coffee. 'Information books' is good but 'factual books' is even better in my view.
- **Arrange a visit by an author of fun factual books** – someone who can win over the doubters: email me at andy@andyseed.com! BTW, in my experience, a virtual visit is about 6% of the worth of a real one!
- **Read excerpts/enthuse/share** – as outlined above. It's powerful.
- **Find out what the kids are into** – and provide information books that match. But tell people they are there! Maybe do a survey to get the info on interests, so you can see the patterns.
- **Break the association that information books are *only* for finding information** (this is one of the reasons why I favour 'factual books' as a label). Instil the idea that they can be read for enjoyment. Tell the children that these books can be amazing, funny, fascinating, visually exciting and gripping.

Go get em!

www.andyseed.com

KS1, 2 and 3 enjoying some factual books:

