

Text Features in **Nonfiction** Books

This reading activity works with all nonfiction titles.

Below is a list of features commonly found within the main text—the guts—of nonfiction books. These features can help the reader to better understand the topic of the book by showing information visually, by providing further explanation, or by highlighting key concepts and ideas.

Hold a discussion with students about nonfiction text features. Log into VIA using a computer and a projector. Show examples of the following text features in a few nonfiction titles, and ask questions about how each one is valuable. Then have students log into VIA and find a nonfiction book, either individually or in pairs or small groups. Students should use the interactive worksheet as they put on their nonfiction detective hats and sift through their books for text features.

Features in nonfiction:

- Headings and subheadings: the names of chapters and sections of text within chapters. These names let the reader know what the broader chapter is going to be about and what each section of the chapter is going to cover.
- Photographs: real images taken with a camera. Photos can be historical—maybe even in black and white—or contemporary; panoramic or close up.
- Illustrations, diagrams, and maps: images created by hand (drawings or paintings) or with a computer.
 - An illustration could be a drawing of a dinosaur, a symbol, an artistic representation of a flag, or other visual depiction.
 - Diagrams usually show the labeled details of something (the different parts of a skeleton or the layers of the earth's crust, for example).
 - Maps show individual places in a larger geographical area, but a map can show either a big area, such as a continent, or a small area, such as a neighborhood.

Literacy Lesson Plan

- Charts, graphs, tables, and timelines: graphic representations of data.
 - The words chart and graph are often used interchangeably. Pie charts, bar graphs, line graphs or charts, and scatter point graphs or charts all fall under the umbrella of chart or graph.
 - A table is a simpler means of displaying numbers (or other data) in rows and columns.
 - A timeline is a visual representation of years—or even decades, centuries, days, or hours—sectioned off by points that represent the individual increments of time lapsed.+
- Captions, labels, keys, and legends: textual information about an image.
 - A caption offers textual information about a visual—a photograph, illustration, diagram, graph, etc.
 - A label is a simpler identifier, usually just a word or a few words.
 - A key or legend is a visual guide used to identify items in a more complicated visual. A map legend might help the reader figure out the symbols on a map; a chart key would help the reader identify the meaning behind the different colors used in the chart.
- Sidebars: contain information that is important but that could disrupt the flow of the main text.
- Pull quotes: important quotes from the text, featured on the page in a way that catches the reader's eye.
- Vocabulary words: many books use new terms that are key to understanding the subject matter; these terms commonly appear in **bold** or in a contrasting **color**. Usually, these words can also be found in a glossary at the back of the book.

Students can make their own charts and graphs using MS Word templates. Here are some examples:

