

Unit Eight – Expert Projects in a Content Area: Writing to Learn and to Teach About Science

May

This unit builds on the energy and enthusiasm children carry about the world around them. Many teachers already know that the children in their classrooms are eager to learn about their world. Whether they are curious about insects or dolphins, or they collect rocks and sea shells, or they notice the way that leaves on the trees change across the year, third graders often come to school excited to talk, draw, and write about the things that surround them every day in the world. All year your third graders have probably been engaged in science workshops of some kind. In these workshops, they have probably already learned a few things about how to observe closely, ask big questions, and follow procedures to find out about those questions.

As readers, they are also able to read and understand a wider array of nonfiction books: field guides that catalogue types and kinds of a particular topic; narrative nonfiction that takes the reader through a timeline within the life of animals, plants, or rivers; expository nonfiction (information/all-about) that teaches all about a topic; nonfiction procedural texts that teach how to accomplish a scientific experiment; poetry anthologies that appreciate the wonder and amazement of nature; pattern books that have a repetitive “comeback” line together with new information on each page; and question and answer books that invite the reader to wonder along with the author, and answer questions. The books you have collected will serve as writing mentors providing writers with a wealth of publishing possibilities. This unit invites third graders to build on their knowledge of how different books about science can go as well as their work all year with mentor texts.

This unit can be aligned with your science curriculum (in New York City, this would be *Plant and Animal Adaptations: How are plants and animals well-suited to live in their environments*), and builds off of the work that children already did in November’s unit on Information Writing. In this unit, kids will learn how to pick topics and grow their knowledge by thinking like scientists, historians, mathematicians, artists, and of course, writers.

In the first bend of the unit, children will study a whole class topic during a daily science workshop, and will write, sketch, and question to record and grow their thinking without a particular end product in mind. In reading workshop, children will be reading to learn, expanding their scientific knowledge. In the second bend, they will spend two weeks alternating between looking closely at mentors and writing many pieces in different genres on topics that interest them within the unit of study. In the final bend, week 4, children choose one or perhaps two of their pieces to revise and edit, again relying on their mentors. The unit will culminate with some kind of celebration in which the children teach others about what they’ve learned.

