Using Literature in the Science Classroom

Have you considered incorporating literature into your science classroom? Although literature and science may seem to be an unlikely pair, the NGSS contain numerous connections to the Common Core State Standards for ELA as verification of the supporting role that literature serves when learning science. Many of the skills students employ when reading and analyzing texts are directly correlated with the science practices of argumentation and of obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information.

Stories can help students connect to an experience or relate to science as a human endeavor and can assist minorities in seeing themselves in a science role. Trade books, both fiction and nonfiction, also allow students to practice their critical thinking and comprehension skills while providing science content knowledge (Mahzoon-Hagheghi et al. 2018). When selecting fiction texts, care must be taken to ensure that misinformation is not embedded in the text. If you are seeking a vetted list of trade books, look no further than NSTA’s Outstanding Trade Books for Students K–12 (https://www.nsta.org/outstanding-science-trade-books-students-k-12). Each year since 1996, NSTA has published a list of the best trade books available so that teachers can embed literary skills while learning science content.

You may want to begin by establishing a classroom library that contains both fiction and nonfiction books. Classroom libraries serve to both increase the volume of voluntary reading and expand the background knowledge of all students, particularly English language learners (Young and Moss 2006). Middle school science teacher Katie Coppens (2018) recommends stocking your classroom library with a variety of high interest books, including popular titles, graphic novels, and picture books. It’s important to have books available in a range of lexile (readability) levels so all learners can take advantage of the library. For more on choosing appropriate literature, see Mayer (1995) for a checklist for evaluating fiction trade books.

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REFERENCES

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