



Overcome Inertia Through Summer Reading

by Juliana
Texley

In·er·tia (ə-’nər-shə) **n.** The tendency of a middle school teacher in motion to remain in motion for at least nine months of the academic year.

Resistance or disinclination to motion is common in middle school teachers over the summer months, especially in those who find themselves at rest in a beach chair. But while your body is at rest, there are plenty of ways to energize your mind. Reading is the ideal way to replace summer inertia with professional momentum. For that reason, the NSTA Recommends team has once again come up with suggestions for your reading enjoyment.

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Under plain brown wrappers

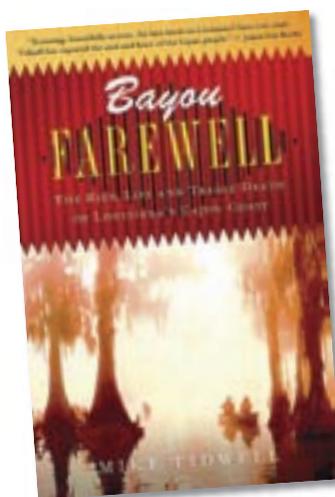
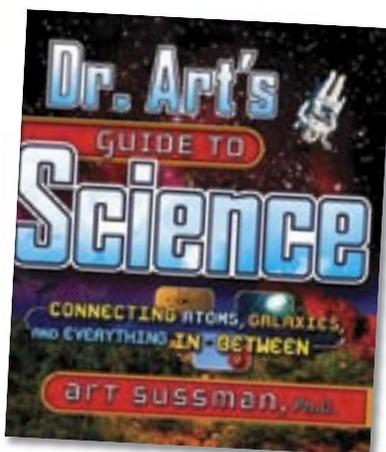
For many teachers, much of the school year is a time warp. Months and chapters fly by, leaving traces of UFOs—unfulfilled objectives. The summer might be just the time to fill the gaps in your own understanding with books that explain science to adults in ways that can be shared with future students.

If your college coursework often seemed disjointed and fragmented, it's high time to see how all the pieces fit. *Dr. Art's Guide to Science* (Wiley 2006) has been described as a "joyful" guide to "atoms, galaxies and everything in between." Art Sussman separates the details of science from the big ideas in a way that makes even adults say "Aha." I especially enjoyed Dr. Art's cogent descriptions of the methods of science, in a light and yet accurate manner.

Another secret addiction of many middle school teachers is the *Stop Faking It* series from NSTA's Bill Robertson. This year the series includes math and a new summary of Earth science. He has become a favorite of teachers who need updates, those who have been reassigned, or those who want to deepen their understanding.

Grab Bill's *Air, Water and Weather* for a good primer on climate before you read the best books on summer storms. Reviewer Tom Brown recommends Isaac's *Storm* (Erik Larson, Vintage 2000) about the Galveston hurricane of 1900, a great page-turner that also reviews the methods used by meteorologists. And if you missed Mike Tidwell's *Bayou Farewell* (Pantheon 2003) last year, the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina will make this colorful and tragic description of the changing Gulf Coast even more poignant now.

Life science teachers, challenged by the politics of creation science and intelligent design, may want to dig deeper this summer to make sure their background is adequate for the classroom and the community. *Evolutionary Science and Society* is a new collection of essays from the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (Rodger Bybee and Joel Cracraft 2006) that fills the bill. It offers political, societal and scientific updates—short enough for sporadic summer reading and in-depth enough to provide real back-



ground. Recommends reviewer Chuck Jervis says: "For its presentation on cladistics and phylogeny alone, it is worthwhile reading for any serious biology teacher." All sections include a summary "education panel" in which brief extended discourses on the educational value or implications of each chapter's topics are presented.

True physics-phobics will have trouble believing that Jennifer Ouellette claims to have once characterized herself that way. Reviewer Elizabeth James recommends Ouellette's *Black Bodies and Quantum Cats* as a "delightful" explanation of physics in a social context and cultural context. From the science of Velcro and roller coasters, to the Addams Family and Schrödinger's cat, you'll not only enjoy this low math primer on popular physics, but will want to want to dogear many sections of the book for sharing with students. The paperback format is just right for stuffing into the bike bag or backpack.

Get momentum from a mystery

Many people love mysteries. Some of the best books for both adolescents and adults this year focus on solving problems using science. Like Sherlock or Hercules, you can follow the trail of a scientific mystery and beef up your science background at the same time with many of this summer's best books.

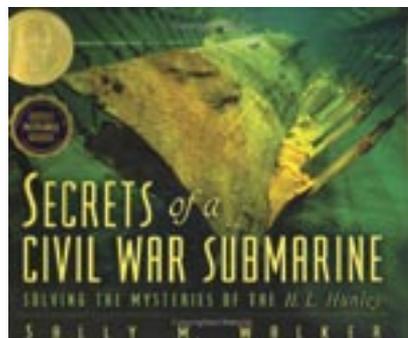
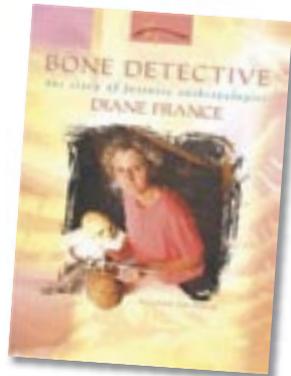
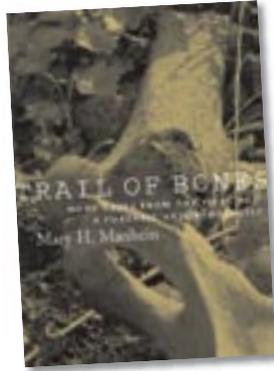
It's rare for the NSTA/CBC committee to place a book of fiction on its list of Outstanding Trade Books. *Code Orange*, by Caroline B. Cooney (Delacorte 2005), is a fiction book saturated with science! Prepare to be captivated as a teenager runs through New York researching smallpox. He discovers signs of an epidemic and leads the reader on a nerve-wracking journey. Cooney's adventure may leave you suspicious of every sneeze, so you might want to move on to Connie Goldsmith's *Invisible Invaders* (Twenty-first Century Books 2006). Reviewer Marilyn Marks suggests this summary of emerging diseases is so clearly written that you can keep it to share with students in the fall. Or try another NSTA/CBC winner, *Attack of the Superbugs*, by Kathiann M. Kowalski (Enslow 2005). This book explores the

development of antibiotic-resistant infections like MRSA. Finally, get prepared for students' inevitable questions about bird (H5N1) flu with *Disease Update: The Influenza and Pneumonia Update* (Enslow 2006). Reviewer Donald Logson recommends this well-written, accurate, and informative book, which describes how flu epidemics start, how they spread, and what we can do to contain them.

CSI fans will also enjoy the latest book by forensic anthropologist Mary H. Manheim (author of *The Bone Lady*), *Trail of Bones* (Louisiana State University Press 2005). Her stories of murder investigations, like the well-known "Precious Doe" case, will tantalize the adult fan of crime science. While many of the book's anecdotes are too macabre to share with students, most readers will enjoy the greater scientific detail in *Bone Detective*, by Lorraine Jean Hopping (Scholastic 2005), which is more appropriate for classroom use. Anthropologist Diane France's work includes not only anatomy, but also soil science and entomology. Good explanations of mDNA and other technologies make this CBC/NSTA award winning book a great bridge between the media hype and the science classroom.

Bone Detective also includes an interesting synopsis of efforts to solve a 150-year-old mystery, the disappearance of the Civil War-era submarine *H. L. Hunley*, with its crew. For a more complete description that's suitable for both students and adults, try *Secrets of a Civil War Submarine* by Sally M. Walker (Carolrhoda 2005). Walker fleshes out the efforts of France and artist Sharon Long in reconstructing the long-lost crew of the first military submarine that was lost. She also describes the diving technology that helped scientists explore the vessel.

And then there are those simpler mysteries of life—the ones that perplex you all year long. Why can't teenagers get out of bed in the morning? Why can't you sleep in when school is out? And why is it so much harder to get over jet lag as you get older? For the answers to these and many other burning questions the *Rhythms of Life* offers both insight and science. Recommends reviewer LaRue Sellers suggests that every teacher will enjoy this readable science up-



date written by Russell G. Foster and Leon Kreitzman (Yale University Press 2004).

Get charged up for fall

Summer is never long enough. As soon as the days begin to get shorter, our own teacher-rhythms prompt us to look for new ideas and deeper insights as preparation for the year to come. Among NSTA's new professional development pubs are two that fill those very special niches in the field.

Uncovering Student Ideas in Science, written by Francis Eberle, Page Keeley, and Lynn Farrin (NSTA 2006), offers a series of formative assessment probes to help you solve the mystery of "what do they know, and how you can find out." *Science for English Language Learners*, written by Ann K. Fathman and David T. Crowther (NSTA 2006), provides proven keys to reach-

ing the diverse student population of students for whom English is not the native language. Both of these new publications have earned rave reviews from readers, and are light enough (both physically and mentally) to carry along on a summer trip.

PDA's, GPS's, and CBL's may seem like alphabet soup, but they are the new currency of today's science education. Problem is, your students have probably had more time to play with these tech tools than you have. To add tech to your fall repertoire, grab a copy of

NSTA's new reprint compendium *Technology-Based Inquiry for Middle School: An NSTA Press Journals Collection*, edited by Edwin P. Christmann (2006). This collection will inspire you to experiment on your own during the summer

months, and will leave you with a few tricks up your sleeve for September.

Once you've enjoyed some of the books above, it won't take much to convince you of the value of *Linking Science and Literacy*, edited by Rowena Douglas, Michael P. Klentschy, and Karen Worth (NSTA 2006). This anthology includes case studies of teachers who successfully shared their own love of literature and science, making curricular connections.

Summer, along with its pleasant inertia, can't last. The days are already getting shorter. It won't be long until a few dozen packages of endless energy crash through your classroom door, challenging you with their curiosity and their potential. So grab a book and get charged up for fall. ■