

Reading

CONSIDERING THE SOURCE

PURPOSE

Students learn how to evaluate authorship of nonfiction texts.

This lesson will be one of a few you will want to teach about the importance of considering the source of the information when reading any text.

LESSON INTENDED FOR

- Reading high-interest nonfiction
- Trade books
- Articles
- Online sources
- Students who are reading texts where there is information on the author available

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Your demonstration reading text, with a clearly written author biography that shows that the author has some expertise on the topic (for this lesson, I use *How to Make a Universe With 92 Ingredients* by Adrian Dingle)
- Students' independent reading texts

Lesson steps

1. Use an imagined scenario where students have to decide whose advice to seek based on a particular context or situation.
2. Explain that readers should find out about an author's areas of expertise.
3. Tell students that knowing the author's background can help let the reader in on the author's possible perspective.
4. Have students spend the rest of the time independently reading, referring to the author's background when appropriate.

What I Say to Students

I have another little thought experiment to try with you today. Let's say you wanted to buy a new video game with money you received for your birthday, but you weren't sure which one to buy. You wanted to learn more information on the options. Who should you ask if these were your choices?

- A) Your best friend, who loves to play video games
- B) A person who works at the video game store
- C) Our school principal
- D) A video game designer

Now, before you answer the question, I want you to think a little bit about what you want to learn, which is what video game should you buy. Each resource has different information. Some of it is better than others for the purposes that you might have.

For example, let's say that your best friend loves to play video games and is about the same age, so this resource can give you a player's point of view.

Your principal can maybe tell you what games she's heard kids talking about (or has taken away from them), but as far as I know, she is not a huge player herself. The video game designer knows how games work, what goes into designing them, and anything about the games she's designed. But she might not know as much about games she hasn't directly worked on. In contrast, the person who works at the video game store knows about all of the latest games, which ones are most popular, and what the prices are.

Talk to your partner about why you might choose each resource and why. And—if you would want to talk to more than one resource, share why you think that.

[Circulate and listen in as students discuss. Then call them back together.]

So here's the thing: it kind of doesn't really matter which resource or resources you said you would consult with because everyone has a different agenda, as well as different preferences. However, it's important to know that's exactly the way readers can consider the nonfiction books they are reading. We consider our own preferences and our own agendas. Then we look at those alongside the backgrounds, experiences, and agendas of the authors of the texts we are considering reading. When we find a good match, we know this is a good text for us. For example—let me show you this book.

[Hold up demonstration text.]

This book is all about the elements. It's called *How to Make a Universe With 92 Ingredients* by Adrian Dingle. If I just want to learn about the topic—all aspects of it—I'm in a pretty good spot. But let me just check the back cover and see who wrote this book—if the author is an expert on this topic or an expert on informational writing . . .

[Open up back flap of book and look at back cover. Read aloud the author's description.]

Adrian Dingle is a high school chemistry teacher. He was born in England but has extensive experience teaching science in both the United States and the United Kingdom. He is the award winning author of several chemistry books at the junior level, including *The Periodic Table: Elements With Style*, and also has a number of textbooks to his credit.

Knowing about the author, what his or her experience is with the topic and with writing in general, isn't going to make me read a book or not read a book, but it will help me to get a sense of where the author is coming from. It gives me some background that I can hold in my mind as a reader. It might tell me if this author has a particular affinity for a topic or a particular

dislike. This can affect the way the author writes about the topic, and as a reader it's important for me to keep that information in my mind as I read.

When I read about [Adrian Dingle](#) just now, I realized that he has quite a bit of science expertise. Also important, he is a teacher, so he brings expertise of how to [speak with and teach children](#). That makes me trust his information is going to be accurate and also sets me up to expect that I will learn a lot from his book.

This is different from if I just jumped online and read the first article that popped up on an Internet search. Sometimes, especially if the information is crowdsourced, like a lot of people shared their information and pieced it together, like they do for Wikipedia, it is challenging to know who the author is and what his or her area of expertise might be. In that case, while I might learn a lot from that source, I might not give it as much credit as another verifiable and definitely identified as expert source.

When you go off to read today, take a few seconds to check out the background of the author of the book you're reading. You might want to even compare two texts with authors with different backgrounds. What do you notice about the depth of information? Or how the different authors treat the material?

And in general, as you read today and in the future, you'll want to be aware of the background and experience of the people whose pieces you are reading, whenever possible.



Partners planning their resources