

Editor's Note



Literacy Skills

Welcome to our annual issue focused on literacy and science education! Not only do we always get more manuscripts for this issue, but I also get the most requests for copies. Why? There are many probable reasons. Many elementary teachers are more comfortable with teaching literacy so they look for a way to use their strengths.

No Child Left Behind legislation has put the spotlight on literacy in the elementary grades, sometimes pushing science (and social studies and PE and art) out of the busy day. Teaching science with literacy skills may be one way to convey important science skills while still teaching and reinforcing literacy.

Teaching literacy skills with science is more than just convenient: It mimics the work of scientists. The article, “Scientific Journals: A Creative Assessment Tool” (p. 22), provides multiple writing genres in which students write about science for an authentic audience. Writing requires many skills—that you know the content and can use the multiple skills of written self-expression to communicate. From punctuation to word choice, students need these skills to express their science learning.

Reading and writing in science can also help students make connections. In “Connections Charts and Book Talk Groups” (p. 27), the authors lead students through a process of thinking about what they know (or think they know), where they learned it, and how to extend it. Students make connections, which is critical to their understanding of the content and to their understanding of their world.

“The P.O.E.T.R.Y of Science” (p. 36), describes how to scaffold a science journal and how to assess it. Journals can become clogged with predictions, data, and conclusions, which may leave teachers with a stack of notebooks about which she must make judgments. How do you know what to do with them? In this article, you will see how to move from what students predict based on preknowledge to how they change those ideas and move into new questions.

Trade books are popular tools for teachers to use to motivate readers. But they can be tricky to use—how do you assess the science? How does one weave it into an inquiry-based curriculum? “The Science and Literacy Framework”

(p. 42) provides advice and strategies for teachers to use with trade books. In “Becoming a Spider Scientist” (p. 32), students draw inspiration from a famous book, analyze the text for accuracies and inaccuracies, and then use the book to spring into field biology. In a similar way, “Integration With Integrity” (p. 46) shows how to structure an insect unit that includes trade books, drawing, and sculpture.

Despite these good examples of how to use trade books effectively in the classroom, I still get nervous when I see an emphasis on reading trade books in science. They can be very effective, but there are some that have inadequate, misleading, or even bad science. Even good ones can have less than positive effects. So, it’s essential that teachers be aware of these challenges and know how to handle them. This issue, we tackle some of these challenges in regular columns.

One of the rationales for teaching literacy and science together is to save time. In *Methods and Strategies* (“Making Time For Science,” p. 50), columnist Joanne Olson shows how integration and other techniques can save time and strengthen learning.

In *Perspectives* (“Children’s Literature and the Science Classroom,” p. 54), columnist Sandra Abell describes some of the pitfalls of using trade books in the classroom and what the teacher can do to avoid potential problems. In *Science Shorts* (“Encouraging Visual Literacy,” p. 56), columnists Tracy Coskie and Kimberly Davis remind us that not all literacy is in narrative form. Their column tackles the essential but often overlooked task of teaching elementary students how to read and interpret visual images, an important literacy skill.

Our science and literacy issue is always one of the most popular issues of the year, and we’re betting that this jam-packed issue will be no exception. We’re ready for the requests for copies!

Chris Thana

Coming Next Issue

The December issue is in a State(s)—of Matter that is! Next issue, we look at ways to introduce elementary students to the idea of matter and its forms.

- The Ultimate Fizz
- What’s the Matter With Teaching Children About Matter?
- Water in Disguise