

Resource

The Nonfiction Studies Program

When we opened KIPP Infinity Middle School in 2005, we made nonfiction a priority. In addition to a dedicated, daily reading class, we built in a daily nonfiction class for fifth and sixth graders.

The nonfiction studies program at KIPP Infinity is a separate class. We intentionally weave nonfiction texts into our shared, guided, and choice reading programs. Shared, guided, and choice reading occurs during the English, or reading, blocks. During nonfiction studies class, students do in-depth research about a science or history state standard. After doing the research, they put together a research project. The research cycle, from finding information about their topic all the way to presenting the information, is repeated monthly at KIPP Infinity.

First, students learn content. For a couple weeks, immerse them in a unit such as “The Colonies.” After they have enough background knowledge about the colonies, students start the research cycle. They choose a topic of inquiry within the colonies, and research that topic in depth. For instance, they might research the role women played during colonial times. Or they might research Georgian colonies.

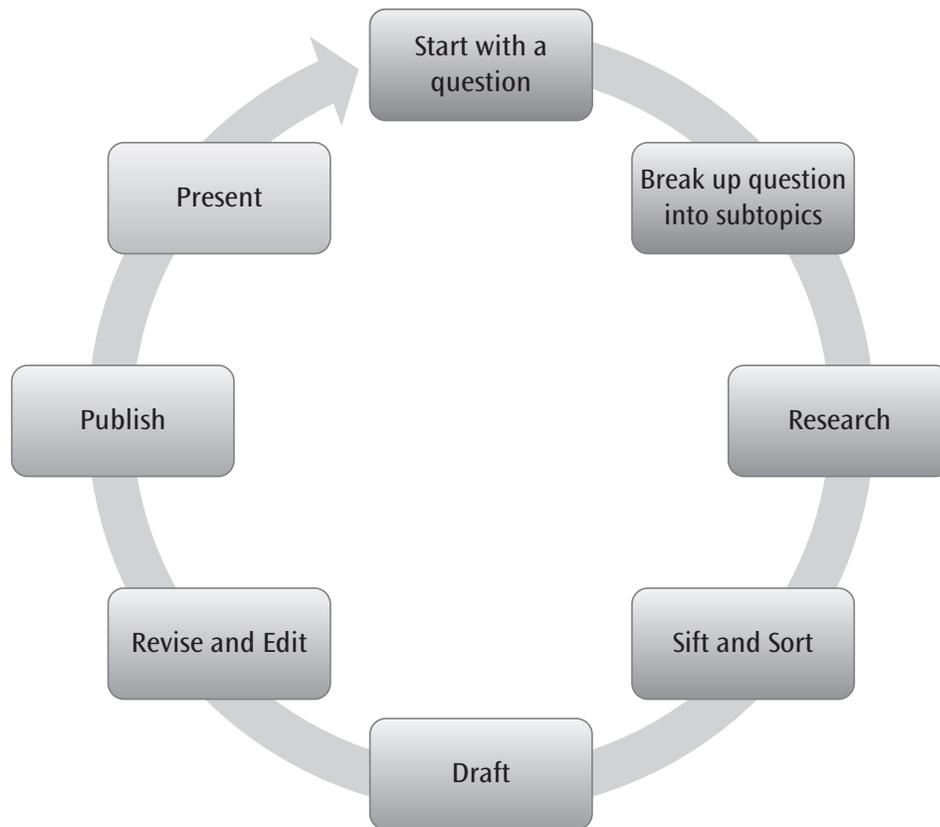


Figure R.2 The Research Cycle

Then students start the research cycle. From start to finish, the cycle takes about three weeks. I recommend doing the same cycle over and over until students are able to independently research something for homework. Because if we want our students to be college ready, then being able to do an independent research project is essential. Students won't master the cycle until they've done it many times.

In addition to the research cycle, we explicitly model strategies that good nonfiction readers use. Typically, nonfiction readers read for information.

Reading to Get Information

- Read with a question in mind.
- Skim and scan to find an answer.

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- Navigate the text by looking at text features, pictures, and diagrams.
 - Read to get the gist.
 - Use the table of contents and index to find answers to your questions.
 - Ask questions as you read.
 - Make text-to-text connections as you read to draw connections for your research.
 - Read with a purpose (to answer your question).
 - Visualize to remember.
 - Use existing knowledge as you read.
 - Recognize whether your reciting or off task voice is on, and turn on your conversation voice.
 - Stop, reread, and read on if you are confused.
 - Find reliable websites.
 - Do a key word Internet search.

I love this class because it's all about love of learning. Kids have anywhere from 10 to 12 opportunities over the course of the school year to independently read and research something that they are passionate about, to have an opportunity to learn something more, to fuel that academic interest in learning for learning's sake. The creativity they are afforded in class inspires them to communicate their new learning in a way that feels personal and powerful.

—Allison, School Leader, KIPP Infinity

We also teach excellent note-taking skills, as readers read for information, so they can use their notes as research.

Note-Taking

- Keep bibliography up to date as you gather facts
- Question facts as you write them down
- Paraphrase, don't plagiarize
- Directly cite
- So what? Write down why the facts are important.

- Isolate important facts from fun facts
- Identify when sources have conflicting information
- Use symbols (+, →, . . . , −)
- Look up unknown words — don't copy them down
- Use bullet points neatly
- Include details, examples, and anecdotes to support facts