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Text Sets: Making Connections Between and Across Books

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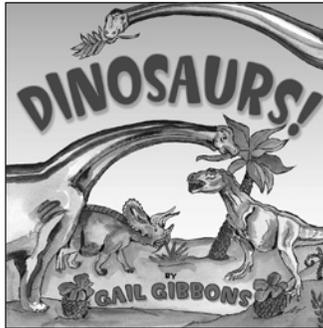
Linking books together has become a popular trend in many classrooms. More and more teachers are creating text sets—collections of books grouped around a similar topic, theme, genre, or author. Text sets allow readers to organize responses in a way that helps them notice patterns, make literary connections, and develop insights across books (Lehman, 2007).

Teachers find that there are many benefits to using text sets with their students. Including a range of levels in a book collection allows more students to experience the topics and themes of study. As students read multiple related texts, their achievement often increases (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997), and they often engage in evaluating the importance, credibility, and relevance of the individual texts read (Kucan, Lapp, Flood, & Fisher, 2007). The reading of similar texts reinforces vocabulary and concept development for struggling readers and English language learners (Young & Hadaway, 2006). Possible text sets are limited only by the teacher's imagination, and those we have collected provide a starting place for creative-minded teachers. We share a few text set possibilities below, beginning with one that focuses on the works of one author and then concluding with a text set of fairy tales.

Author Studies

Author studies allow students to experience multiple books by a single author while they learn about the author's craft. Gail Gibbons, a popular nonfiction author, skillfully combines simple, informative text and vivid illustrations to make a variety of topics accessible to children in the early grades. Her book *Dinosaurs* (2008) includes the most up-to-date information about these creatures that many children and adults find so intriguing. *Coral Reefs* (2007) informs young

readers about how the reefs are formed and grow, how the different types vary from one another, and how many different plants and animals live in these fascinating habitats.



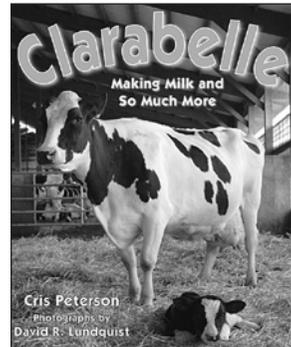
Dinosaurs! Text copyright © 2008 by Gail Gibbons.

Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Holiday House, New York, NY.

Gibbons takes the reader on a journey light-years away in *Galaxies, Galaxies!* (2007) teaching them that the Milky Way Galaxy is not the only galaxy in the universe. Her updated edition of *The Planets* (2008) includes Pluto's new status as a Dwarf Planet. *Snakes* (2007) another book on a topic of great interest to children, identifies the characteristics and habitats of these cold-blooded creatures. Students learn fascinating facts of how they live, give birth, and eat. Her latest book, *Corn* (2008), provides details about corn's role in history from the American Indians and the pilgrims, to the current interest in using corn to produce ethanol. Teachers and children alike are on the lookout to see what Gail Gibbons' next book will address.

Farming and Ranching

If you are interested in reading about life on America's farms and ranches and learning about these jobs, you will enjoy this text set. Students often think of farming in terms of 19th century life. Today's non-fiction books enable children who have never stepped on a farm or ranch to gain insight into farming today. *Clarabelle: Making Milk and So Much More* (2007) by Cris Peterson highlights Peterson's large dairy operation while explaining the latest technology used

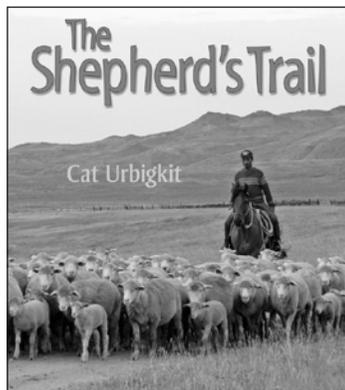


by today's dairy farmers, including how the manure is used to generate electricity, fertilizer, and bedding for the cows. Students are fascinated by such facts as the comparison between the amount of time it takes for a child to eat a bowl of cereal and the fact that one cow provides enough milk to fill another 160 bowls during that same amount of time. This book is ideal for reading aloud.

Teachers will also want to check out the following other farm and ranch books. Peterson's (2006) *Fantastic Farm Machines* presents the giant-sized machinery used on today's farms. Cat Urbigkit's *A Young Shepherd* (2006), *Cattle Kids* (2007), and *The Shepherd's Trail* (2008) take young readers into ranching country where contemporary life sometimes resembles life in the Old West.

Parent's Livelihoods

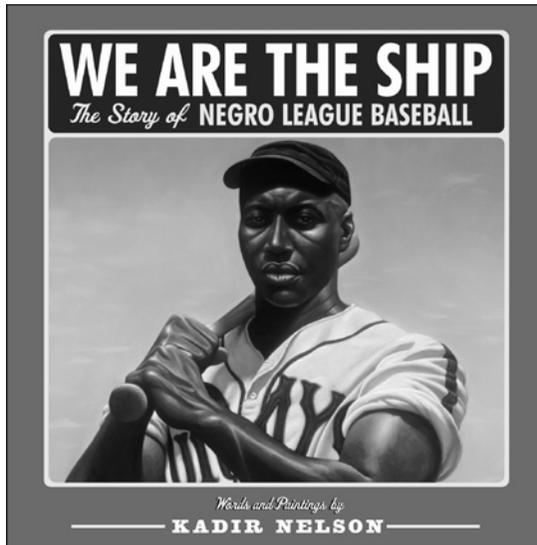
The Shepherd's Trail (Urbigkit, 2008) would work equally well in a text set on around parents' livelihoods. Amazing rural settings filled with photographs of enormous herds of sheep follow the route taken by today's shepherds who must bring their sheep to good grazing lands and protect them from intruders. Readers even watch sheep being sheared in an assembly line. The simple but colorful *Drive* (Clement, 2008) fills children's need to know more about the world of work. Drenched in rich primary colors, *Drive* depicts a day in the life of a truck driver who must rise early in the morning while the rest of the world is slumbering, and head off to his job in a big rig. Readers will enjoy following his route and then seeing him return home to spend time with his son.



The Shepherd's Trail. Text copyright © 2008 by Cat Urbigkit.
Used by permission of the publisher Boyds Mills Press, Honesdale, PA.

Negro Baseball League

Baseball is a topic that has long fascinated young readers, and there are several wonderful titles about the sport that has been dubbed America's favorite pastime. Perhaps the most glorious and gorgeous one is Kadir Nelson's stunning *We Are the Ship: the Story of Negro League Baseball* (2008). In this retrospective, Nelson takes readers to a time when catcher Raleigh "Biz" Mackey had to strap on wood pieces to protect his limbs from players sliding into home plate. Just about anything was acceptable during those early days of baseball, and players had to be ready to deal with cheating and violence from the opposing team. Through a series of chapters organized as innings and one headed "Extra Innings," Nelson describes the birth of the Negro League under the tutelage of Andrew "Rube" Foster as well as tells of the demise of the league. Readers also learn the stories behind Bud Fowler, the first Negro to play professional ball. While Nelson describes the rise of baseballers Jackie Robinson and Satchel Paige, whose acceptance into the white world of baseball foretold the demise of the Negro league, there is abundant new material here. A nostalgic but bittersweet quality lingers around the stories Nelson shares, and the reader is aware that while something was gained through the integration of baseball, something was also lost.



We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball.

Text copyright © 2008 by Kadir Nelson.

Used by permission of the publisher Jump at the Sun/Hyperion, New York, NY.

Nelson's use of first person plural draws the reader into the text, serving notice that "we" were all a part of the very human story of baseball and its heroes. The paintings that cover the book's pages simply pulse with life and strength, and the reader wouldn't be surprised to find a player stepping from the page and hitting one out of the ballpark. Muscles ripple across the men's arms, and steely eyes glare out at the reader in reminiscence of how batters stepped up to the plate and faced off against tough pitchers.

Interested baseball fans will also want to examine nonfiction picture books *Stealing home: Jackie Robinson: Against the Odds* (Burleigh, 2007), *Campy: The Story of Roy Campanella* (Adler, 2007), *Jackie Robinson: Hero of Baseball* (Ford, 2006), and the particularly inviting *Heroes of the Negro Leagues* (Morelli, 2007). Readers who want to learn about how one Native American faced down racism in baseball might want to begin with *Louis Sockalexis: Native American Baseball Pioneer* (Wise, 2007).

Sports

Sports of a different sort are at the heart of several delightful narratives, three for young adults and two for middle grade readers. There's not a reluctant reader out there who won't love the appealing and aptly named *Dairy Queen* (Murdock, 2006) and its sequel *The Off-Season* (Murdock, 2007). They follow the adventures of Wisconsin farmer's daughter DJ Schwenk whose family is so football-oriented that even their dairy cattle are named after famous gridiron heroes. After a romance blossoms between DJ and Brian, the rival high school's quarterback, and DJ finds acceptance on her own high school football team, the sequel shows a maturing DJ, beginning to wonder why Brian seems inclined to keep their relationship such a secret. Injuries, her own and a life-changing one for her older brother, come to the forefront of the storyline, and force DJ to mature even more than in the first book. Readers will fall in love with the engaging, individualist DJ and root for her to find contentment.

Older readers will also relish the struggles of poor little rich girl Syrah Cheng in *Girl Overboard* (Headley, 2008). The daughter of a privileged upbringing, Syrah dreams of a lucrative contract with a snowboard company and tries to live up to her parents' expectations. A knee injury and broken heart have her sidelined and unable to compete at the level she had before the injury. Lonely and confused, Syrah begins looking for ways to make a difference in the world around her. Touched by the plight of a new friend's sister's need for a donor, she cobbles together a snowboarding fundraiser, proving herself to both herself and her parents.

In *The Aurora County All-Stars* (Wiles, 2007), baseball, literacy, and a pageant all tangle up during one impossibly complicated summer. House Jackson is determined to play baseball this year. Unfortunately, his arm was injured by Frances Shotz, who is in charge of a pageant that threatens to derail the baseball game. The book provides insight into the South and is filled with literary references.

L. D. Harkrader's (2005) *Airball: My Life in Briefs* is a fast-paced and funny book about an unlikely and untalented group of eighth graders who rally together to become a great basketball team. The book is almost a parody of "The Emperor's New Clothes" as their coach uses an unlikely strategy that leads to their success—practicing in their underwear. Beyond the basketball story, the book has a more serious thread as the protagonist, Kirby Nickel, seeks to determine who his father is.

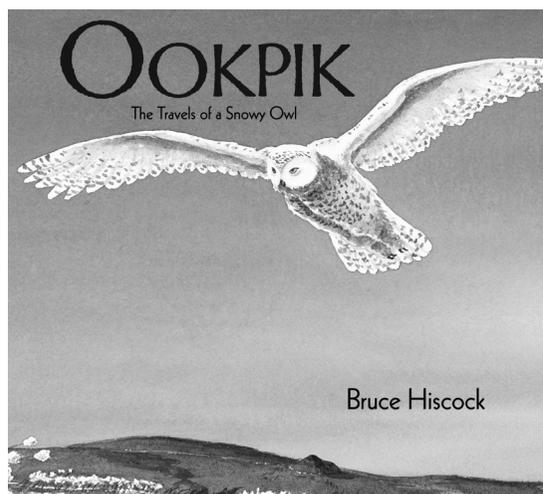
War

The seemingly ever-present threat of war is at the heart of several books sure to provoke lively classroom discussions. Readers will identify with India Moody, the heroine of *Red Moon at Sharpsburg* (Wells, 2007), as she prepares for a college education, something almost unheard of for females during the Civil War era, and studies under the tutelage of neighbor Emory Trimble. India watches as the war inexorably makes its way toward her family's Shenandoah home, and she sees her world completely changed by its violence. Wells carefully shows many perspectives on the war and paints vivid, moving portraits of the medical practices of the day as well as the battle scenes.

The Brothers' War: Civil War Voices in Verse (Lewis, 2007) provides additional perspectives on the Civil War through poetry and stunning photographs of the toll taken on the nation by that war. Also of interest will be *Why War Is Never a Good Idea* (Walker, 2007), a powerful poem that describes the destruction of war. Accompanied by illustrations by Stefano Vitale, the poem relates war's impact on the environment and reminds the reader that war has been with us for a very long time.

Filled with more than 50 poems and powerful illustrations by Stephen Alcorn, *America at War: Poems* (Hopkins, 2008) traces war, starting from the Revolutionary War all the way through the war in Iraq. The collection strikes a balance between paying tribute to those who have lost their lives and revealing the raw emotions war inspires in all of us. Hopkins has gathered poems by Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, and e. e. cummings as well as lines penned by soldiers in the line of conflict. Readers are sure to ponder both the costs and the benefits of our nation's conflicts.

The Natural World

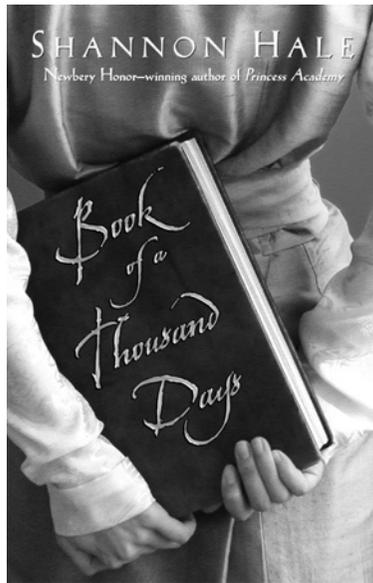


Ookpik: The Travels of a Snowy Owl. Text copyright © 2008 Bruce Hiscock.
Used by permission of the publisher Boyd's Mills Press, Honesdale, PA.

Young readers love the natural world, and a treasure trove of books designed to take them on flights of fancy await their eager eyes. Especially appealing for younger readers is *Ookpik: The Travels of a Snowy Owl* (Hiscock, 2008). Nurtured by his parents in the Arctic, Ookpik must leave home and travel south in search of food as the days grow short, and food is scarce. When he lands in the United States, onlookers leave him alone, respectfully watching from a distance. Hiscock's lovely drawings and engaging text will have readers sighing in pleasure and searching the sky for a snowy owl. Readers intrigued by this story may also enjoy *City Hawk: The Story of Pale Male* (McCarthy, 2007), *The Tale of Pale Male: A True Story* (Winter, 2007), and *Pale Male: Citizen Hawk of New York City* (Schulman, 2008). *Pale Male: Citizen Hawk of New York City* contains gorgeous endpapers and exciting cityscapes that vividly show the unlikely sojourn of a red-tailed hawk in America's largest city. Readers of all ages will be intrigued by this magical account of a bird, soaring high above the city, who chooses to make its nest above Central Park.

Fairy Tales

Magic of a very different sort awaits readers in several modern versions of the archetypal fairy tales. Young readers will adore the rhyming story *Waking Beauty* (Wilcox, 2008), the story of a prince who, while charming and well-meaning, doesn't listen to advice very well, and ends up pouring water on his sleeping princess and shooting her from a cannon. They'll also want to read *Falling for Rapunzel* (Wilcox, 2007) and the lovely *The Princess and the Pea* (Cech, 2007), which are retellings of the familiar fairy tales.



Book of a Thousand Days. Text copyright © 2007 by Shannon Hale.

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Older readers will fall in love with lady's maid Dashti in *Book of a Thousand Days* (Hale, 2007), an adaptation of the little-known Grimm's tale "Maid Maleen." Lady Saran refuses to marry the man chosen by her father and is consequently shut in a tower for seven years with her maid, Dashti. The maid must rise to the occasion as her mistress secretly gobbles the food stores and risks their lives. Through Dashti's eyes, readers experience the horrors of Lord Khasar and the growing love between commoner Dashti and Tegus as described in the maid's thought book. Hale's lyrical language sweeps her readers off their feet and forcing them to spend sleepless nights reading this memorable book.

Into the Woods (Gardner, 2006) offers middle grade readers appealing sisters in the forms of Any, who speaks before she can walk, Aurora, who is in charge of the household, and Storm, the tempestuous heroine who takes responsibility when the children are left on their own, and the wolves begin to surround their doors. A delightful hodgepodge featuring many favorite fairy tales including “Red Riding Hood,” “The Pied Piper,” “Rapunzel,” “Jack and the Bean Stalk,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and “The Twelve Brothers,” will prompt readers to read the original stories in order to find similarities and differences between Gardner’s rendition and the Grimms’. Readers are sure to begin creating their own fairy tale text sets to share with friends.

Books Included in Our Text Sets

Fairy Tales

- Cech, J. (2007). *The princess and the pea*. Illustrated by B. Oberdieck. New York: Sterling. Grades 1-3.
- Gardner, L. (2006). *Into the woods*. Illustrated by M. Grey. New York: David Fickling/Random House Children’s Books. Grades 5-8.
- Hale, S. (2007). *Book of a thousand days*. New York: Bloomsbury. Grades 7-12.
- Wilcox, L. (2007). *Falling for Rapunzel*. Illustrated by L. Monks. New York: Putnam. Grades 1-3.
- Wilcox, D. (2008). *Waking Beauty*. Illustrated by L. Monks. New York: Putnam. Grades 1-3.

Farming & Ranching

- Peterson, C. (2006). *Fantastic farm machines*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press. Grades K-3.
- Peterson, C. (2007). *Clarabelle: Making milk and so much more*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press. Grades K-3.
- Urbigkit, C. (2006). *A young shepherd*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press. Grades 1-3.
- Urbigkit, C. (2007). *Cattle kids*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press. Grades 1-3.
- Urbigkit, C. (2008). *The shepherd’s trail*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press. Grades 1-3.

Gail Gibbons

- Gibbons, G. (2007). *Coral reefs*. New York: Holiday House. Grades 1-4.
- Gibbons, G. (2007). *Galaxies, galaxies!* New York: Holiday House. Grades 1-4.
- Gibbons, G. (2007). *Snakes*. New York: Holiday House. Grades K-3.
- Gibbons, G. (2008). *Corn*. New York: Holiday House. Grades 1-4.
- Gibbons, G. (2008). *Dinosaurs*. New York: Holiday House. Grades K-3.
- Gibbons, G. (2008). *The planets*. New York: Holiday House. Grades K-3.

The Natural World

- Hiscock, B. (2008). *Ookpik: The travels of a snowy owl*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press. Grades 1-3.
- McCarthy, M. (2007). *City hawk: The story of Pale Male*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Grades 1-4.
- Schuman, J. (2008). *Pale Male: Citizen hawk of New York City*. Knopf Books for Young Readers. Grades 1-4.
- Winter, J. (2007). *The tale of Pale Male: A true story*. Harcourt Children's Books. Grades 1-4.

Negro Baseball League

- Adler, D. (2007). *Campy: The story of Roy Campanella*. Illustrated by G. C. James. New York: Viking. Grades 1-3.
- Burleigh, R. (2007). *Stealing home: Jackie Robinson: Against the odds*. Illustrated by Mike Wimmer. New York: Simon & Schuster. Grades 1-3.
- Ford, C. T. (2006). *Jackie Robinson: Hero of baseball*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow. Grades 2-4.
- Morelli, J. (2007). *Heroes of the Negro leagues*. New York: Harry Abrams. Grades 4-8.
- Nelson, K. (2008). *We are the ship: The story of Negro league baseball*. New York: Hyperion. Grades 5-9.
- Wise, B. (2007). *Louis Sockalexis: Native American baseball pioneer*. Illustrated by Bill Farnsworth. New York: Lee & Low Books. Grades 1-3.

Sports

- Harkrader, L. D. (2005). *Airball: My life in briefs*. New York: Roaring Brook Press. Grades 4-8.
- Headley, J. C. (2008). *Girl overboard*. New York: Little, Brown. Grades 9-12.
- Murdock, C. (2006). *Dairy queen*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Grades 9-12.
- Murdock, C. (2007). *The Off-season*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Grades 9-12.
- Wiles, D. (2007). *The Aurora county All-Stars*. New York: Harcourt Children's Books.

War

- Hopkins, L.B. (2008). *America at war: Poems*. Illustrated by S. Alcorn. New York: Margaret K. McElderry/Simon & Schuster. Grades 4-8.
- Lewis, J. P. (2007). *The brothers' war: Civil War voices in verse*. Washington, DC: National Geographic. Grades 4-7.
- Walker, A. (2007). *Why war is never a good idea*. Illustrated by S. Vitale. New York: HarperCollins. Grades 1-5.
- Wells, R. (2007). *Red moon at Sharpsburg*. New York: Viking. Grades 6-9.

Working Parents

- Clement, N. (2008). *Drive*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press. Grades 1-3.
- Urbigkit, C. (2008). *The shepherd's trail*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press. Grades 1-3.

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- Guthrie, J. T., & Wigfield, A. (Eds.). (1997). *Reading engagement: Motivating readers through integrated instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Kucan, L., Lapp, D., Flood, J., & Fisher, D. (2007). Instructional resources in the classroom: Deepening understanding through interactions with multiple texts and multiple media. In L. B. Gambrell, L.M. Morrow, & M. Pressley (eds.), *Best practices in literacy instruction* (pp. 285-32). New York: Guilford Press.
- Lehman, B. (2007). *Children's literature and learning: Literary study across the curriculum*. New York: Teachers College Press.

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