From *The Popcorn Book* to Popcorn! Multigenre Children's Books

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Multigenre texts are a recent trend in children's books. These types of books can enhance students' comprehension and provide models of various types of writing genres. They can be used in differentiating instruction and increasing fluency when transformed into readers' theater texts. Many examples of multigenre books are provided in this article.
It all started with *The Popcorn Book* (dePaola, 1978). This two-level book featured a story about a boy preparing popcorn, while also sharing numerous facts about popcorn and instructions for making popcorn. Then *The Magic School Bus* books by Joanna Cole and Bruce Degen told stories of Ms. Frizzle's outrageous field trips within the context of numerous facts about various science topics.

The number of books written in more than just one genre of writing has recently increased. For the purposes of this article they will be referred to as multigenre books. These multigenre books have a growing audience. “As writers and illustrators continue to expand and experiment with the traditional boundaries of genre, and as teachers and students explore the roles of genre as both readers and writers, we are likely to see those clearly defined lines become even more blurred over the next several years” (Laminack & Bell, 2004, p. 248).

Reading multigenre books, along with interactive class strategies, can certainly boost students’ comprehension and enjoyment of various topics (Camp, 2000). In addition, multigenre books model for students the types of multigenre writing they might try. Instead of writing a report on Sacajawea, for instance, Allen (2001) describes how a 5th grader wrote not only a traditional report about her, but also a free verse poem, an acrostic poem, a repetitive poem, a limerick, an obituary, a Lewis and Clark poster, a newspaper article, simulated character journal entries, and a fictional story. In so doing, this student really came to know Sacajawea in a deeper way, rather than just reporting facts about her life. Students could be encouraged to do this type of multigenre writing as well about a topic of interest to them. An example of Kathy’s writing in many genres about corn is included in the appendix as an example of this.

Reading multigenre books aloud can be an opportunity in differentiation. The text of the book could be turned into a readers’ theater script, with struggling readers reading the less difficult text and more fluent readers reading the more technical vocabulary contained in the informational text.

There are a variety of children’s books recently written in multigenre formats. The books included in the following list could serve
as models of multigenre writing and could be used for differentiated reading as well. As readers and writers read and examine such texts, the books can serve as excellent models that may inspire students to try writing in a multigenre format also.

**Concept Books with Facts at the Back of the Book**

The book *Feathers for Lunch* (Ehlert, 1990) is about birds features pictures of birds tempting a cat with facts about each bird at the back of the book. This book easily transforms itself into a readers’ theater script. The facts about each bird could be inserted into the text as each bird is revealed in the illustrated pages.

*Readers’ Theater Example*

The text says: “He’s looking for lunch, something new” on the page that shows a robin. A readers’ theater script might look like this, including the facts about the robin included at the back of the book:

**Narrator:** He’s looking for lunch, something new.

**Robin:** Don’t eat me! I’m an American Robin. I live throughout the United States and Canada and I eat insects, earthworms, snails, grubs, berries, and seeds.

Readers are asked to guess which animal each animal part belongs to, and how it is used in Jenkins’ and Page’s (2003) book *What do you do With a Tail Like This?* The different animal parts include nose, ears, tail, eyes, mouth, and feet. On each page, the question is asked, such as “How are these noses used?” and the following page gives the answers. The authors include detailed information on each animal shown in the book, at the end. This was a Caldecott Honor Book in 2004.
Oppenheim's (1995) *Have you Seen Trees?* is a celebration of various trees displayed in this concept book with facts about each tree at the end of the book. This book could also be used as a readers' theater script by inserting the facts listed in the back of the book within the text of the book.

**Fictional Texts with Facts Inserted**

In *My Teacher Likes to Say* by Brennan-Nelson (2004), confusing expressions spoken by teachers and other adults are depicted as children imagine them. One example is an illustration of a child and a stuffed animal, both with buttons covering their lips, and the expression "Please button your lip."

Factual information for further discussion is included on each page; on the "button your lip" page, the author offers information on the evolution of buttons, zippers, and Velcro in our society. Written in rhyme, this book is fun and informative.

In a series of books: *Mouse and Mole and the All-Weather Train Ride* (Cushman, 1996); *Mouse and Mole and the Christmas Walk* (Cushman, 1996); *Mouse and Mole and the Year-Round Garden* (Cushman, 1994); the top of the page features a story about Mouse and Mole, while the bottom part of the page is a fact box about something in the story. For instance in the weather book, tornados, hurricanes, etc. are explained in the fact box at the bottom of the page.

In *Miss Alaineus: A Vocabulary Disaster* (Frasier, 2000), a fifth-grade girl, working hard to learn new vocabulary words for a class assignment, learns that "miscellaneous" is a collection of unrelated objects, not a woman named "Miss Alaineus." This humorous book is a gold mine for interesting vocabulary words placed throughout the story. Along the page margins are alliterative sentences for each letter of the alphabet.

Keller (2000) authored a fantasy story about classroom of teeth includes many facts about teeth, a history of tooth care, and categories of teeth (incisors, canines, premolars, molars) titled *Open Wide: Tooth*
School Inside. This book is full of information within the context of a story. It also includes many plays on words and tooth puns.

The Scrambled States of America (Keller, 1998) posed the question what if the states all wanted to change places? Florida and Minnesota, Virginia and Idaho....if the states switched positions, how would they all like it? When it happens in this book, great fun ensues, as each of the states gets a rude awakening about climate conditions they are not ready for. The facts listed at the end of the book on each of the 50 states make this a great social studies reference book.

In I've Got Chicken Pox (Kelley, 1994) a young girl gets the chicken pox and deals with the itches while at the bottom of the page a new “Pox Fact” appears describing what the chicken pox are, how to relieve the itching, etc.

As a group of children take a field trip in outer space, they send postcards home and describe their travels along with facts about space. Facts are inserted in the post cards and in sidebar conversations between the characters in the illustrations in Leedy (1993) Postcards from Pluto: A Tour of the Solar System.

Logan’s (2004) The 5,000-Year-Old Puzzle is a fictional account of the archaeological expedition of 1924 to discover a secret tomb belonging to Queen Hetep-heres in Egypt is chronicled with journal entries on one side of the page and lots of information in the form of facts, photographs, and maps on the opposite page.

In O’Connor & Hartland (2003) The Perfect Puppy for Me! a young boy thinks about the puppy he would like to choose. He relates facts about dogs he learns throughout his process of selecting a puppy. Dog facts appear in the illustrations, as side bars, etc.

A fanciful tale by Priceman (1994) How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World takes the reader traveling the globe for just the right ingredients for making an apple pie: to Italy for semolina wheat for the flour, to France for farm-fresh eggs, to Sri Lanka for cinnamon, etc. A recipe for pie crust and apple filling is included at the end.
Activity Example:

The endpapers of this book's hardcover edition depict world maps, showing all of the continents in which apple pie's ingredients are grown and gathered. As a social studies project, students could complete small group research reports on the various continents, countries, and products. Map skills could also be incorporated into the lesson. An extension activity might be to investigate a different recipe's ingredients, and where in the world they can be found.

Informational Texts with Two or More Levels of Information

*Boston Pilgrims vs. Pittsburgh Pirates, 1903: The Story of the First Modern World Series* (Campbell, 2002) is an excellent account of old-time baseball, written at a level youngsters can understand, incorporating history and our national pastime. The book includes photos, illustrations of early baseball uniforms, bats, and gloves, as well as box scores of the first modern World Series. For further reference, the author has included a bibliography and an index.

*Wild About Dolphins!* (Davies, 2001) is everything you wanted to know about dolphins is offered in this enthusiastically-written book. Both younger and older readers will enjoy seeing the photos, diagrams, and maps of where to find dolphins. The author also includes lists of frequently asked questions, and the many different types of dolphins and descriptions of them.

*Don't Know Much About the Pilgrims* (Davis 2002) is one of a series in the "Don't Know Much About....." books. This book features factual details and illustrations depicting the life of pilgrims who sailed aboard the Mayflower. Written in question and answer format, the text includes sidebar facts, a recipe for "Pilgrim bread," old-fashioned terms for foods, and a map of present-day Plymouth Plantation Site.

As a young child and her mother visit the ocean, they appreciate the shells, flowers, and other aspects of the ocean in *Out of the Ocean*
The end of the book features "An Ocean Journal" where things mentioned in the book are described in detail with photographs and facts.

While telling the history of the apple and how it came to be in North America, Gibbons (2000) inserts "apple facts" within the colorfully illustrated pages in *Apples*. Some items include the anatomy of an apple, a diagram of an apple blossom, products we get from apples, common apples grown in America, how to plant and care for an apple tree, recipes, and a diagram of how an apple cider press works. This is a great book to use in the fall season.

*Grandma Elephant’s in Charge* (Jenkins, 2003) is a descriptive book about a family of elephants with added facts on each page about elephants written in a different type script. The end of the book gives more facts about elephants. Beautiful paintings give added tribute to this magnificent animal.

Laundau’s (2003) *Popcorn!* is a fact book about popcorn including not only the history of popcorn, but also nutritional information, directions for making popcorn in various ways, and recipes. Far from being just a nonfiction book about popcorn, the variety of genres within this one book give the context of popcorn’s popularity as a snack food. See Appendix for multigenre writings about corn and activities.

Each one of the books listed below is a great example of multigenre writing. The books give facts, timelines, charts, graphs, songs, histories, how to pieces, etc. about the topic. These books would serve as good resources for students interested in writing about their favorite topic in many different ways:

*The Life and Times of the Apple* (Micucci, 1992)
*The Life and Times of the Honeybee* (Micucci, 1997)
*The Life and Times of the Peanut* (Micucci, 1997)
*The Life and Times of the Ant* (Micucci, 2003)

All of Pallotta’s alphabet and counting books feature information for both younger and older elementary students. Illustrations are detailed
and authentic, and facts are presented in a humorous way. They are listed below:

- *The Underwater Alphabet Book* (Pallotta, 1991)
- *The Icky Bug Counting Book* (Pallotta, 1992)

Solheim's (1998) *It's Disgusting and We Ate It! True Food Facts from Around the World and Throughout History* offers a rollicking account of strange food customs, with humorous illustrations and captions accompanying the text. Information in the book shows poems about foods, recipes, world maps labeled with different food customs as the endpapers of the book. Chapter titles include “From mammoth meatballs to squirrel stew,” and “If you think that’s sick, look in your fridge.” For students who love “grossology,” this is the book for them.

One survivor on the Titanic was a small stuffed polar bear, the beloved toy of eight-year-old Douglas Spedden, whose wealthy family all arrived home safely after the disaster in Spedden’s (1994) *Polar the Titanic Bear: A True Story*. This book is written through the voice of Polar, the little bear who went along on an extensive European voyage with the Spedden family. The book has detailed watercolor illustrations, as well as actual photographs. In a scrapbook-like style, the author has also included authentic artifacts such as postcards, ticket stubs, luggage tags, and a telegram from the Speddens, informing their relatives that they were safe.

**Poetry with Facts**

*Too Many Rabbits and Other Fingerplays About Animals, Nature, Weather, and the Universe* (Cooper, 1995) features poems about animals, nature, weather, etc. are featured in this book. Included with the poem are actions to accompany the poem and a paragraph with facts about the topic.
In Franco’s & Salerno’s (2004) *Counting our way to the 100th day!: 100 poems*, one hundred poems are listed in the Table of Contents, one for each day leading up to the 100th day of school. The poems describe things that can be counted in groups of 100: crayons, leaves, dandelions, polka dots, pancakes, and other items which appeal to children. Franco and Salerno have interspersed fun facts into the poems and humorous illustrations. This book can be used for poetry and math.


In *Bugs*, Parker & Wright (1991) introduce couplets for a new bug on each page. The opposite page contains facts about the insect.

In Peters’ (2003) *Earthshake: Poems from the ground up* unusual poems about the earth include “Obituary for a Clam” and “Recipe for Granite” in this lively poetry book with information about each featured aspect of the earth in the endnotes of the book.

Poems about the moon each month of the year feature the names of the moon given by Native Americans and facts about the moon at the end of the book by Pollack (2001) in *When the moon is full: A lunar year*.

Scillian (2003) presents a rhyming text as an alphabet book in that each page reveals a word that is the focus for the global page *P is for passport:A world alphabet*. Side notes give lots of facts about that particular object around the world. For instance, the “B” page focuses on “bread” and give facts about bread around the world.

Quintessential African rhymes (much like Western Mother Goose rhymes) feature African animals and places Unobagha’s (2000) *Off to the sweet shores of Africa and other talking drum rhymes*. A very helpful illustrated glossary at the end of the book describes the words and concepts contained in the poems unique to West African culture.

**Travel Writing With Facts Books:**

Ted Lewin (2003) recounts many adventures he has had in this collection of travel writing with facts in his *Tooth and claw: Animal adventures in the wild.* Each chapter tells of his adventure, complete with photographs, maps, and author’s notes with facts.


**Other Books:**

As the Pledge of Allegiance is recited, many facts are given on each page about the meaning of the words, the history of the pledge, and the context of this famous pledge Martin’s & Sampson’s (2002) *I pledge allegiance.* Students might borrow this format as they write about the significance of other important national icons, such as “The National Anthem.”

**References**

Children’s Books


Franco, B. (2004). *Counting our way to the 100th day!: 100 poems by Betsy Franco and 100 pictures by Steven Salerno.* New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books.


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Appendix

Multigenre Writing About Corn

Acrostic Poem

C orn's four main parts are the cob, husk, silk, and the kernels.  
O riginally called Maize by Native Americans.  
R ed, blue, and purple kernels are in decorative Indian corn.  
N eeds hot summer, rich soil, and rain to grow.

Diamante

Corn
Chewy Golden
Sowing Sprouting Harvesting
Kernel Cob Pods Spheres
Planting Growing Gardening
Mushy Green
Peas

Limerick

There once was a baby ear of corn.  
Whose kernels weren't all battered and torn.  
Cut down from the stalk.  
Then fried in a wok.  
Family members are still forlorn and mourn.

The Important Thing About Corn...

The important thing about corn is that it grows on a cob.  
It is made up of kernels.  
It is ground up and made into cornmeal.  
It was introduced by Native Americans to Europeans.  
It is grown throughout the Midwest.  
But the important thing about corn is that it grows on a cob.
Alphabet Pyramid

C
Corn
Creamy corn
Creamy corn cultivates
Creamy corn cultivates circumspectly

Poem in Two Voices

A kernel is planted
A kernel then sprouts.
A stalk grows
then husks emerge.
emerge.
Cobs grow
within husks filled with
creamy kernels of corn.
of corn.
Watered
and fed
by the sun’s magic touch
by the sun’s magic touch
it ripens
and matures
it grows
until it is
knee high
by the 4th of July.
Then the sun takes its toll
and it dries out and fades
from green
to yellow
to tan
to brown.
Harvested in the fall.
Harvested in the fall.
How To Be Corn:

* Contain starch and sugar.
* Give energy to all who eat you.
* Grind yourself into cornmeal.
* Be sweet or popcorn to be eaten by humans.
* Be dent or flint to be eaten by animals.
* Sprout 10 days after being planted.
* Grow into a stalk.
* Develop leafy husks.
* Swell on a cob under the husks.
* Have a building covered with cobs called Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota.

Compliment/Question/Advice poem

Corn
You are so delectable and appealing!
What is your favorite tint of yellow?
Protect yourself from the sun’s unrelenting rays!

How to Make Corn on the Cob:

1. Purchase fresh corn on the cob at a summer roadside stand. (It is usually available from mid-July to the end of August.)

2. Take it home, keeping it cool. Don’t refrigerate it or it will dry out quickly.

3. Remove the husks, silk, and any other debris (smut or worms) at the trash can inside your garage or outside your house. This avoids corn silk and/or worms clinging to your kitchen counter or floor.

4. Bring a big pot of water to a rapid boil.

5. Wash off the ears of corn in the sink and add to boiling water.
6. Cover the pot and allow ears to boil for 5-7 minutes. If you prefer lighter colored kernels, boil for 5 minutes. If you prefer darker yellow kernels, boil for 7 minutes.

7. Remove the pot from the burner and carefully take the corn out with tongs. Wrap the ear of corn in a towel and squeeze to soak up any excess water from the ear of corn. This will keep your butter from becoming too runny or watery.

8. Put the corn on a large plate and then stick in the corn eaters on the ends of the ear.

9. Drench the corn in butter, salt, and pepper.

10. Eat the corn in a typewriter style manner. Be sure to have plenty of napkins on hand to soak up the butter that will inevitably drip down your chin.

11. Drink plenty of water to help with the digestion of the corn.

12. Enjoy and savor the carefree feeling of summer!