Integrating "Just-Right" Books into the Science Curriculum

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Guiding Questions

- As a teacher, what should I take into account when choosing trade books to supplement and enrich the science curriculum?
- How do students respond when granted access to a wide range of science trade books for their independent reading?

Literature Review

- **Science textbooks** may be difficult to comprehend or contain errors and misconceptions (Best et al., 2005; Donovan & Smolkin, 2001; Ford, 2006).
- **Trade book integration** can be used to supplement (not replace) the textbook. Teachers should be very selective when choosing books (Donovan & Smolkin, 2001; Ford, 2006; Olness, 2007; Sackes et al., 2009; Zemelman et al., 1998).
- **"Just-right" books:** Students self-select books that are manageable and interesting to read (Routman, 2003; Tompkins, 2003).

Methodology

Setting and Participants

- 4th grade classroom in rural Midwestern community
- 26 students: 10 boys, 16 girls

Data Collection

- Field notes
- Student book slips
- Final student questionnaires

Figure 1: Students self-selecting "just-right" trade books.

Figure 2: Students often made connections to their books during class discussions.

Findings & Interpretations

- **Teacher Selection:** Criteria should include content accuracy, student interest, readability, and unique text features
- **Student Interest:** Students thought trade books were "more detailed" and "more interesting" than science textbook
- **Student Resourcefulness:** Students referenced trade books during class discussions, and used the books as resources for class projects without any teacher prompting
- **Book Levels:** Generally more difficult to find science trade books for more advanced readers

Conclusion

Need *both* components for success:

1. Teachers who can select a wide range of high-quality trade books
2. Students who know how to pick "just-right" books

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