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

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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