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Inside Information: Taking Off with Nonfiction

by Lillian Heil

Nonfiction books help children explore the fascinating world we see around us, the microscopic world we can't see, the vast universe beyond our sight, the common ordinary things we live with every day, the distant and exotic places of the earth, the past, and even the future. To encourage a greater awareness and use of these exciting materials, Brigham Young University is bringing Beverly Kobrin, children's nonfiction book reviewer, and five authors, editors, and publishers, to the First International Conference on Nonfiction Children's Literature, June 18-22, 1984. These authorities will help parents, librarians, and teachers discover the fascinating possibilities and techniques for using nonfiction books to enhance the learning of children.

Beverly Kobrin teaches gifted children, conducts workshops, and publishes the Kobrin Letter, a review and recommendation of worthwhile nonfiction books for teachers and parents with suggested ways of using them in teaching. The information about dinosaur books reprinted by permission from the November 1983 Kobrin Letter illustrates her enthusiasm and some of her ideas for learning enrichment activities.

Between the Lines

Don't discard dated dinosaur books! Add new ones to your collection and use both kinds to help your children become better information detectives.

Dinosaur books are particularly valuable for research: So much new information has been uncovered, and so many new theories proposed, there is a noticeable difference between the old and new books. Scientists disagree on whether dinosaurs were warm- or cold-blooded, on why they disappeared from the earth; paleontologists recently discovered they'd put the wrong head on one species and that another may have nurtured its young.

Teach children to use many sources when doing research (I require three); to compare illustrations, diagrams and charts, noting copyright dates; to understand that what we "know" is constantly changing.

The dinosaur books in this issue are among the most worthwhile published in the two years since I last reviewed the literature.
Pair these new books with your older ones--remember the paleontologists' motto: We Dig Dinosaurs!

**Updating Dinosaurs**

Scientists once believed dinosaurs, like snakes and turtles, buried their eggs and left them to hatch unattended. In 1978, however, a high school teacher in Montana discovered the fossilized remains of 15 one or two-month old hadrosaurs (duck-billed dinosaurs). He found them in a nest in the midst of what appears to have been a "nursery." Subsequent nearby finds of an adult and other groups of hadrosaur young suggest this species may have cared for its young much as crocodiles do.

Russell Freedman's enlightening discussion of these 75-million year old Dinosaurs and Their Young (Holiday, 1983, $9.95), with drawings by Leslie Morrill, is a view of duckbills all readers will find fascinating.--ages 7 up.

A group of geese is called a gaggle. Would you call a group of hadrosaurs a haggle? Tyrannosaurus Rexes a rabble? What names can your children suggest for sets of saurians?

How do scientists know what dinosaurs looked like, what they ate, how long ago they lived, or how they moved about? Is there anything they don't know about The Monster Who Died (Coward, 1983, $9.95)? Why aren't there any alive today--or are there? Simultaneously satisfying and stimulating curiosity, Vicki Cobbs' discussion of paleontologists' detective work on fossilized evidence and the puzzles that were posed, answered and yet remain, is a first-rate addition to dinosaur literature for young readers and should be in every collection.

Ms. Cobbs' book is clearly written, sensibly limited in scope, gently paced, enhanced by Greg Wenzel's excellent black-and-white illustrations and beautifully designed.--ages 8 up.

Millicent E. Selsam's and Joyce Hunt's First Look at Dinosaurs (Walker, 1982, $7.95) is unique because it focuses upon the classification of dinosaurs. It introduces specific attributes that separate groups of saurians—the lizard-hipped from the bird-hipped, for example. Illustrated with Harriet Springer's accurate drawings, it will intrigue primary graders and help them note similarities and differences among and between the beasts.--ages 6 up.

Remember poetry--whatever you're studying. When it's dinosaurs, share "Archeopteryx" and "Tyrannosaur" from X. J. Kennedy's Did Adam Name The Vinegarroon? (Godine, 1982, $10.95). Heidi Johanna Selig's illustrations of the two prehistoric animals (and 24 other real and fabulous creatures) add to the enjoyment of Mr. Kennedy's witty, alphabetical bestiary.--ages 10 up.
Donald F. Glut's New Dinosaur Dictionary (Citadel, 1982, $19.95), is an excellent reference book for elementary through high school libraries, and the perfect special-occasion gift for any dinosaur devotee. Though addressed to adults it is a volume boys and girls will spend hours perusing. It has over 600 black-and-white illustrations and photographs, and a thoroughly updated, carefully researched alphabetical listing of every type dinosaur known to paleontologists. Make sure you read the fascinating acknowledgements, preface and introductions.—ages 12 up.

Do you want to go on a dinosaur hunt? Let's go ... and don't forget the Field Guide to Dinosaurs (Avon, 1983, $8.95). On the trail or 'hunting' from your armchair, this "first complete (paperback) guide to every dinosaur now known" is another essential for afficionados. It combines David Lambert's splendid writing with the equally outstanding visual presentation that is the London-based Diagram Group's hallmark. Precise, scale and life-size drawings, maps, silhouettes, cut-aways, and reconstructions, are arranged in six chapters to illustrate a compelling text that covers a description of what and where dinosaurs were, their evolution, their various forms, their world, how their remains are displayed, and the people who discovered them.—ages 9 up.

David Lambert's Dinosaurs (Watts, 1982, $7.90), Dinosaur World (Warwick, 1982, $8.90), and Mark Lambert's 50 Facts About Dinosaurs (Warwick, 1983, $8.90) typify the state of the art of children's nonfiction books originating in England: an abundance of excellent full-color illustrations appropriate for any age (particularly important for older, poorer readers); an imaginative layout, well-written text; and appendices that help children locate information. In short, they are attractive, interesting and useful.

Dinosaurs, an "Easy-Read Fact Book," includes information about smallest and largest saurians, and various theories on how they protected themselves, kept warm, moved about, and disappeared from earth.—ages 7 up.

Mr. Lambert's "Gateway Fact Book," is an overview of the Dinosaur(s) World, evolution and eventual demise. A final black-and-white "Do You Know?" section highlights various fossil discoveries and fossil hunters, among them Mary Anning, the first woman to earn her living collecting and selling fossils, and Othniel Marsh, who found more new kinds of fossil dinosaurs than anyone else.—ages 9 up.

If your youngsters choose to write a report on dinosaurs but can't find a focus, send them to Mark Lambert's book. Aside from being a fascinating assortment of questions and answers about dinosaurs and their contemporaries, his 50 Facts ... is an excellent source of ideas for research projects. Papers could
focus on dinosaur interaction, or compare prehistoric to 20th century creatures in relation to size, physical characteristics, diet, and habitat, for example.--ages 9 up.

The four authors scheduled for the conference have all written a number of excellent nonfiction juvenile books that can be used to help children learn more about the fascinating world we live in. Parents and teachers can use many of these to get children involved in imaginative and creative activities to enhance their learning. With Simon's Paper Airplane Book, for instance, a child could make all the airplanes, test them for the best design, or invent new designs. With Cobb's Fuzz Does It, a child can make paper with the lint from a clothes dryer. You may want to check out some of the following titles and use them with your children or, if possible, come to the conference to meet the authors.

Book Lists

Seymour Simon, a science teacher and author of juvenile books such as:

Animal Fact: Animal Fable
Body Sense - Body Nonsense
Danger from Below: Earthquakes
Einstein Anderson
Exploring Fields and Lots: Easy Science Projects
How to be a Space Scientist in Your Own Home
Long Journey from Space
Mirror Magic
Optical Illusion Book
The Paper Airplane Book
Pets in a Jar: Collecting and Caring for Small Animals
Secret Clocks: Time Senses of Living Things
A Look at the Night Sky

Vicki Cobb, a scientific researcher, teacher, television writer, television hostess, and author of juvenile books such as:

Bet You Can! Science Possibilities to Fool You
Bet You Can't! Science Impossibilities to Fool You
How to Really Fool Yourself: Illusions for All Your Senses
The Long and Short of Measurement
Science Experiments You Can Eat
The Secret Life of Hardware: A Science Experiment Book
The Secret Life of School Supplies
Truth on Trial: The Story of Galileo Galilei
Fuzz Does It
Gobs of Goo
Leonard E. Fisher, a painter, designer, illustrator and/or author of juvenile books such as:

Alphabet Art: Thirteen ABC's from Around the World
Boxes! Boxes! 1984
The Factories
The Hospitals
The Newspapers
Story at the Jetty 1981
Nineteenth Century America
The Railroads
Star Signs
The Seven Days of Creation
The Sports
Number Art
A Circle of Seasons

James Giblin, a book editor and author of the following juvenile books:

Chimney Sweeps
The Scarecrow Book
The Skyscraper Book

Peter Usborn, publisher of books such as:

Finding Out About Things That Go
Finding Out About Things at Home
Finding Out About How Things Began
Finding Out About How Machines Work
Time Traveller Books of Long Ago: Knights and Castles
Time Traveller: Pharoahs and Pyramids
Time Traveller: Rome and Romans
Cats and Kittens by Rose Hill
Understanding Cats by Gibb

For those who would like to attend the conference, a registration form is included. But whether or not you can attend the conference, nonfiction books provide a rich resource to the home and school when used imaginatively and creatively. Visit your library or bookstore today, and find out for yourself the fascination of today's nonfiction books for kids of all ages.