

**Nonfiction at the Fore of the Common Core
School Library Journal Leadership Summit 2012**

<i>Their Skeletons Speak: Kennewick Man and the Paleoamerican World</i> by Sally Walker	
Teaching Ideas © The Classroom Bookshelf Blog	
Panel Discussion Focus:	Teaching Ideas to Bring Back to Your District:
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2011, Katherine Kirkpatrick wrote a 60-page illustrated nonfiction picture book on Kennewick Man, illustrated by Emma Stevenson. Have students read the picture book, then dive into the more complex <i>Their Skeletons Speak</i>. How is the content represented in a similar fashion in both books? In what ways does the content differ? If you only read one book and not the other, what might you miss?
Balancing Primary & Secondary Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sally Walker coauthored the book with Doug Owsley as he was researching Kennewick Man. Use this book as a model for how writers capture the work of scientists. Contact a local university, research organization, or state agency and connect teams of students with teams of researchers. Have students read background secondary source materials on the topic as a foundation. Next, have the students shadow the research so that they have access to primary sources in some capacity. Finally, have students write-up the research to share with others in the form of a digital e-book. <i>Their Skeletons Speak</i> incorporates photographs as primary source evidence masterfully; make sure that your students' research does the same.
Balancing Multiple Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Their Skeletons Speak</i> draws from evidence obtained by a variety of different people over an almost twenty-year period, comparing and contrasting how different people, using different approaches and equipment, attempted to figure out Kennewick Man's origin. But Walker also uses research from other Paleoamericans to shed light on the research conducted on Kennewick Man. As students read this book, have them keep track of where the evidence comes from. Then, have them research another aspect of forensic anthropology, perhaps drawing from research on our human ancestors, but use one case study to shed light on another, as Walker does so deftly. For example, students can explore the Smithsonian Institute's digital exhibit "What Does It Mean to be Human?" In doing so, they can use research on the Lucy discovery from 1973 to better understand the recent discoveries in 2008 of Australopithecus Sideba. <p>Resource: http://humanorigins.si.edu/</p>
Stylistic Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walker & Owsley write about Paleoamericans that predate us by thousands of years with vivid narration and at times, a subtext of emotional connection. A particularly beautiful example of that is on page 25, when the Spirit Cave mummy is introduced. Narrative nonfiction often offers readers an opportunity to emotionally connect with the content. Have students identify other parts of <i>Their Skeletons Speak</i> with powerful imagery or that depict the humanity of the people whose skeletons are now the subject of study. Have students do their own research and writing on a scientific topic. Make sure they infuse their writing with voice, rich descriptions, and when appropriate, emotion.

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<i>Bomb: The Race to Build –and Steal—The World’s Most Dangerous Weapon</i> by Steve Sheinkin	
Panel Discussion Focus:	Teaching Ideas to Bring Back to Your District:
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While <i>Bomb</i> focuses on the race to build the first atomic bomb, as Sheinkin makes clear at the end of the book, developing atomic weapons is still big news. Have students use digital databases available through your state or district library to research current efforts by Iran to build an atomic weapon; previous attempts by the United Nations limit the proliferation of weapons; and the state of relations between India and Pakistan, two countries with atomic weapons. Who has the right to atomic weapons? Who doesn't? Who gets to decide? Why? Can the United Nations control the efforts of any one nation? Do students know what the US policy on atomic weapons is? You could have students write their own op-ed pieces, conduct a formal debate on the issue, or use what they have learned to try and shape public policy by meeting with district staff from the office of your Member of Congress or Senator.
Balancing Primary & Secondary Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To research this book, Sheinkin had to explore a great range of primary and secondary source material, from full-length books on the making of the bomb to testimony from trials and hearings to declassified FBI interview. The fast-paced, engaging narrative depends on the facts and context provided by the secondary source material, but also on the vividness of the quotes from the primary source material. Even his Source Notes reveal this careful layering. They are presented in the following categories: Bomb Race Sources, Character Sources, and Primary Sources. Have your students research an event from history, and require them to use the format that Sheinkin uses in his Source Notes, so that they understand they need to represent their human subjects in a multidimensional way.
Balancing Multiple Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the jacket flap, Sheinkin refers to himself as a “story detective.” Doing research often feels like detective work, which is one way to get students excited about engaging in real world explorations. Within <i>Bomb</i>, Sheinkin specifically balances three narrative strands: America’s efforts to build the bomb, America’s efforts to impede the German’s attempts to build the bomb, and the Soviet’s efforts to steal the bomb research from the Americans or the Germans. Have your students become story detectives, researching another aspect of World War II from a variety of perspectives to give an international, interconnected context. Students could examine specific events related to the Holocaust, or the role of women in England, the US, and the Soviet Union during the war.
Stylistic Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Bomb</i> reads like an action movie or a detective story. Even though it is over 200 pages, the short chapters, each no longer than 6-7 pages, keep the narrative moving. So does the tension! Why, as readers, as we experiencing such tension, when we mostly know how it turns out? Have your students explore how the chapters start and close. How are mood shifts and cliffhangers used effectively to propel the narrative?

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<i>Those Rebels Tom and John</i> by Barbara Kerley, illustrated by Edwin Fotheringham	
Panel Discussion Focus:	Teaching Ideas to Bring Back Your District:
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What can we learn about political partnerships and disagreements in the past that can help us diminish the vitriol in Washington? Students can read <i>Those Rebels Tom and John</i> as well as the 2011 <i>Worst of Friends: Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and the True Story of an American Feud</i>, written by Suzanne Tripp Jurmain and illustrated by Larry Day. Younger students can explore the mutual trust and admiration in their political partnership, despite their differences, and how the two former presidents were able to forgive one another and rekindle their relationship. For middle school students, these books can be the launching point for explorations of other political friendships, across party lines and national boundaries, such as the one between Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush.
Balancing Primary & Secondary Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For tips on writing excellent biographies, go to Barbara Kerley's webpage at: http://www.barbarakerley.com/Site/Writing_an_Extraordinary_Biography.html. She takes young writers step-by-step through the process, including the process of using primary sources as much as possible, suggesting young writers consider them as "eyewitness accounts." To further understand how a balance of background reading and primary sources "works," explore some of Kerley's other picture book biographies, including: <i>What to Do About Alice</i>, <i>The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins</i>, <i>The Extraordinary Mark Twain</i>, and <i>Walt Whitman</i>.
Balancing Multiple Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Those Rebels John and Tom</i> presents a balanced view of a professional partnership in action, despite the tremendous differences between the two. But what were they thinking of one another at that time? What did other members of the Continental Congress think about Thomas Jefferson and John Adams? Compare and contrast other written depictions of these two men as individuals, as well as artwork, or the points-of-view of other members of Congress. Have students write short monologues from the point-of-view of one member of the Continental Congress. Students will need to balance secondary and primary research to write their monologues. <p>Resources: Letters of Delegates to Congress, Continental Congress, Library of Congress Holdings http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdg.html</p>
Stylistic Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often, we tell our students to write formulaic paragraphs or compositions that feel like a "fill in the blank" exercise. While writing within a template often feels inauthentic, writing with a tightly wound structure for the purpose of conveying conceptual understanding is a completely different task. Have students read <i>Those Rebels John and Tom</i> and mark up the paragraphs about John and Tom that parallel one another. Have them further note how Kerley often uses the same sentence structure and vocabulary choices to compare and contrast the two men. Have students adopt this style in order to compare and contrast themselves with someone who they perceive to be completely opposite. What is achieved when writing with such tight attention to parallel structure?

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<i>Annie and Helen</i> by Deborah Hopkinson, illustrated by Raul Colon	
Panel Discussion Focus:	Teaching Ideas to Bring Back Your District:
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This fall, both <i>Annie & Helen</i> and <i>Helen's Big World</i>, written by Doreen Rappaport and illustrated by Matt Tavares, were published. These two engaging picture book biographies invite direct comparison with the goal of engaging students' in a discussion of representation, selection, and sources in biography. Starting points for comparison are: the period of Helen's life that receives focus; adjectives and adverbs used to describe both Helen and Annie; the relationship between the narrative sections and the letters or quotes included in each section; back matter and author's notes; and how key events addressed in both texts are described. Teaching Ideas© The Classroom Bookshelf Blog
Balancing Primary & Secondary Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deborah Hopkinson researched Helen Keller's life with a wide range of resources, from archival material to full-length biographies written for adults. While writing about just one year of Helen's life, Hopkinson still had to fully understand Helen's life in its totality. How do writers narrow their topic? Have students explore how Hopkinson does this, using the evidence she provides in her author's note. To more fully understand this writing process, have your students research and write picture book biographies of someone they know. But rather than write about the entirety of their subject's life, have them zero in on one year, one accomplishment. As they conduct research and interviews, have students consider how what they know about the person now impacts how they write about an event in that person's past. Hopkinson used Annie Sullivan's letters to ground the events of her narrative within a single year. What primary source materials, either photographs, letters, or artifacts, can your students use to help narrow their focus?
Balancing Multiple Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The title of this book is a signal to readers that it is as much about Annie Sullivan's tremendous capacity to teach as it is about Helen Keller's tremendous capacity to learn. Reading this very balanced text is much easier than trying to write it! At the end of the book, the narrative comes full circle; after reading excerpts from Annie Sullivan's letters, the reader finally sees a letter written by Helen herself. This just piques our curiosity and whets the appetite for more. How did Helen represent her own life? Have students explore some of Helen Keller's letters, available at the American Federation for the Blind. You and your students may be surprised by the many famous figures with whom Helen shared a correspondence. <p>Resource: http://www.afb.org/section.aspx?SectionID=1&TopicID=193</p>
Stylistic Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both <i>Annie and Helen</i> and <i>Helen's Big World</i> are picture book biographies told in verse. Gather a collection of other picture book biographies that narrate in verse in order to compare and contrast this stylistic choice. How are similes and metaphors used in verse biographies? Using <i>Annie and Helen</i> as a mentor text, have students write verse biographies of someone of interest. Or, if students are more comfortable writing in prose, have them concentrate on incorporating similes and metaphors into the writing, to help convey a sense of their subject more intimately.

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