

57

ideas

for running a book group
activity during
**National Non-Fiction
November**



The Federation of Children's Book Groups
Charity No. 268289

You might decide to write a joke book, a craft book, or maybe a local history book. We're keen for groups to tailor their book researching and making to the interests of their local members, highlighting the huge range of styles and topics that non-fiction covers.



Games and activities to explore the variety of non-fiction

Be inspired by the different ways factual information can be presented and shared by using one or more of these activities to explore the variety of non-fiction available. Seeing what has already been published might give you ideas about what you'd like to write and how you'd like to present your writing.

● Scavenger hunt

In your library / classroom give every participant / team a checklist of different types of non-fiction to find on the shelves. If you don't have access to a library, perhaps you could team up with your local Usborne or Barefoot Books seller, or ask members of your local group to loan their favourite non-fiction books from home.

● Play musical chairs

Set up your space as if for musical chairs and provide each player with some post-it notes. Under each chair place a non-fiction book in a bag (so the cover cannot be seen). When the music stops everyone must pick up the book under their chair. They then have 2 minutes (or whatever time you choose) to browse that book. If they like the book, ask them to write a comment on a post-it note explaining what they like about it. Stick the comment inside the back cover of the book. Play, for example, 10 rounds and then gather up the comments and share feedback on the books.

● Play pass the parcel

Wrap a non-fiction book up as for pass the parcel but between each layer include a picture of a cover of another non-fiction book - so that during the unwrapping lots of covers are shared, and players can talk about what they like the look of and why. The winner gets to keep the book!

● Book tasting (speed dating)

Have a wide selection of non-fiction books in the centre of the table. When the bell goes, each player picks up a book and has 1 minute to browse. Count down the final 10 seconds each time (players like the tension!), then ring the bell and get everyone to swap the book they've got for a new book. Play, for example, for 10 minutes and when finished ask each player to pick up the book that most appealed to them, sharing why they liked the look of it.

● Match the Shelfie to the Selfie

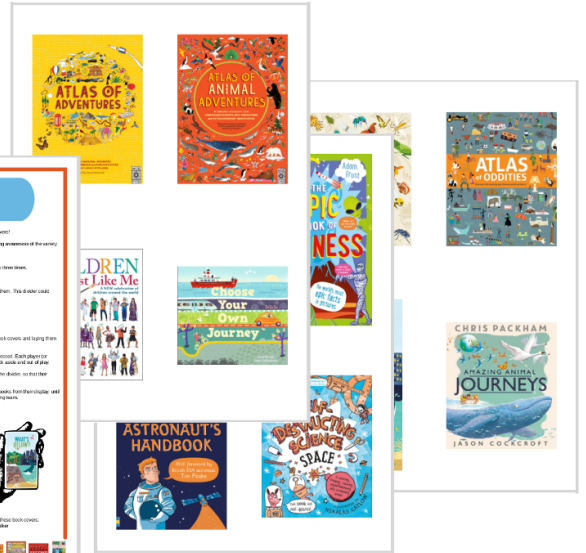
Download the card pack from <http://www.fcgb.org.uk/national-non-fiction-november-2016/>, print off and then see if you can match the non-fiction author's selfie to their "shelfie". Just what sort of books do non-fiction authors have on their shelves?...



● Matt Finch's book fair game

The Book Fair Game is a free role playing game designed by Matt Finch, a game designer with a residency at the State Library of Queensland, Australia. The game invites kids to simulate being at a book fair, role-playing publishing executives who compete to acquire titles, which they then design marketing materials for. You can find out more and download the instructions from <http://bit.ly/1UbduEB>



[illegible]

The Curiosity Club

The Curiosity Chronicle contains a 2m long fold-out map that allows pupils to plot their personal journey and record their experiences



Team competition to write a non-fiction book

Author Catherine Barr ('Elliot's Arctic Surprise', 'The Story of Life: A First Book about Evolution') has very successfully run non-fiction book writing team competitions in schools. These competitions look at all aspects of creating a non-fiction book, and as such they are an ideal starting point for this activity pack.

Catherine has created a fully resourced guide to running these competitions and has very generously shared it with us, making it available for free to anyone who would like to use her model to run non-fiction book making competitions.

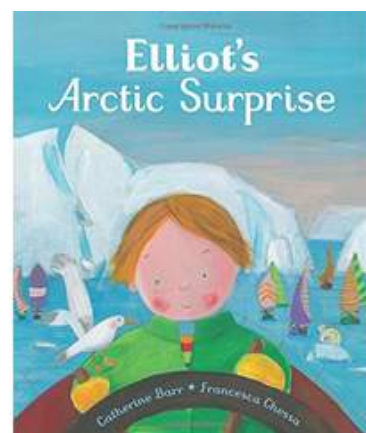
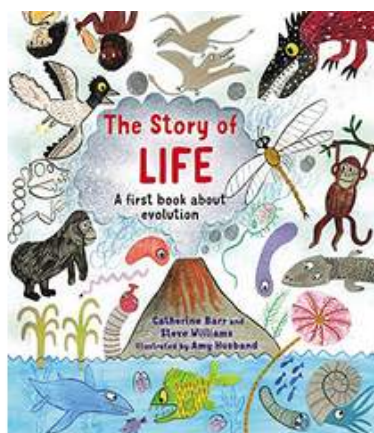
You can download the pack from:

<http://www.fcbg.org.uk/national-non-fiction-november-2016/>

As Catherine says, the aim of the competition framework she's created is *"simply to spark interest and stimulate enthusiasm in discovering non-fiction and creating a non-fiction picture book together. This may be in small teams within school year groups, as a whole class or as a group of friends. The idea is to play to children's strengths, to encourage them to do what they enjoy doing most and enable them to enjoy working together to create a book they are proud of."*



Catherine Barr writes picture books as springboards for conversations between adults and children: to spark curiosity in nature and issues shaping our world. *The Story of Life* was shortlisted for the English Association 4-11 Picture Book Awards and longlisted for the School Library Association Information Book Award 2016. She is currently working on picture books for publication in 2017 and 2018.



If you would like Catherine to visit your book group or school to run this competition please request her email from Zoe Toft, National Non-Fiction November Co-ordinator nfnf@fcbg.org.uk

Ideas to help you choose a topic for your non-fiction book

- What do you want to know about? Ask group members what they'd like to read about or learn about, perhaps giving them each some sticky notes to write their ideas down on. Share on a wall and then vote on the ideas to come up with a topic for a book the group could write together.
- What are children (and adults) in your group themselves expert at? Is there someone who knows a lot about Minecraft? Does someone know everything there is to know about Beyonce? Maybe there's a secret cake connoisseur lurking in the group or someone who knows another language. They could share their expertise and then as a group you could write a procedural / how-to guide about their area of expertise. Scholastic USA has a detailed lesson plan that might provide you with more ideas: <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/how-books>
- Create Surprise Writing prompts. In advance write a selection of topics that you think could work as a non-fiction book (eg cat care, car types, inventions, film guides) on lollipop sticks. Put the lollipop sticks in a jam jar and when it's time to try writing, ask every group member or team to draw one lollipop stick out and brainstorm what they might include in a book on the said topic.
- Lucky Dip Treasures can be a fun way to prompt ideas for writing. Wrap up a selection of fun objects and place in a large container. Each writer/group of writers pulls out one parcel and then researches or brainstorms content for a non-fiction book somehow linked to the object. Lucky Dip treasure could include chocolate (which might prompt a chocolate recipe book, or a plant guide to cocoa trees), colouring pencils (which might inspire a colouring in book), a compass (which could inspire a book about outdoor activities) etc.
- Use an online random fact generator to spark ideas. Maybe a fact will pop up that group members will want to check, explore and expand upon, or maybe you'll use the fact generators to write your own list-style information books. Here are some online fact generators:
mentalfloss.com/amazingfactgenerator
<http://randomfactgenerator.net/>
<http://www.hookedonfacts.com/>
- Find out what happened in history on your birthday or the day you are holding a bookgroup event. Choose one of the facts and use as a prompt to brainstorm / research / write your book. Here's a useful (American) website: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history>
- Memoir, biography and autobiography are important non-fiction genres. You could write your own life story, or interview your family to create a family history, perhaps including photos. Here are some resources which might help:
<https://uk.pinterest.com/explore/autobiography-writing/>
<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/unit-plan-writing-autobiography>
- Ask questions! A great way to prompt non-fiction writing is by asking questions. For example:

Which: Which football team has won the most competitions? Which food in your fridge has come from furthest away?

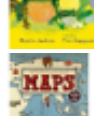
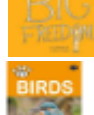
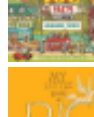
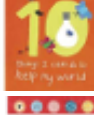
Who: Who were the Beatles? Who is your favourite writer?

What is: What's your favourite animal? What is the reason bananas turn brown?

What if: What if everyone had to walk to school every day? What if there were no bees?

What do you think about: What do you think about where you live? What do you think about the future?

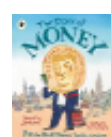
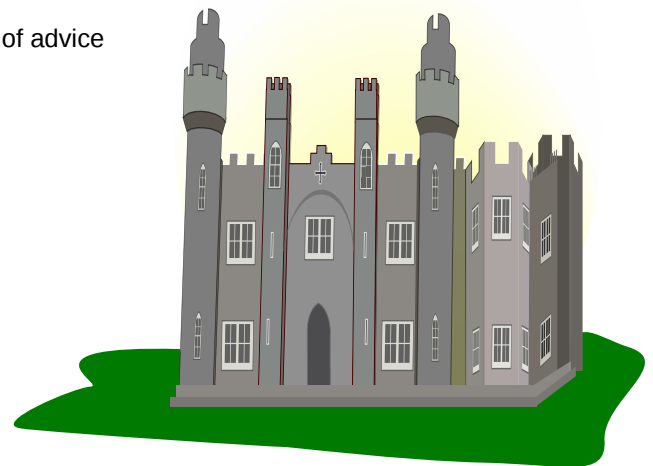




Teaming up with local venues

Is there a local venue you could team up with for National Non-Fiction November? Maybe you could build on links established during National Share-a-Story Month?

- Perhaps you have a local museum nearby where they would be happy to help you research your book? You could write a history of a favourite object in the museum, or a guide for visitors. The document *Developing Effective Family Guides* could be used as a starting point to develop ideas for a guide written in collaboration between your book group and a local visitor attraction:
<http://museum-ed.org/developing-effective-family-guides/>
- Is there a local visitor attraction such as a stately home or park that would love help writing a guidebook? You could include insider knowledge and perhaps even offer it for sale in the gift shop!
- A local cafe or bakery might be up for working with you on a book of recipes.
- What about creating an atlas of your local park? Groups could map different areas and then they could be bound together to create a special local atlas.
- Are there any haunted houses near you? Could you write a guide to local ghost sightings?
- Is there a social club for older people who could teach you a new craft, and then together you could write up the instructions for a book?
- Do you have a local newspaper? Could you visit the premises and see how the paper gets put together and perhaps even write your own column? Here are some tips on how to write a news story:
<http://www.thebookchook.com/2014/06/how-to-write-news-story-guest-post.html>
- A local garage or bike shop might be willing to offer a family workshop with instructions for e.g repairing a puncture on your bike tyre. You could then create a user manual together!
- Walk through your local park and note the flora and fauna you see. Turn this information into a local natural history guide.
- Imagine an alien visiting your town / village - what would you write in a travel guide for them?
- Team up with a local school and write a funny book of advice for teachers.
- Interview people at your local market and ask them about local words and phrases. Use this information to create a dictionary for your part of the world!
- What about asking your local public library if they would like to collaborate on writing a local history booklet?



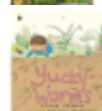
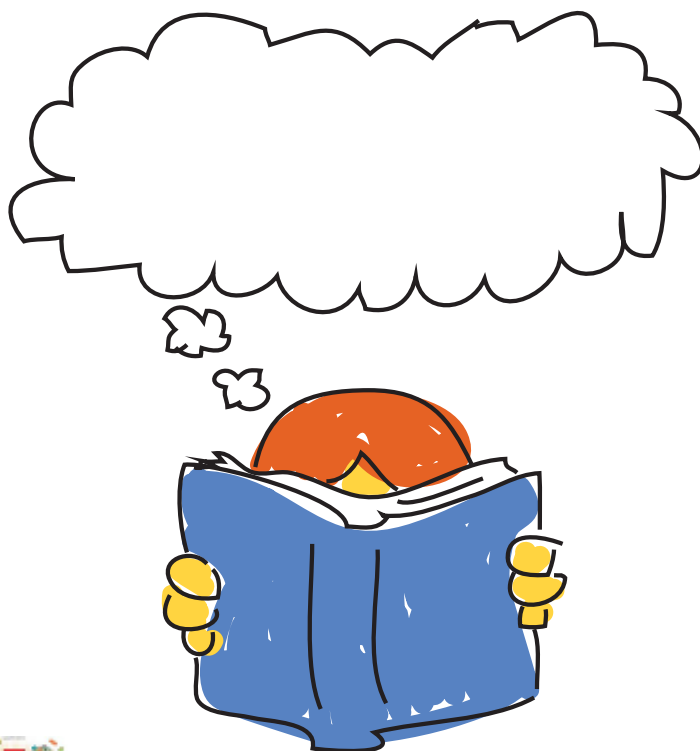
Researching your book

- Speak to the librarians at your local public library - they're bound to have ideas to help you find interesting pieces of information and other relevant resources.
- Find out what other books have been published on your chosen topic and think about how yours will be different. Why not reserve lots of similar books from the library and vote on your favourite?
- Consider what format you want your book to take. It might include flaps or pop-ups – both features are often used in non-fiction.
- When mining other books for information, have lots of post-it notes to hand. Write your favourite facts or phrases on the sticky notes. When you've completed your fact search, you can re-arrange the sticky notes in the order that you think would work best for your book.
- Invite an expert on the topic you're writing about to come and talk to your book group.

Science Live (www.sciencelive.net) will help you connect with local scientists who are keen to talk to groups. If you're writing a cookery book, see if a local chef will come to talk to your group. If writing about puppies, maybe approach a local kennels or dog charity. Maybe you could approach a local FE college or university and ask if they have a lecturer who specialises in your chosen topic.

Before the expert visits, brainstorm questions you'd like to ask her/him. Here's a great guide to help children prepare for interviewing their expert:
<http://bit.ly/24O4k40>

- Make a list of questions you want answers to. See if you can find the answers in books from the library or online.
- Here's a general research guide aimed at children and young people:
<http://www.kyvl.org/kids/homebase.html>





Advice from real-life non-fiction book creators

We asked lots of non-fiction authors and publishers for their top tips when it comes to creating fantastic non-fiction. Here's what they had to say!

A book must offer what the internet (especially Wikipedia) can't, so focus on quality, appropriate text.

Narrative is woven into the human psyche.

Design is king. And queen!

Don't expect to be a millionaire, or even well-off, and you won't be disappointed.

A few well-presented and exciting facts are better than an info avalanche.

Sadly, no one is obliged to read what you write – you must seduce readers with your words.

All these tips came from author Stewart Ross. These are some of the non-fiction books he's written: 'Into the Unknown: How Great Explorers Found Their Way by Land, Sea, and Air', 'Down with the Romans', 'Please Help, Miss Nightingale'.

When researching, read as much and as widely as you can.

Try to find those fascinating little details that might have eluded other authors.

Keep a file of 'out-takes' – good stuff that you couldn't find room to include. You might be able to use it in another book you'll write in the future.

Look for images that add knowledge rather than simply echoing what you've already written in the text.

Try to include at least one funny, grotesque or bizarre fact on each spread.

All these tips came from author Alex Woolf. These are some of the non-fiction books he's written: 'The Story of Food: Chocolate', 'You Wouldn't Want to Live Without Poo!'.



Be playful and surprise your readers. Instead of listing facts about space, why not write a recipe book for astronauts, or instructions for building a rocket?

Make each sentence work hard. Take your first draft and chop out half of the words! It's the best trick for improving your writing.



Make comparisons. Help readers understand something new by comparing it to things they have seen, touched, smelled or tasted. Did you know that fried crickets taste like popcorn?

Write about things you like. From Minecraft to extreme sports, no topic is off limits. If you enjoy something, your readers will too!

There's no such thing as boring. Become a detective and dig out the most interesting things about a topic. Even dust can be fascinating. (If you don't believe me, Google micrometeorites.)

All these tips came from author Isabel Thomas. These are some of the non-fiction books she's written: 'The Misadventures of Charles Darwin', 'How to Change the World', 'Self Destructing Science: Space'.

Read your work out loud. This is important to get the flow and rhythm right so that it will appeal to your readers.

Imagine that you are explaining things to an alien from another planet. This will help you to keep it simple.

Write about something you're interested in. This will come across in your writing and enthuse your readers.



Keep practising! Writing is like learning to ride your bike. The more you do, the better you'll be.

Plan, plan, plan. Work out roughly what you want to say and in which order, before you start writing.

All these tips came from author Anita Ganeri. These are some of the non-fiction books she's written: 'Earth in 30 Seconds' and the Horrible Geography series.





If you aren't the expert in your chosen topic, find out who is, and see if they can help you. Maybe you can even work together?

Research, research and more research – immerse yourself in your chosen topic. Read books, watch documentaries, listen to radio discussions, even watch films and listen to music that might have links to your subject matter.

Keep it simple – it's important to use clear and concise language when writing about non-fiction topics. You don't want your readers to misunderstand you.



Make it memorable – include surprising and fun tidbits of information which will grab the reader's attention.

Choose a topic that interests you – think of a question that you would like answered or a subject that you would like to find out more about. If you're passionate about what you're writing about, that will come across to the reader.

All these tips came from author Deborah Patterson. These are some of the non-fiction books she's written: 'My Book of Stories: Write your own Adventures', 'My Book of Stories: Write your Own Shakespearean Tales'.

Avoid repetition.

'Hear' your words in your head as you write. Make them lively and interesting - what would interest you?

Having said what would interest you - remember who you are writing for - and imagine someone you know in that 'category' - write for them!



Don't use slang or catchwords or trendy phrases.

Use some short and some long sentences to break up any monotony and create 'rhythm.'

All these tips came from author Susie Hodge. These are some of the non-fiction books she's written: 'Drawing...is Fun!', 'Mountains (Extreme Habitats)', 'Extreme Science: Toxic! Killer Cures and Other Poisonings' and 'My Big Art Show'.





When you're trying to come up with a subject for your book, think about events that are coming up so you can make it topical. Lots of people will have been excited to watch the Brazil Olympics this year, so it could be a great time to write a book about the Olympics. If you like history, look out for an anniversary coming up – 2017 is the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution that toppled the Russian government and helped to end the First World War. It's always good if your audience are already interested in the topic. Then they're likely to want to read your book!



This tip came from Cath Senker. Cath Senker has written around 140 children's non-fiction titles, specialising in history, global issues, world religions and environmental issues.

If you're really stuck about how to explain something, try talking about it rather than writing. Whatever you say becomes, at least, a good first draft to work from.



This tip came from Sean Callery. Sean Callery has written more than 60 books, including 'Where in the World?', a biography of Victor Wouk, 'Nature's Most Deadly', and '100 Facts: Rocks and Minerals'.

This tip came from Dan Green. Dan Green's books include 'Rebel Science', and the Basher Science series.



Make sure you really understand an idea before you try to write about it.





Creating physical copies of your book

You've had fun looking at the huge variety of non-fiction books that are now available, you've brainstormed ideas for your own book, you've researched your topic, written your text and sourced or created illustrations to accompany your words, and now it's time to turn all that hard work into a book!

Why not use National Non-Fiction November as an excuse to get crafty and run a book-making session full of paper, scissors, glue and brilliant ideas?

Once you've made your book(s) you could approach your local bookshop to see if they would create a window display around brilliant non-fiction, featuring the book you've created.

Recommended books about creating books with children

'A Book of One's Own' by Paul Johnson

'Making Books' by Paul Johnson

'Get writing! Creative book-making projects for Children' by Paul Johnson

'New Pop-Up Paper Projects: Step-by-step paper engineering for all ages' by Paul Johnson

'Making Books with Kids' by Esther K Smith

'Pop-Up: Everything You Need to Create Your Own Pop-Up Book' by Ruth Wickings and Frances Castle

If you can't get hold of Paul Johnson's books via the library, and they are out of print, you can try via his website:

http://www.bookart.co.uk/paul_johnson_publications.html

Recommended websites with tutorials for creating books with children

<http://www.makingbooks.com/freeprojects.shtml>

<http://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/bookmaking-crafts-make-books.html>

<https://uk.pinterest.com/siftingthrough/bookmaking-for-kids/>

<https://uk.pinterest.com/janeenwinters/making-books-with-children/>

<https://uk.pinterest.com/blueroofdesigns/bookbinding-teaching-kids/>

Rather than making books yourselves with paper and glue, there are lots of other options when it comes to creating finished books.

The Stick-In book

Use a large blank notebook (e.g. <http://www.madeinelindley.com/ecommerce/product/blank-big-book.aspx>) and simply stick in the pieces of writing and illustration created by the children in your bookgroup.

The Slip-In book

Stationers sell a variety of display books that can be adapted for self publication. Choose the size you want and simply slip in your prepared pictures and text! You can also adapt photo albums to work like slip-in books.

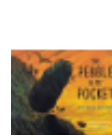
Advantages: Very easy to produce, and cheap. Minimal printing required, and no typesetting needed!

Children can make these books themselves as all it requires is for them to slip the original into the binding.

Disadvantages: Only one copy of each book can be made this way (unless you photocopy the originals).

Cost: £

Ideal for: Storage solutions, one-off books.





● Comb bound

Many local stationers offer a cheap and quick book creation option using comb binding. For this option you'll need to prepare your images and texts so that they can be printed (normally at A4, and not at smaller or nonstandard sizes), and this may involve scanning images and a certain amount of typesetting. Once you've prepared your document, binding can be very quick (a matter of minutes), and because you've prepared an electronic copy you can bind as many copies as you'd like. It's possible to buy comb binders (£100-£300). Many schools may already own one of these. If your group is not school based, perhaps you could ask to borrow a binder from a local school.

Advantages: Cheap and quick, good for multiple copies.

Disadvantages: Can look a bit "cheap", can be a little flimsy.

Cost: £ but don't forget you'll have to include printing costs too.

Ideal for: short runs of books at a low price.

● Glue bound

Is there a university near you? If so, they will often have a binding service, aimed at students with dissertations, but open to the public too. If you're looking for something which looks a little more like a paperback than a comb bound book, a glue bound book might be for you. Again, you'll need to prepare your text and images so they can be printed, but once you've done that, you can print and bind as many copies as you like.

Glue binding is quick (often a while-you-wait) service, and you can often get your pages printed and bound at A5 size rather than A4 (making the finished product look more like a "real" book).

Advantages: Finished book can look quite a lot like a "real" book, which is very satisfying!

Disadvantages: Glue binding is considered "temporary" and so isn't ideal for books which are going to be read very many times. Glue binding won't work if you've very few pages in your book; most binders I've spoken to recommend an absolute minimum of 24 sides (12 pages).

Cost: ££ and don't forget to allow for printing costs too.

Ideal for: When you want a cheapish option which looks like a real book.

● If you want to create books which look even more like books you might find in the library or bookshop, you could self publish via Amazon's CreateSpace, Lulu, Blurb or the Scholastic We Are Writers scheme.

<https://www.createspace.com/>

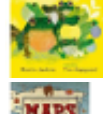
<https://www.lulu.com/> (do take a look at this tutorial from author Juliet Clare Bell about using this service:

<http://picturebookden.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/getting-children-even-more-excited.html>)

<http://www.blurb.co.uk/>

<https://writers.scholastic.co.uk/get-involved>

● The Book Creator App for the iPad can be used to make e-books. Here are some case studies in using this app: <http://www.redjumper.net/blog/2013/10/4-compelling-ideas-using-book-creator-classroom/>







Thank you!

Creating this activity pack would not have been possible without the help of a great many people.

First and foremost thanks go to all the non-fiction authors and illustrators who provided photos, advice and suggestions. In particular I would like to thank:

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Alex Woolf

Thank you also to *all* the publishers of non-fiction for children and young people, but especially the following for providing book cover images for the *Guess Which Book?* game:

360 Degrees (Little Tiger)
DK
Bloomsbury
Quarto
Red Shed (Egmont)
Usborne
Walker



The Federation of Children's Book Groups
Charity No. 268289

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