

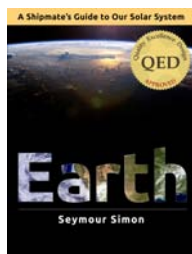
Writing Exciting Nonfiction

Seymour Simon

I spent nearly twenty-five years as a classroom teacher while also writing books for children on science and nature before becoming a full-time writer. In the course of writing more than 250 books, I've done a lot of thinking about the different ways to teach children how to write interesting and compelling nonfiction.

With the widespread adoption of the new Common Core State Standards, many teachers are looking for resources to help them implement these goals in their classrooms every day. Here are some writing examples from my own books that illustrate some of the teaching strategies that I find to be most effective. Many of the books cited are now available in digital form for tablets, smart phones and computers in our StarWalk Kids streaming digital library (www.starwalkkids.com).

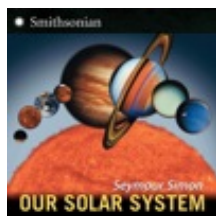
Use Comparisons to help explain unfamiliar ideas, complex concepts and impossibly large numbers



EARTH: A SHIPMATE'S GUIDE TO OUR SOLAR SYSTEM

Seymour Science, 2012 (StarWalkKids.com)

“The sun is very large—six hundred times bigger than all the planets put together. If the sun were the size of a basketball, Earth would be the size of a grain of rice at the other end of a basketball court.”



OUR SOLAR SYSTEM: Collins/Smithsonian, 2007

“The rings are made of an unknown black material that spins around Uranus like lumps of coal on a merry-go-round.”

“Far from the sun, a comet is just a “dirty snowball,” a frozen ball of ice a few miles wide, covered by a layer of black dust.”



TROPICAL RAINFORESTS: Collins/Smithsonian, 2010

“A tapir looks like a mixture of a pig and a small hippopotamus.”

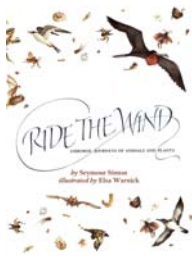
“When it is threatened, a pangolin rolls into a ball and looks like a big pinecone.”

Strong Verbs enhance the reader's understanding



EARTHQUAKES: Collins/Smithsonian, 2006

“Houses began sliding apart, cracks in the pavement opened and closed like huge jaws, the ground rolled in waves.”



RIDE THE WIND: Seymour Science, 2011 (StarWalkKids.com)

“Birds and butterflies soar, flap, glide and flit on journeys of hundreds or thousands of miles. Locusts swarm by the millions, an airborne river of buzzing insects eating everything in their path. Bats flutter their skin-covered wings, zigzagging through the night sky. Some spiders are balloonists, floating on silken threads carried to great heights by the wind. Winged fruits and seeds whirl downward through the air, spinning like tiny helicopters.”

Engage the reader's senses and imagination to set the scene



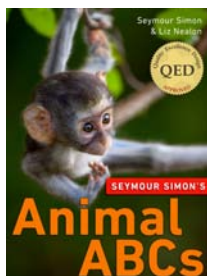
WOLVES: Collins/Smithsonian, 2009.

“Imagine snow falling silently in the great woodlands of North America. The only sounds are from the trees creaking and tossing in the wind. Suddenly the quiet is broken by the eerie howling of a wolf. And all the frightening stories and legends that you've heard about the treacherous and sly wolf and the evil werewolf begin to race through your mind.”



SEYMOUR SIMON'S EXTREME EARTH RECORDS: Chronicle, 2012.

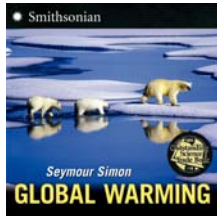
“When you step off the plane onto the rocky ice, you will immediately struggle with challenges that will last anywhere from one to eight weeks, as you acclimate yourself to the coldest place on Earth, Vostok Research Station in Antarctica. During this time you suffer from pounding headaches, painful earaches, and constant nosebleeds. Your eyes twitch and you vomit—a lot. You find yourself short of breath and feel as if you're suffocating due to the lack of oxygen.”



SEYMOUR SIMON'S ANIMAL ABCs: Seymour Science, 2012
(StarWalkKids.com)

“A male narwhal has one long, twisted tooth. Some people say the legend of the unicorn began with a narwhal tooth.”

Ask Questions that anticipate what the reader is thinking about as he or she reads



GLOBAL WARMING: Collins/Smithsonian, 2010

“Why is climate changing? Could Earth be getting warmer by itself? Are people doing things that make the climate warmer? What will be the impact of global warming? Can we do anything about it?”

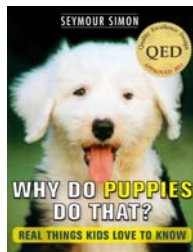
Employ Descriptive Detail



BUTTERFLIES: Collins/Smithsonian, 2011 (Also in Digital)

“As leaves change color in autumn, monarch butterflies begin an incredibly long journey to places they have never seen before. On tissue-paper-thin wings, the butterflies ride the wind as far as 3,000 miles to their winter homes.”

Use Humor to make information memorable



WHY DO PUPPIES DO THAT? REAL THINGS KIDS LOVE TO KNOW: Seymour Science, 2010 (StarWalkKids.com)

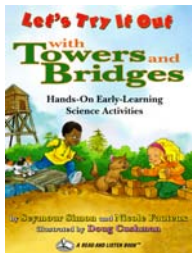
“You should try to ignore a lot of the noise a puppy makes, so she doesn’t learn that barking always gets her what she wants. Of course, that’s easy to say and harder to do. But ignoring the noise is the best way for you to teach your puppy who’s the bark boss in your house!”



MORE FUN FACTS ABOUT PETS: Seymour Science, 2012 (StarWalkKids.com)

“A group of ferrets is called a busyness of ferrets. Spend some time playing with ferrets and you'll soon understand where the word "busyness" came from!”

Offer readers the opportunity to try things out, or otherwise interact with the content

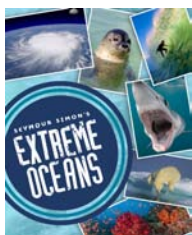


LET'S TRY IT OUT WITH TOWERS AND BRIDGES:

Seymour Science, 2011 (StarWalkKids.com)

“Trees don’t balance on their narrow trunks. They have a strong base of roots hidden under the ground. Find a plastic drinking straw or a cardboard tube and pretend it is a tree trunk. See if you can stand it on end. Will your pretend tree survive a strong wind? **Let’s Try it Out!**”

Use Photographs and Diagrams to clarify and expand the text



Many of my books are photo-essays, which use photographs and diagrams to amplify and expand the text, creating a different way of exploring non-fiction and engaging otherwise reluctant readers. Sometimes “showing” is indeed more effective than “telling”!

La Niña is the opposite of El Niño. La Niña usually occurs after El Niño. La Niña refers to cold conditions in the waters of the Eastern Pacific and causes opposite weather conditions around the world to those of El Niño. During a La Niña year, winters are warmer than average in the southeastern United States and cooler than average in the Northwest. It also causes an increase in the number and intensity of Atlantic hurricanes. La Niña affects the weather more strongly during winters in the United States and the Northern Hemisphere compared to El Niño.

La Niña
The whole planet experienced very strange weather in 2010 and 2011 because of La Niña. From the summer of 2010 to the spring of 2011, the United States had widespread flooding, droughts, heat waves, cold temperatures, large wildfires, and tornadoes—sometimes all at once. At least part of that was due to La Niña that developed in the Pacific Ocean during that time.

Because of La Niña, the cold water of the eastern Pacific Ocean resulted in dry weather and drought in the South and cold, wet conditions across the northern half of the United States. The sharp boundary between the cold and warm air was at least partly responsible for the heavy winter snow, spring rains, and flooding in the middle of the country. During La Niña that year, tornadoes were so severe that April 27, 2011, became one of the deadliest days of tornadoes on record in the United States, with about 320 deaths. The deadliest single tornado in the United States in the last half century occurred the following month, on May 22, 2011, destroying much of Joplin, Missouri, and killing about 150 people.

Why Is It Called El Niño?
Hundreds of years ago, fishermen off the coast of Peru noticed that in some years the waters were very warm around Christmastime. They called that El Niño (“the little child”) after the Christ child that was born during that time. The name is now used to refer to the changes in weather around the world that happen when the Eastern Pacific warms during that season.



This document is a summary of remarks prepared for his speech entitled “READING AND WRITING EXCITING NONFICTION, by award-winning children’s science author Seymour Simon. There are extensive resources available for educators and families on his Webby Award Honoree website, SeymourSimon.com. You can also follow his daily nature walks and see his photographs from the field on Twitter ([@seymoursimon](https://twitter.com/seymoursimon)) or his [Facebook Author page](https://www.facebook.com/seymoursimon). Seymour Simon is the founder of StarWalk Kids Media (www.StarWalkKids.com), a high quality, multi-user, affordable, K-8 eBook collection for Schools and Libraries.