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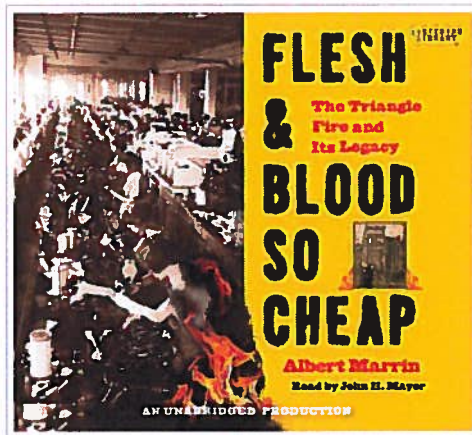
Great Common Core Nonfiction

Kathleen Odean's recommendations of YA books for grades 6 and up

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2013

Flesh and Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy



Marrin, Albert. *Flesh and Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy*. 2011. 182pp. Lexile 1000.

In 1911, 146 workers—most of them young women—died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in Manhattan. Veteran nonfiction writer Marrin goes beyond recounting the tragedy to analyzing immigration, limitations on women, and the rise of unions in conjunction with the fire. He explains why most of the women, ages fourteen to twenty-three, were Russian Jews and Italian Catholics. He describes tenement life, with the portrayal reinforced by black-and-white photographs including some from photojournalist Jacob Riis, whose words provide the title: "Oh, God! That bread should be so dear, and flesh and blood so cheap!" Marrin discusses the aftermath of the fire and the movement to improve working conditions. He wraps up with a look at garment workers today in the U.S. and internationally, some of whom face sweatshop conditions similar to those in the past.

Reading Std #3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. Marrin brings together topics of immigration, the labor movement, and safety issues and laws in his account of the Triangle Fire. Have students analyze how he connects these topics, including the role of important people in the different sub-topics.

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Labels: [American history](#), [immigration](#), [labor history](#), [New York City](#), [tragedies](#), [women's history](#)

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KATHLEEN ODEAN



[Kathleen Odean](#)

I'm a workshop presenter, book reviewer, author, online instructor, and former school librarian. I give all-day workshops for teachers and librarians on books for teens including *The Best Nonfiction for the Common Core* (Grades 6-10) and *The Best New Young Adult Books* (Grades 6-12).

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COMMON CORE BOOKS

In this blog, I annotate excellent nonfiction books for middle school and high school at the Common Core recommended Lexile reading levels, with suggestions for ways to use them within the standards, technology or web tie-ins, and related fiction titles. While Common Core's Appendix B list of exemplars includes some good nonfiction, it's a limited, uneven selection. Students need to read books, not just short passages, if they're going to be ready for college.

BLOG ARCHIVE

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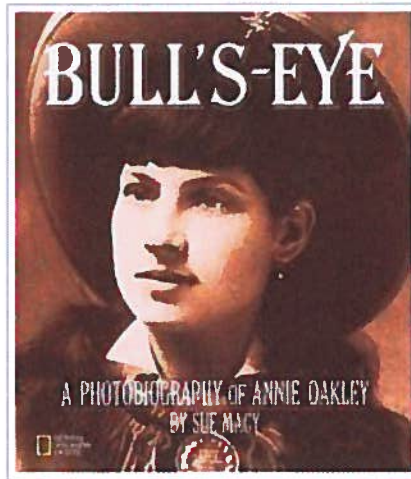
[Flesh and Blood So](#)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2013

Bull's-Eye: A Photobiography of Annie Oakley

Macy, Sue. *Bull's-Eye: A Photobiography of Annie Oakley*. 2001. 64pp. Lexile 1150.

With a figure as legendary as Annie Oakley, who was a superstar in her time, a biographer has to be careful to distinguish fact from legend—and point out when it's impossible to be sure. Macy does this well, especially about the different versions of Oakley's childhood and the rumors that newspapers printed throughout her career. She addresses the issue in her Author's Note, titled "Getting the Details Right." The narrative focus is on Oakley's remarkable skill and international career but it also covers her personal life including her long marriage to fellow sharpshooter Frank Butler. Historic photographs and other illustrations, printed in sepia, give a wonderful sense of the woman and of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Resources include a timeline; a list of books, videos, websites and places to visit; and an index.

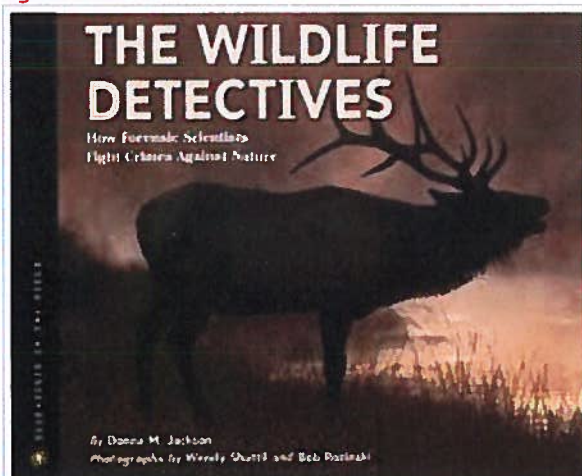


Writing Std #8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information. Use this short biography as a model of assessing the credibility and accuracy of sources. Have students read the Author's Note about getting details right and look through the text for examples of how she handles information that is hard to assess for accuracy. Have them note her specific wording for such examples.

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Labels: [Annie Oakley](#), [biographies](#), [West](#), [women's history](#)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2013

The Wildlife Detectives: How Forensic Scientists Fight Crimes against Nature

Jackson, Donna M. *The Wildlife Detectives: How Forensic Scientists Fight Crimes against Nature*. 2000. 48pp. Lexile 1120.

In this absorbing photo-essay, the author of *Bone Detectives* (out of print but well worth finding in your library) introduces

[Cheap: The Triangle Fire and It...](#)

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the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Oregon, the only Lab in the world devoted to crimes against wildlife. The narrative focuses on the case of an elk shot illegally in Yellowstone. While forensic scientists analyze DNA and bloodstains, identify antlers, and more, rangers and other park officials search for the poacher and his gun. Sidebars supply interesting facts about wildlife forensics, crimes, endangered species, laws about wildlife, and jobs in the field. Color photographs show the scientists at work and add information about wildlife. For readers who like forensic television shows, here's a real life mystery with an unusual twist—and a good dose of science.

Web tie-in: Have students spend some time at the website of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory, which this book describes (<http://www.lab.fws.gov/>). As the opening web page explains, "Our crime laboratory is very much like a 'typical' police lab, except the victim is an animal. We examine, identify, and compare evidence using a wide range of scientific procedures and instruments, in the attempt to link suspect, victim, and crime scene with physical evidence." In the Students and Educators section, short videos provide "tours" of different areas of the lab such as the Toxicology Area, the Testfire Area, and the Pathology Unit.

Students should also consider the publication date of this book, now more than a decade ago, and what that means for the book's accuracy. The website will shine some light on this question.

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Labels: [crimes](#), [forensics](#), [science](#), [wildlife](#)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2013

Onward: A Photobiography of African-American Polar Explorer Matthew Henson



Johnson, Dolores. *Onward: A Photobiography of African-American Polar Explorer Matthew Henson*. 2006. 64pp. Lexile 1070.

Although African-Americans had no chance to lead major explorations in the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, Matthew Henson was one of the first, and possibly the very first, Americans to reach the North Pole. The son of sharecroppers, Henson went to sea at age thirteen, where the ship's captain schooled him in reading, writing, geography, history, and navigation. When he was 21, Henson was hired by naval officer Robert Peary to accompany him, at first as a manservant, on a government mission to Nicaragua and then to Greenland, where Peary first began to reach the North Pole. Smooth writing and fascinating historical photographs tell of their multiple attempts to reach the Pole, often living with Inuits during the expeditions. Henson, who learned the Inuit language and survival techniques, became instrumental in the expeditions including the final successful one. But as a black man, he was given very little pay and only honored late in his life. This photobiography fits into studies of explorers and of black history but also lends itself

to independent reading. Timeline, bibliography, index.

Reading Std #2: Determine central ideas or themes and analyze their development; summarize key supporting details and ideas. One of the central themes in this book is that of racial prejudice. Have students compare the contributions of Matthew Henson and Robert Peary to the expeditions, and their much different rewards for their work, in exploring this theme.

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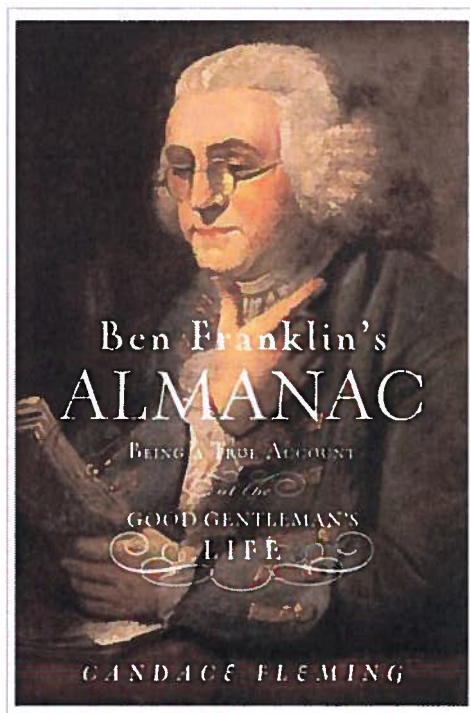
Labels: [biographies](#), [black history](#), [explorers](#), [Matthew Henson](#), [photobiographies](#), [racial prejudice](#)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2013

Ben Franklin's Almanac: Being a True Account of the Good Gentleman's Life

Fleming, Candace. *Ben Franklin's Almanac: Being a True Account of the Good Gentleman's Life*. 2003. 120pp. Lexile 1000.

Fleming uses a scrapbook approach to convey Ben Franklin's multiple interests and talents in this original approach to a key historical figure. Rather than the usual chronological organization, she groups the information by topics such as family, boyhood, science, the Revolution, and his time in France. Within each broad topic are a page or two about narrower topics. Heavily illustrated, with a design that makes it resemble an old-fashioned book, the book starts with a timeline and includes anecdotes, documents, quotes from his writing and writings about him, and extensive visual elements. Great for browsing and to get an overview of this complex man. A bibliography, lists of further reading and websites, and an index round it out.



Web tie-in: At the author's website, candacefleming.com, view the 4-minute Classroom Cast video of her from Random House in which she talks about how she approaches writing biographies. She discusses not just her research but also the questions she finds herself asking about the person and how that person has been portrayed, sometimes inaccurately, in history. Have students consider historical figures they might like to know more about and what questions they'd have.

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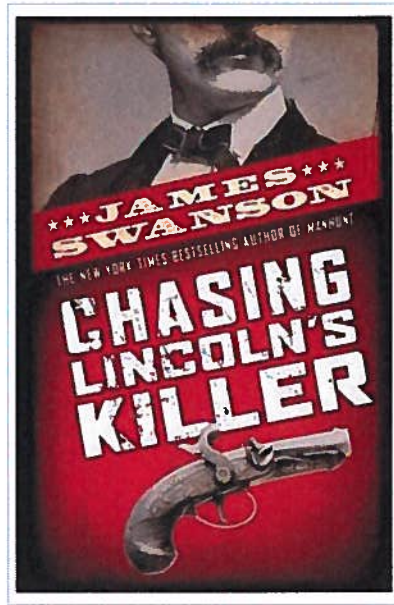
Labels: [Ben Franklin](#), [biography](#)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 5, 2013

Chasing Lincoln's Killer

Swanson, James L. *Chasing Lincoln's Killer*. 2009. 208pp. Lexile 980.

This suspenseful narrative moves between the manhunt in the countryside for John Wilkes Booth after he shot President Lincoln and what was happening back in Washington, D.C. with those shot and others involved in the crime. Told in great detail in a lively manner, the fast-paced account looks at the plan, execution, and aftermath of the assassination. Readers get a strong sense of why Booth did it and learn about his lesser-known co-conspirators. Photographs and other artifacts from the time, an attractive book design, a map, and a list of the "major participants" add to the whole, although the book lacks documentation and an index.



Reading Std #8: Delineate and evaluate argument and specific claims in a text, assessing reasoning and evidence. Have students consider the issue of documentation. Although the author states that all material in quotations is from original sources, is that sufficient to create a convincing argument? Are there kinds of informational books that don't require documentation? If so, is this one of them?

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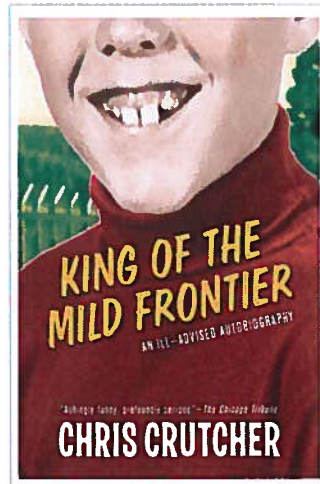
Labels: assassination, Civil War, Lincoln

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2012

King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-Advised Autobiography

Crutcher, Chris. *King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-Advised Autobiography*. 2003. 272pp. Lexile 1180.

Like many of his powerful, popular novels, Chris Crutcher's autobiography is funny and poignant. He writes in a conversational tone about growing up in a small town in Idaho. Despite the town's macho atmosphere, he failed to toughen up or get good at sports. Without bitterness, Crutcher reveals some of his family's problems including his mother's drinking and his father's demanding nature. The anecdotes and themes show the roots of some of his novels. For example, he struggled with a bad temper, a trait that recurs in his fictional protagonists. Near the end, Crutcher talks about his work as a therapist with abused kids and describes how he became a writer. He also



addresses why he uses expletives in his novels as part of his goal of showing life as he knows it, not an idealized version. This is a pleasure to read, especially for Crutcher fans.

Reading Std #8: Delineate and evaluate argument and specific claims in a text, assessing reasoning and evidence. Crutcher's books are often challenged in schools and sometimes removed from the curriculum or library shelves because of their use of expletives. Have students consider Crutcher's argument for including strong language and the broader question of removing books. A debate format would work well for this topic.

Fiction tie-in: While any of his novels would pair well with this autobiography, *The Sledding Hill* especially lends itself to the discussion of banned books. Crutcher appears in the novel as the author of a book that some want removed from the school library. *The Sledding Hill* also ties in to the autobiography's chapter, "'Dead Boy Sledding; or, Why Things Happen,'" about a friend of Crutcher's who died during his childhood.

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