

The Encyclopedia in the Classroom

Did you know that on October 10, 1492, Columbus and his crew agreed to sail on for just three more days, and then turn back if land was not sighted? Were you aware that Magellan's crew sailed for 98 days across the Pacific Ocean without seeing land? They ate rats, ox hides and sawdust to stay alive.

These are a few of the fascinating facts my students and I stumbled upon while using *The World Book Encyclopedia* in our classroom. Through the "Partners in Excellence" program sponsored by World Book, we obtained an entire set of up-to-date encyclopedias which are available for instant, everyday reference.

Thanks to the encyclopedia, I'm able to take advantage of "teachable moments" and capitalize on student interest generated by current events, by travel, by TV specials, or by readings. Encyclopedias and other reference books are ideal teaching tools which create a bridge from classroom to library. Discussions become a sort of "treasure hunt." Students learn to rely on books and their own skills for finding answers to their questions, rather than asking me.

The encyclopedia is an excellent starting point for almost any research project. Students get a broad overview of their topic as well as a bibliography leading to in-depth information in other books. Some teachers discourage children from using the encyclopedia, fearing that they will use it as their *only* source and even copy parts of an article instead of thinking and writing for themselves. Although this can occur, my experience has shown that students who are introduced to the encyclopedia as a tool for *learning*, not just for doing reports, and who are given practice in reporting their learning in a variety of ways leading up to a major report are much less likely to misuse this valuable reference resource. See suggestions for Mini-Reports on the last few pages of this booklet.

The classroom activity in this booklet is to introduce children to encyclopedias. I read through the entire *World Book* and wrote 25 questions for each volume. I chose topics that are likely to capture student interest and entice them into reading on. Students can find all answers by scanning the first few paragraphs of an article. Questions are generally phrased in the same language as the answers in the article. This activity is to ensure *early success* and increase the likelihood that students will come to view encyclopedias as friends and valuable aids to self-directed learning.

Step-by-Step Procedure for this Activity

1. Teach a lesson on the use of the encyclopedia. Students should know alphabetical order and be able to use guide words. Practice finding the *beginnings* of long articles. Use p. 23 with the entire group to practice selecting key words to look up.
2. *The World Book Encyclopedia* contains 21 volumes and an index. Give each child one volume along with a corresponding set of questions (pp. 2–22). Questions for the electronic encyclopedia are on p. 23. All answers are on pp. 24–27.
Note: I guarantee these questions and answers for the 1996 edition of *The World Book*, but the activity will work with any edition since 1988. There will be a *few* differences with editions other than 1996.
3. Allow children time to work through the questions while you walk around the room to offer assistance as needed. If time allows, encourage children who become interested in something to read further and share what they learn with others.
4. When you feel that students have practiced enough, you may wish to test them with a different volume and set of questions.
5. Follow up by assigning Mini-Reports using the lists on the pp. 24–26 of this booklet.