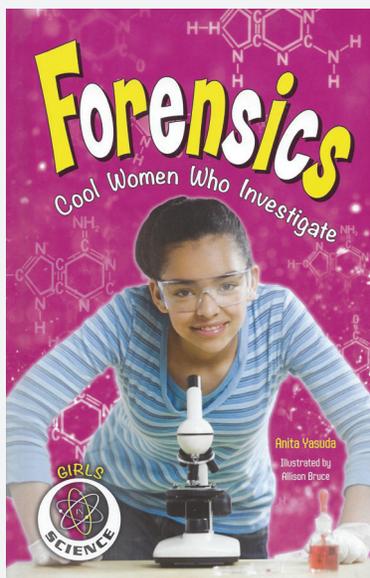


## Second Reaction: Nonfiction Writing as a Gate to Clarity

Yasuda, Anita. Illus. Allison Bruce. *Forensics: Cool Women Who Investigate*. Nomad Press, 2016.

Jennifer Snell



In a society filled with entertainment revolving around crime scenes, detectives, and investigations, kids are becoming more and more interested in the world of forensics. Many organizations have noticed this trend and have developed media entertainment such as *DragonflyTV*, which is a full-length program with a companion website dedicated to nothing but the teaching of forensics to their viewers. The genre of mystery has been a hot topic in children's literature. From Sherlock Holmes to Lemony Snicket, children have been reading and immersing themselves into detective stories and mysteries for years.

When I shared the book *Forensics: Cool Women Who Investigate* with a sixth grade student, she eagerly grabbed the book and was excited to begin the reading journey. Her face lit up and a smile broke out. . . at first; however, after a week she was befuddled to the point of uneasiness. Although she read the information over and over, she remained confused. I, too, felt a bit overwhelmed.

I scanned the pages because I noticed that the insets of information interrupted the main topic of the chapter, even though the topic kept me reading. You see, I am a crime scene investigation (CSI) fanatic. I love watching CSI programs and reading information about forensics.

As a teacher, I am captivated by any student's natural desire to want to solve mysteries and puzzles. Student participation with texts that ask the reader to find solutions to the problem presented can help develop higher-level thinking strategies. As the reader recognizes and identifies clues, possible solutions begin to surface. For this reason, I plan to diligently embed mystery and nonfiction forensic writing into my literacy curriculum. The possibilities of using various sections of this book and to cover literacy objectives in science, reading, and language lessons is appealing for any teacher.

The format in *Forensics* causes reading disconnections. For instance, as I read through the first chapter, I was enticed by all of the comic book–style graphics and colors along the pages. The teacher in me welcomed the “Ask and Answer” questions after various sections. However, in the midst of reading about a particular aspect such as “Fingerprints and the Future” in chapter 1, my attention was pulled from the information about fingerprinting and its uses because of inserted biographies of others in the field of forensic science. While this information is good to know, it took my mind away from the purpose of the chapter. I found this distraction issue throughout the book.

The sixth grader chosen to pursue *Forensics: Cool Women Who Investigate* was also distracted in her reading by extraneous information on the pages. For instance, while information about other “super sleuths” provides for a great read, I feel its placement within the chapter may lead to students losing their focus of the main idea, which in this case would be the future use of fingerprints. Chapter 1 goes from Sherlock Holmes then back to giving information about identification by fingerprinting. As a result, I feel that this book would be very difficult to implement in its entirety into my literacy curriculum.

I did find other chapters more engaging, specifically chapters 2, 3, and 4. Those chapters highlight the careers of women forensic scientists that you would expect to read about, as part of the title includes that promise. While these chapters were very informational about the forensic career areas of each of these women, these chapters are not without fault. Once more there are insets of irrelevant information that are off topic, and, for readers who have difficulty with comprehension, it is too great a distraction. Even the student I shared the book with mentioned her difficulty in remembering what the purpose of each chapter was as she read these various insets of information.

Many readers struggle with comprehension of nonfiction reading. This is why it is imperative that nonfiction should be written with clarity and that its format includes smooth transitions. All in all, while this book looks “cool” and has an intriguing title, it is not one I would ask my students to read and study in its entirety. Rather, I would teach certain sections to my students, teaching them about forensics—and perhaps even discussing how format arrangement can impede our reading with them. In the end, with the “Accelerated Reader” program active in our school, I cannot recommend this book for library purchase.

### **About the Author**

**Jennifer Snell** was born and raised in southern Oklahoma. She has a bachelor's degree in secondary English education and a master's degree in education. She is currently a student at the University of Oklahoma preparing for a PhD in reading and literacy. She taught for fifteen years in English and language arts classrooms, teaching grades from fifth to twelfth. Snell is currently an education instructor at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma.