John Campbell Public School

Collaborative Inquiry Team: Liz Laporte, Instructional Coach; Debbie Finnerty, Grade Six Classroom Teacher; Tracy McDonald ,Vice Principal; Stephanie Douglas, Teacher Librarian.

Inquiry Question: What is the impact of teacher collaboration on grade 6 boys' engagement and achievement in non-fiction reading and writing?

Vision

The team would like to deepen their learning about effectively using non-fiction texts to engage students in real world learning experiences across the curriculum, as well as, increase student engagement in and enjoyment of reading non-fiction.

Theory of Action

If the teacher-librarian, classroom teacher, vice principal and instructional coach collaborate to increase the use of non-fiction reading and writing, then grade six boys' engagement and achievement in writing will increase.

Purpose for the Study

The purpose of this inquiry is to explore non-fiction literacy skills in collaboration with the teacher-librarian, teacher, vice principal and instructional coach as an opportunity to improve student achievement of grade six boys at John Campbell.

Justification for the Study

This team believes that it is important to weave non-fiction reading throughout all curriculum areas in order to effectively prepare students for real world experiences. Non-fiction reading has also been identified by John Campbell staff as an area of focus for their own learning during this school year.

> **"**When observing boys in the classroom, it may be tempting to conclude that they do not like to read. It may be more accurate, however, to conclude that, in many cases, it is not that boys do not like to read, but that they do not like to read what they are presented with in the classroom. Offering a rich and varied mix of materials and being mindful of boys' reading preferences can go a long way towards building an engaging and inviting reading environment for boys." *Me read? No Way? A Practical Guide to Improving Boy's Literacy Skills 2005 P. 8*

Description of Procedures and Actions Taken

The team utilized several different strategies to assess and engage grade 6 boys in non-fiction text.

Interviews
Interviews, including audio recordings, were conducted with the marker students in order to gain insight into the students' understanding of the purpose(s) of non-fiction writing. Students were also asked about their preference for writing fiction and non-fiction. Many students shared that they preferred to write fiction because it was easier to write ideas from their head and use their creativity. Students reported that they found researching topics time consuming.

OWA & CASI
OWA and CASI non-fiction assessments were used to identify boys achieving at a level two and three in order to provide intensive support for non-fiction writing.

Survey Monkey
Surveys were completed to gain perspective into the students' attitudes towards reading and their reading habits at home and school. (Figures 1 – 3)

The following is the list of statements the students were asked to respond to:
1. I enjoy listening to someone read aloud.
2. I like to talk about ideas and information after I have read something.
3. I enjoy reading at home.
4. I think non-fiction is easier to read than fiction.
5. It takes me a long time to read most things.
6. I read for enjoyment.
7. I am a good reader.
8. Reading is just something I do for school.
9. When I enjoy a particular book, I try to find more books by the same author.
10. Reading is boring.
11. Reading is important for subjects like science, writing, social studies, art, or math.
12. I read to learn about things that interest me.
13. I write about things that interest me.
14. Writing is important for subjects like science, social studies, art, or math.
15. I enjoy going to the library.
16. I feel that I am an effective writer.
17. I enjoy writing at home.
18. I enjoy writing at school.
19. It's important to be a good writer.
20. I enjoy sharing my writing with others.
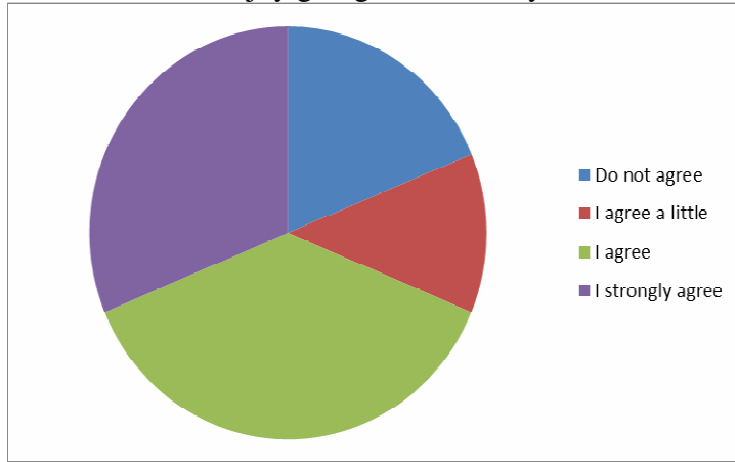
Figure 1
I enjoy going to the library.

- Do not agree
- I agree a little
- I agree
- I strongly agree

Figure 2
I think non-fiction is easier to read than fiction.

- Do not agree
- I agree a little
- I agree
- I strongly agree
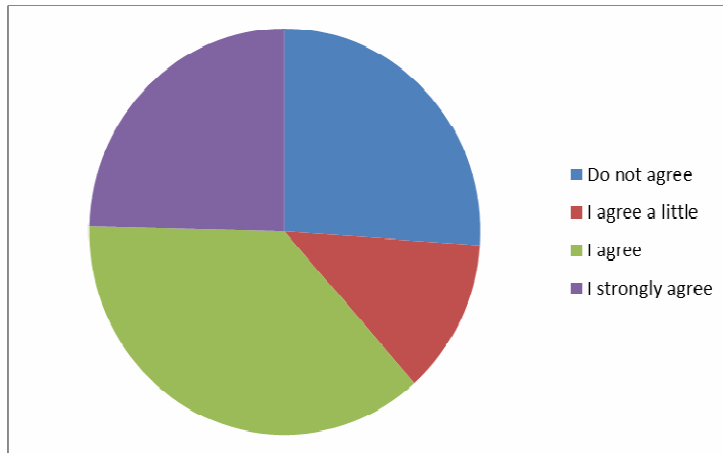
Figure 3
Writing is important for subjects like science, social studies, art, or math.

- Do not agree
- I agree a little
- I agree
- I strongly agree
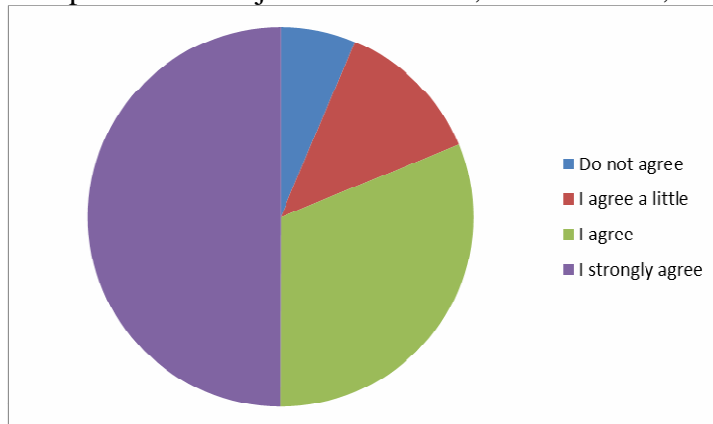
Graphic Organizers
Graphic organizers were used as a way to measure the students' ability to pull information from non-fiction resources. (Figures 4 -7)

Why graphic organizers?
 "Finding better ways that are of interest to students with a focus on **thinking** and how that connects to how effectively students work with one another. More specifically it is about how we think inductively and deductively, why we need to reflect and organize our thoughts…we employ graphic organizers to invoke and encourage the process of organizing our thinking…" Dr. Barrie Bennet in *Graphic Intelligence*. (p.1).
(Figures 4 -7)

Why a Mind Map?
Dr. Barrie Bennet in *Graphic Intelligence* (p.320) writes:
The uses of graphic representations like Mind Maps are far reaching. Mind Maps make learning information easier as they cut down on text by 90%. (Buzan & Israel, p.9). The information overload of our modern world makes these features quite appealing. Mind Maps can be simple, complex, used for children or adults, done alone or in groups. They can be created for personal, professional, academic, or business purposes. Bennet & Rolheiser (2001) note how the colour and images of Mind Maps seem to be more effective for memory than do other Advance Organizers. Higher level thinking skills and social skills can be integrated into learning situations while different learning styles are honoured. (McEwan & Myers, 2002, p. 33). This facet of Mind Mapping is particularly important as our society becomes increasingly diverse. Originally intended by Buzn for the memorization of lecture notes, graphic organizers are increasingly seen as effective in facilitating analysis, elaboration, and integration of subject matter content as well as being illustrative of concept relations. The biggest benefit for the learner is the enhancement of structural knowledge (Driscoll, 2005, p. 105).
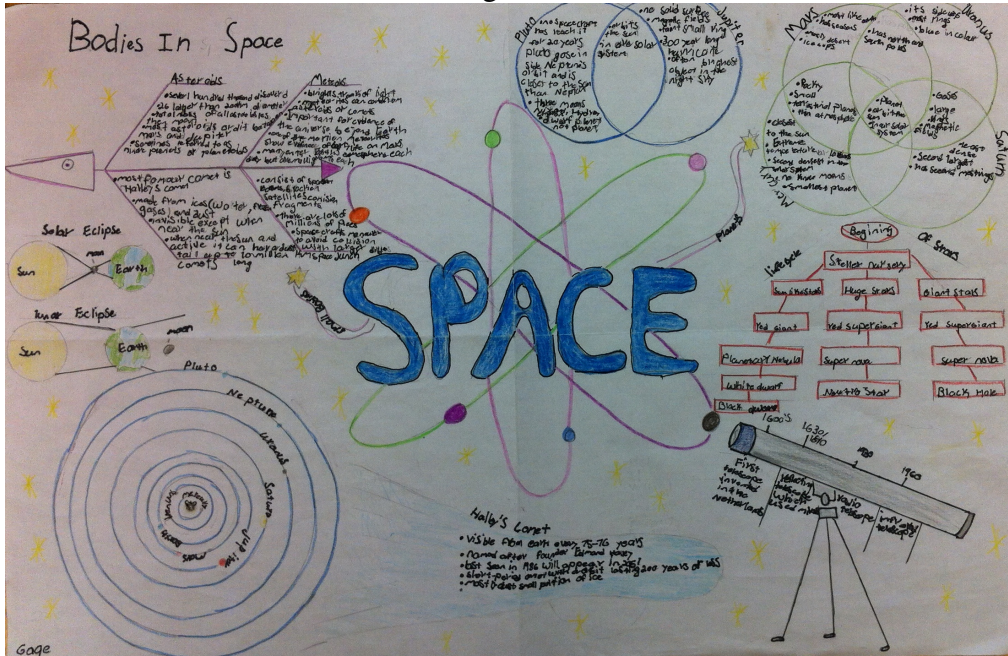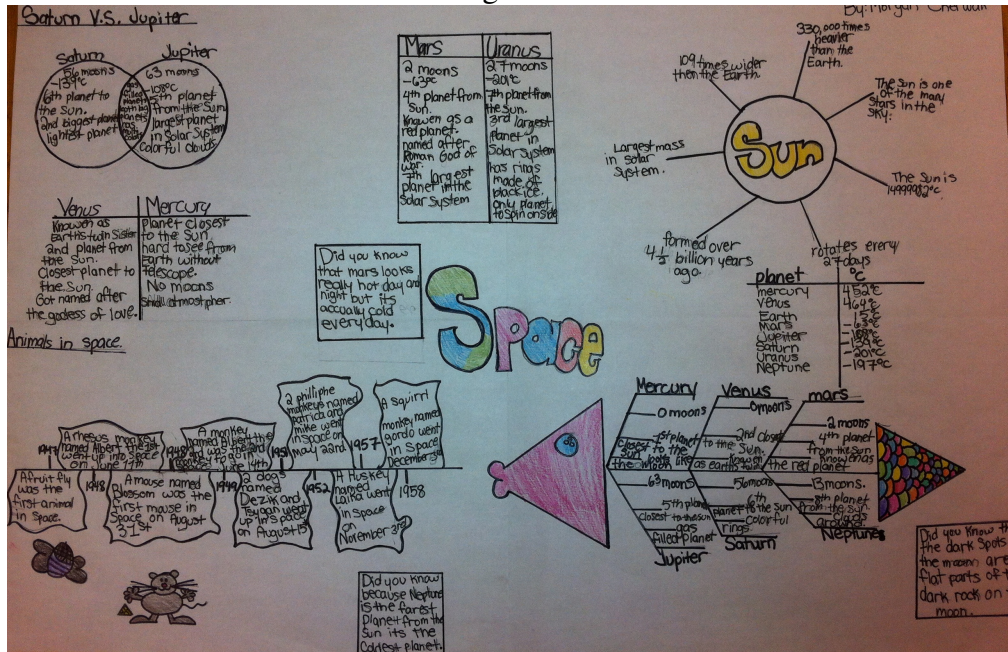
Examples of Student Work

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6
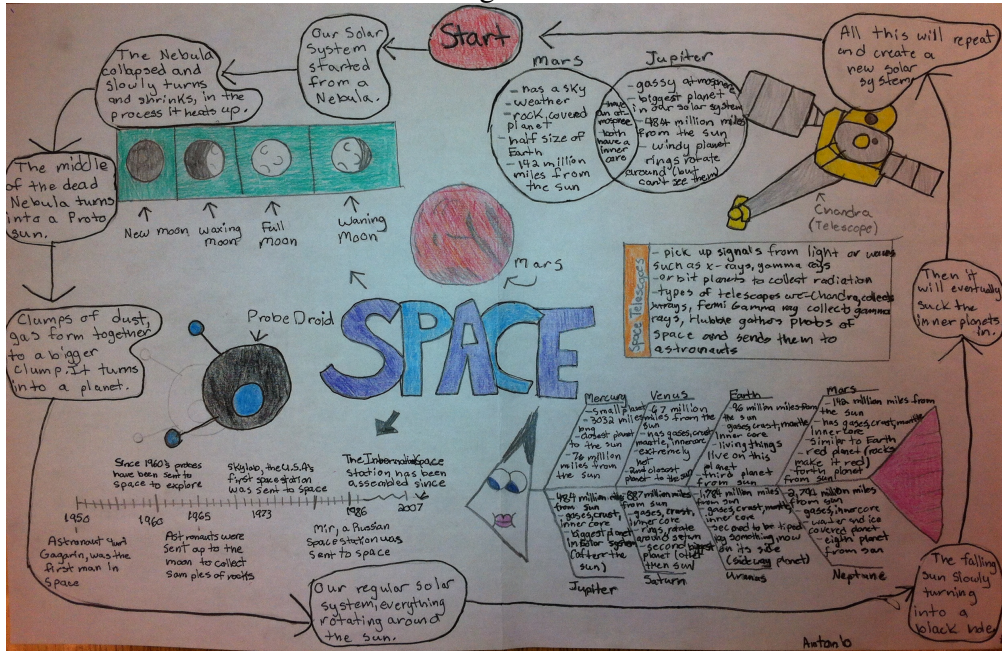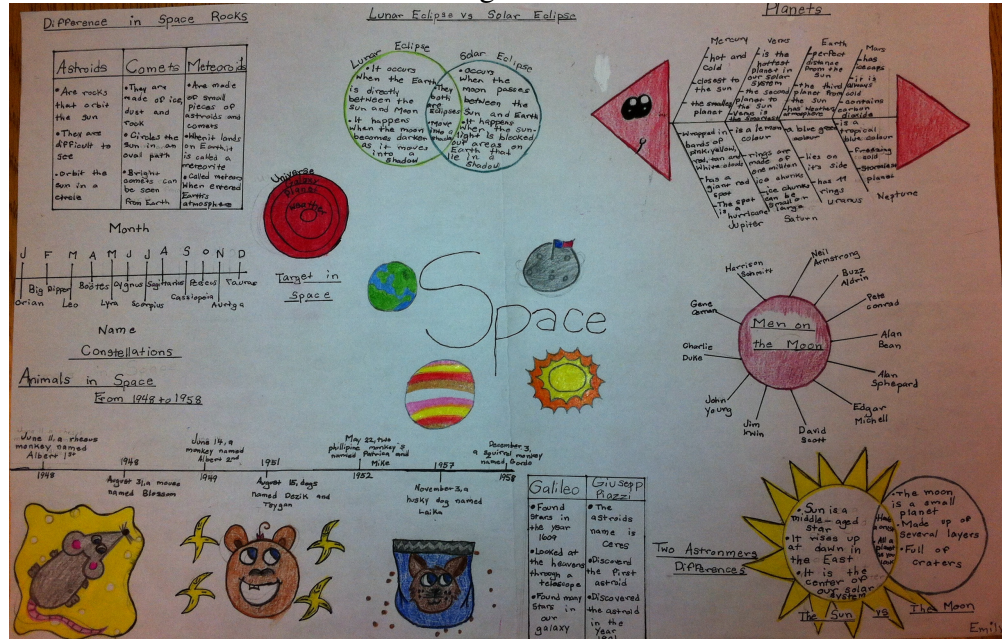

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 7

Technology in the Library

A variety of technology was utilized to engage the grade six class in non-fiction text. Subscription databases, such as *Grolier Online*, were taught explicitly to the students to promote non-fiction reading and research skills to be used at school and at home. Web 2.0 tools were also used as part of the library program for engagement as well as to enhance computer skills and usage. Students used *Fakebook* to create a character profile. They then engaged in online conversations to have a better understanding of the characters' traits and to show what they have learned about them. Students were taught how to create an avatar on *Bitstrips* to complete a space exploration comic strip. Students used their avatar to take their readers on a trip through space to demonstrate their knowledge on the subject. Students used texts located in the non-fiction section of the library as well as online databases to do their research. (Appendix 1 -6)

Library Circulation

Each week students logged on a chart if they selected fiction or non-fiction reading to checkout from the library. Non-fiction book circulation actually declined throughout the process as demonstrated in the graph. We believe this was due to the books being put in the classroom by the teacher so students could use them during their literacy block. (Figure 8)

Figure 8
Grade 6 Library Circulation
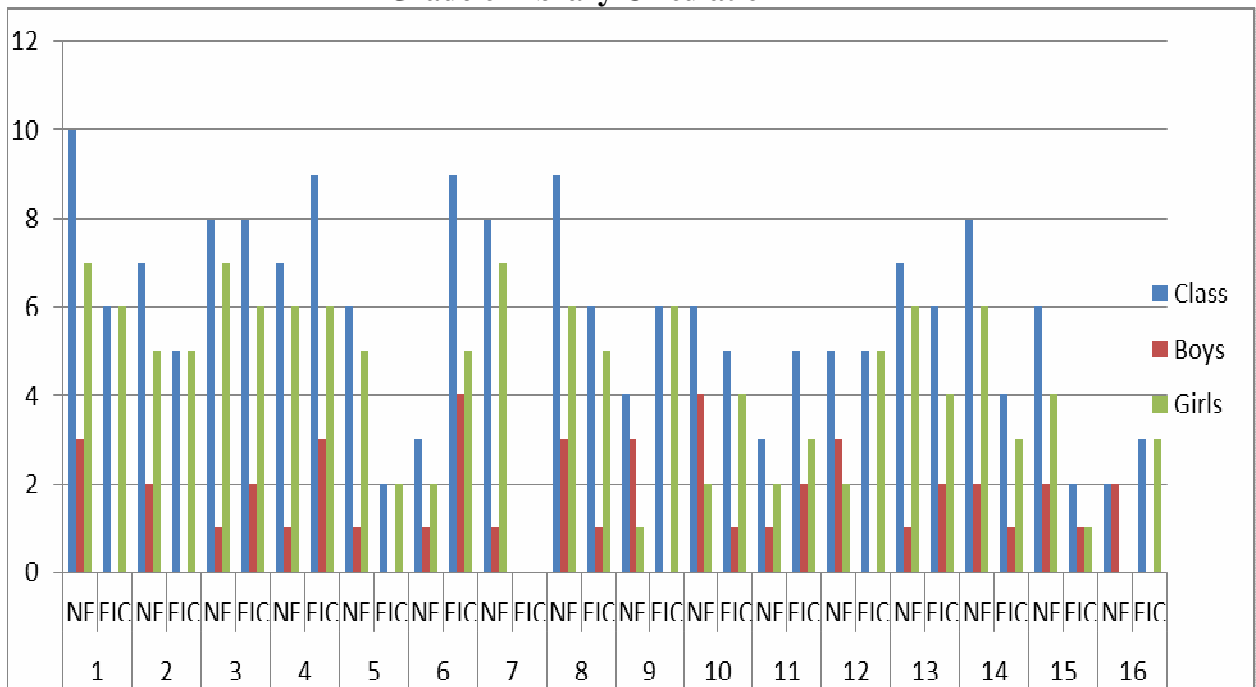
Findings

We found the following as a result of our inquiry:
- The students can cite more non-fiction texts than they could initially.
- Students can recognize that non-fiction texts are relevant to everyday life.
- Attitudes towards non-fiction writing are more positive.
- Most students initially preferred fiction writing.
- Students built research skills through using library resources such as online databases.
- Students were able to gather facts and incorporate them into realistic fiction (i.e. comic strips, opinion pieces, graphic organizers, etc.) and other text forms.

Teacher Reflections

- Teaching in the library works best when doing it collaboratively. With the TL and classroom teachers the library program becomes more enriched. Teacher collaboration helps to link the library program to classroom curriculum, student needs, and school wide goals.
- The inquiry question had to be modified as it was difficult to "measure" student engagement.
- This inquiry would have benefited from exploring the students' knowledge about the library. For example, what books (fiction or non-fiction) are available to them and what are the loaning practices. Many students opted to read classroom novels or texts purchased by the family.
- Bitstrips would be best taught with small group instruction geared towards student computer literacy skills.
- Survey monkey may have not been the best tool to use as the cookies prevented students from answering question independently as the previous students answers were embedded already.
- Graphic organizers apply in every context of the curriculum, regardless of the subject. Students utilized their new learning of graphic organizers to structure and organize their own thinking outside of the project. It was proven that students used these previously taught concepts in other course works, such as title pages, etc.
- We realized the importance of explicit teaching of the concepts and to provide the opportunities to practice in order to teach students how to pull information from a text.
- Since the tasks were not text heavy we had better success with the students, especially the reluctant students.

Student Reflections

Student Reflections Regarding Non-Fiction: December 2011

1. What can you tell me about non-fiction writing?

 "Non-fiction is helpful, like an encyclopedia. They have true facts, subtitles, and pictures. Tells you everything you need to know."
Jaydin C. - Marker Student

"Is to tell information about real things, like soccer."
Antonio - Marker Student

"Non-fiction writing is good for learning and education. It gives you true facts and is realistic."
Dakota - Marker Student

"I find that I can learn a lot of things. True facts. You learn something new, something you can brag about."
Jacobb G - Marker Student

"It's not as much of a visual appearance in your head. It's getting the facts straight. Fiction creates a picture."
Kareem - Marker Student

"Non-fiction is real writing. It has facts. It's not fake. It can be about something that is fake, like the Loch Ness monster because it hasn't been proven."
Gage - Marker Student

2. Do you prefer to write fiction or non-fiction? Why?

"I like both. Fiction you can make it anything you want, but there is also non-fiction too. I wrote a story about a car that came to life, but it also had a 1969 Shelby which is real. Most of the time I like writing non-fiction."
Jaydin C. - Marker Student

"I prefer fiction because non-fiction you have to go on the internet, fiction you can write about anything you want. Non-fiction doesn't use imagination and fiction does."
Antonio - Marker Student

"I prefer to write fiction because it's easier cause you can come up with ideas in your own head. It's original. It's something you can think of without researching."
Dakota - Marker Student

"I prefer fiction because usually when I look up information it's already there written down and I don't learn from it. Fiction I can have fun and use my imagination. No one can prove it wrong or call it bad because it's just what I think."
Jacobb G. - Marker Student

"I prefer fiction because it's easier. It is more creative. It is more fun."
Kareem - Marker Student

"Fiction because it is more fun. You can make up any topic. Non-fiction can be fun with research, but fiction is more fun. Nobody can say you're wrong. It's your writing."
Gage - Marker Student

"I would like to write fiction. I read a lot of fiction books. I'm not really sure I just find a way how to make it easier."
Andre - Marker Student

Student Reflections Regarding Non-Fiction: April 2012

"First I thought non-fiction reading and writing was hard because we read the article/story and it was hard for me to go back into the article/story and find the information about the stuff assigned.
Now I think non-fiction reading and writing is understandable. Why, because I've done more non-fiction reading and writing work so I understand how to phrase everything. But writing is a little harder for me to explain. I think I'm improving."
Antonio – Marker Student

"First I thought non-fiction was boring and took a long time to read because I didn't like reading then and now I think it's cool because now I know non-fiction is educational, tells you events that happened in real life and even more and I like reading more than I did when I was younger. "
Dakota – Marker Student

"First I thought that non-fiction was that we would never need it in our lives. It was just a waste of time. Fiction is all that I care about. I don't care about non-fiction. I ask myself "Why do we need non-fiction? We already have fiction."
Emily

"First I thought non-fiction writing was not good because you cannot express your ideas. I also thought that you could not paint a picture in your head with them. Now I think that non-fiction writing is okay because that are some ways you can say your feelings, for example, an opinion piece. There are also visual ways to show facts like a graphic organizer."
Kareem – Marker Student

"First I thought there was no point of non-fiction writing and you could just get information without reading and it was a waste of time. Now I think non-fiction writing

can give you a lot of fascinating information and help you learn. Also, non-fiction writing can help with school work. I now think non-fiction writing is helpful."
Rebecca

Recommendations
- Students need to be taught how to pull information from a text.
- Opportunities need to be created to allow teachers collaborate and plan in order to share expertise.
- It is very important for the teachers to have an open mind and understand that dissonance is part of the process.
- Create opportunities (next steps) to have students recognize reading and writing in their own lives as opposed to just at school.
- Encourage use of non-fiction reading and writing in all grade levels including primary.
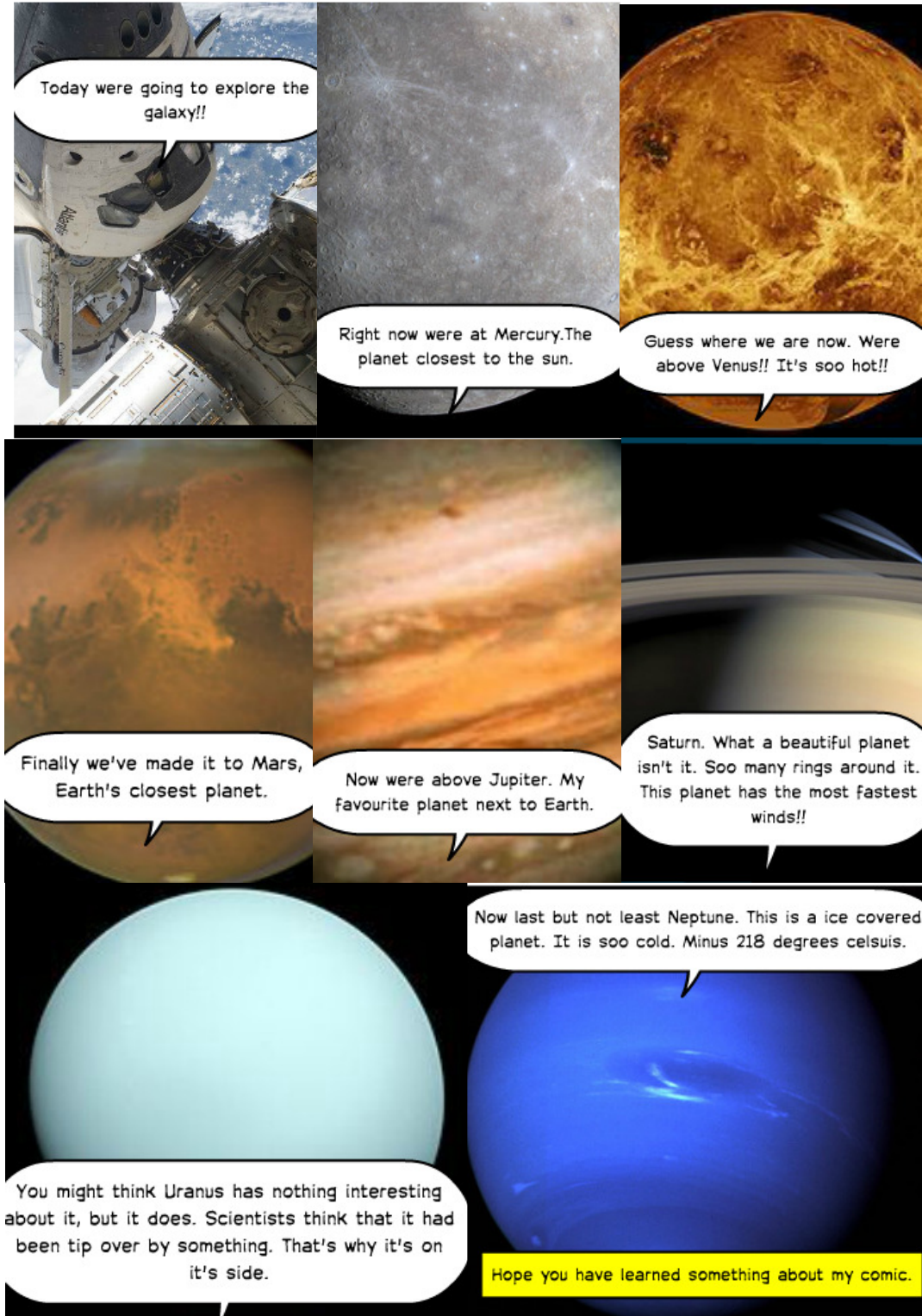
References

Me read? No Way? A practical guide to improving boy's literacy skills 2005 Ministry of Education

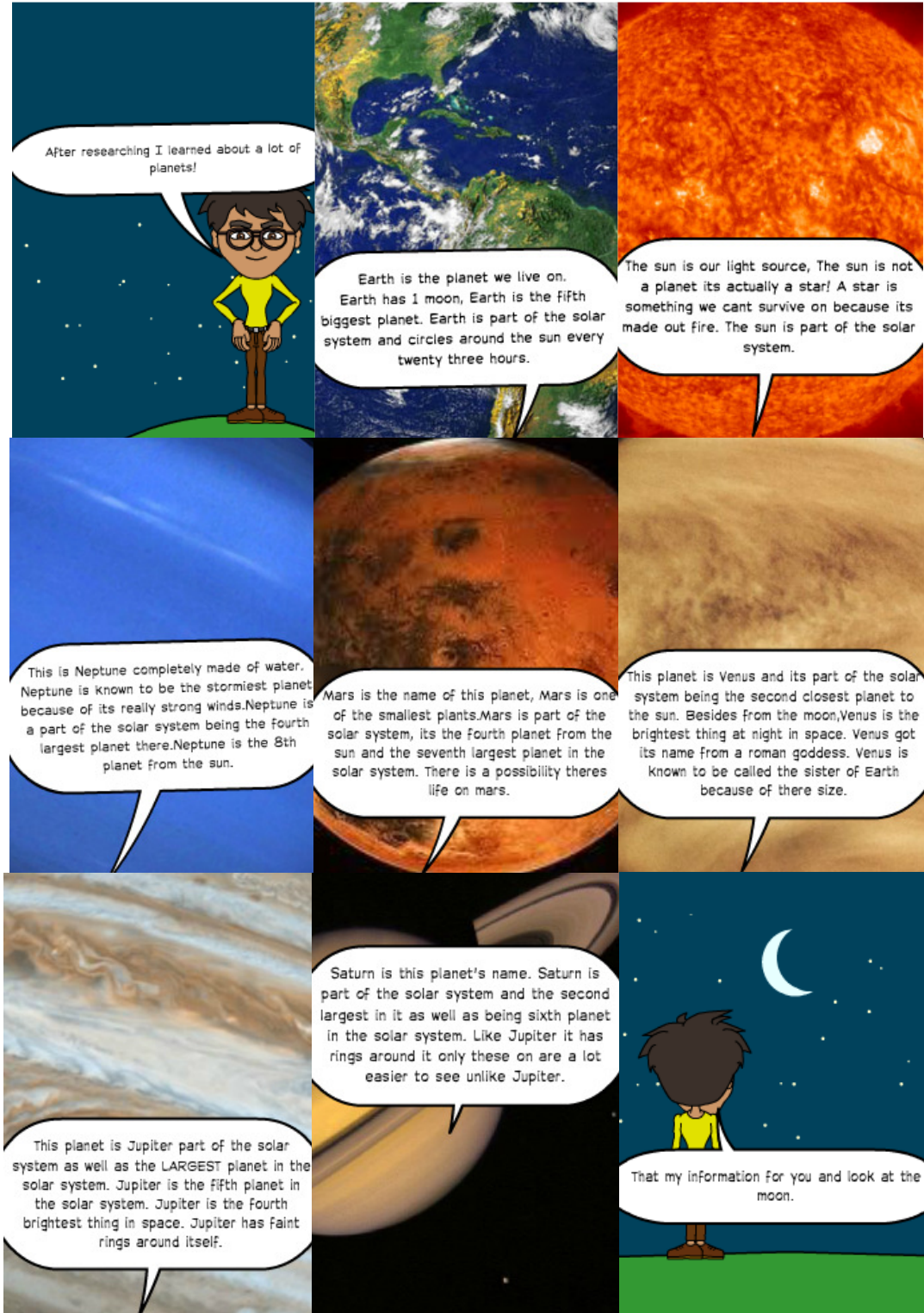Bennet, B. (2010).*Graphic Intelligence*. Bookation: Toronto.

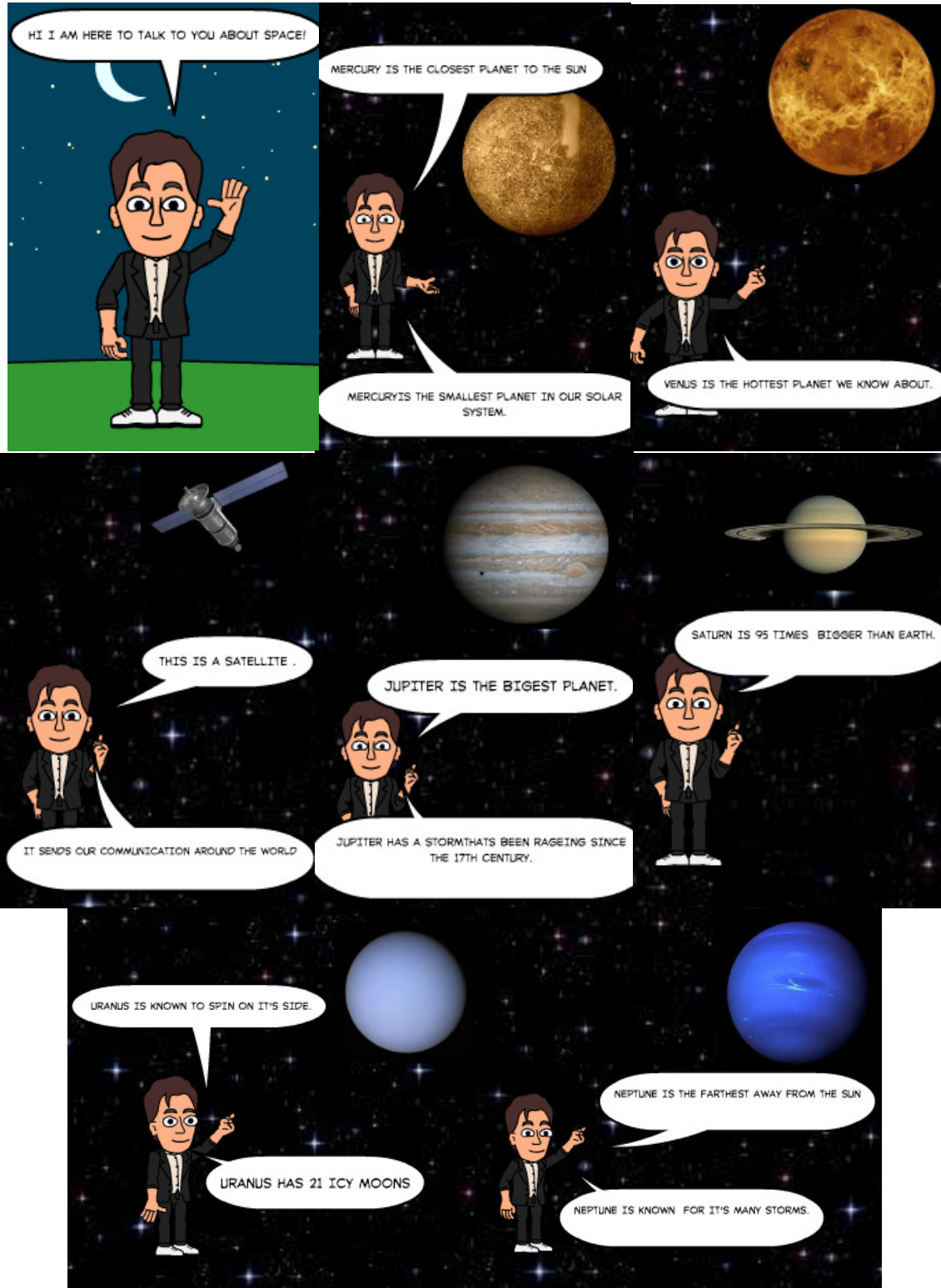Appendix 1: "Space Trip" by Jaydin – Marker Student

Appendix 3: "Untitled" by Dakota – Marker Student

THIS IS THE SUN. IT'S BIGGEST THING IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM. IT IS MADE OF HOT PLASMA.

MY SPACE TOUR IS OVER. I TOUGHT YOU MANY THINGS BUT I COULD NOT DONE IT WITH THE ASTRONOMERS WHO FOUND ALL THESE FACTS. THAT IS HOW SPACE TRAVEL AFFECTED US IT INCREASED ARE LEARNING SO WE KNOW ALOT MORE WHEN WE GROW UP. NOW WE COULD HAVE MORE JOBS ABOUT SPACE BECOUSE WE KNOW MORE.

www.bitstripsforschools.com

Appendix 5: "To be continued..." by Andre – Marker Student

Appendix 6: "Space" by Gage – Marker Student