Labels, Captions and Diagrams: Reading Non-Fiction Text Features in Year 1

In Year 1, children learn to spot and use the special features that make non-fiction books different from stories. Labels, captions, diagrams and contents pages all help readers find information quickly. Learning to notice and use these features helps your child become a stronger reader.

What it is

Non-fiction books share information rather than tell stories. They use special features to help readers find what they need. A label gives the name of something in a picture. A caption adds detail or explanation below a picture. A diagram shows how something looks or how it works. A contents page at the start lists what's inside and where to find it. These features are the tools that make non-fiction books work differently from storybooks, and Year 1 pupils start learning to spot them and use them to read with purpose.

What happens in class

In Year 1, teachers show children non-fiction pages and talk about why each feature is there. A child might be shown a page about animals, for example, and asked: 'What does this label tell you?' or 'Which picture does the caption describe?' Pupils practise matching captions to pictures, following labels to learn about parts of something, and using a contents page to find a page about a topic they're interested in. Some lessons include creating their own labels on simple diagrams – drawing or writing a label to name part of a picture they've made or chosen. This hands-on work helps children understand that these features aren't decoration; they're tools for finding and sharing information.

What it means for your child

Learning to read non-fiction features is a real skill that opens up new kinds of reading. Your child moves from following a story from start to finish to dipping into a book to find one piece of information. This is how most adults read – hunting for what we need rather than reading every word. It's also the foundation for later work in Year 2 and beyond, when children move on to spotting fact and opinion, asking question-words like 'why' and 'how', and reading information for topic work across the curriculum. Right now, in Year 1, the goal is simple: notice these features exist, understand what they do, and use them to learn something new.

How you can help at home

Point out non-fiction features in books and everyday life. When you're reading together, ask simple questions: 'What does this label tell us?' or 'Can you find it in the picture?' Visit the library and let your child choose non-fiction books about their interests – animals, vehicles, nature, space. Read them together without pressure; it's fine to skip around rather than read cover to cover. Look at menus, instruction leaflets, recipe books, or child encyclopaedias – all use labels, captions and diagrams. You might draw a simple diagram together and give it a label, or ask your child to label a picture they've drawn. The key is playfulness: help them see that information is everywhere, and these features are the signposts that help us find it.

Questions parents often ask

My child has favourite story books – will this put them off? No. Children can love both stories and non-fiction; they use different parts of our brain. **Does my child need to read all the words?** Not always. With non-fiction, it's fine to read the bits that interest you. **What if my child finds it boring?** Choose topics they care about – dinosaurs, animals, sports, cooking. Non-fiction is exciting when the topic matters to them. **How much should I push this at home?** Keep it short and fun. Five minutes with a book they've chosen beats twenty minutes of drilling. **What if they still mix up stories and non-fiction?** That's normal in Year 1. Teachers will keep building this understanding all year.

Sources

- Department for Education (2014). National Curriculum in England: Key Stage 1 English. Reading programme of study.
- GOV.UK. Key Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2). Curriculum and qualifications.