

Who, What, Where, When: Spotting Question Words in Year 2 Non-Fiction

This guide explains how Year 2 children use question words like who, what, and where to find facts in non-fiction books. It offers simple, playful ways to support this skill at home without pressure.

What it is

In Year 2, children begin to read more non-fiction texts, such as information books about animals, places, or history. To help them understand these texts, teachers introduce 'question words' (also known as interrogatives). These are words like who, what, where, when, why, and how. The goal is not just to memorise these words, but to use them as tools. When a child reads a heading or a picture, they can ask themselves these questions to predict what information they will find. This skill helps them navigate information quickly and prepares them for writing their own simple reports or captions later in the year.

What happens in class

During English lessons, teachers often use a strategy called 'questioning the text'. For example, if the class is reading a book about sharks, the teacher might pause and ask, 'Who lives in the ocean?' or 'Where do sharks sleep?'. Children learn to scan the text for these specific answers. They might use a highlighter to mark where the answer to 'when' appears, or circle the name of the person in a biography for 'who'. This turns reading into an active search game. Teachers may also ask children to write their own questions before reading a new section, helping them set a purpose for reading. This practice builds confidence in handling factual information.

What it means for your child

Mastering question words helps your child become a more independent reader. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by a page of text, they learn to look for specific facts. This is a key part of the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1, which encourages children to retrieve information from texts. It also supports their writing. When they write a label for a diagram or a sentence about a topic, they can use these words to structure their thoughts. For example, 'The lion lives in Africa' answers 'where'. This skill reduces anxiety about non-fiction reading because it gives children a clear method to follow. It is a foundational skill that supports learning across all subjects, including science and history.

How you can help at home

You can support this skill through short, playful activities using everyday items. Try reading a recipe together and asking, 'What ingredients do we need?' or 'When do we put the eggs in?'. Use information books from the library or even leaflets from a local zoo. Point to a picture and ask your child to come up with a 'who' or 'where' question about it. You can also play a game where you read a sentence and your child has to guess which question word it answers. Keep it light and fun; there is no need for formal drills. If your child is learning English as an additional language, using visual cues alongside the words can be very helpful. Always encourage their curiosity rather than correcting every mistake.

Questions parents often ask



Many parents ask if they should teach the grammar term 'interrogative'. The answer is usually no; at this age, focusing on the function of the words is more important than the label. Another common question is how to help if a child struggles to find answers. Try breaking the text down into smaller chunks or using pictures to guide them. Some parents worry about screen time; using educational apps or websites that ask questions about videos can be a good alternative to books. If your child has Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), ask their teacher for specific strategies, such as using colour-coded question cards. Remember, every child develops at their own pace. If you have concerns, a quick chat with your child's teacher is the best way to get tailored advice.

Sources

- Department for Education: National Curriculum in England: English programmes of study
- GOV.UK: Reading and writing for children and young people