Using RAN Charts to Reimagine Nonfiction Learning

Most educators are familiar with the traditional KWL chart that teachers use before, during, and after teaching a new topic. Students record what they Know and what they Want to know before the lesson begins, and what they've Learned when the lesson's complete. While the KWL chart is a good way for students to assess and build upon their knowledge, author Tony Stead's modified version, known as a RAN chart, takes things a step further.

What Is a RAN Chart?

RAN stands for Reading and Analyzing Nonfiction. There has been a huge shift in education towards students' analysis of texts. Students are expected to read closely with an analytical lens. Structuring your nonfiction teaching (especially in social studies and science) around a RAN chart will guide your students to become the analytical readers that we expect them to be.

What Does a RAN Chart Look Like?

What I Think I Know	Confirmed	Misconceptions	New Learning	Wonderings

Every RAN chart has the following categories:

- What I Think I Know

- Confirmed

- Misconceptions

- New Information

- Wonderings

How To Use a RAN Chart

1. Start with a blank RAN chart, with just the categories, and tell your class the topic. Don't give them any other information at this point.

2. ==Instruct your students to write their names and one thing they think they know about the topic on a sticky note. They should use a new sticky note for each fact that they record. I let my students write as many sticky notes as they want, and then share their notes with the rest of the class. We group together the facts that are the same (for example, if two students say that they think the sun is hot, I would place those two sticky notes on top of each other on the chart) and the students place their sticky notes in the "I Think I Know" column.==

3. Ask your students to think of things they wonder about the topic. Following the same process described above, the students record questions they have on sticky notes and place them in the "Wonderings" column.

4. Next, encourage your class to explore authentic resources that you've made available to them, such as books from the library at multiple reading levels. Split the class into small groups (these can be mixed ability or leveled groups depending on the texts that you have) and give each group text(s) to study. As the students find evidence to prove or

disprove the "I Think I Know" sticky notes, they can move them to the "Confirmed" or "Misconceptions" columns.

5. Have your students present their evidence to the class; they'll be excited to share what they've found! Groups should also be looking for answers to items in the "Wonderings" column, and recording "New Information" that they learn on new sticky notes. "New Information" consists of facts that aren't covered in the "I Think I Know" or "Wonderings" sticky notes.

6. This process can go on for as long as you'd like, and take place over a few days or even a few weeks. The length of time will depend on how deeply you want your students to dig into the topic being studied.

Tip: Make sure to review what was learned from the research at the end of each day, referring to the RAN chart.

Should I Use A RAN Chart?

1. **It creates a safe space for misconceptions.** The "We Think We Know" column sold me on the RAN chart. With a KWL chart, there's an assumption that students are correct in their prior knowledge, when in reality, the facts they share may not be accurate. The

beauty of calling the column, "I Think I Know" gets the children to realize that nothing is certain without evidence or proof. It also allows students who are hesitant to say they KNOW something to participate because you are building an environment of it being OK if a child's prior knowledge is incorrect.

2. **It gives children the opportunity to research and infer.** By having students determine whether or not the notes in the "I Think I Know" column are correct, it empowers them to explore nonfiction books, videos, pictures, or Internet resources to find evidence to prove or disprove these ideas — WITHOUT relying on the teacher for help. When students can research and make inferences on their own, they're more invested in the project and more likely to remember what they've discovered.

3. **It's hands-on.** Visual learners benefit from using a RAN chart because they can move the sticky notes from column to column, helping them remember the facts that they have learned.

4. **It's inquiry-based.** By focusing a RAN chart around one topic, students center their learning around their "Wonderings" and around proving their "I Think I Know" thoughts. Therefore, the class learns what it wants to learn about the topic, based on what the students think they know and questions they may have. They guide their own learning, which gives them ownership of the topic.

5. **It allows for authenticity.** Facts and knowledge must be proven with evidence found in authentic literature. Students search in multiple texts, finding multiple sources for their answers. Regardless of whether facts are moved into the "Confirmed" or "Misconceptions" column, the process itself encourages exploration in these authentic texts.

Modifications for Using a RAN Chart Across All Levels and Grades

RAN charts can be used with students across grade and reading levels. Here are some modifications that you can use to make RAN charts useful in any class.

- **Grades K-1 (or with lower-level readers):** Break down the chart into subtopics to help your class organize and narrow their thinking. This modification keeps students focused on specific categories in the topic they're studying. Another modification for younger students or lower-level readers is to have them find information in pictures and videos. This will teach the importance of interpreting pictures, and it allows students who have difficulty reading words to participate.

- **Independent, Partner, or Small Group:** RAN charts can also be completed independently, with partners, or in small groups using file folders, chart paper and small sticky notes. I have my students create mini RAN charts in small groups when they're in a nonfiction book club, studying a topic of their choosing. It's also a great strategy to use when students are completing independent research reports.

- **For Remote Learning:** Students will have their own RAN chart to write their information. An extra column has been added for new vocabulary.

RAN Chart
(Reading and Analyzing Non-Fiction)

What I Think I Know	Confirmed	Misconceptions	New Learning	Wonderings	New Vocabulary