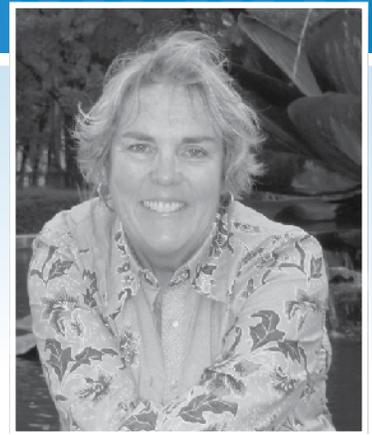


# Why, How, and When to Use National Geographic Ladders

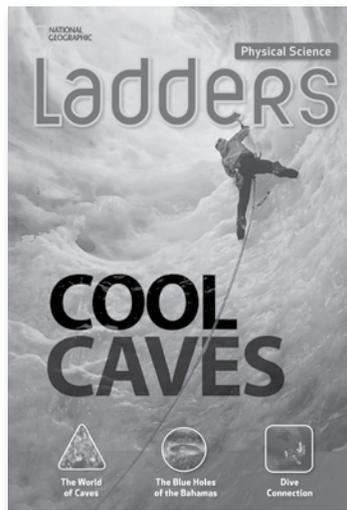
by Stephanie Harvey



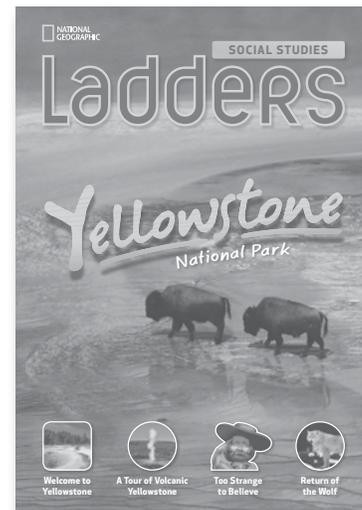
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*National Geographic Ladders  
Reading/Language Arts*



*National Geographic Ladders  
Science*



*National Geographic Ladders  
Social Studies*

Teachers have quite a few hurdles to jump, obstacles to dodge, and ladders to scale these days. It seems as if there is an ever-increasing influx of new initiatives, programs, and standards every year. While all this activity can be exciting, it can also be overwhelming. At times you feel lucky to keep one step ahead of your students. Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could simply give yourself permission to let kids read without a lot of over-instruction or over-testing? I'm here to tell you that is exactly what you should do. We all know, and research has backed this up, that what kids really need is more time to read.

When it comes to reading, volume is important—the more we read, the better we read. That's why I love NG Ladders. With so many titles and topics, there is something for everyone. Your kids, whether they are nonfiction nuts or story fanatics, will find in every book compelling text, amazing photos, interesting features, and multiple genres that will draw them in, fill them with information, and keep them reading. And those hurdles, obstacles, and ladders I mentioned before—while I can't remove them, I can promise you that NG Ladders is one ladder you and your students will enjoy climbing.

## WHY USE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC LADDERS?

There are many reasons to choose NG Ladders, but three of the most relevant ones are the following:

- Engaging and relevant content
- Equity
- Flexibility of use

Let's take a closer look at each of these.

**Engaging and relevant content** is important because that means this is text students will want to read. Remember, the more we read, the better we read, and if we want kids to read more, we have to provide them not only the opportunity to read more but also content they will be interested in reading.

**Equity** plays a role in NG Ladders with the multiple levels of text. This is important because kids should be reading plenty of text they *can* read, not text they *can't* read. In addition, the equity factor in NG Ladders has other unique twists. With NG Ladders, everyone has access to the same concepts at their own level, but the layout, images, captions, graphics, and vocabulary are the same for all levels of each title. Now that's equity!

**Flexibility of use** means that NG Ladders can be used successfully in different settings and across the curriculum. There are many, many ways to use these books—small groups, whole class, and independent reading. There are also tons of topics in NG Ladders, which makes it easy to integrate across the curriculum. You will be able to find books and selections that complement your English language arts, reading, science, and social studies themes and units.

## HOW TO USE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC LADDERS

There are many ways to use NG Ladders. In this “how-to” section, I'll focus on a few ways I find to be the most important and useful.



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- Small Group Opportunities
- Whole Class Opportunities
- Independent Reading Opportunities

Let's take a closer look at each of these.

**Small Group Opportunities** should abound in your classroom. There are two different types of small group opportunities—[small group work](#) and [small group instruction](#). It is important to distinguish the differences between the two. Both types are useful for distinct purposes.

[Small Group Work](#) is crucial, and NG Ladders is a perfect resource for small group work. Did you know that students should be spending approximately 60% of their time in small group work? Right now, in most classrooms, students are only spending about 30% of their time in small group work. That's why it is essential to understand what constitutes small group work. A few types of small group work that would work well with NG Ladders books include the following:

- **Literature Circles/Book Clubs** In this type of small group work, kids have to be able to read the same book. In traditional literature circles/book clubs that means all group members would have to be at approximately the same reading level. With NG Ladders, kids are not restricted from participating in a particular group because of their reading level. Because there are multiple levels of the same title, kids can read the level that suits them and still be able to fully participate in discussion about the book.
- **Inquiry Circles** When kids work together in inquiry circles, they choose to study topics, problems, or questions that interest them. Many of the NG Ladders topics and titles, especially those in the NG Ladders Science and Social Studies programs, will work well in inquiry circles.

**Small Group Instruction** differs from small group work in that groups are arranged around particular needs or interests, with instruction being the driving purpose. NG Ladders would work well in small group instruction, which could include groups arranged for various instructional purposes, such as the following:

- Groups arranged by level for reading instruction
- Groups arranged by comprehension need for strategy instruction
- Groups arranged for topic-, theme-, or genre-based instruction



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**Whole Class Opportunities** should also be considered when determining how to use NG Ladders. Because the same titles are available at multiple levels, you do not need to shy away from **whole class instruction** or **whole class discussion**.

**Whole Class Instruction** With NG Ladders, the content is leveled, but the page layout, images, captions, graphics, and vocabulary are the same for all levels of each title. Because of this, you can choose to do some instruction with the whole class. You can plan mini-lessons that include activating and building background before reading, building background for the genre, and building vocabulary and concepts. You can also conduct explicit instruction in thinking strategies for comprehension, modeling these strategies for students so they understand that reading is thinking. Many examples of modeling are included in the NG Ladders Teacher's Guides. But don't forget that mini-lessons should be short and targeted, and after explicit instruction and modeling, allow students time to practice on their own or in small groups.

**Whole Class Discussion** The NG Ladders check-in questions at the end of each selection and the Discuss questions at the end of each book are the same in all levels of each title. This allows flexibility for either whole class or small group discussion after reading any selection or an entire book.



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**Independent Reading Opportunities** are essential for all students. We need to provide plenty of time for independent reading of books students can read and want to read. We need to also offer all students an element of choice in what they read. With a multitude of topics, titles, and levels in NG Ladders, it won't be hard for students to find a just-right book.

## WHEN TO USE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC LADDERS

NG Ladders is a supplemental program, so it can supplement and complement your core English language arts, reading, science, and social studies themes and units. Have fun thinking of new ways to incorporate these books into your curriculum.

- Use NG Ladders Reading/Language Arts in your ELA or reading block. Use NG Ladders Science and Social Studies in your content area blocks.
- Pick a day or two a week to dub as "Ladders Days."
- Every time you start a new unit of study, seek out NG Ladders titles that work well with the unit and fold them into your lesson plans.
- Offer students the chance to select NG Ladders titles for their literature or inquiry circles.
- Challenge students to reread an NG Ladders title at a higher level than they read before.

- Set aside days for content area reading. Kids need to be spending a good deal of time reading text they can read in the science and social studies realms. NG Ladders programs are great for high-interest content area reading.

## READING AS A MEANINGFUL ACT

As a final note, we must always honor the concept of reading as a meaningful act. To inform our teaching, we can't forget why we, as adults, are drawn to reading in our daily lives. We read because it serves us, and interaction with text is at the core of our reading engagement.

- We read to turn information into knowledge.  
*Reading is thinking, and we construct meaning from our reading.*
- We read to acquire and actively use knowledge,  
*not to take a test.*
- We read for enjoyment, exploring things that interest us.  
*Choice is important in reading.*
- We read to fuel our curiosities, stir our senses, and create emotional connections to stories real and imagined.  
*Reading is a meaningful, personal act.*

Just as we engage in reading for multiple reasons, so should our students be engaged in reading for many of the same reasons. NG Ladders offers students a great opportunity for real reading. NG Ladders exemplifies reading as a meaningful act.