Grade 4 – Informational Writing Work Sample: Meets

Task: Your class is studying about different ecosystems and animal habitats. You are given three sources about various animals and the habitats they live within.

Read the sources carefully to **write an informational article** on animals and their habitats. Using more than one source, develop a main idea about animals and their surroundings. Choose the most important information from the sources to support your main idea.

Scores, Justification of Student Evidence, and Suggested Areas of Student Improvement

Ideas and Content: 5

The paper is thorough, clear, and engaging. The writer establishes a strong main idea—that humans are lucky to have comforts animals don't—and connects it meaningfully to how animals adapt to survive in harsh environments. Accurate, well-chosen examples from multiple sources show deep understanding and effective synthesis of information.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear and Interesting Main Idea:** ○ The opening ("Do you know how lucky you are? You have air conditioners...") hooks the reader and frames the entire piece around a meaningful comparison between humans and animals. This shows both purpose and voice within the informational structure.	➢ **Include a Strong Title Connection:** ○ Adjust "Animal Homes" to better match the main idea—perhaps "Survival in Extreme Places" or "Lucky to Be Human, Smart to Be an Animal."
✓ **Accurate and Relevant Details:** ○ All details are accurate and connected to the writer's central idea about survival in extreme conditions. ○ Key facts reflect content from the sources: ○ The saguaro cactus stores water and provides shelter for desert animals (*Source #1*). ○ Penguins huddle for warmth and polar bears have thick fur and hibernate (*Source #1*). ○ Crabs survive near underwater vents where it is "dark and cold" (*Source #1*). ○	➢ **Add More Depth with Transitions:** ○ Include linking phrases between sections (e.g., "Just as desert animals adapt to heat, Arctic animals face the opposite challenge—cold.").
✓ **Strong Development and Organization of Ideas:** ○ Information is grouped logically by habitat (desert → Arctic → ocean) and expanded with explanations that show understanding, not just listing. The writer explains *how* each adaptation works, such as "small volcanoes they can pass by that act like heating vents."	➢ **Tighten the Central Focus:** ○ Maintain emphasis on "animal adaptations" rather than shifting too much to human comforts.
✓ **Elaboration and Insight:** ○ The conclusion ("Nature can be really cruel, but we all tend to find our way") thoughtfully connects animals' survival to a human theme—resilience—showing insight and purpose beyond a basic summary.	➢ **Clarify Minor Details:** ○ Revise statements like "Lucky for bears, they hibernate and don't have to even worry about anything" to maintain informational accuracy and tone.

Organization: 5

The paper is clearly organized and easy to follow. The writer structures information by environment (desert → Arctic → ocean) and frames it with a creative, engaging introduction and conclusion. Transitions between sections are smooth, and the sequencing keeps the reader interested and oriented throughout.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Engaging Introduction:** ○ The opening immediately connects the reader to the topic with a relatable hook: "Do you know how lucky you are? You have air conditioners, television, computers…" This grabs attention while setting up the contrast between human comforts and animal survival—an effective lead for an informational piece.	➢ **Add a Title Connection:** ○ Revise the title to match the paper's structure and theme—perhaps "From Desert to Deep Sea: How Animals Survive."
✓ **Logical Sequencing:** ○ The body paragraphs move logically through distinct environments, each serving as a separate subtopic: ○ Desert: Saguaro cactus stores water and provides shelter. ○ Arctic: Penguins and polar bears adapt to extreme cold. ○ Ocean: Crabs survive near vents in freezing darkness. This clear order mirrors the structure of the provided sources, aiding coherence and reader understanding.	➢ **Clarify Paragraph Breaks:** ○ Use spacing or indentation to signal clear divisions between environments.
✓ **Effective Transitions:** ○ Simple but purposeful transitions like "First let's talk about the desert" and "Next I would like to tell you about Antarctica" clearly signal topic shifts. While basic, they keep pacing smooth and predictable.	➢ **Vary Transitions:** ○ Replace "Next" or "First" with transitions that show relationships (e.g., "In contrast," "Similarly," or "In another part of the world…").
✓ **Thoughtful Closure:** ○ The conclusion circles back to the opening idea ("Now do you see how very lucky we are?"), providing a satisfying sense of completion and reinforcing the theme of appreciation for both human and animal survival.	➢ **Strengthen Concluding Insight:** ○ Add one final sentence tying the examples together (e.g., "Animals across every environment show us that survival depends on adapting to what nature gives us.").
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Some sentences could flow more smoothly at paragraph breaks, and transition words could be more varied to avoid repetition ("Next" appears more than once).	➢

Voice: 3

The writer's voice is lively, confident, and engaging throughout the piece. The tone reflects genuine curiosity about animals and a conversational style that draws readers in. The writer's enthusiasm and compassion for both humans and animals make the article enjoyable while maintaining an informational purpose.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Engaging and Expressive Tone:** ○ The writer speaks directly to the reader—"Do you know how lucky you are?"—creating a personal, inviting tone. This rhetorical approach effectively hooks the audience and adds energy to the writing.	➢ **Refine Word Choice for Tone Consistency:** ○ Replace exclamations ("It's neat!") with slightly more formal expressions ("It's remarkable how…").
✓ **Genuine Interest in the Topic:** ○ The writer's admiration for animals and appreciation for nature are evident in lines like "You'll be surprised how neat Earth is!" and "Nature can be really cruel, but we all tend to find our way." These show authenticity and care for the topic.	➢ **Add Authoritative Confidence:** ○ Use phrasing that sounds both lively and knowledgeable (e.g., "Scientists have discovered that crabs stay warm near underwater vents…").
✓ **Balanced Between Conversational and Informative:** ○ While the voice is warm and friendly, it still communicates accurate information. Phrases such as "There are small volcanoes they can pass by that act like heating vents" demonstrate confidence and knowledge rather than overly casual storytelling. ✓	➢ **Balance Personal Voice and Informational Purpose:** ○ Keep the engaging tone but limit repetition of "you" to avoid drifting into opinion-based writing.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Occasional overuse of direct address ("You have electricity, We are lucky") slightly shifts the focus away from the informational goal. A bit more formality would strengthen the professional tone.	➢ **Reflective Closing:** ○ Expand the final thought about luck and survival to leave the reader with an inspiring or thought-provoking idea.

Word Choice: 5

The writer uses a wide variety of words that create vivid imagery and maintain reader interest. Vocabulary choices are engaging, sometimes playful, and often precise. The use of contrast words (e.g., *dark and cold, hot sun raining down, heating vents*) helps bring each environment to life and shows control of language suited to purpose and audience.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Vivid and Varied Vocabulary:** ○ These phrases reflect thoughtful language choices that appeal to sight and feeling while explaining complex habitats. ○ The writer selects words that create strong sensory images: ○ *"The hot sun raining down and little water, it is hard to survive."* ○ *"That far down into the sea, you can't find the sun."* ○ *"Small volcanoes they can pass by that act like heating vents."*	➢ **Clarify Comparisons:** ○ When describing animals versus humans, use stronger comparison words (e.g., "Unlike humans, animals…").

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Effective Content Vocabulary:** ○ Words like *saguaro cactus, hibernate, volcanoes,* and *Antarctica* demonstrate understanding of domain-specific vocabulary from the sources. The student uses these terms naturally within context, showing comprehension rather than memorization.	➢ **Add a Few Domain-Specific Terms:** ○ Include words like *adaptation, environment,* or *habitat* to deepen informational precision.
✓ **Tone-Fitting Phrases:** ○ Descriptive but conversational phrases such as *"the chilly temperature is almost unbearable"* and *"it gets warm and cozy for those crabs"* help maintain reader engagement. The playful phrasing works within the context of a Grade 4 informational piece.	➢ **Vary Descriptive Language:** ○ Keep vivid phrases but avoid repeating emotional terms like *lucky*—use variety such as *fortunate, protected,* or *resourceful.*
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Some everyday terms (*"lucky," "neat," "cozy"*) could be replaced with more academic synonyms to match the sophistication of the ideas.	➢ **Replace General Words:** ○ Substitute *"neat"* with *"fascinating"* or *"remarkable"* to elevate tone.

Sentence Fluency: 4

The writing flows smoothly in most places and includes a mix of sentence types. The rhythm is generally pleasant when read aloud, though several sentences run together or lack proper punctuation. Beginnings and patterns show some variety but could use more control and balance.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable Flow and Natural Cadence:** ○ The rhythm is clear and easy to follow, giving the paragraph a natural voice. ○ The piece reads conversationally and holds a steady pace, especially in sections like: *"First let's talk about the desert, with the hot sun raining down and little water, it is hard to survive. But the saguaro cactus doesn't seem to mind."*	➢ **Use Punctuation for Effect:** ○ Practice using commas and periods to create rhythm and flow rather than long strings of ideas.
✓ **Sentence Variety Present:** ○ The writer uses both short, direct sentences ("You have electricity. We are lucky.") and longer descriptive ones. This variety keeps the piece lively and engaging.	➢ **Add Complex Sentences:** ○ Combine shorter ideas with conjunctions (e.g., "Penguins huddle together so they can share body heat and survive the cold.").

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Overly Long or Run-On Sentences:** ○ Some sentences connect multiple ideas without proper punctuation, which interrupts flow: *"The ocean is just as pleasurable, dark and cold. That far down into the sea, you can't find the sun. It is freezing cold! Not to mention it is dark, without the sun no light Crabs don't seem to have a problem though."* ○ These moments need clearer sentence boundaries and punctuation.	➢ **Break Up Long Sentences:** ○ Read aloud to find natural pauses, then divide sentences where the reader would take a breath.
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Starts:** ○ Several sentences begin with "But," "Now," or "You," which creates minor monotony in rhythm and structure.	➢ **Vary Sentence Openers:** ○ Begin with prepositional or descriptive phrases (e.g., "In the icy waters of Antarctica…" or "Across the hot desert sands…").

Conventions: 4

The writer shows developing control over grade-level conventions. Most sentences are readable and capitalization is consistent, but there are frequent spelling, punctuation, and sentence-boundary errors. These mistakes distract from an otherwise strong and engaging piece.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Spelling Errors:** ○ Frequent misspellings appear throughout the draft, including *telivision, tecnique, Antartica, temparature,* and *light (for light).* These indicate the need for more consistent proofreading.	➢ **Check Spelling Carefully:** ○ Correct high-frequency errors (e.g., *telivision* → *television; tecnique* → *technique; Antartica* → *Antarctica; temparature* → *temperature*).
✓ **Punctuation and Sentence Boundaries:** ○ Several sentences run together without proper punctuation, especially in the introduction and the ocean paragraph: ○ "Do you know how lucky you are? You have air conditioners, telivision, computers, food, water shelter, you are lucky" ○ "without the sun no light Crabs don't seem to have a problem though." Periods or conjunctions are needed to separate complete thoughts.	➢ **Revisit Complex Sentences:** ○ Simplify or separate overly long sentences to ensure complete, clear thoughts.
✓ **Capitalization and Grammar:** ○ Capitalization is correct for most sentence beginnings and proper nouns (e.g., "Antarctica," "Earth"). Grammar is generally sound, though occasional missing words or misused commas create confusion in places ("it's air conditioner and water preserving tecnique it gets along quite well").	➢ **Use Periods and Commas Correctly:** ○ Read the draft aloud and insert punctuation where you naturally pause.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Editing Required:** ○ Errors are frequent enough to distract the reader and would require noticeable revision to reach proficiency.	➢ **Proofread in Steps:** ○ Do a separate check for each skill—first spelling, then punctuation, then capitalization.

Use of Sources: 5

The writer skillfully incorporates accurate and relevant details from multiple sources. Information is paraphrased effectively and connected to the writer's larger theme about survival and appreciation for nature. While no formal citations are used, source material is clearly understood, interpreted, and applied with purpose.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Integration of Multiple Sources:** ○ The paper draws on key information from *It's a Cold (Hot, Dry, Dark) Cruel World!* and *Animal Architects*: ○ Desert Adaptations: References to the *saguaro cactus storing water* and its "air conditioner and water preserving technique" show understanding of desert survival facts. ○ Cold Climates: Details about *penguins huddling for warmth* and *polar bears' thick fur and hibernation* accurately reflect the Arctic section of *Source #1.* ○ Ocean Survival: Mentions of *crabs near small volcanoes that act like heating vents* align with descriptions of deep-sea thermal vent ecosystems from *Source #1.*	➢ **List Sources at the End:** ○ Create a simple "Sources" list with article titles to meet grade-level citation expectations.
✓ **Accurate Paraphrasing:** ○ The writer restates information in their own words while keeping factual accuracy. For example, "the cold keeps the water from boiling, but when they erupt it gets warm and cozy for those crabs" captures scientific content using age-appropriate phrasing.	➢ **Clarify Source-Based Groupings:** ○ When shifting environments, add a transition that hints at a new source of information ("In another article about the Arctic…").
✓ **Conceptual Understanding:** ○ The writer goes beyond copying details by framing them within a theme—how animals survive without human comforts—showing comprehension and synthesis of source information.	➢ **Include a Third Source Idea:** ○ Add a brief detail from the ecosystem article—perhaps how animals depend on plants or nonliving things in their environment.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ No signal phrases or attribution ("According to the article…") are used, and the third source (*Don't Step in that Ecosystem!*) is not represented.	➢ **Add Source Attribution:** ○ Introduce facts with phrases like "One article explains…" or "Scientists have found that…" to show awareness of where information comes from.

Suggestions for Teaching Strategies to Support the Student Sample:

The following contain suggestions for teaching strategies and do not encompass a complete list of possible strategies.

Ideas and Content:

Comparative Framing Lesson:

- Have students write side-by-side paragraphs comparing human survival tools to animal adaptations. This helps them develop clear controlling ideas like the one used successfully here.

Detail–Explanation Chart:

- Model how to take one fact (e.g., "penguins huddle") and add two elaboration layers: *how it helps* and *why it matters*. This pushes students toward deeper analysis.

Source Integration Practice:

- Highlight how this writer combined facts from multiple sources. Use a color-coded annotation activity where each color represents a different text, helping students visualize source use and synthesis.

Organization:

Organizational Mapping:

- Guide students to create a three-column chart before writing (Desert / Arctic / Ocean). Under each heading, they list 2–3 supporting details. This visual planning reinforces grouping and logical sequencing.

Transition Word Ladder:

- Provide a chart of transitions organized by type (time order, contrast, cause/effect). Students choose more advanced options when revising (e.g., "However," "Meanwhile," "Because of this…").

Circle-Back Conclusion Practice:

- Show students how to "bookend" an essay—starting and ending with the same theme or phrase. Have them highlight where their conclusion echoes their introduction for a strong sense of closure.

Voice:

Audience Awareness Workshop:

- Have students read their work aloud to a partner, then discuss whether it sounds like a report, a conversation, or a mix. Guide them to adjust the tone to be inviting but still informative.

Model "Voice Range" Activity:

- Show excerpts with varying tones—from flat and factual to overly chatty. Students identify the middle ground that sounds both clear and expressive, then apply it to their writing.

"Energy in Information" Mini-Lesson:

- Select a few factual sentences and challenge students to rewrite them with energy while keeping accuracy. For example, change "The ocean is cold and dark" to "Far below the ocean's surface, animals survive in freezing darkness where sunlight never reaches."

Suggestions for Teaching Strategies to Support the Student Sample:

The following contain suggestions for teaching strategies and do not encompass a complete list of possible strategies.

Word Choice:

"Word Upgrade" Revision Routine:

- Have students highlight one word per sentence and replace it with a stronger or more specific synonym. For example, "neat" → "amazing," "hard to survive" → "challenging to endure."

Content Vocabulary Expansion:

- Create a class glossary of scientific and environmental terms drawn from the sources (*adaptation, organism, ecosystem, survival*). Students must use at least three glossary terms in their revisions.

Descriptive Contrast Practice:

- Show how contrast enhances meaning by modeling paired adjectives (e.g., "dark and cold," "hot and dry," "warm and sheltered"). Students then practice writing two-sentence contrasts for different habitats to build expressive precision.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Combining Workshop:

- Provide choppy sentences from student writing and model how to merge them into longer, fluent sentences using conjunctions or appositives.

"Read It Like a Reader" Fluency Practice:

- Students read their drafts aloud to partners, listening for where the flow breaks or sounds unnatural. Partners mark one sentence that needs reworking for rhythm.

Sentence Opening Revision Sort:

- Give students sentence strips with different openings (prepositional, adverbial, or subject-first) and have them mix and match to vary structure before revising their drafts.

Conventions:

Focused Editing Routines:

- Use short daily editing warm-ups featuring similar mistakes from the class's own writing (e.g., misspellings, run-ons). Students correct and explain each change.

Proofreading Partner Pass:

- Have students read each other's work specifically looking for sentence boundaries and end punctuation. Encourage them to mark one sentence that needs a break or period added.

Word Study Lists:

- Compile commonly misspelled words from this and other class papers to create a personalized spelling list for ongoing practice. Include both academic and high-frequency words.

Use of Sources:

Source Mapping Practice:

- Have students highlight their draft in colors matching each source used (e.g., Source #1 = yellow, Source #2 = blue). This helps ensure balanced use of materials.

Signal Phrase Mini-Lesson:

- Model adding introductory phrases before facts. Practice with sentence frames such as: *"The text says…" "The author describes…" "According to one article…"*

Ecosystem Connection Extension:

- Revisit *Source #3* in small groups and brainstorm one detail about interdependence that could fit into their essays. Have students insert it to expand integration skills.