Grade 4 – Informational Writing Work Sample: Exceeds

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 writing is clear, detailed, and shows a strong understanding of how animals adapt to different environments. The main idea is easy to follow, and the writer accurately uses information from several sources to explain survival in cold regions, deserts, and oceans. While a few ideas are repeated or slightly imprecise, overall the development is thorough and well supported.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Main Idea:** ○ The focus—how animals survive in different environments—is established early: *"We animals and people have different life styles... Some of us live in cold places or hot."* The writer maintains this idea throughout, linking animals' physical and behavioral adaptations to their environments.
✓ **Accurate and Detailed Information:** ○ The essay includes multiple correct facts from the sources: ○ *Cold Regions:* Mentions penguins' blubber, polar bears' dens, and fish with special proteins to avoid freezing (*Source #1*). ○ *Deserts:* Describes nocturnal animals and elf owls living in cacti that act as "natural air-conditioning" (*Source #1*). ○ *Oceans:* Accurately refers to volcanic vents providing heat for crabs (*Source #1*).
✓ **Thorough Development:** ○ Each biome—cold, desert, ocean—is discussed with several specific examples. The details go beyond listing; they include explanations of *how* each adaptation helps survival.
✓ **Minor Weaknesses:** ○ Some ideas overlap ("cold places" and "icy oceans" repeated), and a few inaccuracies or unclear phrases appear (*"Fish have a special protine… not get ice peices in their bodys"*). Still, these don't obscure meaning or factual understanding.

Organization: 5

The paper is well organized and easy to follow. Information is grouped logically by environment, with clear topic shifts from cold regions to deserts to oceans. The introduction and conclusion both support the main idea, and transitions make the progression smooth and coherent.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **Logical Sequencing:** ○ The piece follows a natural pattern that mirrors the structure of the sources and makes sense for readers: ○ Introduction: Establishes the idea that animals and humans live in different environments. ○ Cold Regions: Describes how penguins, polar bears, whales, and fish adapt to the cold. ○ Desert: Explains how nocturnal animals and owls use the cactus for shelter and cooling. ○ Ocean: Describes how deep-sea creatures survive near thermal vents. ○ Conclusion: Connects all environments back to the theme of survival ("Every single animal or person has its way of surviving.").
✓ **Clear Transitions and Flow:** ○ Transitions between sections guide the reader smoothly ("In the icy cold places... There are the complete opposite places in the world like the desert... The last biome is the ocean."). These signals make the text coherent and easy to follow.
✓ **Effective Introduction and Conclusion:** ○ The introduction sets up the idea that "animals and people have different lifestyles" and the conclusion returns to the same idea, creating unity. The ending line ("Whether it's in the Arctic, the desert, or the ocean we all have our ways") provides satisfying closure.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Some transitional wording is repetitive ("There are also... There are the complete opposite..."), and paragraph breaks could be more visually distinct. However, the logic and pacing remain strong.

Voice: 5

The writing has a confident and engaging tone that reflects curiosity, warmth, and respect for animals. The author's personality and sense of wonder come through clearly, making the piece both enjoyable and sincere. The voice matches the informational purpose and invites the reader to learn more.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice
✓ **Engaging and Genuine Tone:** ○ The writer sounds curious and connected to the topic from the opening line: *"We animals and people have different life styles."* The tone feels inclusive and thoughtful, helping readers see the world from both a human and animal perspective.
✓ **Sincere Appreciation for the Topic:** ○ Lines like *"These magnificent creatures also have that layer of blubber under their fur"* and *"It's amazing that we all live today"* reveal admiration and empathy for living things. The writer's positive, appreciative attitude keeps the tone consistent and authentic.
✓ **Balanced Energy:** ○ The piece maintains enthusiasm without becoming too emotional or casual. Exclamation marks are used sparingly and appropriately (*"Some sea creatures even can glow down there!"*), adding excitement without disrupting the informational tone.
✓ **Audience Awareness:** ○ The writer speaks directly but respectfully to readers, guiding them with smooth transitions and clear explanations. This shows an understanding of how to keep an audience engaged while teaching factual information.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Occasional first-person phrasing ("We animals and people…") softens the academic tone slightly, but it does not detract from the overall effectiveness.

Word Choice: 5

The writer uses clear, vivid, and sometimes expressive vocabulary to describe animal habitats and survival. Content-specific words show understanding of the topic, and the variety of descriptive and scientific language helps the piece sound both informative and engaging.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice
✓ **Strong Content Vocabulary:** ○ The student confidently uses scientific and environmental terms such as *adaptations, blubber, nocturnal, desert, Arctic,* and *volcanoes or geysers.* These show familiarity with academic language drawn from the sources.
✓ **Descriptive and Engaging Language:** ○ Imagery adds clarity and appeal, as in *"They cuddle together and block the wind from them"* and *"That is like natural air-conditioning."* The comparison helps readers visualize how animals survive in harsh environments.
✓ **Effective Variety:** ○ Words like *magnificent creatures, freezing, extremely cold, dark and deep, layer of fat,* and *soulution to a problem* (though misspelled) show range and energy in vocabulary. The writer's use of contrast (*"the complete opposite places in the world like the desert"*) demonstrates awareness of word relationships.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ A few misspellings (*protine, oppisist, wammer, natrual*) and repeated structures ("There are…" "They have…") slightly reduce precision, but they do not interfere with meaning or impact.

Sentence Fluency: 4

The writing flows smoothly in most places and shows a mix of sentence lengths and types. The rhythm is natural when read aloud, though some sentences run long or repeat patterns. With a few adjustments for punctuation and structure, the piece could move from solid to strong fluency.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable and Natural Flow:** ○ The paper reads well aloud, with clear pacing and logical progression. Sentences like *"Take penguins for instance, they have a thick layer of body fat or blubber under their feathers"* demonstrate an ear for natural rhythm and phrasing.
✓ **Varied Sentence Lengths:** ○ The writer alternates between longer descriptive sentences and shorter declarative ones: ○ *"Whales swim away to warmer parts of the ocean."* ○ *"An fish have a special protein in their blood."* This variety keeps the writing lively and prevents monotony.
✓ **Some Repetition and Run-Ons** ○ Several sentences begin with similar words ("There are," "In the," "They have"), which makes sections feel repetitive. A few long sentences would benefit from clearer punctuation (e.g., *"They have fur to keep them warm ,a layer of fat ,or each other"*).
✓ **Readable but Uneven Flow:** ○ Although the flow remains smooth overall, inconsistent punctuation slightly interrupts rhythm. Still, the reader can follow ideas easily.

Conventions: 4

The paper shows partial control of grade-level conventions. Most sentences are understandable, but frequent spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors distract the reader. While the writing demonstrates knowledge of basic sentence structure, it requires noticeable editing to reach full proficiency.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Frequent Spelling Errors:** ○ Numerous spelling mistakes appear throughout the piece, including *diffferent, icie, Antartica, oppisist, squirrals, wammer, protine, peices, bodys, natrual, soulution.* These errors often involve omitted letters or phonetic spelling patterns that obscure meaning.
✓ **Punctuation Errors:** ○ Commas and periods are inconsistently placed. For example, *"They have fur to keep them warm ,a layer of fat ,or eachother."* Misplaced commas interrupt the flow and clarity. Some sentences would also benefit from capitalization after periods.
✓ **Capitalization and Grammar:** ○ The writer capitalizes most proper nouns (e.g., *Arctic, Alaska, Antarctica*) but misses others (*Artic, The desert , or the ocean*). Minor grammatical errors appear in subject-verb agreement (*"An Fish have"* instead of *"A fish has"*).
✓ **Readable but Needs Editing:** ○ Despite frequent mechanical issues, ideas are still clear. The paper is readable and shows understanding of sentence structure, though it lacks polish.

Use of Sources: 5

The writer effectively integrates accurate information from multiple sources, demonstrating a clear understanding of animals' adaptations to different environments. Details are paraphrased in the writer's own words, and examples from various habitats show thoughtful selection and comprehension of source material.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources
✓ **Multiple Sources Represented:** ○ The essay clearly draws on factual information from at least two sources—primarily *It's a Cold (Hot, Dry, Dark) Cruel World!* and *Animal Architects.* ○ From *Source #1*, the writer accurately includes icefish with special proteins, penguins huddling, polar bears' dens, and crabs near undersea volcanoes. ○ From *Source #2*, the writer refers to elf owls living inside cacti and the cactus storing water and staying cool like "natural air-conditioning."
✓ **Accurate Paraphrasing:** ○ All information is expressed in the student's own voice rather than copied. The sentence *"Whales swim away to warmer parts of the ocean"* and the explanation of nocturnal desert animals show true understanding and retelling rather than memorization.
✓ **Broad Coverage and Synthesis:** ○ The writer goes beyond listing details—grouping information by biome (cold, desert, ocean) to create a logical comparison across environments. This demonstrates synthesis of ideas from several texts.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Although the student uses multiple sources effectively, there are no formal citations or signal phrases to identify where facts came from.