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
✓ **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.
✓ **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*). ○
✓ **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."
✓ **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.

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
✓ **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.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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. ✓
✓ **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.

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
✓ **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."*
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Some everyday terms (*"lucky," "neat," "cozy"*) could be replaced with more academic synonyms to match the sophistication of the ideas.

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
✓ **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."*
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Starts:** ○ Several sentences begin with "But," "Now," or "You," which creates minor monotony in rhythm and structure.

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
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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").
✓ **Editing Required:** ○ Errors are frequent enough to distract the reader and would require noticeable revision to reach proficiency.

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
✓ **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.*
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.