Grade 4 – Informational Writing Work Sample: Does Not Yet Meet

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: 3

The paper demonstrates progress toward meeting grade-level expectations. The writer shows an understanding of how animals survive in different environments, using facts from at least one source, but ideas are unevenly developed. Some details are accurate and interesting, while others are limited, repeated, or only partly explained.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content
✓ **Partially Clear Main Idea:** ○ The central idea—that animals live in harsh environments and must survive difficult conditions—is present but inconsistently expressed. The introduction focuses on animals being unprotected and "outside where people can shoot them," which shifts away from the informational purpose of the task.
✓ **Some Accurate Source Details:** ○ The writer correctly includes factual information from *Source #1*: ○ "In Antarctica near the South Pole, it can be super cold." ○ "Ice fish have a special protein that lets them swim deep down through layers of ice." These details reflect basic understanding of how animals adapt to cold climates.
✓ **Limited Development:** ○ Information about the desert section ("snakes, lizards, mice, owl, squirrels… most hunt at night") is accurate but brief. The writer lists animals without elaborating on *how* these behaviors help them survive.
✓ **Off-Topic and Minimal Explanation:** ○ The paragraph about being "safe with our families" and "people shooting animals" shows empathy but drifts from the task's informational focus. There is little synthesis or explanation of how the examples connect to the main idea.

Organization: 3

The writing shows developing control of organization. The ideas are presented in a loose sequence that moves from introduction - cold environments - hot deserts - conclusion, but transitions are minimal and paragraphing is unclear. While the overall flow makes sense, missing connections and abrupt shifts make it harder for the reader to follow.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **Basic Structure Present:** ○ The paper follows a general order: ○ Introduction: Opens with a comparison between people and animals ("we are protected and safe with our families… but animals aren't"). ○ Cold Environment: Describes icefish and Antarctica. ○ Hot Environment: Discusses desert animals and nocturnal behavior. ○ Conclusion: Ends with a brief closing line ("This has been Mrs. Odom's class reporting the news"). ○ This shows awareness of beginning, middle, and end, but transitions between sections are weak.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **Limited Transitions:** ○ Phrases like "Here we go!!!" and "The opposite of cold is hot" show enthusiasm but do not clearly link ideas in an informational way. The shift between topics feels abrupt.
✓ **Weak Paragraph Breaks:** ○ All ideas are written in a single block of text, which makes it hard for readers to distinguish between the introduction, body, and conclusion.
✓ **Attempt at Closure:** ○ The ending mimics a news sign-off rather than a summary of key points. While creative, it doesn't provide informational closure.

Voice: 3

The writer's enthusiasm and empathy for animals come through clearly, giving the piece sincerity and personality. However, the tone often shifts away from the purpose of informational writing, becoming more emotional or conversational than explanatory. While heartfelt, the voice needs more control and focus to sound confident and informative.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice
✓ **Personal Engagement:** ○ The writer begins with feeling: *"Wow, it's great to know that we are protected and safe with our families. But animals aren't…"* This reveals genuine care and interest, which makes the opening engaging and expressive.
✓ **Inconsistent Tone:** ○ Phrases such as *"Here we go!!!"* and *"This has been Mrs. Odom's class reporting the news"* add personality but distract from the informational tone expected for the task. The style feels more like a class announcement or a creative story than an article explaining how animals survive.
✓ **Audience Connection:** ○ The student attempts to connect with readers through humor and exclamation but relies on feeling rather than facts to hold interest. While lively, these moments can make the piece sound less credible.
✓ **Emerging Author's Voice:** ○ Despite tone inconsistencies, the voice shows confidence and curiosity—especially when the writer asks, *"I know what you're thinking, 'How do ice fish stay alive?'"* This conversational style is a strength that could be refined into a more academic tone.

Word Choice: 3

The writing shows developing vocabulary and includes a few vivid or scientific words from the sources, but many word choices are repetitive, misspelled, or too general. Some casual phrasing adds energy, yet the imprecise or informal language limits clarity and reduces the strength of the explanations.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice
✓ **Some Content Vocabulary Used:** ○ The writer includes accurate scientific terms such as *Antarctica, South Pole, Fahrenheit,* and *protein,* demonstrating awareness of topic vocabulary from the sources.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice
✓ **Repetitive and Casual Language:** ○ Frequent use of words like *cold, hot, cruel,* and *animals* gives the writing a repetitive rhythm. Phrases such as *"pore animals," "Here we go!!!,"* and *"I know what you're thinking"* sound conversational but detract from the precision expected in informational writing.
✓ **Limited Word Variety:** ○ The paper relies heavily on emotional and everyday words (*pore, cruel, great, lucky*), which could be replaced with more specific terms that describe conditions or adaptations (e.g., *harsh, extreme, unique, nocturnal*).
✓ **Misspellings That Affect Meaning:** ○ Words like *nactural (nocturnal), opisit (opposite), creul (cruel), thier (their)* interfere with the reader's understanding and obscure some otherwise strong ideas.

Sentence Fluency: 2

The writing contains several complete ideas but many sentences are uneven, run together, or lack clear punctuation. Some sections read smoothly when spoken aloud, while others are choppy or confusing. Repetitive sentence openings and missing transitions make the flow inconsistent.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Some Attempt at Variety:** ○ The writer occasionally varies structure by using exclamatory and question forms ("I know what you're thinking 'How do ice fish stay alive?'"), which adds liveliness and rhythm.
✓ **Frequent Run-Ons and Fragments:** ○ Many sentences are fused together without proper punctuation or conjunctions. For example: ○ *"Thing Mrs. Odom's class learned. Wow, its great to know that we are protected and safe with our families. But animals aren't, they are outside where poeple can shoot them and thing are destroring thier homes.They can be in hot, cold ,dark cruel weather!."* This section blends incomplete ideas and fragments, making it hard to follow.
✓ **Repetitive Beginnings:** ○ Several sentences begin with "But," "They," or "This," creating a predictable rhythm that lacks sophistication.
✓ **Choppy and Uneven Flow:** ○ Abrupt topic shifts ("The opposite of cold is hot, so that leads us to the desert") disrupt pacing. Reading aloud reveals stops and starts that affect clarity.

Conventions: 2

The writing contains frequent and noticeable errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar that interfere with readability. While the student's meaning can be understood, extensive editing is needed for accuracy and clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Spelling Errors:** ○ Many common and high-frequency words are misspelled throughout the piece, including *poeple (people), thing (things), destroring (destroying), thier (their), creul (cruel), opisit (opposite), nactural (nocturnal),* and *Anarctica (Antarctica).* These errors occur repeatedly and make the text difficult to read fluently.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Punctuation and Sentence Boundary Issues:** ○ Sentences frequently run together without correct punctuation: ○ *"…where poeple can shoot them and thing are destroring thier homes.They can be in hot, cold ,dark cruel weather!."* ○ Missing commas and periods blur sentence boundaries and require editing for sentence separation.
✓ **Capitalization:** ○ Capitalization is inconsistent, with proper nouns occasionally correct (*Mrs. Odom's class*) but mid-sentence capital letters sometimes missing or unnecessary.
✓ **Grammar and Usage:** ○ Errors such as *"it's great to know that we are protected…"* (missing apostrophe) and inconsistent verb forms (*"thing are destroring"*) show incomplete control of standard grammar.

Use of Sources: 3

The writer uses some accurate details from at least one source and demonstrates partial understanding of how animals survive in different environments. However, the response relies mostly on general knowledge and paraphrased ideas without clear integration of multiple sources or signal phrases.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources
✓ **Some Accurate Source Information:** ○ The paper includes factual content from *Source #1: It's a Cold (Hot, Dry, Dark) Cruel World! —* ○ Correctly mentions Antarctica near the South Pole and icefish having a special protein that keeps them alive in freezing water. ○ Refers to desert animals like snakes, lizards, mice, owls, and squirrels that hunt at night to stay cool. ○ These show a developing ability to recall and paraphrase key information.
✓ **Limited Source Integration:** ○ Only one source is represented (the adaptation article). Information from *Animal Architects* or *Don't Step in that Ecosystem!* is not included, leaving gaps in the overall coverage of the topic.
✓ **Lack of Signal Phrases:** ○ The writer does not identify where the information came from ("according to the article," etc.), so the reader cannot tell which ideas are from the texts.
✓ **Minimal Synthesis:** ○ Facts appear separately without explicit connections across habitats or explanations of how they relate to the larger theme of animal survival.