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How can one fact book, written by a child, address over 30 curriculum content points and inspire kids and teachers across the country?



Bringing purpose to writing

“You can learn soooooooooooooooooooooo much about bears. I thought you might like to step inside...”

Zak, Age 7 ³/₄

The invitation from Zak to step inside his book is one that should be accepted. He is right, you can learn so much about bears. According to Zak's book, 'Bear Facts', bears are omnivorous, they have sharp teeth and claws and they live near mountains.

A report on how a fact book, written by a 7-year old boy, has formed part of a teacher resource package used to inspire and ignite writing across the country, and beyond.



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Context

Zak's teacher was working with her class on planning and composing simple informative texts, on familiar topics for known readers and viewers.

The key content from the NSW English syllabus she wanted to address through this writing project was to:

- create short imaginative, informative and persuasive texts using growing knowledge of text structures and language features for familiar and some less familiar audiences, selecting print and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose,
- compose texts supported by visual information (eg diagrams and maps) on familiar topics,
- reread and edit text for spelling, sentence-boundary punctuation and text structure,
- compare different kinds of images in narrative and informative texts and discuss how they contribute to meaning,
- understand the use of vocabulary about familiar and new topics and experiment with and begin to make conscious choices of vocabulary to suit audience and purpose.

Well, Zak's teacher achieved that, and so much more.

The Project

The Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2) mixed-ability class had been reading and viewing factual texts on different topics, analysing the structure, features and language used in informative texts, and discussing the purpose and audience and how this influences the content and the style of writing used.

After scaffolding their writing and guiding the class through some independent writing of informative texts, she set them their challenge. A challenge that had purpose and an audience. A challenge that followed some inquiry-based learning in science on animals. A challenge that was relevant and meaningful to the class.

Every child was to create an original fact book on an animal of their choice, that would be published as both a digital and a printed for-real-life book, to educate other children about that animal. They had to consider content, structure, features of a fact book, illustrations, layout and how to hook in and engage their reader.

It was a deep learning task, that was part of a term's worth of literacy and science programming.



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Set no limits

By having high expectations of her students, setting no limits, and by providing them with a purpose and an audience, Zak and his classmates produced amazing work.

Through his fact book about bears, Zak has demonstrated his ability to:

- ✓ structure an informative text,
- ✓ write an appropriate blurb,
- ✓ write a contents page and an introduction,
- ✓ use specific vocabulary,
- ✓ present labelled diagrams,
- ✓ use commas to separate items in a list,
- ✓ structure and punctuate sentences correctly,
- ✓ use speech bubbles and humour to engage his reader,
- ✓ impact his audience using different layout of text and images.

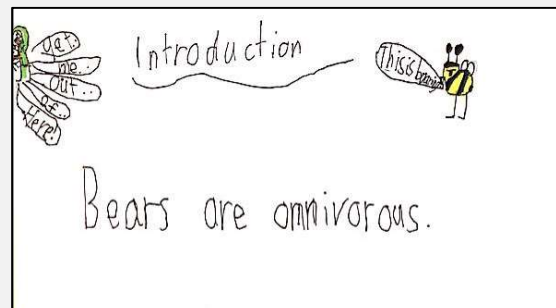
No less than **30 curriculum content points** are demonstrated, some of which move beyond the expected outcomes for a Stage 1 student.

If Zak had been told to write a report on lined paper, following a prescribed structure, that would stay in his writing book, locked away in his classroom, would he have achieved the same results?

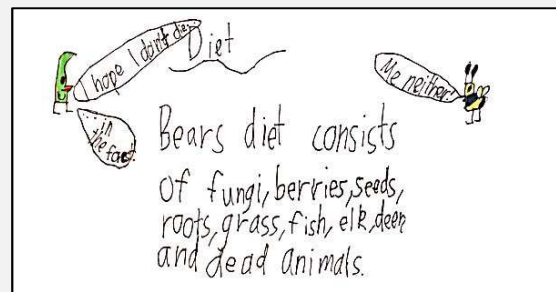
Zak's book demonstrates his knowledge and skills in literacy, numeracy, science, the environment and visual literacy.

Section	Page
Introduction	pg 4
Appearance	pg 6
Diet	pg 8
Habitat	pg 9
Interesting facts	pg 10
Blurb	pg 11

Contents page demonstrates knowledge of an information book structure.
Strong lead up to writing chapter books.
Cross-curricular links with numeracy.



Use of one effective sentence on one page for impact.
Use of the word 'omnivorous' shows research skills and comprehension, as well as use of precise vocabulary.



Consistent use of correct sentence structure with punctuation such as commas, capital letters and speech bubbles.
Use of humour to engage reader.



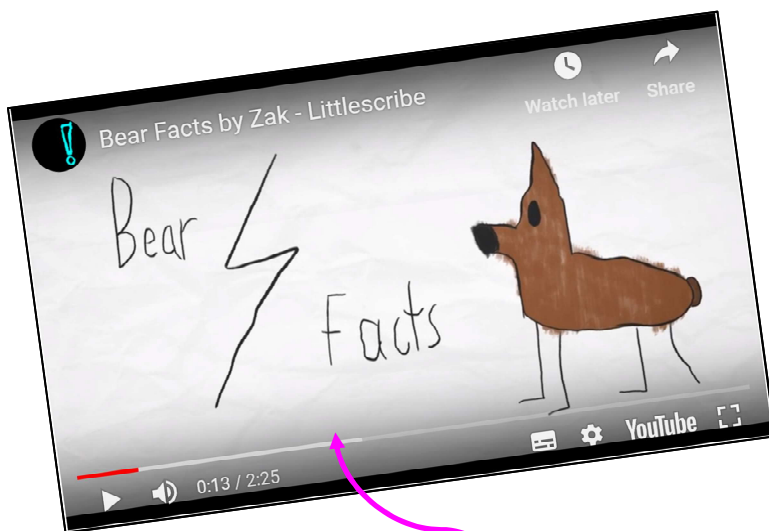
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Creative and critical thinkers

Informative writing does not need to be a prescriptive, methodical form of expression. Students should be given meaningful opportunities to present their knowledge in a critical and creative manner.

Their factual texts need to inspire, educate and offer creative solutions to real problems. Using the work of Sir David Attenborough can offer a real-life model of someone passionate and knowledgeable on sustainability and the need to preserve and protect our planet.

Zak's book, 'Bear Facts', has been made by LittleScribe! into an animation, with a voiceover in the style of Attenborough. This short video has influenced the writing of students in many schools, as children can see how their informative writing can take on a new purpose.



'Bear Facts' as an animation!
<https://www.littlescribe.com/>

A cross-curricular approach

Engaging students in the writing of information texts can support the teaching of the General Capabilities and Cross—Curriculum Priorities from the Australian Curriculum, in a relevant and literacy-based approach.

In order for children to better understand their world, "the priorities provide national, regional and global dimensions which will enrich the curriculum through development of considered and focused content that fits naturally within learning areas. They enable the delivery of learning area content at the same time as developing knowledge, understanding and skills relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia and/or Sustainability."

Learning can be personalised appropriately, catering specifically for high-performing students, through an approach based on the General Capabilities or Cross-Curriculum Priorities. "Students can access teaching and learning programs... that is relevant to their individual learning needs, while at the same time experiencing opportunities to add depth, complexity and richness to student learning in content elaborations."

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)



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Inspiring others

Zak's book has influenced other teachers and students to create fact books that are engaging, informative and interesting for the reader.

At Balmain Public School in Sydney, a Year 3 and 4 class had finished their Geography program on comparing Australia with China, and were inspired by Zak's book to create fact books on the two countries. The purpose of writing a book, and knowing they would have a real audience for their work, encouraged them to evaluate what they had learnt and apply their knowledge in a way that could inform, educate and entertain others.

At Koputaroa Primary School in New Zealand, three classes in Years 4, 5 and 6 produced their best work when they were given the opportunity to create fact books on native New Zealand animals. Not only did they inform others, they also used critical and persuasive devices to detail the danger some species are currently in, and the plight that we need to undertake to protect them.

And in Zak's own school, there were many high-quality fact books written about animals, proving that if children are shown examples, given an engaging topic, a purpose for their writing and an audience for their work, they will apply their knowledge and skills from across the curriculum to create 'gold'.

Zak's book, 'Bear Facts' has had a positive impact on the learning outcomes for many students. The informative words, colourful images and the humorous sub-text told through the characters' speech bubbles, have all had a **Megabonkeramus** influence on others.

There are many examples of fact books, like Nadia's book on jaguars, in the LittleScribe! Megabonkeramus library.

Catering for all learners

A relevant, open-ended task, with no 'ceiling', encourages all learners to excel. The Maker Model (1982) for curriculum differentiation, highlights the need for a real audience, real problems, abstraction, complexity and freedom of choice when catering for gifted learners. By allowing all students to create their own fact books, you are providing opportunities for all learners to acquire knowledge on an important topic, synthesise and evaluate the information and present it as a book for others to read.

Source: Maker, C.J. (1982). 'Curriculum development for the gifted.'



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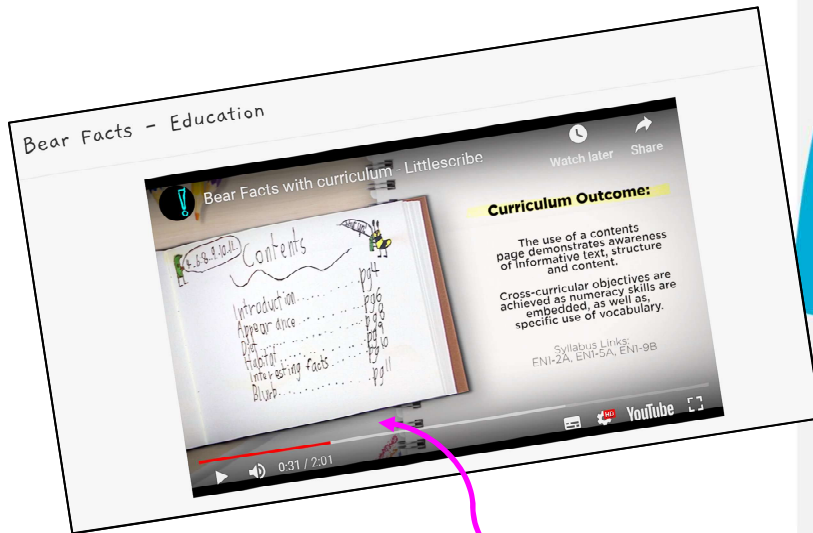
A resource for teachers

Bear Facts now forms part of a Littlescribe! 'Best of Fact Books' series, along with 10 more animal fact books written by children. They sit in the Littlescribe! library with the curriculum outcomes and content areas highlighted **and resources and programs ready for teachers to implement.** The series provides quality examples for other students to read and discuss, and for teachers to use as a model for teaching writing.

Bear Facts: A fact book about animals, now a resource for teaching writing

As well as learning about bears when you read his book, you can see how Zak has shown evidence of his learning in over 30 curriculum content points from the NSW English syllabus!

Teachers realise the value in this, and children love having a purpose and an audience for their writing.



"Why a bear?
I chose a bear because I
just got a sensation to do
it!"
Zak 7 ¾

'Bear Facts' as a teaching
resource! See the curriculum links
highlighted.
<https://www.littlescribe.com/>

The teachers at Bourke Public School and Brewarrina Central School in Far West New South Wales have used the methods, approaches and examples of books to engage disadvantaged and under-performing students in Years 5 and 6. And they saw instant and impressive results.

**Register Here
For 2019 Teacher Resources.**

Includes Littlescribe writing process, reference books,
videos, curriculum links and classroom resources.
A complete package.

