

Seals

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Year 4



Overview

This article presents information about seals in an engaging way. In the opening paragraph, the writer speaks directly to the reader, encouraging them to wonder and arousing their interest to find out more. The text is broken into sections, clearly defined with subheadings. Students can find out about the ways seals are adapted for living on land and sea, the various species found around New Zealand, and how they raise their pups. The article also includes reference to early sealers and the sealing industry. The article finishes with a “dos” and “don’ts” list of imperatives about how to act if you come across a seal.

This article:

- provides facts and information about seals
- has photographs, maps, and diagrams to support the text
- has non-continuous text, organised with subheadings
- includes a glossary.

A PDF of the text and an audio version as an mp3 file are available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme

“My Name Is Davy Lowston” SJ L2 May 2016 | “Ugly” SJ L2 November 2014 | “Cats – Who Needs Them?” SJ L2 June 2014
“The Bat That Walks on the Ground” SJ L2 April 2013 | “Living Fossils” SJ L2 October 2012

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

New Zealand's Seals
Three species of seal live around the coast of New Zealand.

New Zealand fur seal (kekeno)
This is our most common seal. Fur seals have large dark eyes and a pointed nose, as well as the furry coat that gives them their name.

New Zealand sea lion (whakahaio) (also known as Hooker's sea lion)
The New Zealand sea lion is larger than a fur seal.

a straightforward text structure, such as a structure that follows a recognisable and clear text form

Seals in Danger
When the first people arrived in New Zealand from Polynesia, they found huge colonies of seals. They hunted the seals for their meat and used their fur to make warm clothing. Seal teeth also made excellent fish-hooks!
In 1792, the first European sealers arrived in New Zealand. Over the next hundred years, they killed tens of thousands of seals for their fur and the oil in their blubber. Seals almost became extinct, so the government passed a law to protect them.

Seal Spotting
Seals are very social animals. In summer, large numbers gather at rookeries to have their pups. Seals usually return each year to the same place. They also come ashore to rest at areas called haul-outs. Look out for them on rocky beaches that have big boulders for shade and pools for cooling off. In Otago and Southland, you might also see them on sandy beaches, or in sand dunes behind the beach.

some compound and complex sentences, which may consist of two or three clauses

Seals have **streamlined** bodies so they can swim underwater easily. They also have four powerful flippers to push themselves along. Seals have a layer of fat under their skin called blubber. It keeps them warm in cold water and also helps them to float. Seals don't just live in the water, though. They can move about on land too. They often come ashore to rest, and once a year, female seals (cows) come out of the sea to give birth. Each cow has one baby, called a pup. Like all mammals, young seals drink milk from their mothers. Most cows come together to care for their pups in large areas called rookeries.

Seals - adapted for living in the water
streamlined body
flippers
whiskers
nostrils that can close underwater

some words and phrases that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to the students, the meaning of which is supported by the context or clarified by photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and/or written explanations

New Zealand Seals: Where they mostly live

New Zealand fur seals: along mainland New Zealand's rocky coastline, on small outer islands, and on the Chatham Islands

New Zealand sea lions: Auckland Islands, Campbell Island, Snares Islands, Stewart Island, and the Otago coast

Southern elephant seals: Campbell Island, the Antipodes Islands, Macquarie Island, and sometimes on the mainland

Chatham Islands/ Rēkohu/Wharekauri
Otago coast/Te Tai o Araiuru
Stewart Island/Rakiura
Snares Islands/Tini Heke
Antipodes Islands/ Moutere Mahue
Auckland Islands/ Maungahuka
Campbell Island/ Moutere Ihupuku

other visual language features that support the ideas and information, for example, text boxes or maps



Reading standard: by the end of year 4

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

– Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

– Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

SCIENCE (Living World)

Level 2 – Recognise that living things are suited to their particular habitat.

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Level 2 – Understand how time and change affect people's lives.

Possible first reading purpose

- To find out about the types of seals that live around New Zealand.

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To find out some interesting facts and information about seals
- To consider why seals are special animals.

Possible writing purposes

- To research and write about another animal living in the seas around New Zealand
- To write a persuasive article about whether or not people should be allowed to hunt animals
- To make a poster or a chart comparing a land mammal with a seal and describing the features that make each one suited to its habitat.



The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

(Some of the suggestions for possible supporting strategies may be more useful before reading, but they can be used at any time in response to students' needs.)

VOCABULARY

- Topic-related words, some of which are explained in the text, including “flippers”, “whiskers”, “blubber”, “fleshy”, “rookeries”, “nostrils”, “colonies”, “species”, “sealers”, “extinct”, “pollution”, “haul-outs”, “rocky coastline”, “outer islands”, “adapted”, “streamlined”, “mammals”, “prey”
- Names of places: “Auckland Islands”, “Campbell Island”, “Snarers Islands”, “Otago coast”, “Antarctica”, “Polynesia”
- Names of species: “New Zealand fur seal”, “Hooker’s sea lion”, “southern elephant seal”, “leopard seal”
- Te reo Māori names for seals and places: “kekeno”, “whakahao”, “ihupuku”, “Rēkohu/Wharekauri”, “Te Tai o Araiteuru”, “Rakiura”, “Tini Heke”, “Moutere Mahue”, “Maungahuka”, “Moutere Ihupuku”.

Possible supporting strategies

- Identify words or phrases that may be unfamiliar. Discuss and explain them briefly as they arise, prompting students to draw on their prior knowledge of animals in the wild and on contextual clues and word function.
- Direct students to the glossary, the diagrams, and the maps that support the topic-related vocabulary.
- Discuss the shared language from the animal world, such as “cows”, “bulls”, and “pup” – students will probably associate these words with cattle and dogs.
- Support students to identify place names as they read, from the signpost heading “Where they mostly live”, and to differentiate between place names (with capital letters) and generalised places, such as “rocky coastline”.
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also *ESOL Online, Vocabulary*, for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

- Some understanding of the respiratory system – how we breathe and store oxygen in the blood
- Knowing that animals with whiskers have them for a purpose, such as sensing movement
- Conceptual understanding of defending territory
- Developing understanding of changes over time in relation to hunting and pollution.

Possible supporting strategies

- Support students to make connections with their own experiences of holding their breath underwater.
- Discuss the ways different creatures are designed for their environment.
- Compare the way seals use their whiskers with the way other animals, such as mice and cats, use theirs.
- Have students share their personal experiences of defending territory in a game and make comparisons with animals defending their territory.
- If you have students from other countries in your class, encourage them to share their knowledge of endangered or extinct animals from their parts of the world.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

- Short sections of non-continuous text with subheadings indicating content
- Short paragraphs, each of three or four sentences
- Maps, diagrams, and a glossary to support the content.

Possible supporting strategies

- Before reading, prompt the students to recall what they expect to find in an article. Provide opportunities for them to talk to a partner to remind each other of what to expect in an information text.
- If necessary, guide the students to identify the places marked on the map.
- Review the use of features such as subheadings, maps, and diagrams to support meaning.



Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

English Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences; Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

Science Living World Level 2 – Recognise that living things are suited to their particular habitat.

Social Sciences Level 2 – Understand how time and change affect people's lives.

First reading

- Set the purpose for reading.
- Introduce the text and support students to make connections by providing a clear link (recognising that the starting point will vary). For example:
 - *We have been learning how to organise our ideas. Now we will read an article to see how the information is organised.*
 - *We've been learning about marine mammals. This article is about the seals around New Zealand. Let's see what we can find out about them.*
- Read the first page together and allow students to respond. Prompt them to use their prior knowledge about swimming and holding their breath.
- Direct students to subsequent headings. Question them to clarify meaning and purpose and to support predictions.
 - *If a creature is "made for the land" or "made for the sea", what do you think we are going to find out?*
 - *What is a rookery?*
- Provide opportunities for students to talk with a partner to get information from the diagram and the map.

If the students struggle with this text

- Activate prior knowledge by inviting students to recall and share personal experiences. *Have a chat with the person next to you about putting your head underwater. What is it like? What do you do?*
- Have the students focus on the subheadings and ask them to predict what they expect to find in each subsection.
- Encourage students to ask questions of the text. *What do we want to find out about seals?*
- Make links between reading and writing explicit. *The writer has used bullet points under this heading. How is this helpful for us when we read it? Talk to your buddy about when you could use bullet points in your writing.*

Subsequent readings How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose.

The teacher

Discuss the way the information in "Seals" is organised. Share the page of information about tuatara, from the related text "Living Fossils" (SJ L2 October 2012). Lead discussion around the use of the bullet points:

- *What is the difference between this list with bullets and the one about seals?*
- *Can we record our facts with one word or phrase, or will we need to write in sentences?*

Ask students to record key information about seals, using bullet points. Model the "reward" of reading that comes when we find out something interesting or intriguing:

- *It says that tuatara take one breath an hour when they are saving energy. What does that remind me of? How long can seals stay underwater?*

If appropriate (for example, linking to an ongoing inquiry), provide students with additional material about seals and other New Zealand-based marine animals.

The students:

- reread the text (one section at a time) and make decisions about which ideas are the main ones
- use bullet points to record main ideas or key facts about seals – drawing on the information they have noted from the text
- record questions about seals, such as "What else do we want to know?"
- take the opportunity to browse through additional material.

Subsequent readings How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose.

The teacher

Support the students to think critically and to form an opinion:

- *Are seals special animals for New Zealand? If so, what makes them special?*

Ask them to share their opinion with a partner and then work in pairs to prepare an oral response to these questions.

Prompt connections with domestic animals and what makes them special. Share all or part of the related text “Cats – Who Needs Them?”

Lead discussion about why we think some animals are special and on the similarities and differences between wild animals and domestic animals.

Have the students work in pairs or small groups to make a poster or chart about seals and one or two other animals to show features that make these animals special.

METACOGNITION

- How did your discussion with a buddy help you to make up your mind about what makes seals special? What helped you decide how the writer feels about seals?

The students:

- locate examples in the text and evaluate the information
- think critically about what they have learned and share this with a partner
- in pairs, prepare and share an oral response to support their opinion about whether or not seals are special
- use their personal experience of pets such as dogs, cats, or rabbits to form opinions about what makes them special
- locate specific information about seals and compare this information with other animals they know about
- examine the diagram to identify how it shows the main ideas by using the illustration and a few key words
- recall prior knowledge about other marine animals found in and around New Zealand
- consider the way we make choices about animals.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You’ve found all the main ideas about why seals are threatened by looking in the section Seals in Danger. Using headings to narrow down your search is a good way of finding key ideas.*
- *You worked well with your buddy to find out what is special about seals – it was useful to share your strategies. Sharing strategies helps to build up your reading skills.*



Reading standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks

Seals: Additional information that you could share with your students

There are two main groups of seals – “eared seals” (fur seals and sea lions) and “true seals” (all other seals except walruses). These two groups are fundamentally different in the way they move on land and in the water. True seals use the back flippers for swimming and crawl on their stomachs on land. Eared seals use their front flippers for swimming and lift their body off the ground to walk on their flippers. This is the main reason eared seals can move so quickly on land – up to 20km/hour!

New Zealand fur seals are our only endemic seal – they breed only in New Zealand. They are often scared of people and may run for the water when humans approach. New Zealand sea lions, on the other hand, are usually not scared of people and may approach them. If they do, it’s best to leave the area.

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences; Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

Text excerpts from “Seals”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Page 26

Seals have streamlined bodies so they can swim underwater easily. They also have four powerful flippers to push themselves along.

Page 28

Fur seals have large dark eyes and a pointed nose, as well as the furry coat that gives them their name.

New Zealand sea lion (whakahao)

(also known as Hooker’s sea lion)

The New Zealand sea lion is larger than a fur seal and has a flatter nose. The females are cream-coloured and the males are dark brown. The male sea lions are a lot bigger than the females. The adult males also have thick hair around their necks like a lion’s mane.

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

Writers choose specific words and phrases to convey images and to describe things clearly in a scientific description.

Explain how writers choose language carefully to create an image for the reader. Prompt students to recall what they know about descriptive writing.

- *Have a chat with the person next to you about the words we choose when we are describing.*
- *What does your reader need to know?*

Many of the adjectives used in this text relate to shape, size, and colour. Support students in identifying the specific nouns, the adjectives that tell us more about those nouns, and the verbs that describe action. You may wish to provide examples of each part of speech to help support English language learners.

- *How has this writer helped us to know what the seals look like? What did we find out about the fur seals’ eyes? What do the seals use their flippers for?*

Direct students to where they have described a different animal in their own writing.

- *What you have told the reader about the animal’s appearance? Have you been clear? Have you given your reader enough detail about size, colour, and shape?*

Page 30

Seals in Danger

When the first people arrived in New Zealand from Polynesia, they found huge colonies of seals. They hunted the seals for their meat and used their fur to make warm clothing. Seal teeth also made excellent fish-hooks.

In 1792, the first European sealers arrived in New Zealand. Over the next hundred years, they killed tens of thousands of seals for their fur and the oil in their blubber. Seals almost became extinct, so the government passed a law to protect them.

PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

To persuade their readers to agree with their point of view, writers choose facts and opinions and real-life examples. They also use emotive language and sometimes pose rhetorical questions to make the reader think.

Direct students to the two paragraphs headed “Seals in Danger” and reread them together. Invite a response.

- *We get a lot of information here. What does the information make us think?*

Lead a discussion about the way writers deliberately choose the words they use to persuade us.

- *Do you think the writer is trying to make us think it is wrong to kill seals? What makes you think that? Could the writer have been more persuasive?*

Have the students talk together to clarify their opinions and then express these orally (or they could jot them down in a couple of sentences).

- *How do you feel about hunting animals? I’m interested in finding out what everyone thinks. We’ll jot our opinions down. When we do quick writing, it helps us to work out what we think.*

Model the use of rhetorical questions to persuade.

- *Do you know how many New Zealand seals were killed by hunters? Why are people so mean to animals?*

Have the students write a response to the question “Should people be allowed to hunt animals in the wild?” Prompt them to think about the words they use to persuade their readers.

Text excerpts from “Seals”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Page 26

Seals – adapted for living in the water

- streamlined body
- flippers
- whiskers
- layer of blubber
- nostrils that can close underwater

USE OF KEY WORDS IN DIAGRAMS

In information texts where diagrams are used to support the text, writers choose just the essential words that are going to help the reader make sense of the text.

Ask the students to reread the section from “Seals” that lists the seals’ features and shows how they have adapted to survive and thrive in the water. Discuss how these features are shown in the diagram.

Encourage students to select a land animal and create a similar list. Students will need to be discerning about the features they choose. (It will be useful for students to have access to images of a variety of animals.)

Have the students create a diagram comparing a land mammal with a seal, using key words to show the features that make the mammal suited to its habitat.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *You have certainly made me think about hunting. You have written three good reasons to support your point of view. Now your point of view is clear to me and anyone else who reads it.*

METACOGNITION

- I noticed that after you read through your piece about the dolphin, you moved some of the information to another section. How did you decide where that piece of text belonged?



Reading standard: by the end of year 4



The Literacy Learning Progressions



Assessment Resource Banks