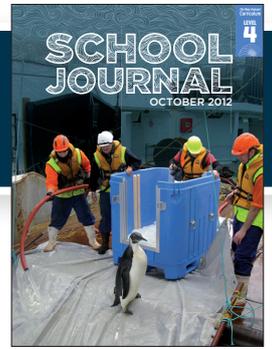


# The Emperor of Peka Peka Beach

by Sarah Wilcox

School Journal  
Level 4, October 2012  
Year 8



## Overview

When a sick Emperor penguin was found on Peka Peka beach, a huge amount of interest was aroused about how to deal with the penguin. Much attention, time, and money was spent on restoring and sending the penguin (named “Happy Feet” by the media) back to his Antarctic home. Opinions for and against saving just one penguin were polarised. The article presents and explores these polarised opinions, posing questions for students as they consider the moral dilemmas.

A vet, scientists, a philanthropist, and students give their

opinions. This allows students to explore and evaluate the arguments before forming their own judgments about this and similar situations. The article also lends itself to a discussion of balance and bias in the presentation of emotional issues. The use of reading strategies such as analysing, synthesising, evaluating, and summarising will support students to appreciate the issues and dilemmas and engage with the author’s purpose.

Texts related by theme

“Deer, Oh Deer” SJ 4.1.10 | The Wild Deer Debate SJSL 2011 | “The Bittern” SJ 3.1.09

## Text characteristics from the year 8 reading standard

complex layers of meaning, and/or information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading, (that is, competing information), requiring students to infer meanings or make judgments

**THE EMPEROR OF PEKA PEKA BEACH**  
by Sarah Wilcox

**LOST AND FOUND**  
Do you remember when Happy Feet, the emperor penguin from Antarctica, turned up on Peka Peka beach? Only once before had an emperor penguin somehow made the long, perilous journey as far north as New Zealand. Not surprisingly, Happy Feet quickly became a media sensation, with news of his arrival spreading across the globe.  
When Happy Feet was still on the beach after a few days – and he'd begun to eat sand – it became

clear something needed to be done. But what? As with stranded whales, it was obviously unacceptable to leave him to suffer a slow death on the beach, especially with the world watching. But unlike with whales, a clear process for helping stricken emperor penguins didn't exist. Should the creature be euthanased, assuming he was going to die anyway? Or should he be nursed back to health at an animal hospital, despite the cost, and then released?

**The Emperor of Penguins**  
Emperor penguins, which live and breed in Antarctica, are the largest of all penguin species. They are well adapted to survive the extremely cold conditions, with their dense feathers and layer of blubber providing essential warmth. In huge colonies, huddling together, the male birds each incubate a single egg for two months during the harsh winter. Young emperor penguins like Happy Feet leave the ice for several years to feed in the ocean south of New Zealand until they are old enough to breed. They usually stay at least 1000 kilometres south of New Zealand, which means that Happy Feet was well off-course.

Emperor penguins, Antarctica

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elements that require interpretation, such as complex plots, sophisticated themes, and abstract ideas

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs, containing main ideas that relate to the text's content

Reading standard: by the end of year 8

## Possible curriculum contexts

### CURRICULUM (Social Studies)

Level 4: Understand that events have causes and effects.

### ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

### ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

### Possible reading purposes

- To explore arguments for and against saving the life of one penguin
- To evaluate arguments to form our own opinions
- To find out what is involved in saving the life of a wild animal.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

### Possible writing purposes

- To present arguments for and against a topic of interest
- To develop a rebuttal to an argument
- To describe the care and treatment of a pet or other animal.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

## Text and language challenges

### VOCABULARY:

- Unfamiliar vocabulary, including “perilous”, “instinct”, “ecologist”, “priorities”, “dubious”, “stricken”, “incubate”
- Phrases describing abstract ideas, including “media sensation”, “world watching”, “limited resources”, “media attention”, “public expectations”, “public sentimentality”, “round-the-clock care”, “global appeal”, “As with stranded whales”.

### Possible supporting strategies

Explore unfamiliar words in context before or during reading.

Explain to students that writing can express ideas that are not carried in the words alone. Talk about the clues in the context and the vocabulary and explain how they can use this information to make inferences about what the author means.

For some students, it may be helpful to provide mixed pairs of cards containing the words along with example sentences and their meanings. Working in pairs, ask the students to match them, explaining why they go together, and then compare their answers with other pairs.

Identify words that students should prioritise for their learning. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has some useful information about learning vocabulary.

### SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge of the habitats and features of emperor penguins
- Knowledge of Antarctic conditions
- Knowledge about the availability of resources for saving and/or rescuing wild animals
- Knowledge of texts that discuss both sides of an issue.

### Possible supporting strategies

Provide photos or visit Internet sites to familiarise students with emperor penguins and their habitat. For some students, extreme and cold conditions may need some explanation.

Explain that all government agencies have a limited budget and that saving one animal impacts on how much is available for saving others. A simple chart showing who makes decisions about spending money could be a helpful connection. Provide the students with examples of texts that show both sides of an issue and ask them to identify specific features and structures. Develop a chart of features as a reference.

### TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Logical structure
- Headings that may require some inference
- Opposing opinions presented throughout
- Questions for the reader’s consideration
- Photos, diagrams, and a map.

### Possible supporting strategies

Preview the text with the students, pointing out the layout and the use of different coloured background treatments to help with navigating the text. Help them to notice that the story is in chronological order and follows the events, from finding Happy Feet to his release back into the wild.

For some students, the headings may require some inference. Write them on a board or chart and ask the students to make predictions in pairs about what they mean. (This could be done before reading to help preview content and language.)

It may be helpful to split students into two groups and ask each group to list arguments for one side of the debate about Happy Feet. They could use this list to evaluate the arguments, draw their own conclusions, and compare them with the statements at the end of the text.

For students who find this text challenging, you could preview some of the content and language by having them brainstorm the arguments, in pairs, after reading pages 12–13. Then have all students share their ideas. During this discussion, record their ideas, encourage them to give reasons for their ideas, and where appropriate, explain some of the key vocabulary and create a vocabulary list.

# Instructional focus – Reading

**Social Studies** (Level 4: Understand that events have causes and effects.)

**English** (Level 4 – Ideas: Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.)

## Text excerpts from “The Emperor of Peka Peka Beach”

Should the creature be euthanased, assuming he was going to die anyway? Or should he be nursed back to health at an animal hospital, despite the cost, and then released?

Lisa Argilla, a vet from Wellington Zoo, had been trained to do everything possible to save the life of an animal, be it domestic or wild.

Peter’s job is to use limited resources to help entire populations of animals – and one lone penguin wasn’t exactly high on his list of priorities.

“Wildlife experts – and the public – accept that it’s sometimes best to withhold treatment and euthanase.”

“Logic and reason were overruled by emotion.”

“I helped because of the chance to promote environmental and ecological issues related to Antarctica. I would have spent three times that amount to get the kind of visibility for the region that Happy Feet brought.”

Was rescuing the penguin worth it? What, exactly, did it achieve?

Or maybe there’s a different reality. Maybe Happy Feet was only saved because penguins are cute.

... what will happen if another emperor penguin is ever stranded on our shores?

## Students (what they might do)

*The students read the whole text to understand the arguments for and against saving Happy Feet. They revisit the text to explore and discuss the opposing arguments.*

*They evaluate the reasons for removing Happy Feet from the beach and make inferences about why this decision was taken. They integrate information to think critically about whether or not they agree with the decision.*

*The students consider the reasons for saving Happy Feet. They make connections to the statement “Logic and reason were overruled by emotion” and integrate this with the arguments in the text to infer the difficulty of making a decision. They also analyse and evaluate the argument that saving Happy Feet provided “the chance to promote environmental and ecological issues related to Antarctica”, making connections to their prior learning.*

*The students synthesise the information and summarise the opposing arguments. They consider and discuss the questions at the end of the text, referring to the arguments and information presented in the article to draw their own conclusions. The students then evaluate the arguments, looking for evidence of balance and/or bias.*

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**DIRECT** the students to read the text to understand the arguments. In particular, ask them to note the reasons for:

- removing Happy Feet from the beach
- treating and saving Happy Feet.

You could ask students to make notes in a graphic organiser, listing the main argument (that is, to save or not to save), each point in the argument, and support for each point. For students who have difficulty with this task, model filling in one or two sections of the graphic organiser. These notes can form the basis for writing a summary after reading – and the framework of the graphic organiser can be used to help plan for writing.

**ASK QUESTIONS** (after the first reading) to support the students’ critical thinking.

- What do you think is meant by “Peter’s job is to use limited resources to help entire populations of animals?”
- Why was a lone penguin not high on Peter’s list of priorities?
- Should cost be taken into account when saving an animal?

### ASK QUESTIONS

- What is meant by “logic and reason were overruled by emotion?”
- Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not?
- How could this have influenced the decision to save Happy Feet? What do you think?

**PROMPT** the students to discuss the arguments.

- Think about all the reasons for and against and summarise them into one or two statements for either side.
- Consider the questions at the end of the text and then discuss with your partner. How would you answer these questions?
- How do you respond to the notion that Happy Feet was only saved because he was a cute penguin?
- What do you think should happen if another emperor penguin turns up on one of our beaches?
- What is your overall opinion about saving Happy Feet?

**EXPLAIN** how to identify balance or bias.

- With texts that are intended to influence us, authors present an argument. It is important to know whether the arguments are balanced or if the writer has used bias to influence our thinking. Revisit the text and consider the types of content and language.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- When you answered your partner’s question, you showed her the three places you found information to inform your opinion. That’s exactly what is involved when integrating and synthesising information. As you read more complex texts, this is something you will do more and more.

### METACOGNITION

- What helped you to identify the validity of the arguments for saving Happy Feet?
- What helped to influence your thinking? What information was missing? What else would have helped you? Why?
- What questions did you ask before reading this text? Were they answered?

Reading standard: by the end of year 8

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

# Instructional focus – Writing

**Social Studies** (Level 4: Understand that events have causes and effects.)

**English** (Level 4 – Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.)

## Text excerpts from “The Emperor of Peka Peka Beach”

Lost And Found

One Penguin’s Fate ...

Not Over Yet

Logic Overruled?

Nature Reaching Out?

Back To The Wild

The Million Dollar Question

But despite this overwhelming amount of positive attention, the decision to treat Happy Feet continued to have its critics, including one ecologist from Victoria University.

Gareth Morgan, a well-known businessman, helped to pay for some of the costs of saving Happy Feet. His opinion differs from Dr Linklater’s.

“He was coughing up sand and sticks and looked so sad and miserable,” Lisa remembers.

“We knew that we couldn’t let the penguin die on the beach,” Peter says.

Rania: I think what they did for Happy Feet was a really good thing.

## Examples of the characteristics

### HEADINGS

*Generally headings are used in non-fiction articles to foreground the content of each section. Skilful readers use the headings to help them predict what they will be reading, to navigate the text, and to determine whether the text will help them meet their purpose for reading.*

### PRESENTING BOTH SIDES OF AN ARGUMENT

*Many texts present both sides of an argument and leave readers to make up their own minds about the issue. Authors take care to provide balance when presenting two sides of an argument.*

### USING QUOTES

*Quotes from experts on a particular topic can provide authenticity and weight to an argument.*

### METACOGNITION

- Tell me why you chose the headings.
- Do you think you covered both sides of the argument? How do you know? How did you avoid any bias?
- How did thinking about the reading strategies for reading non-fiction texts help you when choosing specific language features as you were writing?

## Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

**MODEL** how the headings help to navigate the text.

- These headings don’t necessarily tell me specifically what is in each section, but they give good clues. The writer has implied information and left some information out to entice the reader. For instance, in the heading “Lost and Found”, the question I have is, What is lost and what is found? It doesn’t say directly, but if I know the article is about a penguin that was found on a beach, I can start making inferences..

**TELL** the students to review their writing with their partners.

- Which sections need headings?
- What is each section mainly about?
- What heading would encourage your readers to make inferences but has enough information for them to know what the section is about?.

**ASK QUESTIONS** to support the students to present both sides of an argument.

- What key ideas do you have for each side of your argument?
- Do you have a balance of ideas, both for and against your argument?
- Do you have enough information to support each side?
- Are the reasons equally as strong?

Refer to the graphic organiser you used during and after reading.

- Use a graphic organiser like this to plan your writing. Write each side of the argument in the top row. Write points on each side and the support for each point. Refer to the chart of features of arguments to ensure your writing is effective.

**EXPLAIN** how quotes can support an argument.

- Both of the major quotes are either from experts or well-known people. But students are also quoted to add a student voice. Quotes can add weight either to what you want to say or to help the reader make up their own minds.

**PROMPT** the students to include quotes in their writing.

- Look at your writing and think about how a quote or two by an expert might add weight to your argument.
- What part of your argument would be best supported by a quote?
- Whose quote would be the most useful?
- How can you obtain it?.

### GIVE FEEDBACK

- The reasons you have used are very compelling because for each one, you have used hard facts rather than emotion. I can see I will have to think hard about where I stand on the issue.
- The headings you’ve used helped me to navigate my way through your text but they also made me think more deeply about the text .

 Writing standard: by the end of year 8

 The Literacy Learning Progressions