

Children's book reviews

Weather

Summary

A book which targets primary school children and aims to explain some of the basic weather features such as ice, wind, clouds and tornadoes. There is also a mention of how animals are affected by the climate and a brief introduction of global warming. There is a variety of photographs, pictures and detailed diagrams which help to explain the physical processes.



Front cover

The photograph looks striking and very dramatic but I don't think it's appropriate to the target audience of primary school children. Although it could capture the attention of some, it could also work the other way and frighten some away. I don't think it matches the inside style because inside it's much brighter, friendlier and more inviting to look at. However, if children took a look inside, I think they would soon be hooked.

Blurb

The blurb is very effective because of the questions it poses, such as 'How can rain sometimes be red?' These capture the child's attention and encourage them to open the book and find out. Also, the personal address of 'you' makes the child feel as if the book is personalised to them.

Contents page

This is easy to follow and introduces the title of each page.

Content

This book features a wide range of varied information about weather, water, clouds as well as many others. It is explained in a simple language which is perfect for primary school children, but there are also some technical names such as Cumulonimbus included. I think this is good because it introduces the vocabulary early on. What I liked were the specific examples of climatic locations around the world, such as the Sahara desert and the Golden Gate Bridge in Francisco. I think this puts the different climates into perspective for the children and also broadens their geographical knowledge. I love the extra unusual facts included, such as 'under the hot sun, desert rocks become so hot you could fry an egg on them' because I think it keeps the content fresh and exciting.

Photos, pictures and diagrams

I think there is a great balance between real photographic evidence and pictures in 'Weather'. The photographs show the children that the power of the weather is not exaggerated and that the effects can be very dramatic. However, there are also a variety of drawn pictures, which are bright, colourful and engaging. I think these would really appeal to the children, as would the little characters such as the frogs, crocodiles and birds. These remind the children that weather is fun and full of interesting facts for everyone, even for them. The use of diagrams in the hydrological cycle and hail description is very effective and the numbering of points makes the facts easy to follow. The diagrams allow children to visualise the information, and possibly retain it for longer. In some cases, I even think that more use of diagrams could be made.

Structure, presentation and layout

The general organisation of the book captured my attention because it's very varied and interesting. Each page has its individual layout, with text, pictures and facts in different places. This keeps the children's concentration and makes them want to find out what's coming next. I like the way in which the photographs are used as a background for each page because it means

that the whole page is full of colour, but the pictures and diagrams still stand out. The colour and large text mean that the structure of this book is ideal for children.

Glossary and websites

I like the idea of having a glossary because it introduces the structure of non-fiction books to young children, but also allows them to find out about certain weather features. The little pictures next to the words evoke associations from the children, meaning they are more likely to remember the definitions. There is also a page to advise the children on where to go on the internet to find out more, which I think is important nowadays because so much is based around the internet. If the children are interested in the weather, it's very easy for them to find out more.

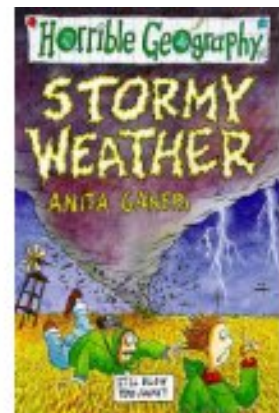
Conclusion

I think that 'Weather' is an excellent book to get primary school children involved in a difficult field. It introduces and simply explains some climatic features, as well as featuring some beautiful photographs and eye catching diagrams. My only slight criticism would be that the front cover is not appropriate to the lively content, but if the child opens the book, they are likely to read on. I would rate this book 7.5 out of 10.

Horrible Geography – Stormy Weather

Summary

This humorous but very informative book is ideal for late primary school through the teenage years. This particular book focuses on storms, winds and violent weather such as hurricanes, but others in the series look at other climatic features. There are also some specific examples, such as Hurricane Mitch, 1998 as well as quizzes through out which allow a testing of the knowledge. There is some very original content such as instructions on building an anemometer, so the childrens' interest is likely to be kept. There are also various cartoons, drawings and quotes which vary the structure of the book and break up difficult text.



Front Cover

The front cover is bright, busy and colourful which would immediately capture attention. I love the contrast of the grey cloud and the yellow-white title which is bold and stands out brightly. It also matches the wheat at the bottom, so the composition looks effective. The funny cartoons introduce the style of the book and encourage the reader to open up and read on.

Blurb

I like the continuation of the picture onto the back cover with details such as the tractor and farm house. The bright background with white text looks very effective, but I think the text is slightly too small. However, I like the use of rhetorical questions such as 'Does geography grind you down?' because they evoke a response from the reader. The bullet points also work to break down the text and make it easier to understand, which again introduces the format of the whole book. I think that a young reader would be captured by the blurb because it introduces some of the facts of the book as well as some of its exciting features.

Contents

The headings for pages on the contents page, such as 'awesome atmosphere', capture the reader's attention and are easy to follow.

Introduction

I like the idea of including an introduction because it shows the reader what to expect from the book and introduces the informal but informative style of the book. Mona the Meteorologist is also introduced which brings the book to life and makes it feel personal.

Content

I love this book because it's full of variety, keeping the reader's concentration and enthusiasm. It features real historic weather events, such as Hurricane Mitch, along with the personal experience of a teacher. This shows how the weather works in reality and gives the reader something to relate to. The consequences and responses to the natural hazards are also described. The book is very easy to follow, but still features very detailed and factually accurate information, such as the composition of the air, pressure descriptions and the earth's atmosphere. The technical words are clearly explained with an asterisk, which is perfect for young readers. Historic facts are also included to add variety, such as 'the ancient Greeks thought the wind was the breath of the Gods'. The personal address of 'you' and the rhetorical questions capture the reader's attention. I love the quizzes included as the book progresses, with upside down answers to allow the knowledge to be tested. This keeps the read exciting and active, which appeals to a lot of children at that age. There are also instructions on building an anemometer, which adds practicality and brings the weather to life. Safety advice on surviving difficult weather is also included, so there's a huge range of material in the book. The reader is bound to find something which appeals to them.

Pictures and diagrams

Sometimes, it can be very difficult to understand something when there are pages of text, but this book breaks up the text with cartoons, pictures and diagrams. This makes it ideal for the target audience and keeps them entertained. The humorous cartoons and quotes break up the difficult factual information and make it easier to digest. There are also maps and weather charts to show ocean currents included in the book, which act as a visual aid in understanding weather features. I think it's important to include a variety of pictures because it captures the reader's attention and makes the information stick with them for longer.

Structure, presentation and layout

This book is full of diversity as each page is different. This keeps the reader waiting to find out what's coming next and encourages them to turn the page. There is a great balance between diagrams, pictures, maps, diary extracts, instruction manuals and text. There are a lot of bullet points and sub headings which help to structure the text and make it look more exciting on the page. The numbered steps, arrows and diagrams are also very easy to follow. I like the idea of having different fonts and styles throughout the book, because it shows that the weather really is full of variety.

Comments about the ending

This is where I would slightly criticise the book because it ends very abruptly. It would have been good to include a glossary of terms to remind the reader of what they had read and to give a reference point throughout. However, I think that after the last chapter, the reader will be left intrigued and fascinated by the weather, and will look on to read more books from the series.

Conclusion

Overall, I think this is a fantastic book for the late primary-early high school years because it introduces a topic which is very difficult, but makes it understandable through its colloquial diction and real life examples. There is a huge range of material included, so there's something for everyone, as well as the funny cartoons to liven things up. I think this book is the perfect way in which to get children fascinated by the weather, so would give it an impressive 8.5 out of 10.