Outback: The Amazing Animals of Australia: A Photicular Book

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In Dan Kainen and Ella Morton's Outback, Photicular illustrations pair with text, resulting in accessible infographics that amaze, educate, and delight.

The definition of the Outback itself is rich and complex. With no determined perimeter, it features significant distances from any major city, a sparse population, and erratic rainfall, yet it also encompasses deserts, rainforests, salt pans, tropical savannas, shrublands, woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, and a whole host of animal species found in no other part of the world.

The text strikes the perfect balance between delivering straightforward facts and unique details without watering down its content. This book will grow with its young readers. The introduction covers the Outback's history, ecology, and future; eight infographics detail specific animals. They include gems like the fact that koalas’ fingerprints are indistinguishable from humans’ and about the echidna’s backward-pointing rear legs.

While the text layers trivia with far-reaching issues, the images require little to no explanation. Any movement of the eight full-page Photicular plates jostles the animals into motion: kangaroos leap, camels lope, wombats trundle, and koalas chew. Each plate begs to be moved, if only to watch the animals shift backward then forward, faster and slower through ordinary motions made extraordinary by the Photicular panels’ inherent sense of play.

Like many parts of the world, Australia grapples with a history of colonization, and Outback makes its effects visible through an examination of the ecosystem. During the discussion of its eight chosen animals, Outback also covers the challenges of feral introduced species, the looming threat of climate change, and Aboriginal Australians' role in the nation's past, present, and future. Throughout, the book signals the necessity for honesty, humility, and cooperation when preserving and healing the land.

Whimsical, thought-provoking, and wonderful, Outback dips into one of the world's most unique landscapes in ways that spark the imagination.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (November / December 2019)

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