

NON-FICTION SCREEN CANON (Y3- 8)™

Documentary & Info Sources Ranked by Year
Group + Interest

For children preparing for:

OC • Selective • Scholarship Reading & Writing

Background Knowledge Building

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INTRODUCTION: Why This Exists & How to Use This Guide

Why This Exists:

Selective / OC / scholarship reading loves:

- Current issues
- Science & environment
- Tech & space
- Australian society & history

Kids who already know this stuff from BTN, Nat Geo, etc. find inference and background-knowledge questions much easier.

This guide gives you a ranked canon of:

- Documentaries
- News shows for kids
- Educational YouTube channels
- Info sites

...split by Year 3–4 / Year 5–6 / Year 7–8 and interest area.

Use it as your "go-to" list instead of scrolling Netflix or YouTube aimlessly.


HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Aim for 1–2 episodes or videos a week from the canon.

For each one, ask 3 questions:

1. "What was this mostly about?"
2. "What surprised you?"
3. "What big problem or idea did it show?"

Colour Code:

 = gentle / lower primary

 = core upper primary (Selective sweet spot)

 = older / sensitive content – parent preview first

CHAPTER 1: Year 3–4 Starter

Canon (Core + Gentle)

A. NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS

1. BTN - Behind the News (ABC) - 🟡 Y4+, some segments fine for late Y3

Type: Weekly kids' news magazine (ABC TV + website + YouTube).

Why it matters:

- Australia's standard kids' news show (aimed at ages 8–13).
- Breaks down current events, civics, science stories, global issues in 8–12 minute segments.
- Perfect for building background knowledge + non-fiction inference.

How to use:

- Watch 1 episode a week.
- Ask: "What was one story about? Why is it important?"

B. NATURE & ANIMALS

2. National Geographic Kids - Video Hub & YouTube - Y3-4+

Type: Short animal & science videos ("Amazing Animals", "Around the World", "How Things Work").

Why it matters:

- Bite-sized (1–4 mins) clips on animals, habitats, places, basic science.
- Great for learning subject vocabulary (predator, migration, ecosystem, etc.).

How to use:

- 2–3 clips as a warm-up before reading or writing.
- "Tell me 3 facts you learned. What was the main idea of this video?"

3. Nature Boom Time / Kids vs Plastic (Nat Geo Kids) - Y3-4+

Type: Environment & sustainability video series within Nat Geo Kids.

Why it matters:

- Introduces pollution, plastics, environmental action in a kid-friendly way.
- These themes appear constantly in OC/Selective reading.

C. SCIENCE & "HOW THE WORLD WORKS"

4. Crash Course Kids (YouTube) - Y3-5

Type: STEM & basic humanities channel, aimed at roughly Years 3–5.

Why it matters:

- Short 3–5 minute explainer videos on Earth Science, Physics, Engineering, Ecosystems and more.
- Builds the conceptual backbone for science passages in reading.

5. SciShow Kids (YouTube) - Y3-5

Type: Science experiments and "why" questions for kids; recommended as a top science channel in multiple ed-tech lists.

Why it matters:

- Tackles questions like "Why do planes leave white streaks?" with simple experiments.
- Excellent for cause-and-effect thinking and scientific explanation.

D. AUSTRALIAN & GLOBAL KIDS' LIVES

6. 199 Little Heroes (ABC Education / ABC iview) - 🟡 Y4-6

Type: Docu-series following children around the world going to school.

Why it matters:

- Brilliant for HSIE / Geography and empathy – "How do kids in Jordan / Australia / other countries travel to school?"
- Builds comparative thinking for questions like "How is this life similar/different to yours?"

E. GENERAL LEARNING / FUN FACTS

7. Horrible Histories / Horrible Science (TV adaptations) - 🟡 Y4-6

Type: Comedy + fact shows based on the book series; recommended for homeschooling / education TV.

Why it matters:

- Makes history & science sticky via humour and sketches.
- Helps kids handle texts that mix fact, satire and exaggeration.

CHAPTER 2: Year 5–6 Core Selective Canon (High Leverage)

This is your main Selective / scholarship prep tier.

A. NEWS, CIVICS & CURRENT ISSUES

8. BTN - Behind the News (regular weekly viewing) - 🟡/🔴

Already listed above, but for Y5–6:

- Use more serious episodes (climate, elections, international crises).
- Perfect for practising "What is the issue?", "What are different viewpoints?".

B. AUSTRALIAN HISTORY & SOCIETY

9. My Place (ABC Education / ABC iview) - Y5-6+

Type: Historical drama series based on the My Place book; each episode set in a different decade of Australian history.

Why it matters:

- Gives rich context for Federation, migration, First Nations history, post-war changes.
- Great for multi-text tasks (pair an episode with a non-fiction article).

10. Aussie Inventions That Changed the World (History / ClickView / SBS) - Y5-8

Type: Documentary series on Australian inventions; referenced as a top educational show.

Why it matters:

- Perfect for innovation, design, cause-and-effect passages.
- Shows how ideas move from problem → prototype → impact.

11. The School That Tried to End Racism (ABC) - Y6-8 (parent preview)

Type: Docu-series about a ground-breaking anti-racism program in an Australian primary school.

Why it matters:

- Tackles bias, fairness, identity – very aligned with modern exam themes.
- Use select episodes / clips; good discussion for mature Year 6 & up.

C. NATURE / PLANET / ENVIRONMENT (BIG PICTURE CORE)

12. Our Planet (Netflix, narrated by David Attenborough) - 🟡 Y5-8

(Age 6+ but intense in parts; preview for sensitive kids)

Why it matters:

- Stunning visuals + strong climate change, habitat loss, biodiversity messages.
- These themes are exactly what you see in selective reading and persuasive prompts.

Parent note: Some scenes of predation / animal death and, in later episodes, distressing climate impacts. Common Sense Media rates it age 6+ but notes graphic moments.

13. Planet Earth / Planet Earth II (BBC, widely available) - 🟡 Y5-8

Type: Landmark nature doc series.

Why it matters:

- Broader planetary overview (habitats, ecosystems, animal adaptations).

- Builds vocabulary & schema for any animal / environment text.

14. David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet (Netflix, PG) - Y6-8 (parent preview)

Why it matters:

- Part memoir, part environmental argument.
- Excellent prep for argument / persuasive non-fiction in upper primary & early high school.

D. SCIENCE, TECH & FOOD

15. Scope (Network 10 / education platforms) - Y5-8

Type: Aussie children's science show; recommended in "Top 11 TV shows for homeschooling".

Why it matters: Fun segments on engineering, medicine, space, tech; aligns nicely with STEM passages.

16. Phenomenom (Aussie web series about food & agriculture) - Y5-6

Type: Food education & sustainability series.

Why it matters: Fantastic for food systems, sustainability, health – a growing exam theme.

E. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE & HUMAN STORIES

17. 199 Little Heroes - (see Y3-4)

🟡 now use more complex episodes & discussion.

18. BTN Specials (Finance / Environment / Refugees / Indigenous issues) - 🟡 Y5-6

BTN publishes themed specials (e.g. Finance, Environment, Sport, Indigenous stories).

Why it matters: Deep dives that align with longer non-fiction extracts.

F. YOUTUBE - UPPER PRIMARY "CORE CHANNELS"

These are your go-to non-fiction channels to build general knowledge.

19. Crash Course Kids - 🟡 Y4-6

Already mentioned; use as a structured "mini class" on ecosystems, engineering, space, forces.

20. SciShow Kids - 🟢/🟡 Y3-6

Science "why" questions.

21. Nat Geo Kids (YouTube) - 🟢/🟡 Y3-6

Animals, places, "How Things Work".

CHAPTER 3: Year 7–8 Extension Canon (For Strong Thinkers)

For your advanced Year 6s and early high-schoolers who soak this stuff up.

A. BIG-IDEA EXPLAINERS

22. Kurzgesagt - In a Nutshell (YouTube) - ● Y6-8 (parent preview by topic)

Why it matters:

- High-end animated explainers on space, biology, existential risks, AI, climate.
- Great for strong readers; can be intense or philosophical → choose topics carefully.

23. CrashCourse (main channel) - ● Y7-8+ (select series)

Why it matters:

- Structured courses in World History, US History, Biology, Economics, Literature.

- Older style, fast-paced; excellent for extending top kids' content + academic vocab.

B. SOCIAL ISSUES & IDENTITY

24. The School That Tried to End Racism (ABC) - (listed earlier) - ● Y6-8

Use this now as part of ethics / civics and writing prompts:

- "Should schools run programs like this?"
- "What are the challenges?"

C. LONG-FORM DOCS (FAMILY VIEWING)

25. Our Planet & Planet Earth / Planet Earth II - used more deeply:

pause and discuss cause/effect, problem/solution, persuasive language.

26. David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet - use as basis for:

- "Summarise his argument in 3 points."
- "What evidence does he use? Which is strongest?"

D. GENERAL ED YOUTUBE SHORTLIST (FROM ED-TECH CURATION)

In addition to those already listed, tech & parenting sites frequently recommend **TED-Ed**, **Khan Academy**, **National Geographic Kids**, **CrashCourse** & **SciShow Kids** as high-value educational channels across subjects.

For Y6–8, selectively use:

TED-Ed

Short animated lessons on history, science, philosophy, puzzles.

Khan Academy

Concept explanation (especially for maths/science) rather than "documentary", but very useful for background understanding.

REFERENCE: Quick "Discussion Card" for Any Doc

Print this and stick it on the fridge.

After any documentary / episode / video, ask:

1. What was this mostly about?

("This episode was about...")

2. What was the big problem or idea?

("The main issue was...")

3. What surprised or bothered you? Why?

4. Who was affected, and how did they feel?

5. If you were writing an exam passage based on this, what question would you ask?

This turns passive watching into exam-style comprehension practice and makes every doc a little non-fiction reading lesson in disguise.

QUICK GUIDE: Minimum Effective Dose for Selective (Y5–6)

If a family is busy and wants a bare minimum "screen canon" for a Year 5–6 Selective attempt:

BTN - 1 episode/week (core)

Our Planet / Planet Earth - 1 episode/fortnight (environment core)

199 Little Heroes - 1 episode/week (global kids' lives)

Crash Course Kids / SciShow Kids / Nat Geo Kids - 2-3 short videos/week (science core)

My Place / Aussie Inventions / Horrible Histories - 1 episode/week rotating (history & society core)

That alone, over a year, builds huge background knowledge for:

- Reading comprehension
- Inference skills
- Writing ideas (examples/stats/contexts)

Result:

That's exactly what this guide gives families: **A ranked, extensive canon of documentary & non-fiction sources, matched to year level and interest, so parents can stop guessing and just follow the list.**