Writing to Persuade

Minilessons to Help Students Plan, Draft, and Revise, Grades 3–8

Karen Caine

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH
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INTRODUCTION

How to Use this Book
Welcome to Writing to Persuade: Minilessons to Help Students Plan, Draft, and Revise, Grades 3–8.

This book can be used in different ways depending on your needs. Are you looking for a persuasive writing unit to be used as is? If so, read and follow the To Adopt directions on this page. Are you looking for some new lessons to supplement an existing framework or unit? If so, read and follow the To Adapt section. If you want to design your own unit, read through the To Create section. Enjoy!

To Adopt   If you want a persuasive writing unit that is already designed:

- Read the question-and-answer section (see following page).
- Read Chapter 1 and select a unit.
- Begin teaching!

To Adapt   If you’re looking to add some new lesson ideas to a persuasive unit you’re already using (developed by your school or district, for example):

- Read the question-and-answer section.
- Read the first two pages of Chapter 1.
- Browse through the minilessons and select lessons that will enhance your persuasive writing unit.
- Begin teaching!

To Create   If you’re looking to create a unit from scratch:

- Read the question-and-answer section.
- Read and discuss the first two pages of Chapter 1.
- Read, discuss, and write the answers to the questions on page 17, Unit VII.
Some Questions and Answers Before You Start

Why Teach Persuasive Writing?  Maybe you’ve chosen to study persuasive writing with your class because it’s part of your curriculum. Maybe it’s because of the standardized writing test that your students will take in the spring. Maybe it’s because you just bought this book and are eager to try out a new study. All great reasons. The truth is, though, that even if none of these things were true, if you were not required to teach children how to write persuasively, you would.

Allow me to persuade you.

A good used-car salesman can convince us to buy a car he knows is a lemon, but the average person best convinces an audience when he believes what he is saying and has written the argument in such a way that the reader believes it too. In order to write well persuasively, the writer must have an opinion about the issue. The writer must also have evidence to support the argument. The old parent adage, “Because I said so,” doesn’t work here. A persuasive author must figure out how to show that what he is saying is true. And beyond opinion and evidence, the writing must have a convincing voice.

How to express an opinion, support it with evidence, and convey these thoughts using an intentional writing voice are skills urgently needed in writing instruction. This is why you should and do teach persuasive writing.

But let’s think about the kind of learners we want our students to become. I don’t mean what we want our students to know in terms of standards, but more broadly. In our ideal world, when our students walk out of our classrooms on the last day of school, what will they know how to do? How will they see themselves in relation to the world? Will they view themselves as thoughtful people who have opinions about the world? I hope so.

I’m thinking about Mandy, a fourth grader whom I taught in a public school in New York City. Mandy was doing well in school, so I was surprised when her mother wrote me a note saying Mandy didn’t understand her homework. That afternoon, I spoke with Mandy and began to realize that she understood the homework but was uneasy about putting her thoughts down on paper. When it was time to write, she asked me what I wanted her to write. When I asked her to find a topic of interest from the social studies reading, she wanted to know what I thought a good topic would be. She was consumed with pleasing me and getting the “right” answer. She had a difficult time figuring out what interested her—what she wanted to say in writing, in reading discussions, in her math log, in social studies.

During that school year, Mandy experienced small successes. Once she gave another student completely different advice from that offered by the rest of her group. She gave her opinion: You need to cut your draft, not add to it. She told why: You repeat yourself too often. And she gave evidence: On pages two and three you say the same thing four times. I wanted to jump up and down and tell her she was beginning to find her voice.

There are a lot of Mandys sitting in our classrooms. They approach learning passively. They are uncomfortable with open-ended assignments and constantly ask whether their work is “good.” They sit quietly in class and are unaccustomed to thinking independently.
in school. These students are good at following directions but not as good at knowing and expressing what they believe.

In *Crafting a Life*,\(^1\) Don Murray talks about why he writes personal essays. I believe that these reasons hold true for persuasive writing:

- To give myself voice. I am heard when I write; I vote in the human community, registering my opinions, what I stand for, what I fear, what I stand against, what I celebrate.
- To discover who I am. Writing the personal essay celebrates my difference, authenticates who I am, justifies my existence. (1996, 55)

Studying persuasive writing increases the chances that students will leave our classrooms and be more thoughtful about the world in which they live.

**What Are the Different Types of Persuasive Writing?** There are many different kinds of persuasive writing that we come in contact with every day. Open any magazine or newspaper and you’re likely to see editorials, op-eds (in this book the terms op-ed and editorial are used interchangeably—for information on the difference between these two kinds of writing see Unit III on page 8) advertisements, articles, advice columns, political cartoons... the list seems endless.

Some writing is noticeably persuasive; other writing is persuasive in a more subtle way. Recently, a friend of mine received a letter from an old friend of hers who wrote that she wanted to rekindle their friendship. Most of the letter was chatty and informational. Then bang! In the last paragraph she wrote that she was running for political office and asked her “old friend” to send a contribution to her campaign. (My friend found this approach sneaky and manipulative. She didn’t contribute.)

To complicate the issue, some writing is purely informational, other writing is purely persuasive, and some seems to be a combination of the two. A few years ago, *Time* magazine ran a story on using the Bible to teach literature in public school. Even from the title it was clear where *Time* stood on the issue. Instead of calling the article, “The Trend Toward Teaching the Bible in Public School” or “The Reasons Some Teachers Use the Bible,” the article was titled, “Why We Should Teach the Bible in Public School.” As you might expect, the article cited the advantages of using the Bible but didn’t discuss any of the disadvantages.

Reviews often fall into this informational/persuasive gray zone. Some reviews give a summary: “The princess falls in love with a man she believes to be a poor gardener. Then, in a case of mistaken identity, he is accused of stealing.” Other reviews are sharply critical: “Another story of a spoiled princess and a case of mistaken identity! Give me a break. Don’t bother. Save your money—don’t even rent the DVD!”

What about infomercials? The first time I saw an infomercial I didn’t know what it was. I thought I was watching a television program on fitness, when all of a sudden I saw the words *money-back guarantee* flash across the screen. Wake-up call! I turned the channel immediately. (I was informed. I was even entertained. A good consumer? That, I was not.) These advertisements are designed to look and sound informational and entertaining but are first and foremost persuasive. They employ more than one or two persuasive strategies,

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including the use of facts and statistics (although I use those terms lightly) and testimonials. Infomercials are notoriously deceptive, but many of them are very effective.

These days there are ads that sound like articles, charitable donation letters that sound like personal letters from a friend, talk shows with hidden agendas, talk shows with explicit agendas, writing filled with facts, and writing filled with propaganda. Confusing.

Personal essays—the kind you might hear on National Public Radio—are thoughtful, but are they persuasive? Sometimes and sort of. How’s that for wishy-washy? This kind of writing tells what the author believes and usually has an identifiable thesis statement and examples to support the thesis. Simply put, personal essays fall short of persuasion because they are not primarily designed to convince the reader. Persuasive writing seems to say, Please think this way. Personal essays seem to say, Think about this with me.

Recently, I heard a personal essay that was part of NPR’s This I Believe series. Robert Fulghum (the author of All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten and many other books) wrote a piece called “Dancing All the Dances as Long as I Can.” It was a heartwarming piece about getting older and continuing to challenge his body, mind, and spirit by learning how to dance the tango. “Unleashing the Power of Creativity” and “Living Life to Its Fullest” are two other titles of personal essays I have read lately. All inspiring. All well written. But not persuasive.

As teachers, we are left in a bit of a quandary. How do we decide what writing is persuasive and what’s not? How do we explain to our students that some writing is informational, some is entertaining, some is persuasive, and some is any combination of the three?

Whether a text is designed to be persuasive is worth discussing with students. There is bound to be disagreement about some of the writing. Good! This is a great way to begin a study of persuasive writing. To determine what is persuasive, select one or two pieces of writing and have students ask and answer the following questions:

■ What is the primary goal of the writer?
■ What makes me think this?
■ Is there another reason this writing was written?
■ What makes me think this?

Of course, not all writing will warrant this type of discussion. Print advertisements and editorials are easily identified as persuasive. Some letters are obviously persuasive, as are most public service announcements. Some advice columns are persuasive, although the truth is I hardly ever feel persuaded by them. (Do people really adhere to this advice? You should be honest with your former best friend and just come out and tell her you don’t like her anymore. No thanks, I’m not convinced.)

The chart that follows on page xvi shows some of the different kinds of persuasive writing and where they can be found. It can be used:

■ As a jumping-off point to begin a professional conversation about persuasive writing with your colleagues.
■ As a guide to help you collect persuasive writing to use with students.
■ As a guide to help students gather published samples of persuasive writing to share with the class.
■ To determine what kind of persuasive writing your class or grade will study.
How Does the Age and Writing Experience of My Students Affect What Kind of Persuasive Writing I Teach?  

Age and writing experience are important considerations when determining the type of persuasive writing to study. This is because some types of persuasive writing are easier than others. Writing a personal persuasive letter is almost always easier than writing an editorial. Students as young as second grade are familiar with the structure of letters, because they’ve actually seen them. In addition, topics for personal persuasive letters are easy to find. What student doesn’t want to convince another family member of one thing or another? (As I write this my older son is trying to convince one of his brothers to let him use his skateboard.) And letters can be short but still be well developed, whereas editorials require more elaboration.

Let me be clear. I’m not suggesting that persuasive letters are a better kind of persuasive writing to teach. Nor am I saying that op-ed pieces are too difficult. I do believe, however, that certain kinds of persuasive writing are more suited to certain grade levels and writing experience. So (with a little trepidation) I include a chart (on page xvii) on recommended grade levels for different kinds of persuasive writing studies. My hope is that this chart will lead to schoolwide discussion and then curriculum decisions.

At What Point in the Year Should I Teach Persuasive Writing?  

On the one hand, the answer is any time you can. Better to teach children how to write persuasively than not. Ideally, though, you should begin a persuasive unit about one-third of the way through the year. Simply put, persuasive writing is difficult to write. The persuasive writer must find a topic, determine a stance on the issue, develop an argument, find reasons and examples to support the argument, consider other points of view, and on and on. This is hard work and likely to be labor intensive. Additionally, for students to write persuasively they have to trust one another and trust you. Creating this kind of classroom environment takes time. If persuasive writing is a first or second unit of study, students are more likely to select generic, safe (and overused) topics because they are worried about what the rest of the class will think. One fourth grader whispered this to his teacher, “I’m not really sure that I want to tell people what I think, because I know most kids won’t agree.” Your best bet is to begin a persuasive writing unit after students know one another and feel it’s okay to share what they truly believe.

Not surprisingly, I would like to see more persuasive writing done in upper elementary and middle school. What about a study of editorials in January and a study of political cartoons in May? At a minimum, teachers should do one unit on persuasive writing and then revisit this kind of writing a few weeks before a writing test or assessment.

Do Writing Workshop and Persuasive Writing Work Together?  

Yes! Students will learn to write persuasively if they have a chance to select their own topics, learn persuasive techniques a few at a time, write often, and receive both student and teacher feedback on their work. The best way to do this is to use a writing workshop approach to teaching writing.

Most days in the writing workshop proceed like this: The teacher begins with a short minilesson, the students spend the bulk of the writing period actually writing, and the period ends with a share session (whole class, small groups, or partners) in which students read some of what they have written or offer some advice to one another. There are of course
## Some Types of Persuasive Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Writing</th>
<th>Purpose of the Writing</th>
<th>Where You Are Likely to Find This Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Op-Ed</td>
<td>To provide and support an opinion, usually on a current events issue</td>
<td>Newspapers, magazines, television and radio broadcasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>To provide and support an opinion, usually on a current events issue</td>
<td>The back page of many newspapers or magazines (this section is sometimes called opinion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive Letter (personal letter, business letter, cover letter, charitable letter, political letter)</td>
<td>To convince a decision maker to support a cause or position</td>
<td>Websites, spam, personal mail, direct mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to the Editor</td>
<td>To provide an opinion on an article and/or current events topic</td>
<td>Often appears on the inside cover of a newspaper or magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Cartoon (illustration or comic strip)</td>
<td>To convey a political or social message or view</td>
<td>Newspapers, magazines, political websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Speech</td>
<td>To win support for a policy or position</td>
<td>Newspapers, books (written), television (spoken)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petition</td>
<td>To make a formal request of some authoritative person or body</td>
<td>Court papers, websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service Announcement</td>
<td>To educate and convince the public to take a particular action or refrain from an action</td>
<td>Television, radio, magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>To sell goods and/or services</td>
<td>Newspapers, magazines, television, radio, email, junk mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice Column</td>
<td>To counsel, and recommend that the reader think or act in a particular manner</td>
<td>Newspapers, magazines, and websites</td>
</tr>
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# Suggested Grade Levels for Persuasive Writing Studies

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<tr>
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<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
<th>5th Grade</th>
<th>6th Grade</th>
<th>Beyond</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Editorial/Op-Ed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persuasive Letter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter to the Editor</td>
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<td>Political Cartoon</td>
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<td>Political Speech</td>
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<td>Public Service Announcement</td>
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<td>Advertisement</td>
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<td>Advice Column</td>
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<td>Petition</td>
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</table>
variations to this structure. The only thing that does not vary is that most of the time is spent writing. When I was new to writing workshop, using these structures and keeping a set schedule every day was extremely helpful.

While students are writing, the teacher confers with individual students or small groups of students. Teachers show students how to get ideas, write with clarity, elaborate, focus their writing—and so much more. Unlike minilessons, which are planned in advance, conferences do not usually have a set agenda. Below are suggestions about writing conferences.

1. Watch what students are doing before you meet with them. This may give you ideas about what to teach.
2. Read (or skim) the student’s writing. Think about strengths and weaknesses.
3. Ask questions: How is it going today? What kind of writing work are you doing right now?
4. Try working from an area of strength: Over here you have strong imagery; let’s see how you did that and whether you can try it again.
5. Try working with what you see as a weakness in the writing—a lack of focus, for example. Teach students how to help the reader follow what they’re saying.

What Should I Keep in Mind When Teaching Persuasive Writing Lessons? Keep persuasive writing minilessons short, and save the majority of the period for writing. In a forty-five-minute period, aim for a ten-minute minilesson followed by twenty-five to thirty minutes of writing followed by five or ten minutes spent sharing. Students will learn how to write persuasively with a little instruction and a lot of practice. It’s difficult to keep lessons short. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Tell, don’t ask!** Many of the questions a teacher asks during a lesson should become direct statements. It’s more efficient to make a statement than ask a question. So instead of, Who knows what part I decided to cut while I was revising?, you could say, Here is the part I cut and this is why. Or, Who remembers what we talked about yesterday? can easily become, Yesterday we worked on such-and-such.

- **Teach one thing.** Try to avoid phrases like and also, and just one more thing, also remember, another thing I want to tell you is! We know this intuitively but sometimes we feel like we haven’t taught enough. There is still more to say, so we are tempted to add another sentence and then another and just one more until we have talked about so many things that we have really taught nothing.

- **Use one or two quick examples to illustrate your point.** Don’t reread a whole persuasive text in a minilesson, just the few sentences that illustrate the point you want to make. Show one or two short examples, not three or four.

- **Avoid combining two lessons in order to catch up or stay on schedule.** Combining two lessons usually means students don’t retain the information in either because the lesson moved too quickly and there was too much information to process at one time.

- **Enjoy yourself.** Something happens to some of us (myself included!) when we teach writing that we know students will be tested on this year or next. We get serious. Nervous. Our tone changes. I try to use my poetry voice—the voice that is warm and inviting—even when I’m not teaching poetry.
Persuasive Writing Units

No matter what kind of persuasive writing you’re teaching or which lessons you select, laying the groundwork before beginning will ensure that your unit goes more smoothly. Here are things to do to get your persuasive writing unit off to a great start.

**Think About Environment**  Create a classroom environment in which students respect one another and feel comfortable speaking honestly, asking for help, and sharing ideas.

*To do:* Read *anything* aloud to your students and give them time to talk to one another about what they heard. (Even three minutes is a start.) Talk to students about how you’d like to see them work together. Ask: *Who worked with another student today and how did that person help you with your work? Who took a risk today by trying something new in their writing? Did it pay off?* (Some risks do and others don’t.)

**Decide on Pacing**  Decide on the length of your unit. The units in this chapter are fast paced—not breakneck, nobody-is-understanding-but-let’s-move-along-anyway (been there, done that), but also not leisurely (never been there but would like to try it some day!).

*To do:* Pick a start date and an end date for your unit. Post these dates in your classroom. (This will keep you on track.)

**Plan but Don’t Overplan**  Plan some of the lessons you’ll do in your unit but save some free days to add lessons as needed.

*To do:* Read through the sample units in this chapter. Then browse through the minilessons in this book and note ones you want to try. This is also a good time to find an end-of-unit assessment tool (see the rubric on page 207) and decide how and when to publish and present student writing. For help with pacing your unit, see the chart titled Suggested Pacing Guide for a Persuasive Unit (page 17).

**Title Your Unit**  Talk with other teachers at your grade level about the focus and goals of the unit. Then title the unit. Don’t fall back on “Persuasive Writing”; select one
that narrows the topic and helps you focus on exactly what it is you will be teaching. Here are some examples:

- Finding an Audience and Writing a Personal Persuasive Letter
- Studying and Writing Editorials
- Voice and Persuasive Writing
- Structuring Persuasive Writing

*To do:* Discuss goals with your colleagues and decide on a title that will help you define and narrow your focus.

**Enlist help**  Ask, *Who can help me?* Possibilities are the school librarian, other teachers, the administration, parents with access to a newspaper or with a persuasive writing background, this book’s appendix, websites, and so on.

*To do:* Make a list of people who may be able to help you and write down ways they can help.

**Gather Sample Writing**  Collect samples of published persuasive writing appropriate for your unit.

*To do:* Select and duplicate some of the sample writing in the Appendix. Look for some of your own samples too.

**Ask Students to Bring in Samples of Persuasive Writing**  Approximately two weeks before the unit begins, ask students to find and bring in samples of persuasive writing. Place this writing in hanging files or baskets and give students time to read it.

*To do:* Read and discuss some of the ideas presented in the persuasive writing samples. (See Chapter 2).

**Find Out What Students Already Know**  Informally assess what students know about persuasive writing.

*To do:* Talk to last year’s teachers and find out if persuasive writing was studied in the grade before yours. If it was, find out specifically what kind of persuasive writing was taught. Ask students this question: *What do you know (or think you know) about persuasive writing?* If there is time, ask students to write a quick (ungraded!) persuasive paragraph. Skim these paragraphs to get rough idea of what students know how to do and what should be taught.
UNIT I: Introduction to Persuasive Letter Writing

A persuasive letter is written to convince the reader to think or act in a particular way. It can be formal or informal, depending on the subject of the letter and the writer’s relationship to the recipient. A letter to your sister will undoubtedly have a different tone from a letter to your local congressman.

About This Unit In this unit, students will write a persuasive letter. The focus of this letter-writing unit is on the process of writing—in other words, how to get ideas down on the page. There is one lesson on revision and one lesson on looking at writing techniques but the unit emphasizes how to find an idea, how to select a topic, and how to organize writing. (Persuasive techniques are mentioned but not covered in detail.) This study is especially appropriate for students who do not have extensive writing experience.

On the last day of the unit, students are asked to select another persuasive letter topic from the first day of the study and to draft this letter without the help of a minilesson or a writing conference. Use these letters as one way to determine what students have learned and are able to do independently. This study can be done in place of or in addition to a unit on friendly letters.

Special Considerations Arrange for students to mail the letters they’ve written. As students get replies, have them share these responses with the class.

Although the majority of students will write letters that are serious, a few students may want to write humorous letters. (Although the minilesson on Using Humor to Entertain and Persuade—see page 71—is not included in this unit, you may want to use it with the whole class, with a small group of students, or in a writing conference.) Topics of persuasive humorous letters students have written include letters to a soccer coach explaining “why I should get more playing time even though I am the worst player on the team” and a letter to a principal about book fairs that begins like this: “Instead of banning books, I think we should ban book fairs.”

Before Students Begin to Write . . . Read, enjoy, and discuss sample persuasive letters with your class. Specifically:

- Discuss which letters are particularly persuasive and which ones are not.
- Make a list of what you notice about persuasive writing. (It has reasons and examples, and words that help convince the reader.)
- Notice the different ways persuasive letters begin. (With a butter-them-up paragraph, with a jump-in lead, with a question, etc.)

Day by Day Plans

Day 1 Finding an Audience: Whom Would You Like to Persuade? (p. 50)
Keep in mind: Have students take notes during share time because often one student’s idea sparks another.
Day 2  Have students pick one idea from Day 1 and begin to write a persuasive letter. *Keep in mind:* Students have not had time to develop their persuasive ideas yet so their letters are likely to sound like a piece of an idea—not a whole idea.

Day 3  Have students pick another idea from Day 1 and begin to write a different persuasive letter. 
*Keep in mind:* You may also want to give students the option of taking their idea from yesterday and writing more about it instead of writing on a new topic.

Day 4  Selecting a Topic (p. 84)  
*Keep in mind:* Some students will select topics that are informational and not persuasive. Help steer students toward persuasion.

Day 5  All Reasons Are Not Created Equal (p. 90)  
*Keep in mind:* Some students may not have strong reasons as to why they believe as they do. Help students develop their reasons by asking them to answer the question: *Why is that true?* Some students will naturally develop examples and other students will have to be prompted to think of a “for instance” for their reasons.

Day 6  Some Might Think: How to Write Counterarguments (p. 96)

Day 7  Finding and Imitating Persuasive Writing Techniques (p. 58)

Day 8  Examining the Structure of Your Persuasive Writing (p. 108)  
*Keep in mind:* Structure is difficult. Allow students time to develop a tentative letter structure but allow and encourage students to augment their structure as they draft tomorrow.

Day 9  Ready, Set . . . Draft! (p. 125)  
*Keep in mind:* If you watch students draft you’ll be able to understand their drafting process and what to say as you confer with them.

Take one or two days off from writing workshop. Take time to evaluate students’ persuasive drafts and to determine class strengths and weaknesses. Determine what revision lessons you will teach.

Day 10  Call to Action (p. 149) or Elaboration 2: Expanding Your Own Writing (p. 137)  
*Keep in mind:* Underdeveloped paragraphs are usually a problem with persuasive writing. You may want to do the first and the second Elaboration minilessons.

Day 11  Coaching the Reader by Using Punctuation (p. 154) or select another revision lesson and ask students to begin to edit during another point in the day or for homework. 
*Keep in mind:* You may want to follow up and repeat or extend the lesson from Day 10.

Day 12  Ask students to do a final proofread by using Proofread Carefully (p. 167) and then ask them to recopy or retype their writing. (Do not ask students with severe handwriting difficulty to rewrite their work.)  
*Keep in mind:* Older students can help younger students do a final edit and type their letters.
Day 13  Self-Assessment (p. 174)
*Keep in mind:* Students may want to email their letters in addition to sending a hard copy.

Day 14  Celebrate (and then mail letters).
*Keep in mind:* Students can read excerpts of their letters if they are very long.

Day 15  Have students select one of their letter ideas from the first few days of collecting ideas or choose a new topic altogether.
*Keep in mind:* Teachers will have to give students time to reread their lists from the first day of the unit and recall who else they wanted to write to.

Day 15½  Have students draft and revise a second persuasive letter. Remind students to use what they’ve just learned from writing the first letter to help them draft this letter.
Tell students, *This letter will show me what you have learned from our persuasive writing unit so do your best work.*
*Keep in mind:* This is only one measure of students’ understanding of persuasive letter writing. You may also want to use any of the following to help determine what students learned during the unit: class discussion, conferring notes, and observation.
UNIT II: Advanced Persuasive Letter Writing

A persuasive letter is written to convince the reader to think or act in a particular way. It can be formal or informal, depending on the subject of the letter and the relationship of the writer to the recipient. Some persuasive letters are essentially advertisements, others are requests for donations, and still others are personal letters.

About This Unit  This unit moves more quickly than Introduction to Persuasive Letter Writing. It’s particularly suited to students who have had a good deal of writing experience.

Special Considerations Students will write at least two letters. (The chart on page 53 lists different kinds of persuasive letters.) They can write both letters to the same person, or you can require that the second letter be written to someone who is more distant from the writer—a local school official or the head of school bus transportation for your county, for example. (Writing to someone they don’t know personally is usually more difficult, so it’s an added challenge.) You might also have students read a local newspaper and discuss local issues before they write their second letter.

Before Students Begin to Write . . . Read sample persuasive letters with your class. Discuss these questions: What parts of this letter are particularly well written? What makes you think so?

Day by Day Plans

Day 1  Finding an Audience: Whom Would You Like to Persuade? (p. 50)
Keep in mind: Students can make a list of what bothers them in order to get ideas for persuasive letters.

Day 2  Have students pick one idea from Day 1, then use Writing Quickly and Continuously to Find First Thoughts (p. 74)
Keep in mind: Students can begin to free write by writing the target audience or the general idea at the top of the paper.

Day 3  Have students pick another idea from the list from Day 1. Then have students free write using this new idea. Use Writing Quickly and Continuously to Find First Thoughts (p. 74)
Keep in mind: If student want more time to write about their topic from yesterday, you may want to give them this option. (Other students will be more than happy to try out a new topic.)

Day 4  Select a topic lesson and then talk and create a chart similar to Resource 4-4 on page 91.
Keep in mind: Today’s lesson is really two lessons. You should do this work when you have at least fifty minutes for writing. Also, encourage students to look back on their free writing from Day 2 or Day 3 and use that writing to help them with the chart.
Day 5  I came. I saw. I conquered. Short Declarative Sentences Persuade (p. 144)
Keep in mind: Younger students may already write short declarative sentences. If this is true of your students, select another lesson from the revision or developing ideas chapters. What about pinpointing some persuasive writing techniques from sample letters and trying these techniques?

Day 6  Leads That Capture the Reader’s Interest (p. 123)
Keep in mind: Students often have very weak leads to their letters. Show students examples of strong leads from any type of persuasive writing.

Day 7  Ready, Set . . . Draft! (p. 125)
Keep in mind: For struggling writers consider making copies of one of their notebook entries. Use this entry as a draft.

Day 8  Cut It Out! Deleting Unnecessary Words (p. 141) or Reading Lead Sentence to Determine Balance and Clarity (p. 159)
Keep in mind: It may help students if they have a chance to work with a writing partner, read their writing aloud, and discuss their thoughts before writing.

Day 9  Coaching the Reader by Using Punctuation (p. 154)
Keep in mind: You may want to confer with groups of students who need this kind of instruction.

Day 10  Finding an Audience: Whom Would You Like to Persuade? (p. 50) Use Resource 3–7, Types of Persuasive Letters (p. 53)
Keep in mind: You may want to ask students to think more about today’s lesson for homework. Sometimes quiet time to think helps an author think of more ideas.

Day 11  Have students pick one idea from Day 10, then use Writing Quickly and Continuously to Find First Thoughts (p. 74)
Keep in mind: There have been many days in this unit when students use free writing. Practice may not make perfect but it sure does make better. Don’t worry about overusing free writing; if it works well, use it again and again.

Day 12  Students write a draft (no minilesson today—but many writing conferences).
Keep in mind: Students have drafted just a few days ago so it may not be necessary to do another lesson to lead students into drafting. As students draft, observe how they go about the process of putting words on the page.

Day 13  Self-Assignment Day
Keep in mind: Ask students to set individual writing goals for today. Most students should reread their work or spend the writing period revising.

Day 14  Proofread Carefully (p. 167)
Keep in mind: Proofreading a letter that is going out into the world is very important. Let students know that their letters should be proofread to the best of their abilities.

Day 15  Celebrate (and mail letters).
Keep in mind: Ask students to select one of the two letters they would like to read to the class.
UNIT III: Editorials

Editorials and op-ed pieces are published in newspapers and magazines and are often—but not always—about current events. The most important difference between an informational article and an editorial is that an editorial is written to share opinion (not just news, but the author’s view of the news).

Technically, there is a difference between an editorial and an op-ed. An editorial is written by the editor of a newspaper or magazine and expresses the view of the writer and in some cases the staff of the magazine or newspaper. An op-ed piece, which gets its name because it used to be opposite the editorial page, also expresses the opinion of the author who is an outsider—unrelated to the newspaper. (For ease of reading, the term editorial will be used throughout this unit and this book).

About This Study If your class is not familiar with persuasive writing or you are going to include class minilessons on research, your students will need more than three weeks to write an editorial. Don’t let this scare you off—students learn an incredible amount about developing and supporting an argument in this unit.

Special Considerations Elementary and middle school (and even some high school) students may be unfamiliar with editorials; therefore, before students begin to write, they should spend a minimum of four days reading editorials. Students will write much higher-quality editorials if they understand why editorials are written and what techniques authors use when writing editorials.

Research can be part of a unit on editorial writing. You may elect to teach whole-class minilessons on research or introduce research to the few students whose topic will benefit most from it. (For more information on research, read pages 81–82. For minilessons on research see pages 60 and 63.)

Before Students Begin to Write . . . Read and discuss editorials. Then read the same editorials again and point out what persuasive writing techniques the author used. When searching for editorials, look for topics that will be of high interest to your students—editorials that are well written, and editorials that are at the right reading level. Editorials that fit all of these qualifications are difficult to find. Therefore the Resources section has more sample editorials than any other kind of persuasive writing. To locate your own sample editorials:

1. Look at websites that specialize in persuasive writing (there’s a list in the Appendix).
2. Google a current hot topic (airsoft guns, paintball, or Barry Bonds, for example).
3. Look in a national newspaper (or check its website). Editorials are often listed under editorial, opinion, debate, or columnists.
4. Look in magazines written for students (Time for Kids, for example).
5. Check your local paper.

Sometimes editorials are quick snippets of opinion with little or no proof or support. If you use writing like this, make sure you discuss both its strengths and challenges. What kinds of proof would make the editorial stronger?
Day by Day Plans

Day 1  Finding Persuasive Ideas: Rereading Written Responses (p. 42)
*Keep in mind:* Students can use the ideas in this lesson to get more than one idea for their own editorial writing.

Day 2  Things That Bother Me in the World (p. 44)
*Keep in mind:* You may have to show students the connection between some of their ideas and an editorial piece of writing. The topic can become an editorial if the idea can be made into a controversial issue and there can be an audience of many people. *I am angry when my mom takes away TV as a punishment* would work best as a persuasive letter, but *parents should not use TV as a punishment* might work as an editorial.

Day 3  Use a topic from yesterday’s list and write more about it.
*Keep in mind:* Students sometimes have a list of topics, but they aren’t sure how to get started with their writing. Show students ways to begin their writing: start with a reason that has the word *because*, start with a question, start with an image, and so on.

Day 4  Selecting a Topic (p. 84)
*Keep in mind:* As students look through their writing to find an idea to develop, they may realize that they don’t have any ideas that they can or want to develop. If this happens with a few students, allow them to try out a few other topics on their lists. Tell them that they should be firm on a topic by the next writing period. They will have to do some catch-up work, like free writing on the subject, but you are allowing them just a bit more time to find a topic that excites them.

Day 5  Writing Quickly and Continuously to Find First Thoughts (p. 74) or Finding and Imitating Persuasive Writing Techniques (p. 58)
*Keep in mind:* You may want to do both of these lessons in one day especially if students have had experience free writing. First, ask your students to free write. This needs little or no lesson since students are familiar with this strategy. Then teach students a persuasive writing technique and ask them to experiment with this technique using one of the ideas from their free writing.

Day 6  Writing a Thesis Statement (p. 86)
*Keep in mind:* Writing a thesis is hard work. Confer as much as you can today and have students listen to other students’ conferences so they get a better idea of what a strong thesis sounds like.

Day 7  Planning Persuasive Writing (p. 118)
*Keep in mind:* Confer with small groups of students. Show students how to put their ideas into a working organizational plan. Demonstrate with one student’s writing and let the others watch. Ideas that you cannot group with others at this point can be placed on a sticky note. In few days, when students draft, they can keep their sticky notes nearby and will see where these ideas fit in to their writing.
10  Writing to Persuade

Day 8  Leads That Capture the Reader’s Interest (p. 123)

Keep in mind: Don’t skip this lesson. Working on different leads can really help an editorial. Since editorials tend to be longer than persuasive letters, it is particularly important that an editorial lead is a good one. If your students are new to writing workshop, you may want to bring their drafts home and read their leads. Do they lead them down a good road? If so, move on to the next lesson. If not, work with those students whose leads are weak and who you fear may be going down an unfocused or unclear path.

Day 9  Today students will experiment with writing techniques. Go back and reread the class’ favorite op-ed or editorial pieces and discuss the writing techniques the author used. If you have time, ask students to try some of these techniques. Today is a experimenting day.

Keep in mind: Students like days when they feel they are just doing some “try it” writing exercises. This feels like a break from the more intense and serious work of sticking with one idea for a long time.

Day 10  Ready, Set . . . Draft! (p. 125)

Keep in mind: Now that students have leads that are likely to lead them down the right path and are also well written, give students enough time to write the rest of their drafts. (Spend time rereading students’ drafts before beginning to teach revision.)

Day 11  Loaded Language: Positive, Neutral, and Negative Words (p. 94)

Keep in mind: At this point there may be one or two students who hate their drafts. If this happens ask these students if they would like to try writing another draft today and then ask them which draft they like better. Tell them that sometimes it is a relief to just start over. Give them this option and if they take it, help them get started writing a new draft.

Day 12  Smooth Transitions (p. 131) or Elaboration 1: Expanding Someone Else’s Writing (p. 134)

Keep in mind: These lessons work well as a writing conferences, too.

Day 13  Copy Cat! Finding Great Writing and Doing It Again (p. 146)

Keep in mind: This is difficult for some students to do. Remind students to underline or circle two of their favorite parts and then figure out what they like about those parts. Help students determine what they like about that part of their writing.

Day 14  Proofread Carefully (p. 167)

Keep in mind: Some students may be ready to recopy or type their work. Let these students begin to do this work so that tomorrow is less stressful!

Day 15  Today students will put their writing in final form.

Keep in mind: Today students will be working on different things. Some students will be typing, some will be recopying, and others may be finished. If they are finished, they may write something else in their writer’s notebooks, or ask students to begin to write about what they learned during your editorial unit.

Day 15 (again)  Celebrate!

Keep in mind: Encourage all students to share at least a short excerpt of their editorial.
UNIT IV: Public Service Announcements

Public service announcements (PSAs) are helpful messages that are part of a public awareness campaign to inform, educate, and persuade the public about a specific health or safety issue. PSAs can be audio, video, or print. In this unit, students study and write public service announcements that appear in print. This kind of persuasive writing uses the following techniques:

- scare tactics
- statistics and facts
- storytelling

- testimonials
- visual imagery
- a call to action

About This Study In this study, students select a health or safety concern and create a public service announcement about it. They learn about gearing particular language to the target audience and writing a call to action. In addition, they study persuasive images and work on creating images that sway the audience.

Scheduling the Unit Find out whether your school sponsors PSA programs or contests (during Red Ribbon Week, for example—a week highlighting the dangers of drugs), and teach the unit before students are offered the opportunity to contribute to these events.

Before Students Begin to Write . . . Begin a study of PSAs by reading and discussing this type of writing. With a partner or in small groups, ask students to decide which announcements are very effective, somewhat effective, and relatively ineffective.

You may use the sample PSAs in the Resources section. These are all print PSAs and have been selected because they have persuasive techniques that students can easily identify and then try in their own writing.

You can find other sample PSAs on the Web by Googling public service announcements (narrow the search by adding the words print, radio, or television) or Ad Council (the largest producer of PSAs in the United States). Look for examples that your students will find interesting, are well written, and deal with an appropriate topic.

Some oldies but goodies are: This Is Your Brain on Drugs; Take Pride in America campaign promoting volunteerism; and the Things That Break Your Heart ads about dealing with and preventing diabetes. Asking students to locate sample PSAs is not a good idea because the subject matter is sometimes inappropriate. Don’t avoid this study on these grounds; just gather your own PSAs.

Day by Day Plans

Day 1 Effective or Ineffective Persuasive Writing? You Decide (p. 34)

Keep in mind: Students will want time to discuss the content of the PSA before they analyze the writing, the image, and the overall presentation. This lesson works best if students are reading PSAs for the second time and have already reacted and responded as readers. (See lessons in Chapter 2.)
Day 2  Things That Bother Me in the World (p. 44). Students list their own health and safety concerns.  
*Keep in mind:* Allow students time to think about their own health and safety concerns, even if some of these ideas do not lend themselves to a PSA.

Day 3  Call to Action (p. 149)  
*Keep in mind:* Each student should experiment with different ways to call the audience to action—with a question, a statement, in the image, with a slogan, and so on.

Day 4  Studying How Images Work with Words (p. 111)  
*Keep in mind:* You may want to begin the writing period by asking students the following question: *How does the image help the text? Would the PSA be less effective if it were only words? How?* (Help students be specific about what they notice about the images.) Then, do a short lesson on two or three of the things students noticed. Ask students to keep these things in mind while they create their own images today.

Day 5  The Idea Is a Good One or I’m Hip to That: Formal Versus Informal Language (p. 106) or Learning More About Your Topic 1: What Kind of Research Can You Do? (p. 60)  
*Keep in mind:* Students may want to use some of their research findings in their PSA.

Day 6  Celebrate! Students share their PSAs with each other. (This celebration works well when students are in groups of four or five.) Reread their health and safety concerns list and begin to work on another PSA.  
*Keep in mind:* The celebration will only take a few minutes so you may want to do a lesson first and save the celebration for the end of the writing period.

Day 7  Learning More About Your Topic 2: Internet Research (p. 63)  
*Keep in mind:* It is easier to read information from paper rather than a screen. If possible, have students print their research and highlight important facts and information. This is a chance for students to learn more about their subject and to incorporate a fact or statistic from their research into their PSA.

Day 8  Using Precise Words and Phrases (p. 92)  
*Keep in mind:* Students continue writing their PSAs and focus on selecting precise words. For an extra challenge, ask students to think of synonyms for some of their words—or to experiment saying what they want to say in many different ways. Then discuss what language is most effective.

Day 9  Studying How Images Work with Words (p. 111). Use the questions in the follow-up section of the lesson from Day 4 to help students understand that images can support words in many different ways.  
*Keep in mind:* The more the students study the images, the more intentional they will be about creating their own images. Help students think about these questions: *What kind of mood does the picture create? How do mood and persuasion go together?*

Day 10  Celebrate: Students share their PSAs with each other.  
*Keep in mind:* Display you students’ PSAs.
UNIT V: Political Cartoons

Political cartoons (also called editorial cartoons) are written to make a statement, take a stand, give an opinion, or make fun of a political event or person. To understand the cartoon, the reader has to be familiar with the event or person referred to. Political cartoons use the following techniques:

- humor
- exaggeration
- symbolism
- labeling
- analogy
- irony

About This Study  In this unit, students study and create political cartoons. Students publish at least three cartoons in a three-week period. This quick publishing and celebrating is very appealing to students and teachers alike.

Special Considerations  Before beginning this unit, make sure students read and discuss current events. Student magazines like Time for Kids, Junior Scholastic, and New York Times Upfront (appropriate for middle school) are a great resource to help students find out about current news. CNN Student News (a daily ten-minute newscast) is another excellent resource.

Because images and words work together in political cartoons it’s beneficial if an art teacher joins you in presenting this unit. (Use your powers of persuasion!)

Before Students Begin to Write . . . As a class, study current events; read political cartoons in books, magazines, or newspapers; and discuss the meaning of the cartoons. Also study the techniques of political cartoonists (previously listed).

To find political cartoons on the Internet, search the words political cartoons or editorial cartoons.

Challenge  Create a political cartoon along with your students!

Day by Day Plans

Day 1  Read political cartoons and decide if they are effective or ineffective. What makes them effective or ineffective?
     *Keep in mind:* The more students read and try to interpret political cartoons, the easier it will be for them to create their own.

Day 2  Discuss controversial news stories students know and care about. List these ideas. As you list topics with students, you may say things like, *Some people believe this about this politician or news story. Other people think this . . .*
     *Keep in mind:* If students have seen political cartoons and have some knowledge of the current happenings in the world, you may want them to make a political cartoon today. As they work take notes and ask questions about what students are doing. This will give you a good sense about what students already know about political cartoons.
Day 3  Learning More About Your Topic 2: Internet Research (p. 63)
Keep in mind: The more students know about a topic, the better they can address the topic and form a point of view based on facts. Give students time to research current event topics of interest.

Day 4  Writing a Thesis Statement (p. 86). If time allows have students sketch ideas for a political cartoon.
Keep in mind: By writing a thesis statement students will understand that political cartoons are not only about the news, but are the cartoonist’s opinion about a news story or political figure.

Day 5  Have students look at images and symbolism. Show students that everything that is drawn in a cartoon has a purpose. Use the immigration cartoon (see Appendix p. 237) to show students why Uncle Sam is drawn (he is a symbol of the United States), why each sign is drawn, and why Uncle Sam is on a fence of barbed wire.
Keep in mind: Students should be clear about what they are trying to show in their cartoon and should have a reason for everything they include.

Day 6  I came. I saw. I conquered. Short Declarative Sentences Persuade (p. 144)
Keep in mind: Use Resource 6–6, Example of a Short Declarative Writing. Have students experiment with different captions and words for their cartoon. If students finish a cartoon, let them begin another.

Day 7  Today begin with a political cartoon celebration. Let students share their political cartoons in a small group.
Keep in mind: Students can start on another political cartoon. Or they can write or sketch:

- Funny (ironic) things about life today. (For example, kids saying I’m bored but having a million different kinds of electronic gadgets. Kids not knowing what an encyclopedia is but knowing how to find any kind of information on the Internet, etc.)
- People (parents, local politicians, etc.) who say one thing but do another.
- Funny differences between parents and kids.

Day 8  Students write one last political cartoon.
Keep in mind: You may want to give students the option of working alone or with a writing partner.

Day 9  Set up a political cartoon museum in which students display their work and other students comment on what they like about each cartoon.
Keep in mind: Each student can have a comment sheet to place near his or her work so other students can write their reactions on each student’s comment sheet. Show students how to write specific comments. Instead of “your cartoon is good” write “a very funny image” and so on.
UNIT VI: A Follow-Up Persuasive Writing Study

This unit is designed as a follow-up unit for students who have already studied persuasive writing. In this unit, students are given three or four samples of the same type of persuasive writing they will study (select writings from the Appendix) and time to read and study these samples. Students work in groups or with partners for the first third of each writing period and then spend the bulk of the writing time, writing. There are no traditional mini-lessons. Instead students use essential questions to guide their learning discussions with each other.

While students are reading and discussing, confer with one group at a time. Teach students how to stick to one topic, reread their persuasive packet of writing, and how to build on each other's ideas. While students are writing you may want to confer with them individually.

About This Study  The study can be done in two ways.

1. All students study a new kind of persuasive writing together. (For example, the whole class can study advertisements and each student can write his or her own advertisement.)

2. Small groups of students study and write different kinds of persuasive writing. (For example, some students study and write advertisements, other groups study and write PSAs, other groups study and write political cartoons, and so on.) If you select this option, ask students who are studying the same kind of persuasive writing to sit near one another and discuss what they have learned.

Special Considerations  In order to hold students accountable for doing an appropriate amount of work, ask them to write a one-sentence goal at the beginning of each lesson. At the share time, ask students to check in with their writing partners and let their partners know if they met their goal for the day.

Before Students Begin to Write . . .  Remind students to use the resources they have gathered from the last persuasive study including: published persuasive writing, student writing samples, charts, and of course—each another!

Day by Day Plans

Day 1  What can we learn from reading this kind of persuasive writing? What techniques do these authors use?

*Keep in mind:* Before this lesson give students samples of persuasive writing. Using the information they acquired from the last persuasive study, help students to identify effective persuasive techniques like use of statistics and hypothetical situations.

Day 2  How will we get ideas for this kind of persuasive writing?

*Keep in mind:* As you confer, help students be specific and build on each other's ideas. If
one student says for example that he is going to look at what he has already written, tell the other students to ask him to say exactly what he will do. Where will he look and how will he look for this writing?

**Day 3**  How will we develop our own persuasive ideas?  
*Keep in mind:* Remind students to think about ways they developed their persuasive writing in the last study.

**Day 4**  How will we write a strong persuasive draft?  
*Keep in mind:* Students will start drafting today so make it as long a writing period as possible.

**Day 5**  How will we know what revision work we should do?  
*Keep in mind:* This is the hardest thing for students to do. Remind students that they should reread their writing (not skim) and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the piece. Then have them revise their work. Ask students to edit their work for homework.

**Day 6**  Presentations and Celebrations.
UNIT VII: Create Your Own Unit of Study

Suggested Pacing Guide for a Persuasive Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Number of Lessons</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collecting</td>
<td>2–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting</td>
<td>1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>1–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting</td>
<td>1–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising</td>
<td>2–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>1–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>1–2</td>
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</table>

Create Your Own Persuasive Writing Unit:
1. Read through the units on the previous pages, review your state writing standards, and browse through the minilessons in this book. Working with your colleagues, discuss and write the answers to the prompts below.
2. Create a day-by-day lesson chart (like the ones in the other units) and fill in your lesson ideas. Use the pacing guide to help with planning.
3. At the end of the unit, discuss and write the answers to the reflection questions below.

Design Your Unit to Include:
About This Study
Special Considerations
Before Beginning This Study
Day-by-Day Plans (lessons we must do because they are urgent or because we can’t wait to do them)

After Your Persuasive Writing Unit Ask:
- How did the unit go?
- What would I do differently next time?
- What other comments do I have about this unit?
CHAPTER 2

Minilessons for Reading Persuasive Writing

Wait a minute, isn’t this a book about teaching persuasive writing? What’s reading doing in here? Actually, the decision to include a chapter on reading persuasive writing was an easy one. Reading persuasive texts before writing persuasively almost always yields better student writing.

When Reading Persuasive Writing . . .

... by published authors (and sometimes student authors), have students:

1. Discuss what they have read.
2. Pinpoint specific persuasive writing techniques the author uses.

Give Students Time to Read and Respond

Begin by reading persuasive writing for the pleasure of it! Let students agree or disagree with what is being said. Give them a chance to respond to what they read—not by answering a set of predetermined questions, but by reacting to the reading. Strong persuasive reading conversations are not focused on detached and disconnected thoughts: Here’s what I want to say. Here’s another thing I want to say. Now what do you think? They are conversations in which students listen to one another and build on each other’s thoughts. The talk should be similar to the talk in an adult book club: You talk. Hmmm. (I think about what you said.) I add something to what you said. Someone else says, “That’s true but what about . . .”

Many of you work with students who have a hard time expressing themselves—second language learners, children who have difficulty with word retrieval, or children who have specific learning disabilities. These issues make it even more difficult to teach students how to read and talk about what they’ve read. So start small, maybe just five minutes a day. Summarize the author’s opinion about the issue and then ask students to talk about why they agree or disagree. Wherever your students are on the conversational continuum, teach them how to be better readers, thinkers, and talkers about persuasive text.
Students who do not face learning challenges are also often not adept at talking about what they’ve read. These students tend to summarize not analyze the text. Again, work with these students by teaching them how to respond thoughtfully to the text and to one another’s ideas. Teach students to take one idea and discuss it even if they don’t agree and even if they don’t have a solution to the problem they are discussing.

As we give students time to read and respond to persuasive writing, something else happens: They begin to get excited about their own persuasive pieces. This excitement is almost as important as the minilessons themselves. We want students to think: Hey, I’ve got opinions too. Let me tell you what I think. I’ve got something to say.

Reading persuasive writing will help students begin to formulate ideas for their own persuasive topics. Recently, in a fourth-grade class where students were studying editorial cartoons, a student made this comment: “I totally disagree with the cartoonist, and if I were creating an editorial cartoon I would say that global warming is the number one issue that America ought to be concerned with.” Weeks later, she was writing about that very topic!

**Reread and Study Persuasive Writing**

After reading and discussing persuasive writing, teach students how to reread and find the persuasive techniques the author uses. The more students study writing techniques and discuss how and why the author used rhetorical questions, for example, the better their writing becomes.

This point was illustrated for me when a friend asked me for help writing a business plan. I racked my brain for information about business plans and came up blank. I was stumped and then embarrassed to be stumped. I had no idea how to write a business plan because I had never written or read one. I didn’t know the purpose, the audience, the sound, or the look of this kind of writing. When I decided to come clean and admit that I didn’t know about business plans, I heard the disappointment in my friend’s voice. I knew she was thinking, Isn’t she supposed to know about writing?

I had to do something.

Over the next several weeks, we searched the Internet and read business plans. We found a few that we thought were well written—that stood out from the rest. We also talked to people who had written business plans. We needed to know:

- Who is the audience?
- What makes this kind of writing well written?
- What makes this writing effective?
- How is this writing organized?
- What kind of language is used?
- What’s the ideal length?

We learned a lot in a short time—enough so she could start writing.

Imagine the kind of writing our students could do if we took the time to read and study writing first. Imagine if we spent a week (or two) studying persuasive writing before asking our students to write it. Writing would not only be easier, but the quality of the writing would surely be better. In addition, we would be demonstrating how to learn about writing in a way that students could use over and over again, with and without our guidance. We would be showing students that reading is something writers do when they want to be better writers.

Guiding students in reading and studying the kind of writing they will do is not just a nice add-on to the writing curriculum—it is the writing curriculum!
# Predictable Problems and Possible Solutions While Reading Persuasive Writing

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<th><strong>Problem</strong></th>
<th><strong>Solution</strong></th>
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| You feel you cannot spend time reading persuasive writing since doing so is not part of the curriculum. | Study your state’s reading standards. Determine which standards can be addressed while reading and discussing persuasive writing. Here are just a few examples:  
  - Identifies and analyzes main ideas and supporting details.  
  - Makes insightful and well-developed connections.  
  - Relates new information to prior information.                                                                                                      |
| Students do not seem to understand what a particular piece of persuasive writing is about. | If the reading is too difficult, try a different text. If the reading is at a good level, but students need background information to understand it, give students the information they need. Say, *One thing that is important to know is...* Read the text several times. First, read it aloud, then ask students to read it independently, and then read it aloud again. |
| Your students do not know enough about a particular persuasive writing topic to be able to explain the reasons for their opinions. | Find persuasive writing about a subject familiar to your class. Look in student magazines like *Junior Scholastic* or *Time for Kids*.  
Have the students do quick research on the topic and then jot down notes in order to prepare for a class conversation. |
| Your students make general statements but do not refer specifically to the text. | Teach students how to locate and refer to evidence in the text that supports what they are saying.  
Assign one person the role of asking this question:  
*Can you prove that statement?* |
| There is too much repetition in student conversation. | Teach students how to ask these questions:  
*What ideas can we add?*  
*What questions didn’t the article answer?*  
*What’s another way to look at this?*  
*What things didn’t the author mention?* |
An Open Exploration of Persuasive Writing

Students are given different kinds of persuasive texts to read and study. (They aren’t told that the writing is persuasive.) Some students may identify the writing as persuasive right away; many will not. By watching what your students do and listening to what they say to one another, you’ll learn how they approach reading in general and what they know about persuasive writing. Time: Thirty-five minutes

Preparation
Collect about twenty-five examples of persuasive writing: a combination of travel brochures, advice columns, advertisements, and op-ed pieces. (For more suggestions on where to find different types of persuasive writing, see the Appendix).
Divide the students into groups of four.
Read Resource 2–1, Excerpt from a Persuasive Writing Conversation.

Minilesson
When I was in first grade my teacher put a bucket filled with rods on each table. There were long rods and short rods, red rods, and orange rods. There were short little beige rods, too. She told us to study and play with the rods. I learned how many beige rods it took to equal one orange rod, and I learned how to stack the rods on top of each other so that the longest one was on the bottom. I discovered patterns and talked with my friends about what I was learning.

In a few minutes you’ll have a chance to explore some writing in this same way. This is an open exploration so I won’t tell you how to study this writing. Today there will be no questions to answer except the questions you ask yourselves and each other. I do, however, want to make a suggestion about how to begin. When you first meet in your group, spend some time, probably about ten minutes, reading each kind of writing. All of you may not finish reading all of the writing, but you will at least have some ideas of what each text is about and how it is written.

I’m curious to see what you’ll learn and what you’ll talk about. Who knows (well, I do but I am not saying!), maybe we will write like this some day.

Hand out the writing and watch and listen as students explore. Write down some of what they say and read some of what they say during share time.

Share
Say, Here are some interesting things I heard you say. This group noticed that ... a few different groups said that ... one group said one thing and then another group said the exact opposite for example . . .
Ask, What kind of writing do you think this is? What did you notice? What did you wonder about? What questions do you have?

Possible Problems and Suggested Solutions
Students have no idea what kind of writing they have in front of them. Do the lesson again and give students more time to explore. Guide the exploration by asking, Why do you think these pieces were written? What is the purpose? Who is the audience?
Students identify the writing as informational. This is not that far off base, since much persuasive writing does give information. Tell students the writing does provide information but has another purpose, too.

Students switch topics too quickly during their small-group discussions. Show how to wait a few seconds after someone talks so everyone can process what was said. Show students how to respond to the last comment made instead of saying something unrelated.

Follow-Up
Look at the same persuasive texts again on another day. Ask students to focus on one thing they notice and see if it is true for all the texts. (For example, if students say a particular text contains questions, is this true for all the pieces?)

Look at different examples of the same kind of persuasive writing (all advertisements or all editorials, for example). What are their similarities and differences?

Ask students to think of a question they have about this kind of writing and write the question on a sticky note. Place the sticky notes in a central location in the classroom and let students read one another’s questions. Refer to these questions throughout your unit.

Resource 2–1 Excerpt from a Persuasive Writing Conversation

Stuart: This one has information about visiting Florida, and this one has information about buying this candy bar.

Andrew: Yeah, I agree. This says that you should go to Reynolds Plantation, and it even has pictures to show you what it looks like.

Stuart: I know someone who’s been there and it doesn’t really look like that.

What the Teacher Notices Only two students are talking. The exchanges are quick, interrupted. Students are looking for a “quick fix.” There is not enough exploring going on. Still, the teacher is impressed that Stuart started the conversation, since he usually waits for someone else to do so. Also, a few weeks earlier the class had read a number of examples of informational text, so informational writing is not just a random guess.

Teacher: Okay, let’s see if we can slow down this conversation and stick to one idea for a while. I’m going to teach you something. Are you ready? One way to explore this writing is not only to tell what you see but also to ask a question about the writing or tell the group something you wonder about the writing. You know, something you don’t know the answer to—for example, why are certain parts of the writing included?

Kyle: Okay, so I think is that—I mean, what I want to know is why it says you should come to Reynolds Plantation? Why do they want us to come there? I mean, I know why they want us to come there, so that they can make money, but it seems like they are just trying to say how great it is.

The teacher sits with the group for two more minutes. She reminds the boys to leave some “wait time” after each child speaks. This helps the students build on what the person before has said. Kyle leads the group in talking about the purpose for the writing. The word persuasive is never mentioned but the concept of persuasion is alluded to.
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Writing to Persuade

Literal Understanding of Persuasive Text

When students read fiction, we sometimes ask them to retell what they’ve read so we can
gauge their understanding of the text. Similarly, when students read a persuasive text, we
want to be certain they understand the main point. (Sometime they can fool us because they
seem as if they understand, but upon closer inspection, we realize they don’t.) In this
lesson, students learn some guiding questions to use as they read and then retell what they’ve
read. **Time:** Fifty minutes

**Preparation**
Choose a persuasive text your students have read recently and have them reread it.
Copy another persuasive text your students have read recently.
Look at Resource 2–2, Examples of Retelling Persuasive Text, to help you see the difference
between a weak retelling and a strong retelling.
Copy Resource 2–3, Guiding Questions for Retelling a Persuasive Text.

**Minilesson**
Before we jump into our reading conversation, let’s take a few minutes to learn about a
strategy that will help you retell and summarize what you have read. From now on, we’ll
begin discussions by retelling. This will remind us of what we’ve read, and it will help the
members of the group decide whether they understood the article or have questions about
what they read.

We can keep certain questions in our minds as we read persuasive articles. If we try to
answer these questions as we read or right afterward, we’ll have a better understanding of
what we read. Here they are. [Read Resource 2–2, Guiding Questions for Retelling a Per-
suasive Text, aloud.]

Now, I’m going to summarize an article we read the other day. First, I’m going to
reread the article, keeping these four questions in mind. This will help me focus my read-
ing. Then I’ll use these questions to help me retell what I read.

Read the selected text and then demonstrate how to summarize the text by asking your-
self the guiding questions aloud and answering them completely and succinctly.

Now I’d like you to summarize a persuasive article.

Hand out copies of an article your students have already read and ask them to reread it.
(A short article is best.) Then ask them to summarize it using prompts like, *This persua-
sive text is mostly about . . . and The main issue here is . . .

**Share**
Don’t ask students to share today. This minilesson is long, and students will have already
reached their sit-and-listen limit.

**Possible Problems and Suggested Solutions**
*Students do not understand the issue in the text.* Reread the text or part of the text and
have students identify key words that help determine the main idea. When choosing text
to use in the future, ask yourself:
Is this piece an appropriate length for my readers?

Does it contain key words or concepts some children may not know? (If it does, give an overview of the text before students read it: The piece we are about to read is about_______. The author makes the point that ___________. He gives several reasons he believes this to be true. For example, . . .)

Can I find another piece of writing that is a better match for my students?

Follow-Up

Ask students to retell what they have read at the beginning of whole-class, small-group, or partnership work. Listen carefully and help them fill in any gaps or misunderstandings. (Some students may also benefit from highlighting or circling key words.)

Retell a harder or easier text.

Retell another persuasive text using the guiding questions but tell the students that you will purposely do a bad job. Ask students to tell how to improve your retelling.

Resource 2–2  Examples of Retelling Persuasive Text

Brandon’s Retelling of “Science: It’s Just Not Fair” by Dave Barry

Well this guy, the author, says that he likes science fairs but that some kids don’t like science fairs because they have to go out in the middle of the night to get what they need and it puts too much pressure on them so they don’t like them. That is the main point. He says that his wife did a funny science project.

The teacher notices: Brandon doesn’t say that the article is mainly about how students wait until the last minute to prepare for these science fairs and how it is difficult for the parents to support students in doing this work. He doesn’t seem to know that it is humorous either.

The teacher thinks: This may not be a great article to use, because Barry’s humor and the way he switches subjects so quickly may be confusing. Then again, it might be a great piece to study, because many students appreciate wit and want to write humorous pieces. I’m just not sure yet. I will read it aloud tomorrow and see whether students understand it better.

Clark’s Retelling of “Science: It’s Just Not Fair” by Dave Barry

This writing is hysterical! Okay, so the main point is that science fair projects are really a pain in the neck (which can be true). And then there is the part where the kid only remembers the night before that he even has a project.

I think the main point is for us to think about whether these science fair projects are really worth it or not. Or it could be that there really isn’t a main point, just that he wrote it to make you laugh. I am not sure if there is an issue here. That part I don’t know.

The teacher notices: Clark understands the purpose of this article. He understands that the writing is humorous and that the author, using humor, asks the reader to question the idea of the at-home science fair project.

The teacher thinks: I will listen carefully to see if students understood the writing the way Clark did. Also, I wonder if students would like time to write an entertaining yet persuasive piece of writing. My teaching would be to show them how to write about a subject they know well and how to use details to create strong and humorous images.

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