



St. Paul Public Schools
Writer's Workshop Units of Study

Persuasive Writing: Letter to the Editor

Grade 6

Unit Overview

Persuasive Writing: Letter to the Editor

Author Heather Lattimer writes:

Introducing students to editorial (writing) is essential if we want our children to grow up to become thoughtful, participatory members of society... We want them to ask questions, carefully consider alternatives and choose wisely... Thoughtful interaction with editorial text allows readers to better understand their own positions on confusing and controversial issues.

Thinking Through Genre: Units of Study in Reading and Writing Workshop 4-12

Persuasive writing is born out of passion. When examining and writing persuasively, we give our students the opportunity to become independent thinkers and leaders. During the Persuasive Writing: Letter to the Editor unit, we ask students to thoughtfully consider issues that are important to them and to learn to make decisions for themselves. We teach and expect them to use well-reasoned arguments, clear structure and strong evidence to support their arguments. We want students to view themselves as citizens who have important opinions about the world and who can have a greater influence on our larger society.

Important Links

Reader’s Workshop – In December’s Reader’s Workshop, students spent three weeks immersed in the examination of periodicals, including editorials and opinion-editorial (“Op-Ed”) texts. They studied controversial issues from a variety of perspectives, asked questions in order to understand particular issues and examined the language of persuasive text.

Feature Article Unit of Study – This unit of study is intentionally designed to follow the Feature Article unit of study. When writing a Feature Article students were expected to identify and write about a topic of which they felt strongly. It was expected that these Feature Articles were written with a strong sense of perspective or *slant*, using facts and stories; the author wrote from a particular angle (opinion) that was **implicitly** stated. In essence, the writer’s voice was *absent* (i.e. no “I” statements).

In the Persuasive Writing: Letter to the Editor unit of study, students will look more closely at letters to the editor. They will compose their own letter, writing from their own, personal perspectives. Unlike in the Feature Article unit of study, students will be taught to **explicitly** embed their own opinions and passions in the letters they write. When selecting a topic, students will be encouraged to write a letter to the editor about either: 1. The topic of their Feature Article; or 2. The topic of a classmate’s Feature Article. As in every unit of study in Writer’s Workshop the teacher will model writing her or his own letter to the editor. It is expected that students’ letters to the editor will be **sent** (newspaper, magazine) or **posted** (on-line periodicals, blogs, etc.). See websites within the Resources section on page 3.

Purpose:

- Students will recognize and learn to use the structure and techniques of persuasive text.
- Students will learn to write a letter to the editor with well-developed ideas and arguments, employing strong evidence, compelling language and well-reasoned ideas.

Framing Question:

- What issue, or issues in my world do I feel passionately about?
- How can I share these feeling with a specific audience in order to convince others to support my position?

Writer’s Workshop Big Ideas

- Identify features of persuasive texts.
- Identify author’s opinions and bias in persuasive texts.
- Analyze language and technique authors use to appeal to their audience
- Take a clear position on an issue and write to convince a specified audience to believe or do something.
- Anticipate and address reader concerns and counterarguments.
- Use a text structure that fits the issues and author’s opinion (sequence of events, problem-solution, compare/contrast).
- Support arguments with detailed evidence, citing sources of information as appropriate.

Minnesota Writing Standards	NCEE New Standards: Writing
<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in a writing process, with attention to organization, focus, quality of ideas, audience and a purpose • Write topic sentences • Create multiple paragraph compositions that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Correct paragraph indentation style ○ An introductory paragraph formulating a thesis or opinion ○ Supporting evidence in paragraph form that upholds the overall thesis or opinion ○ A concluding paragraph as a summary • Use composing processes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prewriting – planning strategies such as brainstorming, journaling, sketching, listing, outlining and determining audience, purpose and focus • Drafting – organizing, supporting and putting ideas into sentences and paragraphs • Revising – improving the quality of content, organization, sentence structure and word choice • Editing – correcting errors in spelling and grammar • Publishing – producing a document and sharing the writing with the audience • 	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the reader by establishing a context, creating a persona, and otherwise developing reader interest • Develop a controlling idea that makes a clear and knowledgeable judgment • Create an organizing structure that is appropriate to the needs, values, and interests of a specified audience, and arranges details, reasons, examples, and anecdotes effective and persuasive • Include appropriate facts and details • Exclude extraneous details and inconsistencies • Use a range of appropriate strategies, such as providing facts and details, describing or analyzing the subject, and narrating a relevant anecdote • Advance a judgment that is interpretive, analytic, evaluative or reflective • Support judgment with elaborated and convincing evidence from the texts, references to other works, or personal knowledge • Create a multiple paragraph composition using the conventions of a Personal Essay that states, maintains, and uses details in a logical order • Provide a sense of closure to the writing

WRITING

Suggested Professional Resources

Lattimer, H. (2003). *Thinking Through Genre: Units of Study in Reading and Writing Workshops 4-12*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse

Allyn, P. & Pastore, L. (2008). *The Complete Year in Reading and Writing: Grade 5* New York: Scholastic

Caine, K. (2008). *Writing to Persuade: Minilessons to Help Students Plan, Draft, and Revise Grades 3-8*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Websites:

Possible Lesson Plans

http://lesson-plans-materials.suite101.com/article.cfm/letter_to_the_editor_activity

Internet Magazine Resource

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront/index.asp>

List of World-Wide Newspapers

<http://www.refdesk.com/paper.html>

“Internet Public Library” List of Publications

<http://www.ipl.org/div/news/>

Internet Blog Resource

<http://blogsearch.google.com/>

Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

http://www.psychlaws.org/generalresources/advocates_tred.htm

Sample Letters

<http://www.schoolandstate.org/Handbook/sampleletters.htm>

Week 1 – Immersion: Building the Foundation for a Letter to the Editor – Prior to the start of this writing unit, students will have had multiple opportunities to examine different editorial texts. They will now examine several different letters to the editor in order to create a working definition. They will begin to examine how writers use different ways to persuade which **may** include:

- **ethos** (based on ethics – appealing to a reader’s sense of right and wrong),
- **pathos** (emotions – humor, fear, pity or pride to change),
- **logos** – (using facts and statistics along with inductive or deductive reasoning).

Students will rate the strengths and weaknesses of letters to the editor and will generate a list of attributes they would find in a successful letter to the editor. They will define persuasion in everyday life, asking questions such as, “How do these issues connect with me in my every day life?” “How does this relate to the larger community?” “How can my voice effect change in my world?”

Week 2 – Crafting a Letter to the Editor – Students will select topics for their letters and will begin a first draft. Students will examine the **structure** of a letter to the editor. They will also study the **language** of persuasive writing. They will ask and answer the following questions – “Who is my audience?” “How can I organize my ideas to be the most compelling?” *If students choose to write a letter to the editor about another student’s Feature Article, the teacher may want to conduct some guided writing groups. These students should also be encouraged to reread their peer’s article and to interview the writer (many important ideas may not have made it into the final copy).*

Week 3 – Drafting – Students will continue to revise their letters with a focus on using precise language, arguments and counter-arguments, and appropriate tone and style.

Week 4 – Revising and Editing – Students will finish their letter to the editor, using co-created editing checklists to edit for mechanics and conventions. They will send or post their letters. Finally students will celebrate their writing and will take time to reflect on the process, focusing on answering the framing questions. *Students should be encouraged to follow up on the status of their letters or postings.*

Note: Lesson titles under **** and in italics are from *Writing to Persuade: Minilessons to Help Students Plan, Draft, and Revise, Grades 3-8* and/or *Thinking Through Genre: Units of Study in Reading and Writing Workshops 4-12*. Teachers with access to these materials may choose to use them for the indicated lessons in this unit.

Writer’s Workshop Unit Planner

<p>Week 1 Immersion & Definition: Building a Foundation</p>	<p>Lesson 1: Sample Letter to the Editor (Read a sample letter and jot observations. What is the writer passionate about? How do you know? How can we use our writing to change the world around us?)</p>	<p>Lesson 2: Comparing Two Letters to the Editor (Identify some common features)</p>	<p>Lesson 3: Review Sample Letters to the Editor (What are the writers’ opinions and biases? How do we know?)</p>	<p>Lesson 4: Building a Definition (purpose, structure and craft)</p>	<p>Lesson 5: Questions To Spark a Letter to the Editor</p> <p>*****</p> <p><i>Thinking Through Genre</i> (page 137)</p>
<p>Week 2 Drafting a Letter to the Editor</p>	<p>Lesson 6: Choosing a Topic for a Letter to the Editor</p>	<p>Lesson 7: Developing a Position Statement: Meaningful Arguments</p> <p>*****</p> <p><i>Writing to Persuade</i> (page 90)</p>	<p>Lesson 9: Organizing Structure</p> <p>*****</p> <p><i>Thinking Through Genre</i> (page 142)</p>	<p>Lesson 10: How Writers Appeal to Their Audience (ethos, pathos, logos)</p>	<p>Lesson 11: Arguments and Counter Arguments: Consider the Opposite Point of View</p>
<p>Week 3 Revising a Letter to the Editor</p>	<p>Lesson 12: Signal Words and Their Purposes in Letters to the Editor</p> <p>*****</p> <p><i>Thinking Through Genre</i> (124)</p>	<p>Lesson 13: Using Precise Words and Phrases</p> <p>*****</p> <p><i>Writing to Persuade</i> (page 92)</p>	<p>Lesson 14: Leads That Capture the Reader’s Interest</p> <p>*****</p> <p><i>Writing to Persuade</i> (page 123)</p>	<p>Lesson 15: Revising for Voice and Style</p>	<p>Lesson 16: Peer Editing</p>
<p>Week 4 Revising, Editing, Publishing</p>	<p>Lesson 17: Final Proofread and Edit</p>	<p>Lesson 18: Celebration of Writing – Letters to the Editor</p>	<p>Lesson 19: Reflection on My Learning</p>		

Assessment	Student Work	Artifacts of Teaching and Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferring notes, anecdotal notes • Student reflections • Teacher and student-scored rubrics <p><i>This section will be expanded at a later date.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writer’s notebook entries • Drafts • Craft ‘try-its’ • Revisions • Published letter to the editor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-created charts (see examples, below) • Standards-based teaching bulletin board • Genre Word Bank: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bias ○ Angle ○ Slant ○ Opinion ○ Fact ○ Perspective ○ Point of View ○ Compare/contrast ○ Article ○ Editorial ○ Evidence ○ Current Events ○ Special Issues ○ Journalism ○ Periodical • Editing Checklist • Assessment Rubric

Artifacts – Possible Charts

This section will be expanded at a later date.

<i>Supporting Evidence: Backups for My Thinking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dictionary definitions• Similes or metaphors•	<i>Big Ideas and Themes</i>
<i>Author's Craft</i>	<i>Thinking About Messages & Lessons</i>

Sample Newspaper "Letter to Editor"

Editorial Page Editor

Newspaper Name

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Editor:

I was distressed at the number of "Free Pets to Good Homes" ads in the newspaper tonight, and just had to write to let people know what happens to many of the pets obtained through such ads. Much too frequently, the Humane Societies and other animal rescue organizations are called in to rescue former "free to good home" pets--if the pets are lucky.

There are very good reasons that Animal Rescue, the Humane Society, and Animal Control all charge an adoption fee for their animals. These small fees in no way begin to cover the cost incurred for medical treatment and upkeep of the pets they adopt out.

Did you know:

- People value what they pay for. Pets obtained for free are more likely to be abused and/or discarded, because "there are plenty more where that came from!"
- Puppy millers take free unspayed/unneutered pure-bred dogs for breeding stock.
- So-called "Bunchers" gather free pets until they have enough to make a trip to a lab worthwhile, then sell them for \$25 a head for experimentation!
- Free animals are taken to "blood" pit-bulls and other fighting dogs - -to train them how to kill, and to enjoy it!
- According to one Humane Society, free kittens are being taken to new "good homes" in some areas--as dinner for a pet snake!
- So-called animal hoarders watch the newspapers for Free to Good Home animals. These hoarders truly believe they are "rescuing" the animals!

Some people answering the "Free to Good Homes" ads really are loving, responsible pet owners. Many are not. Please DON'T advertise Free pets; charge at least \$25 to discourage sale to research labs. Please DO take the time to interview each and every prospective owner; the Humane Society or any rescue organization can help you with what types of questions to ask. And please have Mama spayed as soon as the kittens or puppies are weaned!

Sincerely,

(your signature)

Your Name

Your Address

Your Telephone Number

Source: <http://www.nowisconsinpupmills.com/newspaperltr.html>