

Introduction to Persuasive Writing

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Third Grade
Clarendon Elementary, Portland, OR

Background

Mark is introducing his third-graders to persuasive writing, which is part of Oregon's state writing curriculum. With Mark's support, each student will identify a community problem, determine his or her position on the issue, and write a persuasive letter to an appropriate recipient. To help the students get started, Mark reads a picture book about a community issue. He also shares sample persuasive letters written by other students. Since this is a new concept for most third-graders, Mark limits his students to arguments in favor of their particular positions.

Instruction and Activities

Day One

Mark begins the unit on persuasive writing by reading Patricia Zelter's picture book *The Wonderful Towers of Watts*. This book tells the true story of the Watts Towers in Los Angeles: how they were built and how the community saved them from being torn down. Mark stops at the point in the story when the city decides the towers must be removed.

Mark asks the students to imagine that they are the people in the story — the residents of the Watts neighborhood, including neighbors, children who play around the towers, parents, city officials, and so on. Then he asks the students to think of reasons for keeping or tearing down the towers, recording these arguments on a t-chart.

Next, Mark uses an overhead projector to share examples of persuasive letters written by students from previous years. He asks the class what they notice about the language and the arguments in the letters, records their responses, and circles some of the language and techniques the authors of the letters used.

The class brainstorms about people and groups who can help with different issues in their community. Mark introduces a graphic organizer to help students plan a persuasive letter. As a whole-class activity, Mark and the students choose an issue, take a position on the issue, think of arguments supporting the position, and then record the arguments on the graphic organizer. Next, Mark and the students brainstorm a list of possible recipients.

Instruction and Activities

Day Two

Mark takes the students on a short walk around the neighborhood to take notes about problems they observe along the way. Mark asks each student to choose one of the problems observed on this walk as the topic for a persuasive letter.

Once students decide on an issue, Mark asks them to think about who can help with the problem — the audience for their letter. Students begin to write, using the graphic organizer as a pre-writing aid and talking to each other and Mark as they work. Later on, when the students are ready to publish, Mark will mail the letters to their intended recipients.

Name _____

Persuasive Letter Planner

Your idea

Use this space to explain what you want the person or group to know about.

The person or group you are writing to

Your arguments

Use these boxes to write down your arguments. Write as many as you can think of that will persuade your audience to do what you want. Later you can decide which ones work best.

Empty rectangular box for writing.

Empty rectangular box for writing.

Empty rectangular box for writing.

Empty rectangular box for writing.

[Student Work]

Dear Portsmouth Neighborhood Association,

I am a third grader at Clarendon Elementary school and I live in the Portsmouth neighborhood. I am writing to you to tell you about a problem I think our neighborhood should work on together. Every day I walk to school like most of the kids at my school and there are scary dogs that make me worried. Sometimes one of the dogs gets out of the yard and chases some kids. I want people to know that it is not okay for their dogs to get loose. I think the neighborhood association should help this problem by letting people know that they have to keep their dogs in their property.

There are a lot of good reasons to keep dogs in their yards. First, a dog that escapes might run away and then the owner will be sad. Also, a dog that is loose could get hit by a car and get hurt some other way. If the dog is mean then it could attack a kid or someone else's pet, like a smaller dog or cat. The law says that if your dog attacks somebody then you can get in trouble or have to pay them money. Last, if there are mean dogs running around everywhere then people might think our neighborhood is a vicious wild animal park!

I think you will agree with me about these reasons. If you would like to contact me you can write back at the address on the envelope or you can call my teacher at the school. You can also use this letter in your newsletter so people will see what I'm saying.

Thanks for your help,

[Student Work]

Dear Mayor Katz,

I am writing you to ask you to help our schools. I am a student at Clarendon Elementary in North Portland. My little sister goes to this school, too. My big sister goes to Portsmouth school. I am worried for them and me because schools might close down early. I hope you can help keep the schools open.

If schools close early because there is no money then there will be some big problems. First, how much learning will be lost? Two or three weeks is a lot of time for teachers to teach new stuff. My teacher said that we might not get to do some of our big projects and field trips if schools close down early. The second thing is that my family doesn't know who will take care of us if school is closed. Both of my parents work and they can't take off any time. I don't want to be at home alone with my sisters. Scary! The last thing is that people around the country will think that we are a city that doesn't care about learning. People might think that this city doesn't care about kids or schools. That would be embarrassing for the whole town of Portland.

Thanks for reading my letter. I hope that you agree with my arguments and will help take care of the problem. You are a good mayor.

Sincerely,

[Student Work]

Dear Housing Authority of Portland,

I am writing to you about the big project you are planning for the Columbia Villa. I am a kid in the neighborhood that is next to the Villa and I have some concerns. I want to make sure that the big trees that are in the neighborhood stay there. I hope you can help me with that.

Trees are important to the neighborhood for a lot of reasons. They look good and make everyone feel relaxed, especially older trees. Little ones are nice, too, but big add a special beauty to the area. Older trees will make people want to come to live in the Villa. Trees are also helpful to houses, because they provide shade that keeps your house cool when it gets hot out. Big trees help the city because they soak up a lot of water that would go into the sewer or the Columbia Slough if the trees did not help.

I know you have a lot of changes to make so you can find a way to save trees. Thanks for reading my letter and feel free to write back.

Sincerely,