



Transactional Writing: Argument

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii **2** 3 4 5

If There Were No Cats

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

Over a three-week period, the class focused on developing argument in writing.

The teacher initiated the topic by sharing a variety of fairy tales with the students. They discussed the characters, and she asked them what they thought of their actions. The students responded both with discussion and in writing. The aim of this phase was to motivate them with snippets.

Earlier in the year they had studied endangered animals, and as this was very topical, the teacher decided to pick up on it again. She chose an article in NIE Outlook about whether the killing of native birds is a reason to ban cats in New Zealand.

Asked for a PMI (Plus, Minus, Interesting) on the topic, the students were most passionate, and the teacher wrote their ideas onto a chart.

The teacher presented a scenario in which “the Prime Minister is going to propose a new law that cats will be banned in New Zealand”. The students’ task was to write a letter persuading her otherwise.

To assist them, the teacher:

- modelled how to write an introduction
- used ideas from the PMI and asked students for suggestions
- modelled paragraphing.

The agreed criteria for the letter were:

- an introductory statement
- at least two opinions backed up with reasons
- evidence of paragraphing
- the students’ original ideas.

On day one, the students wrote independently and shared their writing with a partner. On day two they each conferenced with the teacher, and on day three they published their work.

After this, they were to write from the point of view of the cat, which led to a lot of chat about cats, and personal stories. Their job was to describe themselves as cats, and discuss why they shouldn’t be banned.

Teacher-student conversations

After the first draft:

Teacher: Are there any changes you would like to make? Does it make sense? I like your questions to the audience.

Benji: I am happy with it.

Teacher: I love the bit about the woollen balls. I get a really clear picture in my mind.

Teacher: You worked quickly to get all your ideas down. Well done. Now what do you need to do?

Benji: Get my green pen and put a line around the words I need to check.

Teacher: Let’s find the first one together.

[Benji circles ‘crischich’.]

Teacher: Where might you find this to check it out?

[Benji quickly points at Christchurch on the map.]

Teacher: That was quick. Now see if you can find three more words from your writing that you need to check. Look around the room or in your dictionary. When we come together I will be interested to hear how you have got on.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

There are opportunities for Benji to:

- Research the issue through guided reading.
- Write letters to the editor about the same or similar issues. What are the language features of such letters?
- Find “points of view” in a variety of *School Journal* articles. What vocabulary do the writers use? How do they maintain the relationship with the reader?
- Find clear examples of imagery in persuasive writing, and relate it to his own.

In addition, he could be encouraged to skim, make notes, and summarise from factual information, especially in guided reading.



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WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Benji towards the next learning step, the teacher might help him to focus on:

Ideas

- he could include greater detail and elaboration. Why are cats just a minor problem? How could they be banned from just one city? Is there a solution?

Structure

- this piece ends midstream and needs a concluding statement.

Proofreading

- fixing spelling errors, capital letters and question marks.

Most of these points could be addressed by modelling with the whole class, the student's group, or in individual conferences.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 2: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions and explanations, state facts and opinions, and recount events in a range of authentic contexts

Levels 1 and 2: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring language: Students should be able to explore choices made by writers, and identify and use common conventions of writing and organisation of text which affect understanding.

Thinking Critically: Students should be able to identify and express meanings in written texts, drawing on personal background, knowledge and experience

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35-36

REFERENCE

Ministry of Education. (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: In writing to the Prime Minister on the topic of whether cats should be banned in New Zealand, Benji knows exactly whom he wants to persuade. He attempts to play on his reader's emotions, and supports his argument with elements of personal experience.

Student's second draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Presents ideas with some supporting evidence: "because...".

Structure

Begins to sequence ideas.

Sentences

Varies beginnings.

Attempts complex sentences.

Vocabulary

Makes increasing use of topic-related vocabulary.

Language features

Attempts rhetorical questions.

Dear prime Minister

I am writing about your suggest law: that cats should be banned from New Zealand.

I disagree with you because you don't need to bannd cats from the hole of New Zealand just from one city like Auckland or crischrch. Cats ant the only problem there a miner problem. Wher would childrin lem responsibility from if ther were no cats.

If there were no cats who would play with old womons wollin balls and who would grandmas snugl up to in their big rocking cher

You can't banned them there to cute, fuzzy and helpes.

Surface features

Grammar

Attempts more complex sentences.

Spelling

Shows knowledge of consonant sounds: crischrch, snugl, lem.



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