



Transactional Writing: Argument

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

Possum Debate

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

This class had previously focused on presenting arguments orally, with group debates about school issues, and individual statements about personal issues such as being allowed to have long hair.

Moving on to written arguments, the teacher discussed and modelled the format, focusing on how to make points for and against, and appropriate opening statements.

She encouraged the students to discuss and share what they knew about possums, prior to a shared reading of the *School Journal* story “Sarah’s Possum” (2.1.94). They also read “Possum Facts” in the same journal and found further information on the internet.

They were then asked to adopt a personal point of view on the “usefulness” of possums, stating their reasons and sharing their views in small groups. They were to draft their personal views, ensuring they made an opening statement, a middle statement giving evidence for their views, and a concluding statement.

While this was in progress the teacher roved, questioned and conferenced with individual students.

Elliott wrote two drafts before reshaping and reworking the second draft into its final form.

Teacher-student conversations

After the first draft:

Teacher: “ all sorts of things” – what do you mean?

Elliott: They kill birds and stuff – they take their eggs.

Teacher: You’ve got the beginnings of a good argument but you need to flesh it out and organise it into paragraphs.

After the second draft:

Teacher: This has really improved. Your statements are better organised. Now, can we reorder some of your sentences to make the argument more effective – convince your readers.

The teacher worked with Elliott on the final paragraph of this draft, because he had included the comment, “Plus five of their six ends are pointy!”

Teacher: Does this sentence help your argument?

Elliott: No. I was just trying to be funny. I’ll take it out – it’s okay.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Reading programmes provide opportunities for students to read a range of genres. For argument/persuasive writing, the teacher could use guided and shared reading sessions to explore:

- the ideas in the text
- the structure and organisation of ideas
- persuasive language features and vocabulary.

Some models of persuasive writing can be found in stories and articles in the *School Journal* as well as in literature. The teacher should consider the student’s interest in possums and other pests when selecting texts for guided reading.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Elliott towards the next learning step, the teacher might encourage him to focus on:

Ideas

- developing ideas with significant elaboration.

Structure

- sequencing ideas logically in paragraphs. This might also help him avoid repetition of ideas. It is interesting to note that Elliott used paragraphing in his second draft but not in the final form.

Language features

- using features of persuasive language such as rhetorical questions, repetition, and inclusive pronouns, and relying less on emphatic devices such as exclamation marks.

The teacher could model texts, discussing the features that students need to focus on. During individual conferences, specific points can be emphasised through explicit instruction. Students can be encouraged to set and attain personal learning goals relevant to their next step.



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CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 3: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions, explanations and factual accounts, and express personal viewpoints, in a range of authentic contexts, sequencing ideas logically.

Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should identify, discuss and use the conventions, structures and language features of different texts, and discuss how they relate to the topic.

Thinking Critically: Students should discuss and convey meanings in written texts, exploring relevant experiences and other points of view.

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: Elliott states his opinion very clearly and supports it with a range of reasons. He is also beginning to speak directly to his audience by using emotive language and imperatives. He has used these features to make us “listen” to his argument.

Student's final draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Develops ideas with some detail.

Structure

Sequences ideas logically (position taken, evidence, emphatic ending).

Sentences

Uses a variety of beginnings and structures.

Vocabulary

Attempts words that make the argument more powerful.

Language features

Uses some persuasive language features, especially emotive words and phrases, imperatives and emphatic devices such as capitals and exclamation marks.

Possum Debate

I am against possums because they eat our trees, and at the same time are killing our native birds. If they eat all our trees, the birds will have nowhere to live! When a possum does not feel like leaves or branches, they will go straight for our native birds eggs! Down with possums! If they eat our trees, It's not just the birds that will suffer! people will lose their jobs, less furniture will be made and less firewood will be sold. Plant growers will be broke! GET RID OF POSSUMS! They eat trees, wreck gardens, destruct huts, they will do just about anything! Send 'em back to Australia!

Surface features

Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions correctly.

Punctuation

Uses capital letters, full stops, commas, and exclamation marks with increasing independence.

Spelling

Demonstrates good understanding of most basic sounds and spelling patterns in written English.



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Possum Debate

Student's final draft

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