



# Transactional Writing: Argument

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 4 5

## Animals in Circuses

### THE LEARNING CONTEXT

In exploring written arguments, the students discussed current events and issues that were important to them. They talked about how they had to feel strongly about a topic and to hold a strong opinion on their chosen topic. Each student eventually selected a topic that they felt strongly about.

The teacher then modelled each stage of writing an argument, to demonstrate taking a position, substantiating reasons, and making a recommendation. He encouraged the students to offer ideas and advice about how to write a persuasive argument. In particular, he focused on language features and choices, such as emotive language, rhetorical questions, repetition, and the imperative. He had selected a topic that none of the students had chosen: “Why is it important to have male teachers in primary schools?”

The students then returned to their own topics, confirmed their position on it and brainstormed any ideas. Then they selected what they considered to be their strongest three to five points, and used a planning sheet to develop each point in sequence. Having planned their argument, they wrote their initial draft.

The teacher modelled editing to improve the persuasiveness of an argument. He also modelled the use of a thesaurus to improve vocabulary choices, checking spelling with a dictionary, and correcting grammar and punctuation.

The students were expected to take responsibility for editing and proofreading their work in all these areas. There was no direct teacher intervention in their writing.

Once they had done an initial edit and the teacher had seen this, they read their argument aloud to a buddy, who made comments and suggestions about the language features and the general persuasiveness of the piece. The students made any changes they deemed necessary, and then wrote a final draft.

They then published their argument on the computer, where they were allowed to use the spell check, but not the grammar check.

### Teacher-student conversations

The teacher talked with each student during each stage of the writing process. They discussed progress, what the student thought they were doing well, and what they still needed to work on. They also focused on deeper language features and techniques.

The teacher discussed the following features with Neala:

- the sequence in which the points and their elaboration were introduced
- the importance of sentence variation and impact.

Teacher: There are a number of long and rather complicated sentences in your writing. Let’s see if we can help the reader by interspersing them with some shorter ones. This might have more impact. You use “we” in your rhetorical questions, and “you” at the end – what would be most effective, “we” or “you”?

As a result, Neala made some significant changes to her final handwritten draft.

### INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

The writing of arguments could be accompanied by a reading programme which incorporates the features of exposition texts, particularly in guided and shared reading. Students can explore persuasive writing skills and strategies via published texts and models of writing,

Persuasive writing texts could take the form of published expository essays expressing a point of view, newspaper articles, editorial columns, letters to the editor, reviews, poetry, songs etc. Persuasive writing may be found in the *School Journal*, newspapers, brochures, comic strips, posters, fables, advertisements, library books, and sophisticated picture books.

Through the reading programme the skills and strategies of persuasive writing could be explored, and links established to the students’ own writing.



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### WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Neala towards the next learning step, the teacher might help her to focus on:

#### Ideas

- extending the ideas that support the argument, to give it depth.

#### Language features

- continuing to expand persuasive vocabulary and persuasive language features.

#### Structure

- linking ideas logically.

This could be done through:

- a guided reading programme to identify and explore the strategies of persuasive writing in published texts. In particular, focus on how statements are corroborated by evidence
- modelling of argument writing to develop an understanding of how the features of persuasive language may be employed
- regular individual conferencing to develop these points.

### CURRICULUM LINKS

*English in the New Zealand Curriculum*

#### Level 4: Writing Functions

**Transactional Writing:** Students should write instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express and explain a point of view, in a range of authentic contexts, organising and linking ideas logically and making language choices appropriate to the audience.

#### Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

**Exploring Language:** In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language students should, using appropriate terminology, describe, discuss, analyse and apply the distinctive features of a range of texts and explain how they suit the topic and purpose.

**Thinking Critically:** In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language students should be able to 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:** Neala uses a variety of persuasive language features to strongly communicate a point of view. The reader is captured by an engaging beginning, direct appeal, emotive language, imperatives, and rhetorical questions. Neala substantiates her opinion with a wide range of carefully worded and descriptive reasons.

Student's final draft

### Deeper features

#### Ideas

Clearly states, develops, and elaborates ideas.

Includes relevant ideas and supporting evidence.

#### Structure

Organises and links ideas logically (position taken, evidence, re-statement).

Uses conjunctions for showing results.

Organises ideas into paragraphs.

#### Sentences

Uses a variety of structures for effect.

#### Vocabulary

Uses persuasive vocabulary appropriately.

#### Language features

Uses a range of persuasive language features, often effectively. These include emotive language, rhetorical questions, imperatives, repetition, direct appeal to audience.

Dear The Manager of the Ringling Circus.

This argument is about

ANIMALS SHOULDN'T BE KEPT  
IN CIRCUSES

Circuses, a secret place where magical, fantastic things happen behind the scenes. That's what we think.

Did you know that behind the scenes of famous circuses cruelty is happening to our normal and endangered animals?

These animals have been taken from their homes to come to circuses and have been introduced to whips, cages, tricks, humans and other animals.

The animals are living a sad, unusual life. They are being forced to do humiliating tricks and punished for doing wrong. Their chained up and not fed properly. All these animals are being forced to do un-natural things.

After the circus is over and the crowd has died down. The animals get crammed into trucks with chains, whips and yells. Then the cycle starts over again. Back to chains and whips. Hours of training. Performing a humiliating stunt in front of hundred. The crowd full of screams, yells and boos. This is a circus life.

Do you want this to continue? Let our animals be open to cruelty and starvation. Then stop!

If you want our animals to entertain a crowd then send them to zoo's. At a zoo the animals will be cared for properly. They will get fed and be in the right habitat.

Care For Our Animals

### Surface features

#### Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions accurately.

#### Punctuation

Uses appropriate punctuation independently.

#### Spelling

Spells most high-frequency words and content words correctly.



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Care For Our  
Animals