



Transactional Writing: Argument

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 4 5

Bending the Truth!

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

This teacher used role play and discussion to introduce argument writing. The students and teacher worked out statements about a variety of texts. The students role-played to either support or refute the opinion expressed in the statements.

The teacher introduced the students to written arguments by modelling writing a letter to the editor. She discussed possible approaches to argument writing and some language features of persuasive writing, and recorded this information on a chart.

The students used this model and information to write their own letters to the editor. They shared this with partners, who listened to see if they were persuaded and to give feedback and suggestions.

The students then wrote several other arguments. The teacher modelled aspects of argument writing, and the editing and proofreading process, and conferenced with the students on the approaches and features they were using.

The teacher introduced the topic "It's all right to bend the truth in certain circumstances." The students discussed when this happens, why people would bend the truth, the morality of it, and times when it is all right. The teacher recorded their ideas.

The teacher reminded them of the structure of an argument before they wrote their arguments independently. She encouraged them to critique and proofread their work by themselves and then with a partner both during and after the writing.

Teacher-student conversations

The teacher made a range of general comments to all the students during the writing process:

Teacher: Remember that we're looking at "power words". Let's get some of your examples onto the board.

Teacher: What are some interesting ways to begin your sentences?

Teacher: How do you convince people that you're right?

Sarah then worked with little direct teacher assistance, apart from the following:

Teacher: How will you convince people that you're right?

Sarah: I'll use examples that everyone can relate to, and make them funny.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

A reading programme that incorporates the features of exposition texts, particularly in guided and shared reading, could accompany the writing of arguments. Students could explore persuasive writing skills and strategies in published texts and models of writing. They could be asked to:

- find examples of the persuasive language features
- find examples of vocabulary that enhances the persuasive impact
- examine the grammatical structures authors use in their arguments and identify features that they could adopt in their own writing
- analyse the way main ideas in published texts are linked and supported within and between paragraphs.

Persuasive writing texts could include *School Journal* articles, expository essays, newspaper articles, editorial columns, letters to the editor, reviews, poetry, songs, magazine articles, advertisements, and books.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Sarah towards the next learning step, the teacher could help her to focus on:

Impact

- working at balancing the more formal requirements of this genre with the need to target and engage the reader.

Ideas

- continuing to explore relevant examples to support points.

Structure

- linking ideas between paragraphs, and making a recommendation that links directly to the position taken.

Contexts for such learning about the skills and strategies of persuasive writing could include: the guided reading programme, teacher modelling and exploring published models of persuasive writing, and regular individual conferencing.



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CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 5: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write coherent, logical instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express and argue a point of view, linking main and supporting ideas, and structuring material in appropriate styles in a range of authentic contexts.

Levels 5 and 6: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should, using appropriate terminology, describe, discuss, analyse, and apply the distinctive conventions, structures, and language features of a range of texts and explain how they suit the topic and purpose.

Thinking Critically: Students should interpret, analyse, and produce written texts, identifying and discussing their literary qualities, and explore and identify attitudes and beliefs in terms of personal experience and knowledge of other texts.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35–36

NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement)

Transactional Writing: Argument

Achievement Standard AS90053: English 1.2 Produce Formal Writing.

www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ach/English/index.html
New Zealand Qualifications Authority (2001).

PDF: www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ach/English/as90053.pdf

Unit Standard 8812: Produce Transactional Written Text in Simple Forms.

www.nzqa.govt.nz/framework/explore/domain.do?frameworkId=973

PDF: www.nzqa.govt.nz/nqfdocs/units/pdf/8812.pdf

REFERENCE

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



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Sarah deals with a topic that is very relevant for a lot of her peer group. She speaks directly to this group and clearly targets them through humour, using supporting arguments that will be familiar and appealing to them.

Student's final draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Supports her main ideas convincingly through elaboration, use of evidence, and links to other ideas.

Structure

Structures material appropriately for form and purpose.

Uses a range of conjunctions and linking phrases to link main and supporting ideas within and between paragraphs.

Sentences

Uses a variety of sentence structures with some impact.

Vocabulary

Shows increasing control in selecting appropriate vocabulary.

Language features

Uses a wide range of persuasive language features with control and intent.

This includes emotive language, rhetorical questions, imperatives, repetition, inclusive pronouns, humour, and a deliberately conversational tone.

Bending the Truth!

It is all right to "bend the truth" sometimes so we don't offend other people. Sometimes we tell people "fibs" for their own good so they don't pull dangerous stunts or to persuade them to do something that that will help them in later life. How could you tell your best friend her art work stinks and she should give it up?

Sometimes we bend the truth so we don't hurt other peoples feelings. Could you tell your Gran you didn't like the present she gave you and that it went out of fashion two years ago? Of course you couldn't. Anyway it's not like you can't sell it. You could buy something you want that only the most popular kids have, and she'd never know! Even if your brother's paintings are pretty pathetic you "bend" the truth so you don't hurt his feelings because (being optimistic) one day they will get a lot better. All you need to do is boost his confidence. And honestly, how can you stand your Dad's so called "Chocolate Muffins"? They taste like they have mud in them. (Just from me to you, here's a trick, use them in a sling-shot, its bound to work.)

It's even more important to "bend" the truth when you are trying to convince people to do something. Instead of telling children that veges are good for them, make up exciting "fabrication" about how they make parts of their body superhuman. What parent hasn't told their kids that eating carrots make them see in the dark, or that crusts make your hair go curly? Curls are just to die for. Sometimes if Dad is speeding or if he hasn't got his seatbelt on, say "Um...Dad, there's a cop, like uumm ...3 cars behind us, I think you'd better put your seatbelt on and slow down." Trust me 10/10 this works. You can con Dads into doing anything!

Face it. Everybody fibs but this might just be a tad more important to do for this reason: To convince people not to do something for their own safety or to persuade them against doing things that might prove hazardous to their health. Take this for example; Over anxious mothers are always telling their children not to swim out too far from the shore or else they will get eaten by sharks. Even though it is a pathetic excuse, children stay up to their knees in water! Has your mother ever told you to stop teasing your pet or else they'll give it away? Well it's all for a good reason. Once upon a time there lived a little girl and her cat, but it was really a monster in disguise ... Whoops, maybe I went a bit far but you get the picture. If you tease your pets, Beware!

Sometimes it is necessary to "fib" because often people need to be guided to the right choice for them. If you told people straight out what you thought of the present they had given you, wouldn't they think you are a rotten, spoilt brat? Bending the truth is fine as long as it has been done for the right reasons.

Surface features

Uses the writing conventions of grammar, spelling, and punctuation with few intrusive errors.



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Student's final draft

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(continued over)



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