Unit 4--Persuasive Essays

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s): **English Language Arts**
Time Period: **Marking Period 3**
Length: **6 to 8 weeks**
Status: **Published**

Unit Overview

In this unit students will choose pro or con topics for which they will formulate a thesis. From there, they will compose a cogent, compelling, organized essay following proper structure and conventions. This year's work on persuasive essays sets a foundation for units in grades 7 and 8 on research-based argumentation.

Teachers may choose to follow the "Persuasive Essays" chapter from *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade 6.*

In Bend I (Developing a Plan for a Persuasive Essay), students review the structure of an essay through essay "boot camp," a shared writing experience during which the class co-constructs a simple essay to quickly warm up for the work that goes into this kind of writing. From this point forward, students will choose an issue that matters to them and decide their stance on it. They will grow more ideas about the topic by writing entries in their notebooks, and they will learn the various parts and structure that make up an argument essay. Finally, they will spend some time developing a claim and supports.

In Bend II (Drafting and Revising a Persuasive Essay), students will draft and then revise their essays as they learn ways to make these more persuasive and more powerful. They'll learn that essayists shift between reasons and illustrative anecdotes, that they angle stories to make points, and that they pay special attention to how they begin and end their essays, introducing a counterargument and concluding by revisiting this counterargument and making a plea for an action plan. Students will learn, too, to study famous persuasive speeches, using these as models for how to revise their essays so that they are more convincing. This bend ends with students checking the work they've done on their essays against evaluation checklists, setting goals for what they can do better.

In Bend III (Try it Again, with a Twist: Research and Persuasive Essays students choose a second topic from the list they generated and plan and write a second essay, this time with a focus on research. Students will learn how to develop and organize their new essay plan, weighing evidence and finding angled stories that best support their claims. They will put their energy into writing and revising with greater sophistication, considering their audience, word choice, and tone, and aiming especially to lift the level of their persuasiveness.

Standards

LA.W.6.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
LA.W.6.1.A	Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.
LA.W.6.1.B	Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
LA.W.6.1.C	Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.
LA.W.6.1.D	Establish and maintain a formal/academic style, approach, and form.
LA.W.6.1.E	Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.
LA.W.6.2.A	Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts, and information, using text structures (e.g., definition, classification, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, etc.) and text features (e.g., headings, graphics, and multimedia) when useful to aiding comprehension.
LA.W.6.2.B	Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
LA.W.6.2.C	Use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
LA.W.6.2.D	Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
LA.W.6.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, voice and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
LA.W.6.5	With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
LA.W.6.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.
LA.W.6.7	Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
LA.W.6.8	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.
LA.W.6.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, metacognition/self correction, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.
LA.SL.6.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
LA.SL.6.1.B	Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
LA.SL.6.1.D	Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.
LA.SL.6.2	Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.
LA.SL.6.4	Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate speaking behaviors (e.g., eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation).
LA.SL.6.5	Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.
LA.SL.6.6	Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal

	English when indicated or appropriate.
LA.L.6.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
LA.L.6.1.A	Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case (subjective, objective, possessive).
LA.L.6.1.B	Use intensive pronouns (e.g., myself, ourselves).
LA.L.6.1.C	Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.
LA.L.6.1.D	Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents).
LA.L.6.1.E	Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.
LA.L.6.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
LA.L.6.2.A	Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.
LA.L.6.2.B	Spell correctly.
LA.L.6.3.A	Vary sentence patterns for meaning (syntax), reader/listener interest, and style/voice.
LA.L.6.6	Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Essential Questions

1. What goals should I set for myself in terms of my topic's depth, choosing the best sources for my research, and generating my own ideas and conclusions from research?
2. How do I develop a thesis statement based on my research question or topic?
3. What kinds of sources command the most respect and trust from my readers?
4. How should I organize my essay in order to support my thesis statement consistently and present information coherently?
5. Which conventions and habits define informative writing--and which habits should I avoid?
6. How and why should I make use of my skills, resources, peers, and teacher as my work takes shape?

How can I raise the level of my persuasive essay writing by strengthening my structure, studying mentor texts, and including research to make my writing more convincing?

Bend I*: How can I draw on everything I've learned to generate meaningful persuasive topics and plan claims and supports for those ideas?*

Bend II: *How can I use mentor texts to help me draft and revise powerful arguments, angling my examples and writing counter-arguments?*

Bend III: *How can I incorporate research into my persuasive writing in order to make it more convincing to readers?*

Application of Knowledge: Students will know that...

- Arguments are more effective when backed with some sort of evidence.
- Basic skills such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation apply to all writing.
- Clear and coherent writing illustrates development, organization, and style that are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Conferences are two-way discussions whose frank interchange of ideas facilitates good writing.
- Daily practice in writing is essential for development of skills and enjoyment.
- Personal pronouns have case and number in relation to their antecedents.
- Sources of information have potential biases and varying degrees of credibility and authority.
- The research process gains significant momentum when a researcher formulates a research question from the topic.
- Writing is a process that unfolds over time, beginning with ideas, taking refinement over several drafts, and improving with inspiration from outside texts as well as with consultations with peers and teachers.

Application of Skills: Students will be able to...

- Apply personal pronouns properly in relation to their antecedents.
- Apply the basic skills of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation properly to their writing.
- Assist and receive assistance from peers in developing ideas, writing, revising, and editing.
- Complete at least the final phase of their work using digital and cloud capabilities and produce final products in digital form.
- Include a clear introduction, an ample body, and a thorough conclusion in an essay.
- Include pertinent facts and add their own appropriate analysis and synthesis to their topics.
- Observe formal writing conventions, suiting vocabulary and tone to an academic audience.
- Participate in meaningful peer and teacher conferences, providing and evaluating advice and applying it as appropriate.
- Spell, capitalize, and punctuate correctly.
- Use a research question as the basis for investigation, research, articulation of a thesis, and composition of an essay.
- Use appropriate transitions to optimize continuity.
- Use punctuation to set off parenthetical elements.
- Write on a daily basis toward the completion of an extended research-based project.

Teaching Points and Suggested Activities

The following teaching points and activities are adapted from the “Persuasive Essays." *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade*) and serve as a resource for teachers.

Teaching Points

Bend I: Developing a Plan for a Persuasive Essay

Reminding Students about Basic Essay Structures through "Boot Camp"

- When writers argue for their point of view, they want to be heard. They want people to nod in understanding. This means that writers have to have a careful balance of emotion—the heat of the argument—and logic—the brains behind it.
- Argument writers are familiar with the structure of an essay.

Choosing an Issue to Address and Developing Voice on That Issue

- Persuasive essay writers often have a few issues that they care deeply about or that they think are important in the world. They think about these issues, and explore them through talk and writing, to find out what they really believe.

Writing Entries to Grow Ideas about the Issue

- Instead of diving into drafting a plan for an essay, writers know that it pays off to spend time collecting materials and writing ideas to rethink the essay plan. Front-end work always saves time.

Developing an Image of an Argument Essay

- Writers study an example of the kind of writing they themselves aim to write, to get a clear image of strong work in that genre.

Rethinking a Claim and Supports

- Essayists draft and revise their claims, trying to say what they mean exactly and playing with the wording of the claim so that it has 'punch.'

Bend II: Drafting and Revising a Persuasive Essay

Getting In and Out of Illustrative Stories

- At this stage of the writing process, writers often identify the need to shift from making a claim to including vignettes or Small Moment stories that illustrate a reason. One workable way to do this is simply to say, "For example . . ." and then begin providing evidence that might, for example, take the form of a mini-story.

Angling Stories to Make Points

- One important strategy is to study any instances when they told stories to make points and to ask, "Was the story angled to bring out the point?"

Writing Introductions and Conclusions

- One way writers introduce and acknowledge counterarguments in an introduction is by suggesting that the issue under discussion is a complicated one.
- Essayists often end with a conclusion that both names a counterargument and includes a call to action—a plea for what should change in the word based on the essay's assertions.

Revising with Great Speeches in Mind

- Essayists often try on some of the writerly moves that speech writers have made, to improve their own powers of persuasion.

Analyzing Essays against a Checklist

- To work toward making their best work even better, they can hold their writing up to the Argument Writing Checklist to identify areas of need and areas of success.

Bend III: Try it again, with a Twist: Research and Persuasive Essays

Using Past Learning to Get a Running Start on a New Piece

- Once essayists understand how to get started in their writing, they carry that knowledge with them forever, putting it to use whenever they start a new piece.

Using Texts to Shape Ideas about Topics

- Essayists use their reading and rereading of informational texts to shape their ideas.

Developing and Organizing Essays

- As essayists get ready to write, they spend a little time quickly organizing their information, either through a written or mental outline, so that it can make best use of the facts, thoughts, and stories they want to include, and then they get started writing.

Drafting and Revising for Greater Sophistication

- Essayists study and read other (often more seasoned) essayists to get inspiration and ideas for their own writing. In particular, they focus on the craft moves these other authors make, thinking how they, too, might incorporate these moves into their own writing.

Creating Convincing Writing by Knowing Your Audience

- Something that seasoned essayists know well: knowing your audience is key to writing persuasively. Specifically, essayists ask themselves, 'Who am I trying to persuade?' and 'What piece of evidence will most convince this audience?' Then they think about particular language and examples they can emphasize or tailor to fit their intended audience.

Concentrating on Word Choice and Tone to Lift the Level of an Essay

- Essayists know that the words they use matter. Essayists make careful and precise word choices to convey their exact ideas and to be as convincing as possible. As they search for the perfect word, they try out a few and zero in on the one they think is the best choice.

Celebration and Publication

- Essayists share their work with an audience.

"Persuasive Essays." *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade 6.* Lucy Calkins, TCRWP

The following teaching points address the objectives of this unit, as well as the standards in the Common Core:

- Generating ideas for persuasive writing topics
- Developing an explicit, cogent thesis statement
- Employing compelling supporting points
- Using punctuation to set off parenthetical elements
- Making personal pronouns agree with their antecedents
- Organizing everything into an introduction, body, and conclusion -all with transitions
- Review of writing conventions and style guidelines
- Priorities for peer conferences
- Digital and cloud resources for composing, revising, editing, and publishing

Typical Daily Activities

- Mini-lesson (connection, teaching point, modeling, active engagement, independent practice, sharing)
- Daily writing
- Conferences (between peers and with the teacher) and sharing

Critical Phases of Student Activity

- Developing topics
- Research
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Publishing

Assessments

Assessment in this unit takes three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Assessment rubrics are available in Lucy Calkins's Reading and Writing Project resource kits, but teachers may also develop their own rubrics in order to include more specific elements of knowledge and skills listed in this unit summary.

Additionally, student self-assessment and peer assessment should take place whenever possible--again, in all three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Removing the traditional emphasis on teacher assessment enables students to take more initiative and become self-directed.

Also, whenever possible, teacher assessment should take place in the context of a conference, or at least be followed up by a conference. This reinforces expectations, advice, assistance, and ultimately, growth.

Diagnostic Assessments

Review of student's portfolio from the previous school year, particularly persuasive and argumentative writing projects

On-demand argumentative essay (e.g. "Think of a topic or issue that you know and care about, an issue around which you have strong feelings. Tomorrow, you will have forty-five minutes to write an opinion or argument text in which you will write your opinion or claim and tell reasons why you feel that way. when you do this, draw on everything you know about essays, persuasive letters, and reviews. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source, you may bring that with you. Please keep in mind that you'll have forty-five minutes to complete this, so you will need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting. In your writing, make sure you: write an introduction, state your opinion or claim, give reasons and evidence, organize your writing, acknowledge counterclaims, use transition words, and write a conclusion." - Taken from *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, 6-8"*

Formative Assessments (Informal)

Daily observation of students' participation and products during the active participation segment of each mini-lesson.

Students' questions, comments, suggestions to teacher

Comments, corrections, and records from peer conferences between students

Formative Assessments (Formal)

Teacher-student conferences

Summative Assessment

Published research-based argumentative pieces

On-demand argumentative pieces

Activities to Differentiate Instruction

The Writing Workshop framework enables students to generate research topics based on their own interests and experiences. The inherently self-directed nature of developing initial concepts requires continual reinforcement, however, at all phases of instruction during the unit.

This particular unit on persuasive writing also enables students--based on interest and ability--to choose in consultation with their teachers from a range of approaches to organizing their pieces. Struggling students may choose the more basic structures suggested by the argumentative writing guide provided by the ELA department. Teachers will encourage other students to move beyond the basic formula, providing additional exemplars. Highly imaginative students effective writers will often develop their own approaches, as they are influenced not only by exemplars provided in class but also by their own research, passion, and activism.

The active participation component of mini-lessons enables a teacher to move around and observe students at work on concepts and strategies that were presented in a whole-class format. The teacher can intervene at his or her discretion.

Likewise, a sharing component of many lessons will allow for a sampling of work from multiple students. A greater flow of ideas and products brings about a more thorough appeal to the individual dispositions and learning styles of students listening. Also, this unit will culminate in a publishing/celebrating day on which students put their individual skills and products on display.

Supplementing this, multiple exemplar texts in varying styles will broaden the appeal and accessibility of the knowledge and skills students are developing.

Due to varying dispositions and learning styles, teachers promote various strategies during all phases of the writing process. Students will have opportunities to work alone, in pairs, and in groups. They will choose either to compose in a traditional pen-on-paper mode or to compose, revise, edit, and publish digitally.

Conferences also provide a critical opportunity for students to receive individual attention and instruction. Small-group conferences with a teacher will allow for a diverse mix of ideas and advice that students can apply to their work whether it was specifically given to them or not, and the discussion is often easier to follow and takes place in closer proximity to individual students than whole-class instruction. Of course, at several stages in the writing process, the teacher will hold conferences with individual students for formative and summative purposes.

In compliance with 504 plans and IEP's, teachers will review applicable documents, consult appropriate personnel connected with special-needs students' cases, work closely with inclusion teachers and classroom aides, and communicate with parents in an effort to see to the specific needs of all students.

In some cases, most often in GATE classes, teachers may elect to have students compile their persuasive pieces into a true publication, requiring many individual students to work in specialized capacities such as copy editors, section editors, editors-in-chief, and layout and design specialists. Over several instructional units, additional students will serve as archivists.

Integrated/Cross-Disciplinary Instruction

Consistent with the concept of differentiated instruction, students should learn the knowledge and skills of this unit in conjunction with concepts from various content areas. The topics and research questions for argumentative writing span far beyond the middle school curriculum. Here are some possible research questions for argumentative writing and the content areas to which they apply:

- Do Roman numerals put mathematicians at a disadvantage? (mathematics)
- Should the United States have entered the Vietnam War? (social studies)
- Is rock and roll a true art form? (social studies, music)
- Should NASA receive so much government funding when we have so many homeless people? (science, social studies)
- Should schools restrict certain foods from their cafeterias? (health/PE, social studies)

While some teachers will provide instruction that includes specific concepts from various content areas, all should direct students to specific text and online resources pertinent to various content areas. Also, teachers will consult grade-level content area teachers on concepts covered in their classes, allowing subjects, lessons, and experiences to reinforce each other.

Suggested Mentor Texts and Other Resources

Mentor Texts:

Sample essay from the GBMS Persuasive Writing Guide

Sample essays from the "Persuasive Essays" unit of study from the Reading and Writing Project

TCRWP Nonfiction Text Sets:
http://readingandwritingproject.com/public/resources/booklists/nonfiction%20sets/Middle_School_Nonfiction_Text_Sets.pdf

Some possible texts to support research:

Community

- http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/benefits/publications/carelink/tipsheets/community.pdf (short article on importance of community and how to be a part of it—aimed at adults)
- http://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/creating-a-bully-free-school-national-bullying-preventionmonth/ (building a bullying-free community)
- http://www.wikihow.com/Help-Make-Your-School-Bully%E2%80%90Proof (another on how to build a bully-free community)
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-w6H2rs3FU (video on bully-free community)
- http://www.citizing.org/data/pdfs/sso/SSOIssueBrief_RoleOfCommunity.pdf (high Lexile, but it's a student commentary on the role of community in education)

Leadership

- http://www.cafanet.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=qwswE8roe74%3D&tabid=96 (chapter about the importance of leadership)
- http://www.aboutleaders.com/bid/169732/Kids-Leadership-and-a-Community-Experience (article for kids on components of leadership)
- http://www.life123.com/parenting/young-children/good-leadership-skills/ethical-leadership.shtml (article on the importance of teaching ethical leadership to students—short)
- http://money.cnn.com/2008/11/11/news/companies/secretsofsuccess_gladwell.fortune/ (Malcolm Gladwell interview—skewed toward a business angle, but an adept student could apply it to any situation)
- http://www.ted.com/talks/stanley_mcchrystal.html (TED talk video on how to lead)
- http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1821659,00.html (high Lexile, but could be great for some; article on Nelson Mandela's eight principals of leadership)

Kindness

- http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/social-emotional-skills/kindness-counts (low Lexile level)

- http://parenting.kaboose.com/behavior/kindness.html (article on how to teach kids kindness)
- http://everydaymiracles.hubpages.com/hub/Kindness-Can (importance of kindness article)
- http://www.livescience.com/25816-kindness-makes-kids-happier.html (article that may have some convincing evidence for kids to be kind)
- http://www.heartlight.org/articles/200808/20080802_humankindness.html (Cold War example of kindness making a difference)

Resources:

"Persuasive Writing Guide." GBMS ELA Department.

"Style Guidelines for Formal Essays." A resource composed by GBMS ELA teachers and distributed to students.

Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing:

- "Persuasive Essays." *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade 6.* Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop, Intermediate Grades*. Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *Writing Pathways, Grades K-8, Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions*. Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *If...Then... Curriculum*, Grade 6 (Assessment-Based Instruction). Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *Resources for Teaching Writing* (DVD). Lucy Calkins, TCRWP

21st Century Skills

CRP.K-12.CRP2.1	Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.
CRP.K-12.CRP4.1	Career-ready individuals communicate thoughts, ideas, and action plans with clarity,

	whether using written, verbal, and/or visual methods. They communicate in the workplace with clarity and purpose to make maximum use of their own and others' time. They are excellent writers; they master conventions, word choice, and organization, and use effective tone and presentation skills to articulate ideas. They are skilled at interacting with others; they are active listeners and speak clearly and with purpose. Career-ready individuals think about the audience for their communication and prepare accordingly to ensure the desired outcome.
CRP.K-12.CRP11.1	Career-ready individuals find and maximize the productive value of existing and new technology to accomplish workplace tasks and solve workplace problems. They are flexible and adaptive in acquiring new technology. They are proficient with ubiquitous technology applications. They understand the inherent risks-personal and organizational-of technology applications, and they take actions to prevent or mitigate these risks.