

Workshop 4

Teaching Persuasive Writing

Overview

Workshop 4 features the classrooms of two teachers: sixth-grade language arts teacher Jenny Beasley and fifth-grade teacher Jack Wilde. Both are teaching units on persuasive writing that allow students to write about topics that matter to them—topics drawn from their experiences within their own communities. Like other workshop sessions in *Write in the Middle*, Workshop 4 also features excerpts from a discussion between the teachers in which they reflect on their teaching practices and strategies.

For Jenny’s sixth-graders, the definition of community is wide-ranging—it includes their families, their school, their places of worship, and their town. But under this broad umbrella, Jenny encourages her students to think specifically and concretely about issues that interest them. The students begin by exploring a range of possible editorial topics. When we catch up with the class, they already have narrowed their focus to one issue. Now, with Jenny’s help, the students are laying the groundwork for effective and authentic editorials by stating their opinion, identifying their audience and purpose, and beginning to think about support for their point of view.

Meanwhile, Jack Wilde is introducing his students to persuasive writing by asking them to write on a familiar subject—their school community. Using a skillful mix of modeling, brainstorming, and conferring, Jack is teaching his class how to develop and organize an effective persuasive essay. The children’s audience is the school principal and their purpose is to persuade him to go along with a suggested change—letting fifth-graders go home for lunch or giving students more computer time, for example. We see the students beginning their first drafts, well on their way to the unit’s culminating activity: choosing representative essays for the principal to read and respond to.

Workshop 4 Teachers

The teachers seen in the video program include:

- Jenny Beasley, Grade 6, Meece Middle School, Somerset, Kentucky
- Jack Wilde, Grade 5, Bernice A. Ray School, Hanover, New Hampshire

Background Reading

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the unit plans for Jenny Beasley and Jack Wilde available on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/). These unit plans may be downloaded and printed, along with supporting classroom materials and samples of the students’ writing.
- Reading the two articles provided under “Related Reading” on the Workshop 4 Web page and highlighting two or three sections from each essay that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the articles in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the “Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 4,” available on the next page and on the Web site.

Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 4

In this workshop session, you will see a number of effective practices for helping students develop as writers, including the following:

- Teachers “invite” writing by leading students to write about matters they know and care about. The reason for writing is to accomplish something students find important: in this case, persuading others to bring about a desired change in the school or community. Students are writing for realistic, authentic purposes and are drawing on their own experiences and interests.
- Teachers and students spend ample time preparing to write: brainstorming, talking, reading samples, making a list of features, conferencing, using a graphic organizer, and planning their arguments and methods of support for their ideas.
- Teachers promote student ownership by encouraging students to share their thoughts about writing samples, ask questions, and make decisions about their own writing.
- Teachers foster a positive atmosphere for writing, for example, by demonstrating respect for students and their writing, by expecting students to respect each other, by promoting student ownership, by encouraging students to share their thoughts, by offering positive response to students, by arranging for open discussion, and by listening carefully to students.
- Teachers arrange for students to read and discuss samples of writing like those they are preparing to write.
- Students analyze and evaluate samples and form lists of characteristics they can refer to as they develop their own writing. Teachers display model pieces on the overhead projector so students can both see and hear the sample and/or provide written copies for the students to refer to as they think about the writing.
- In discussing samples, teachers use questioning techniques and synthesize students’ ideas to promote both an awareness of criteria for good writing and an understanding of why these features are important.
- Teachers are sharply focused, methodical, and clearly intentional in conducting lessons about writing, for example, lessons on building a persuasive argument, thinking about readers, or using an appropriate tone. Students are expected to apply these lessons in completing their own writing.
- Teachers reveal useful techniques for managing a writing workshop, for example, mini-lessons, teacher-and peer-conferencing, analysis of samples, sharing of ideas and work in progress, and modeling writing.

Facilitator's Outline: Workshop 4

This outline of the Workshop 4 video contains approximate entry points for each section. Use this chart to help identify the pause points in the Watch the Video section. Zero your VCR counter at the Annenberg/CPB logo at the beginning of the tape.

Segment 1 (0:00–11:40)	Introduction (beginning at 0:00)	
	In the Classroom (beginning at 3:50) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorming topic ideas Sharing information about topics 	Jack Wilde Jenny Beasley
Segment 2 (11:41–32:05)	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 11:41)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of prewriting 	Jenny Beasley and Jack Wilde
	In the Classroom (beginning at 15:37) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modeling student writing 	Jack Wilde
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 22:37)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immersing students in a genre 	Jenny Beasley and Jack Wilde
	In the Classroom (beginning at 24:06)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorming content/rank ordering arguments 	Jack Wilde
Segment 3 (32:06–38:10)	In the Classroom (beginning at 32:06)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing content/reflecting on audience 	Jenny Beasley
Segment 4 (38:11–end)	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 38:11)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching audience awareness 	Jenny Beasley and Jack Wilde
	In the Classroom (beginning at 40:16)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping students develop writing criteria 	Jack Wilde
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 46:11)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using writing models in alternative ways 	Jenny Beasley and Jack Wilde
	In the Classroom (beginning at 48:48)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using an ineffective persuasive piece 	Jack Wilde
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 54:25)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes 	Jenny Beasley and Jack Wilde

Workshop Session

Discussion and Sharing (15 minutes)

- Share one successful experience you have had incorporating community issues into your writing instruction with other participants.
- If time allows, share the ideas you recorded in your workshop journal in response to the “Related Reading” articles for Workshop 4.

Watch the Video (60 minutes video plus 30 minutes discussion)

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment (see the Facilitator’s Outline on the preceding page for help locating the pause points). If you are watching the workshop on your own, use your workshop journal to respond to two or more discussion questions from each of the four segments.

Segment 1 (0:00-11:40)

[Pause point: After Jenny Beasley’s students share information about their topics and before the first Teacher Discussion.]

- Why does Jack Wilde find persuasive writing so challenging for his middle-level students? Cite examples from your own teaching that support or refute his assertions.
- Why do you think Jack has his students share one of their topic ideas with the whole class before they begin generating more topics on their own?
- Jenny Beasley encourages her students to take ownership of their writing by allowing them to choose the topics for their editorials. At least two students have decided to write about the same topic: cell phones in schools. How does she respond to this situation? How would you respond? What are the advantages and/or disadvantages when students choose to write on the same topic?

Segment 2 (11:41-32:05)

[Pause point: After Jack Wilde’s students rank-order their arguments from strongest to weakest and before Jenny Beasley models “Slicing the Pie.”]

- Jack uses a model—an example of a persuasive piece written by a former student—to help his class deduce the elements of persuasion: effective leads, awareness of audience, use of arguments both pro and con, etc. In your experience, what element(s) of persuasion present the greatest challenge to middle school writers? What strategies have you used to help your students deal with the challenge?
- Jack alternates among whole-class instruction, individual work, and small-group interactions. Why is this structure effective for middle-level students?
- Discuss the importance of ranking arguments from the strongest to the weakest in the prewriting stage of persuasive writing.

Segment 3 (32:06-38:10)

[Pause point: After Jenny models “Slicing the Pie” and discusses audience with her students.]

- By using outside resources, interviews, and surveys to support their positions, Jenny’s sixth-graders are taking persuasive writing a step further than Jack’s fifth-grade class. What types of higher-level thinking does their use of supporting examples and details involve? What is the value of graphic organizers at this stage of the writing/thinking process?
- What does Jenny accomplish by modeling “Slicing the Pie” using her own topic idea?
- Although students make most of the choices about their persuasive pieces, both Jenny and Jack require their classes to write for an adult audience. How does the experience of writing for an adult audience differ from writing for peers? What is the value of each experience?

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Segment 4 (38:11-end)

[View to end of program.]

- During the whole-class analysis of two persuasive pieces, Jack often restates what his students say. What are the instructional advantages of this technique?
- Jack Wilde says that it is good practice for students to analyze both effective and ineffective writing models. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Based on the models Jack provides, his students generate a list of the attributes of effective persuasive writing to help them draft, evaluate, and revise their persuasive pieces. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of this strategy as opposed to providing a teacher-generated rubric or list of criteria?
- What kinds of writing models do you use with your students? Share any strategies you have for collecting, categorizing, storing, and using student examples and/or professional examples of various genres.

Going Further (15 minutes)

- The classroom segments featured in Workshop 4 center around prewriting activities for persuasive pieces. In your workshop journal, quickly jot down one or more prewriting strategies that have been particularly successful in your classroom.
- Discuss your favorite prewriting strategy with the group. How did the students respond to the strategy? What were its results? Why do you think this strategy works well for young adolescent writers?

Before Next Week

Homework

- Complete your exploration of the Web pages for Workshop 4—looking at materials, listening to audio files, and/or printing out resources. Record any comments or responses in your workshop journal to share with your colleagues. In particular, you might check out the editorial featured in “Responding to Student Writing” (see the links on the home page and on the banner of all interior pages). This interactive activity gives you a chance to read and respond to an early draft of a student’s persuasive piece and see another teacher’s comments on the draft.
- Develop a unit outline modeled on one of the persuasive units featured in Workshop 4 or described in the two “Related Reading” articles, adapting your unit to fit the needs and interests of your students. Components might include a title; a brief description of what you will concentrate on; and lists of possible activities, resources, and materials.
- Revisit how you presently teach persuasive writing and see at what points you might include strategies demonstrated in Workshop 4. Record your ideas for changing your present practice in your workshop journal.

Background Reading for Workshop 5

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the lesson plans for Mary Cathryn Ricker and Laurie Swistak available on the Workshop 5 Web pages (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/). These plans may be downloaded and printed, along with supporting classroom materials and samples of the students’ writing.
- Reading the article provided under “Related Reading” on the Workshop 5 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the article in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the “Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 5,” available in this guide and on the Web site.

Selected Sources for “Teaching Persuasive Writing”

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