

Allen Teng's Lesson on Persuasive Writing Using Popular Media

Allen Teng's use of popular media, particularly rap music, resonates with his students and engages them in thinking and writing about critical issues. In this lesson on persuasive writing, Allen peppers the class with images from rap music and from the larger world as a way to help them develop and articulate their opinions into persuasive writing pieces.

Allen spends the first day and a half on a number of pre-writing exercises, many of which involve class discussion and movement—particularly effective for active middle level learners. Students analyze the audience and purpose of a variety of videos and rap songs. They're also studying larger world issues and beginning to take stands and articulate their positions. By the end of the second day, they start to write persuasive pieces on topics of their own choosing.

Instructional Goals

Allen's persuasive writing lesson enables students to:

- Develop consciousness of consumerism and of over-consumption.
- Work on utilizing complex sentence structure to express opinions with reservations.
- Develop critical awareness of the themes and messages in media.
- Understand the power of different persuasive techniques.

Materials

Books/Poetry/Magazines

- Rodriguez, Luis. *Always Running: Gang Days in L.A.* Westport, CN: Touchstone Books, Westport. 1994. ISBN: 0671882317.
- *Scope* magazine from Scholastic. 18 biweekly issues for young teenagers with selections from classic and contemporary fiction, nonfiction, and poetry plus read-aloud plays, often based on current movie and television adaptations of classic literature. Call 1-800-SCHOLAS (1-800-724-6527) or order online at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/classmags/scope.htm>.
- Serros, Michele. *Chicana Falsa: And Other Stories of Death, Identity, & Oxnard*. Reprint edition. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. ISBN: 1573226858.
- Taylor, Clark. *The House That Crack Built*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992. ISBN: 0811801233.

Recordings

- Crow, Sheryl. "Soak Up the Sun." Rec. 2002: CD single. Universal International.
- Eminem. "Sing for the Moment." Rec. 2002: *The Eminem Show*. Interscope Records.
- Lil' Kim. "Crush on You." Rec. 1997: CD single. Atlantic.
- Nelly. "Air Force Ones." Rec. 2003: CD single. Universal International.
- Notorious B.I.G. "Juicy." Rec. 1994: *Ready To Die*. Bad Boy.

- Scott-Heron, Gil. “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.” Rec. 1974: *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*. RCA.
- 2Pac. “To Live and Die in L.A.” Rec. 1998: *2Pac Greatest Hits*. Interscope Records.

Other Materials

- One diploma cap
- Thirteen books
- Nine bowls
- Ninety-nine fake dollar bills
- Doll-like cut-out person to draw

Description of Lesson

Allen’s lesson on persuasive writing begins with a review of audience and purpose. He takes ordinary writing forms and the class identifies the “FAT-P” (Format, Audience, Topic, Purpose) of the different types of writing. Allen does a few whole-class examples. Then the students analyze examples individually and share their analyses in small groups.

After the review of FAT-P, Allen plays two rap songs (Nelly’s “Air Force Ones” and Lil’ Kim’s “Crush on You”) while the students read the lyrics. Afterward, the class discusses the FAT-P of the two songs. Allen plays a third song (B.G.’s “Bling Bling”), and the class lists how many products are mentioned in the song. The class further examines and classifies what’s important in the songs, i.e., money, jewelry, drugs, guns, alcohol, cars, and clothes, as an introduction to themes and messages. The class discusses the audience and purpose of the songs.

After a break, the second part of the lesson uses the students themselves to represent the world. Allen uses symbols to help the students understand the role of the United States as a world citizen. For example, books are passed out to the appropriate number of students (47 percent) to represent the number of world citizens who can read, and empty bowls symbolize those who suffer from malnutrition (35 percent). Allen poses a discussion question and the students write a position statement.

Allen begins the second day with the students completing a self-assessment in which they rate their agreement on 10 to 20 controversial issues. After the students record their opinions on a chart, they move their desks to clear the center of the room for an activity called “Crossing the Line,” which has students physically move to one side of the room or the other depending on whether they agree or disagree with a statement Allen reads. Allen sometimes asks two students from each side to come together in the middle for a quick debate. After the activity, the students return to their desks for a quick-write activity—recording the three strongest arguments for their position.

A guided reading activity follows, with Allen and the class reading pro and con examples from *Scope* magazine, a teen-oriented publication from Scholastic. Some of the topics include media violence and children, junk food in schools, and lowering the minimum voting age. The students practice taking notes by defining the salient points from the debates while thinking of counter-arguments.

For the next activity, Allen reads a model of a persuasive writing piece about the negative influence of rap music. He guides the students through the model, pointing out the thesis, opposition addressed, salient points, examples and evidence for each point, references, and effective introduction and conclusion. Next, Allen plays “Sing for the Moment,” a rap song by Eminem, and the class discusses Eminem’s opposing viewpoint of rap music as a form of nonviolent emotional release and a legitimate means of escaping poverty.

After a break, Allen reads the book *The House That Crack Built* by Clark Taylor, and the class discusses the FAT-P and the cyclical, global effects of the drug trade. Next Allen directs the class to a discussion of poems about gangs—“We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks and “Tag Banger’s Last Can” by Michele Serros—and books such as *Always Running* by Luis Rodriguez. They listen to excerpts from 2Pac’s “To Live and Die in L.A.,” and quote excerpts from other rap musicians that reference selling drugs to make a living to support family.

After the discussion, students begin to write their persuasive pieces based on their choice of topics. Allen provides a list of suggestions:

- Is selling drugs ever justified?
- Is rap music a positive or negative influence?
- Do rappers promote an unhealthy lifestyle?
- Choose any of the four *Scope* topics.
- Why do poor communities have gangs? Can gangs have a positive influence?
- Does the U.S. do enough for the rest of the world?
- Is the U.S. too wasteful and too rich?
- Is media a negative influence on young people?
- What does one actually need in order to live?