

Grade Level |

3-5

California Writing Project

Opinion Writing: Building Skills Through Discussion, Reading, & Writing

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From Teacher to Teacher

In *Results Now*, Schmoker says, “Reading, writing, and discussion—these three—are the foundation for a well-equipped mind: the key to equity, access, and economic opportunity.” When you walk in my fifth grade classroom you will see that the physical landscape is intentionally designed to support a reading, writing, and discussion classroom. The desks are organized into six groups to foster listening and speaking, which are critical aspects of reading and writing, especially for opinion writing.

- I assign “talking partners” at the beginning of the year because partner-pair share is an integral part of our learning.
- Because class discussions are so important to our study of opinion/argument writing, I establish norms for listening and speaking that are new for some of my students. I have to teach them how to listen, not just with ears, but with whole body and attention, eyes on the speaker and pencils down.
- When students give their opinions, they are expected to justify or give reasons for their claims. Other students are encouraged to respectfully agree or disagree, but they must explain the reasons underpinning their response.
- They never tire of opportunities to practice their arguments before writing. Sometimes this is a whole class exploration of a question: Which is a better pet—a dog or cat? They argue with passion and evidence for their favorite sport team, singer, or car. When they hear an opposing view or their classmate’s differing opinion, they more fully marshal their evidence because their arguments are developed with an audience in mind. When these students go from discussion and oral arguments to paper and pencil, they are well equipped with reasons and evidence from text and life to support the stance they will take in their writing.

During my school day, the whistle of the San Joaquin Amtrak sounds off as regularly as the recess bell. The train whistle reminds me that my classroom is a temporary depot for my young scholars. They are traveling a path leading them well beyond my fifth grade classroom. Although 92% of my fifth graders are socio-economically disadvantaged and 16% of them are English learners, they sit taller in their chairs when I address them as scholars. They respond to the beginning steps of argument literacy, and as they become more confident informational and argument writers and readers, the doors open wider for their future.

Text Resources

Hoose, P. and H. Hoose. *Hey, Little Ant*. Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press, 1998.

Nickle, John. *The Ant Bully*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc. 1998.

Ryder, Joanne. *Each Living Thing*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace, 2000.

Stead, T. *Should there Be Zoos?: A Persuasive Text*. New York, NY: Mondo Pub, 2000.

Stead, T. *But Mom*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 2005.

Stead, T. *The Best Pet*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 2005.

Teaching Context

This lesson was developed for fifth graders in the Central Valley, including English learners from Hmong- and Spanish-speaking backgrounds, struggling readers, and students from varied academic backgrounds. Lesson sessions are approximately 45 minutes.

Text Type, Genre, Writing Prompt

- Opinion Writing/ Informal Writing and Essays

Writing Prompt One

Your principal plans to invite someone to speak at a school assembly. Students are asked to give suggestions. Think about the person you would like to hear speak to your school. Would they have something interesting to say to students? Is this person popular with people your age? Make notes about why this person would be a good speaker. Write an essay to your principal convincing her/him to ask this person to come to your school.

Writing Prompt Two

You have just read a newspaper story about someone who has a tiger as a pet. You don't think wild animals should be kept as pets. Think of reasons why wild animals do not make good pets. Where should animals like these live, in zoos or in the wild. Write an essay persuading other people not to keep wild animals as pets.

The lesson sequence includes additional writing prompts, some informal writing prompts, so students can practice what they learned that day and others that give students the opportunity to choose the topic for their opinion writing.

Instructional Strategies

- Use of mentor texts
- Genre feature analysis of opinion writing
- Teacher modeling
- Think-Pair-Share
- Pro/Con Poll
- Author's Chair for feedback and going public
- Setting norms and meeting standards for collaborative work

Common Core State Standards

Standards in bold are focus standards. Those not in bold are important supporting standards.

Writing Standards – Grade 5

- 1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.**
 - Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer’s purpose.**
 - Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.**
 - Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).**
 - Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.**
4. Produce clear and coherent writing (including multiple- paragraph texts) in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3.)
- 5. With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.** (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grade 5 on page 14.)
6. With some guidance and support from adults, 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 two pages in a single sitting.

Speaking and Listening Standards – Grade 5

- 1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.**
 - Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.**
 - Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.**
 - Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.**
 - Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions.**
2. Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
3. Summarize the points a speaker or media source makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence, and identify and analyze any logical fallacies..

English Language Development Standards

ELD Standards Grade 5

Part 1: Interacting in Meaningful Ways

A. Collaborative

1. Exchanging information and ideas with others through oral collaborative discussions on a range of social and academic topics.
3. Offering and supporting opinions and negotiating with others in communicative exchanges.
4. Adapting language choices to various contexts (based on task, purpose, audience, and text type)

B. Interpretive

5. Listening actively to spoken English in a range of social and academic contexts.
7. Evaluating how well writers and speakers use language to support ideas and opinions with details or reasons depending on modality, text type, purpose, audience, topic, and content area.
8. Analyzing how writers and speakers use vocabulary and other language resources for specific purposes (to explain, persuade, entertain, etc.) depending on modality, text type, purpose, audience, topic, and content area.

C. Productive

9. Expressing information and ideas in formal oral presentations on academic topics
11. Supporting own opinions and evaluating others' opinions in speaking and writing.
12. Selecting and applying varied and precise vocabulary and language structures to effectively convey ideas.

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- analyze student texts for salient features of opinion/argument genre
- link features of debate and discussion to opinion writing
- study mentor texts composed by students, the teacher, and professional authors
- compose a scaffolded retell of a literature reading that will be a bridge to opinion writing
- compose a series of opinion/argument essays.

Session One: What is Opinion Writing?

1. Pass out copies of Mentor Text, “Boys are Better than Girls,” written by a former 5th grade student (see *Appendix: Student Writing as Mentor Text-Lesson One*). The essay works well to launch a discussion of opinion writing because the writer’s opinion is so strong and his reasons for his opinion are so unexpected that discussion is inevitable.
2. I read the essay aloud as students follow along. Students take five minutes to discuss with their partner their answers to this question: “What did you notice about this opinion essay?” Then I chart their responses on chart paper. We will post the chart and add to it as we work through the lesson sequence. The goal is to develop a list of the genre characteristics or features of opinion essays (see *Appendix: Sample Class Chart On Qualities of a Good Opinion/Argument Essay*).
3. Then we address this question: “Where have you ever seen this type of writing? Are there other types of opinion writing?” Some mention movie recommendations, book reviews, opinion pieces in newspapers. I invite them to join me in a search for more examples to share with class. Some other forms opinion writing can take: television advertisements, debates, arguments, letters, advertising pamphlets, newspaper advertisements, food or restaurant recommendations. We post the artifacts of opinion writing they collect on a dedicated wall space so that they can see how many genres and formats opinion writing can take.

Session Two: Modeled or Talk-aloud Writing

1. This lesson is designed to emphasize the text features of opinion /argument writing and give students an opportunity to identify and label those features in writing that I will model.
2. I select a rule or practice I would like to change, one I think might be interesting to my students, or an opinion I have about a school issue—for example, Let Me Keep My Classroom Key Over the Summer or No Teachers Should Have Recess Duty the First or Last Week of School. I compose aloud before I write the words, pausing to wonder, giving myself some choices. My students need to hear the opinion take shape and then read it in writing.
3. After I write the essay, I invite my students to look back at the list of features on the Opinion/Argument Essay chart and ask them to identify and label the salient features my essay demonstrates:
 - States an opinion/argument
 - Can the audience be identified?
 - Evidence appropriate to topic and explained in detail
 - Provides supporting reasons for the opinion – based on logic
 - Facts, personal experiences, examples, illustrations
 - Logical reasoning
 - Opening introduces the topic
 - Conclusion summarizes the opinion/argument

Session Three: Whole Class Opinion Check-In

1. This is a scaffolded opportunity for students to define their opinion/stance and collaboratively select the reasons that support their opinion.
2. On a large chart in front of the room is a question— Which is a better pet? Students have two choices: a dog or a cat. They read the question, think about their opinion, chart their answer, and sign their name under their choice as a dog or cat lover.
3. Then the students divide into the cat group and the dog group. They discuss possible supporting reasons for their opinion. When they agree on their top three or four, they list them on a chart at the front of the room.
4. In a debate format, a dog lover club member reads their best supporting details and a cat lover club member does the same. Students get an opportunity to understand both sides of an issue, which then leads into a discussion for the need for counterarguments.
5. Students then write an opinion essay about “dog as best pet” or “cat as best pet,” adding supporting reasons and details from their discussions, examples from their own experiences, and any facts they may have picked up from their reading.
6. Any similar questions can serve as practice and provide a more scaffolded experience for less prepared writers. Questions that have worked for my students: “Is tetherball or four square the best recess activity?” or “Is pizza better than hamburgers?” or “Hamburgers are better than pizza.”

Session Four: All Reasons are not Equal

1. Read aloud *Hey, Little Ant*, a mentor text with a very engaging conversation between a boy about to squish an ant and the ant who starts to talk and stick up for himself.
2. Ask partners to discuss/review the reasons for squishing the ant (boy's opinion) and reasons for not squishing the ant (ant's opinion).
3. At this point students are ready for guided practice. Pass out index cards or a stack of sticky notes to partners. Together they use a card or sticky note to list each reason the boy gives for squishing the ant, and then they list each of the ant's reasons for not being squished. Partners should verify they have listed all the reasons given by the boy and the ant. They will need all of them later to support their claim to squish or not be squished.
4. Next the partners rank the boy's reasons and ant's reasons from most convincing to least convincing. Being able to arrange and rearrange the cards or post-its aids the discussion. Give them time to discuss their rankings before sharing with the whole group. Select one or two of the reasons that were highly ranked by most students. Discuss why these reasons were more convincing than others. Make the point then that not all reasons are equal. Sometimes as authors they will choose to write two really great reasons or four good reasons. There is no writers' formula that says all opinion essays should have X number of supporting reasons.

Session Five: Retell and Take a Stand

1. I reread *Hey, Little Ant*, telling the students they are going to write an answer to the question posed at the end of the story. What should the boy do?
2. After the reading, if they have not done so already, they determine their stance, To squish or not to squish. They develop a brief essay, using the reasons they named and organized in Session Four. Because they are not required to develop their own reasons for the stance they take, this writing activity gives them a chance to focus on organizing an opinion essay with supporting reasons without having to grapple with the content.
3. At the end of this period or the beginning of the next day's session, I invite students to share their drafts at Author's Chair.
4. See one example in the Learning From Student Work section.

Session Six: Studying the Organization of an Opinion Letter

1. Tell students the goal for today is to analyze one effective way to organize an opinion letter or essay. Pass out the student sample, "Moving," to each set of partners (see *Learning From Student Work* section for the essay). Tell students that a boy whose family was moving wrote a persuasive opinion letter to his parents. Read the opening paragraph and then ask: What do you think Jared is hoping to convince his parents to do?
2. Now ask them to note how Jared organized his letter. After writing an opening paragraph, Jared wrote a paragraph addressing each objection his parents might have.
3. Ask students to identify the objections Jared's parents had and the reasons Jared provided for why each objection shouldn't be a problem.
4. Ask students to underline the reasons Jared provided and then to decide with their partner which are the most convincing and why.
5. If the students don't do so, point out transition phrases such as "If we can stay in American Fork" that should be logically followed by "When we get to our new home."

Session Seven: Moving toward Independent Writing

1. Students will select from one of two writing prompts the opinion/argument essay they want to write.

Prompt 1

Your principal plans to invite someone to speak at a school assembly. Students are asked to give suggestions. Think about a person you would like to hear speak to your school. Would they have something interesting to say to students? Is this person popular with people your age? Make notes about why this person would be a good speaker. Write an essay to your principal convincing her/him to ask this person to come to your school.

Prompt 2

You have just read a newspaper story about someone who has a tiger as a pet. You don't think wild animals should be kept as pets. Think of reasons why wild animals do not make good pets. Where should animals like these live, in zoos or in the wild. Write an essay persuading other people not to keep wild animals as pets.

2. Students gather in two different groups. Those who select Prompt 1 gather together and the Prompt 2 group meet in another part of the classroom. I give the groups "fourteen" minutes to discuss their prompt and the opinions they want to express. They may also use this time to chart the supporting reasons for their opinions. Then it's time for them to draft their essay.

Session Eight: Author's Chair for Revision

Students are invited to read their pieces from the chair at the front of the room. After reading, they ask classmates if they have any comments or questions. They call on no more than six students.

Usually the author at the chair takes a clipboard, pencil, and sticky note, so they can note on their draft suggestions to consider for when they revise. They revise, proofread, making this essay the first that has been taken from informal writing to a final draft of a formal essay.

Session Nine: Students' Independent Writing on their Choice of Topic

1. Students need to learn to write opinion letters and essays about issues they care about. With the students, I create a class list of opinion topics using these questions as a starting point:
 - What would you change if you could?
 - What do you think is unfair? What bugs you?
 - What would you like to happen that isn't happening right now?

2. The topics can be about home, school, community, or the world. Model the brainstorming process by starting a class list together. Then in partners or groups of four, students can brainstorm as many topics as possible. Come back together to add their suggestions to the class list. The categories and some of the topics are inspired by Tony Stead's book, *Is That a Fact? Teaching Non-Fiction Writing K-3*.

Some topics brainstormed from previous 5th grade classes:

Home:

Spending more family time
Purchasing an important toy or piece of sports equipment
Allowing more freedom or a later bedtime.
Should TV time be limited? Should kids be limited in the shows they watch?

School:

Organizing an intramural program, art or music classes, or a talent show
Improving cross-age PE
Reducing homework
Whether or not school uniforms should be required
How to improve the cafeteria
School bathrooms should be better taken care of
Selling healthier snacks at recess
Keeping the playground clean

Community:

Girls should be allowed to play flag football
County library (or school library) should be open more hours
Should skate boarders be allowed downtown?
Saying no to smoking or other drugs

Global:

Should Under God be left in the Pledge of Allegiance?
Should seat belts be required in buses?
Should helmets be required for all bicyclists?

Over the course of the week that follows, my students usually write two or more essays, collecting them in their writing folder. They then select the one they would like to continue to improve with the help of their peers. Their investment in this writing piece of their choosing drives their commitment to work through the stages of peer response, revision, editing, and publishing.

See several student examples across this lesson sequence in the *Learning From Student Work* section.

Reflections

This collection of lessons is designed to be used in the order presented, although teachers should feel free to pick and choose what to do for their students. The order has worked for me, because I want to support my writers who are novice writers or new to the genre, as well as my EL students. Although our students play and live with opinions and arguments in their recreational and home lives, it may be a few years until we see students in our intermediate classes who have experience with this type of writing in an academic setting, which is why I rely on as many talking experiences as I can think of. In addition to Think-Pair-Share, putting students who share an opinion about a topic in small groups allows them to listen, talk with classmates, and construct new or shared thoughts they can later use in their writing.

In the early stages of this type of writing, when it is new, it is important to select topics and questions that suit your students' interests. Continue to listen to them and survey favorites, current events and popular cultural icons. I also recommend that in the beginning, also offering topic choice to your students is wise. Both of these suggestions ensure writer buy-in. And during the learning curve of what is a good opinion/argument essay, often a motivated student perseveres through the writing process more easily.

Extension Resources

Instructional Resources

Orloff, K.K. *I Wanna Iguana*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2004.

Viorst, J. *Earrings!* New York, NY: Alladin, 1990.

Stead, T. *Should There Be Zoos?* New York, NY: Mondo Publishing, 2002.

Professional Resources

Harvey, S. *Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1998.

Lane, B. *Why We Run With Scissors*. Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press, 2001.

Schmoker, M. J. *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2006.

Stead, T. *Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse. 2002.

Tompkins, G. E. *Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2008.

Criteria Chart for Opinion Writing

Genre Features	Features for our Writing
States an opinion/argument	The writer launches the essay early on with their opinion, and it is clear to the reader. The writer holds their stance throughout the essay.
Can the audience be identified?	The essay is understandable to the reader. The writer does not assume the reader knows what he or she is talking about. (Both the reader or a recipient of the opinion writing can be the audience.)
Evidence appropriate to topic and explained in detail	<p>The evidence is appropriate to the topic and explained in detail.</p> <p>Each development paragraph stays focused on a new reason based on logic and ample support.</p> <p>Uses facts, examples, and observations as evidence.</p>
Provides supporting reasons for the opinion – based on logic	<p>The essay has two or more good reasons that are explained with plenty of specific examples.</p> <p>Each development paragraph stays focused on a new reason based on logic and ample support.</p>
Facts, personal experiences, examples, illustrations	
Logical reasoning	
Opening introduces the topic.	The essay is well organized with an opening paragraph, development paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.
Conclusion summarizes the opinion/argument	<p>The essay is well organized with an opening paragraph, development paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.</p> <p>The conclusion should help influence the reader's thinking. It can circle back to the lead or summarize the reasons.</p>
Effective use of language and punctuation	<p>The wording should be convincing with strong verbs, descriptive language, and effective use of sentence variety.</p> <p>The punctuation helps the reader understand the piece. It should not have errors that are distracting.</p>

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Student Sample A

This EL student wrote this first draft in class after hearing *Hey, Little Ant*, read aloud two different times as a introductory genre model for opinion writing. All students received instructions to answer the question the author leaves us with—Should the boy squish the ant or not? Students were reminded to pick one or the other. Yes, squish the ant or no, do not squish the ant. I believe this scaffolded writing invitation is important because at this stage of the lesson sequence, students do not need to carry the burden of selecting a topic, creating the reasons, developing the details and evidence, and finally organizing an essay in a coherent way. They can focus on answering the author's question and can rely on the author's reasons. Their primary task is to restate the reasons in the book, organizing them into an essay. Or they may restate the reasons in the book and add their own. But in either case, this is not considered constructing an essay, because it follows a read-aloud and is an opportunity for novice opinion writers to capture the essence of an opinion essay on their paper, with their pencils, hopefully adding their own reasons.

After reading *Hey, Little Ant* I have a strong opinion about squishing ants. I think that the ant shouldn't be squashed because we have to respect all living things and because they won't harm you if you let them go. They could clean places by taking the dead leaves and eat the crumbs people left behind.

We should respect all living things even things that we don't like. Ants have families and friends just like us.

Ants won't do anything that will harm you. They will not bite and make you itch like red ants will do.

Ants could clean places by taking the dead leaves off the ground and take it to their homes. They also eat the crumbs that people drop on the ground.

I think the ant shouldn't be squashed.

Annotation – Student Sample A

This is an example from an EL student who is able to craft a simple opinion essay independently, in class, after listening to the book, *Hey, Little Ant*. The writer shows an understanding of choosing a stance, holding focus, and grouping reasons together. It is a skeletal draft of a first opinion paper. Examining this paper, gives me direction for what to teach next: adding more details to support the reasons in each paragraph, and eventually helping with summarizing the piece. And of course, expecting to see some carry over for organization of the essay when this student writes an opinion piece that he/she selects and writes independently during upcoming lessons.

Student Sample B

This student wrote this paper in class, rewrote after peer revision group responses, and had access to a classroom computer if needed to collect facts. All students selected the topic and audience for their opinion writing.

Dear Mom and Dad,

Imagine me on our porch, full of tears, watching my sister pull out of the driveway in our gray Toyota with college bags and books stacked up in the back seat. I wave and turn to the house only to find myself as lonely as a turtle without its shell. Do you want this to happen? This is why I want a dog to keep me company while Ariel is off to college.

I should get a dog since Ariel is off to college and I don't have any other siblings. A dog is a great source of companionship. According to a national survey, the majority of dog owners selected companionship as one of their major reasons for having a dog. I completely agree with them because dogs are non-judgmental. You can tell them your deepest and most intimate feelings and emotions and don't forget the unconditional love they are to you. To me dogs are a girl's best friend.

Another reason I should get a dog is because a dog would encourage me to get up and be active. For example, if I feel like skipping my daily walk or I just want to play video games all day, a dog would beg me or even make me take them out.

You may be wondering how I'm going to get the money for the dog, dog food, dog treats, etc. However, I do get report card money so I could come up with the money by trying my best in school. It may come to your mind that how am I supposed to clean up after a dog if I can't clean up my own room. To prevent me from having a messy future, we can set some rules that would get me to clean my room several times a week.

In conclusion, I should get a dog because they are a great source of companionship and they can encourage me to get up and active. So let's get off the couch and get ourselves a beautiful, loving dog.

Annotation – Student Sample B

The writer of this piece:

- used the opening not only to introduce the topic of wanting a dog, but also to engage the reader with a hypothetical scenario
- developed this paper with logic and ample support, even including results of a national survey that illustrate her reason for wanting a dog, companionship. The writer pushed the essay to the next level by writing a problem-solution structure in the 4th paragraph. The writer explains how to afford a dog and make rules that would ensure clean up for the dog and her room as well.
- used the conclusion to reiterate the stance, restate the major reasons and positively wrap it up with “come on, let's get ourselves (not just me) a loving dog.”
- wrote an essay that shows a writer moving beyond grade-level standards for an opinion/argument essay.

The writer utilizes narrative strategies to make this essay vibrant, engaging, and even convincing. We see examples of persuasion throughout this piece: the reasons, illustration of the desire for a dog, and insightful audience awareness. Woven into this piece is a counterargument. I know you think..., but I will be able to... This student shows elements of a 6th grade persuasive essay with the inclusion of counterargument, problem solution, and effective use of support and details.

Student Sample C

This student wrote this essay in class, with peer revision groups, and access to the classroom computer for collecting facts. All students were required to think about something they wanted to change at school. Depending on their topic, the audiences they chose from were: school principal, cafeteria manager, librarian, office manager, or teacher. This student chose to write to the school principal.

Dear **Mrs. Hamilton,**

Imagine **John Muir** students coming into school feeling more confident and feeling less stressed because they see the beautiful and encouraging mural painted on the wall. This may become a reality if we get a mural painted.

One reason why we should get a mural is because when people come to John Muir, they will come in the school, stare at the beautiful sight, and realize John Muir elementary school is all about "learning and working together to make a better place!"

Another reason why we should get a mural is because kids will be inspired to do their best in school. You might not think this at first, but haven't you noticed at basketball games the crowd is so ecstatic because they see the mural of their school's animal growling ferociously at the opponent? Not only for sports, but for school also. Have you seen the mural at Merced High School? Well, I have and it's beautiful and I don't go to that school but I already feel more confident. Staring at the mural with different religion symbols and ethnics I don't see a well thought out painting I see the words, "Merced High School a place where all kids from different cultures, places, and ages will succeed."

You may be concerned that someone might tag the mural. However, we can put video cameras or we can paint the mural in the cafeteria and lock the doors. You also might be wondering if the cost to paint it is too expensive, however, we can have a fundraiser and wouldn't you want successful kids more than spending your money.

We should get a mural because when people walk into the school they will know what **John Muir** is all about and students will be more confident. If we end up getting a mural I have the perfect name for it. "John Muiral."

Annotation – Student Sample C

The writer of this piece:

- presents a hypothetical scenario in the opening paragraph that engages the reader and establishes the topic, suggesting a school mural would relieve students' stress and build confidence.
- shows a strong sense of audience throughout the essay, and particularly in paragraph 4 where she answers the concern a principal may have about the cost and safekeeping of a mural.
- gives ample support in paragraphs 2 and 3. A series of rhetorical questions implores the principal to consider the mural IF "you want your kids inspired and doing better in school."
- makes effective use of sentence variety and paragraph 2 is one effective sentence.
- uses the conclusion to reiterate the stance and makes a clever play on words in the last sentence calling it a "John Muiral."
- shows me what editing and punctuation features I can conference with this student about.

Student Writing as Read-aloud Mentor Text – Lesson One

This opinion paper was produced by a former student at the beginning of a similar genre study on opinion writing. I use this paper as a mentor text because it is a high interest opinion. My students attend to this paper, laugh, and agree or disagree. The motivation to discuss the opinion is very high. This student did not receive any feedback from classmates or teacher. You will note that we had not discussed introductory and concluding paragraphs yet, and because of the language errors, I read this piece aloud.

Boys are Better

I am a 10 year old boy. And I want to prove to you that boys are better than girls.

The reason why boys are better than girls is boys are not scared of dogs. I know for a fact that girls are scared of dogs. I know this because every time that I watch movies it's always the boys that get bit. I also know this because every time boys go to the pet shop they say, "Mom can I get this dog?" or "Mom can we buy a pitbull?" And the girl will say, "Look at this gerbil." Or "Can we get this kitten?"

One other reason why boys are better than girls is, they are stronger. I know this for a fact because when a girl lift weights they lift less than a guy. One reason I know that because, when my sister, brother, nextdoor neighbor and I have a weight lifting competition, my sister only lifts 30 pound-40 pounds. And my brother, nextdoor neighbor and I lift 50-80 pounds. And that's how I know boys are stronger than a lot of girls.

One other reason why boys are better than girls is that, when a man gets home he has dinner waiting at the table. And also when he gets home from work he just says where's the paper and they give him the paper. Another is that when you get home you go on your big comfee bed and pass out, while the lady's sweep, clean off the table, wash your clothes, wash the dishes and clean the house.

Now, that is why boys are better than girls.

The End

Annotation – Boys are Better

The writer of this piece

- introduces an opinion and creates an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped together to support the writer's opinion.
- provides reasons that are supported by examples in his/her personal experience though not necessarily appropriate and sufficient.
- introductory and concluding paragraphs are 1-2 sentences and very skeletal.

"I am going to prove to you that boys are better than girls."

"Now that is why boys are better than girls."

What the writer does well is focus on one opinion and organizes the related ideas in groups, and he understands that for every reason he needs to add supporting details. The next teaching step for this writer would have been to share his opinion with peers and consider adding evidence that is logical and sufficient to support his/her opinion.

Then we can also work on editing language and spelling.

Sample Class Chart from the Lesson on Qualities of a Good Opinion/Argument Essay

Generated through several class discussions

- The writer launches the essay early on with their opinion, and it is clear to the reader. The writer holds their stance throughout the essay.
- The essay has two or more good reasons that are explained with plenty of specific examples.
- The essay is understandable to the reader. The writer does not assume the reader knows what he or she is talking about.
- The essay is well organized with an opening paragraph, development paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.
- The opening paragraph has a lead that grabs the reader and also informs him what the opinion stance is.
- The evidence is appropriate to the topic and explained in detail.
- Each development paragraph stays focused on a new reason based on logic and ample support.
- Uses facts, examples, and observations as evidence.
- The conclusion should help influence the reader's thinking. It can circle back to the lead or summarize the reasons.
- The wording should be convincing with strong verbs, descriptive language, and effective use of sentence variety.
- The punctuation helps the reader understand the piece. It should not have errors that are distracting.