

California Writing Project

Persuade Me to Purchase: Marketing as Argumentation

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From Teacher to Teacher

Consumers are bombarded with texts everyday that aim to persuade them to buy. Teenagers are a prime target for such texts as they are the up-and-coming generation of consumers in this country. Teenagers are familiar with the push to buy but often are not aware of how the texts they encounter are geared to persuasion. In the small town where I teach, there is no mall. In fact, there are no stores at all, yet there is always a buzz among the youngsters surrounding the next cool thing they simply can't live without. I chose to use as mentor texts the genre of catalogue descriptions. Because students can readily relate to the intention of the text, the descriptions are well-suited to examining an author's choices in terms of persuasive writing. I also like the fact that catalogues are easy to get and often free, the pages can be torn out and distributed to students, and they are colorful and engaging. I also like for students to think about the idea that someone earns their living writing for these catalogues.

The students who participated in this lesson are in a special education class for English due to a number of issues—including low cognition, disabilities in the area of language processing, processing speed delays, and a number of behavioral and self-regulatory issues. These students were qualified for special education early on and have been in a self-contained day class for most of their elementary and junior high years. Much of the reading and writing curriculum historically used with these students had a focus on isolated skills, such as phonics and fluency, and did not call for them to think critically. Programs that promise easily chartable data to document growth in discreet skill areas are appealing to special educators who are under significant pressure to demonstrate measurable growth that can be documented for compliance in terms of educational benefit. But these programs which ask students to repeatedly read word lists, read unrelated texts into tape recorders, read to timers, and count sentences, leave students at a loss when it comes to understanding why they should ever read or write for any other reason.

Students who struggle with literacy need the most incentive to be engaged with it. They need to understand that literacy means power. The notion that all writing is intentionally crafted to serve a specific purpose and that a reader can reveal that purpose by looking carefully at wording and structure is empowering. When a student can look at a piece of text and determine for whom it was written and to what end, he can approach it with a sense of skepticism, a sense of curiosity, and a critical eye. When a student can write clearly within a genre to move a particular audience in some way, he is empowered as well.

Genre theory is at the heart of this unit, and at the heart of my practice in general when it comes to being a teacher of literacy. When students understand that people write to meet a certain need—to report out the results of the experiment, to inform participants about the activities planned for the day, to convince consumers to buy an item—they can start to see how there is no one way to write. Different ways of writing are needed to serve different purposes. Knowing how purpose shapes writing empowers all readers, including special education students, to discern and question the text, and writers to craft it with specificity and intention. (See my recommendations for professional learning resources if you would like to read more about genre theory.)

In this lesson students analyze the genre of catalogue item description writing and compose their own original descriptions. A significant part of the analysis involves students naming the kinds of things that they extracted and identified from the text as purposeful. Allowing the students to come up with their own language for the features they identify in the text and using that language to frame the rest of our work gave the students a sense of power over the text and the work they were doing with it. Students continued to use that language as they composed and revised their own catalogue item descriptions at the culmination of the unit. It is that sense of power and agency that I want my students to recognize and claim.

Text Resources

I chose the following catalogues because they are packed with rich descriptions that persuade, using a variety of approaches. But the principles of the work involved in this unit can and should be applied to any number of genres or text types.

Herrington. The Herrington Catalogue. n.d. <http://www.herringtoncatalog.com/info.html> (accessed July 5, 2012).

Trader Joe's. Trader Joe's Fearless Flyer. n.d. <http://www.traderjoes.com/fearless-flyer/> (accessed July 5, 2012).

The J. Peterman Company. n.d. <http://www.jpeterman.com/> (accessed July 5, 2012).

(I did not use this catalogue, but more advanced groups might. Descriptions in this catalogue include a significant amount of allusion).

Teaching Context

- The students who participated in this lesson are in a special education class for English due to a number of issues—including low cognition, disabilities in the area of language processing, processing speed delays, and a number of behavioral and self-regulatory issues.
- These students were qualified for special education early on and have been in a self-contained day class for most of their elementary and junior high years.
- With modification, this lesson could be used in mainstream classes as well.

Text Type, Genre, Writing Prompt

- **Genre**
Argument writing that draws on informational and narrative strategies for development of catalogue item descriptions
- **Writing Prompt**
Write your own catalogue item description. Be sure to use some of the persuasive moves, as well as the format and structure features, that were identified when we examined the catalogue genre.

Instructional Strategies

- Use of realia (bringing in several different kinds of texts for students to examine to determine the intended audience and purpose)
- Whole group and small group questioning strategies
- Small groups for determining categories of purposeful language in text
- Whole and small group brainstorming, validation and elaboration of student ideas
- Structured class discussion
- Using LCD projector to examine online or projected texts as a whole group
- Noting student ideas on posters and leaving them up for reference
- Use student-determined language to describe the different categories of purposeful writing in the text and developing a graphic organizer/self-assessment rubric based on the students' language
- Guided reading
- Multiple exposures to the concept (opening activity, graffiti, Trader Joe's, Herrington's)
- "Unpacking"—looking closely at what a text is made of (format, structure, language, images, etc.)
- Highlighting language in text
- Peer conferencing for revision ideas
- Teacher conferencing for editing/conventions

Common Core State Standards

READING STANDARDS FOR INFORMATIONAL TEXT, Grade 9

1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).
5. Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text a) Analyze the use of text features (e.g., graphics, headers, captions) in functional workplace documents. 8th grade: a) Analyze the use of text features (e.g., graphics, headers, captions) in consumer materials.
6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

WRITING STANDARDS, Grade 8

Text Type and Purposes

1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. a) Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. b) Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. c) Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. d) Establish and maintain a formal style. e) Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts, to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content. a) Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension. 2) Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples. 3) Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts. 4) Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic. 5) Establish and maintain a formal style. 6) Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. a) Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. b) Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. c) Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events. d) Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
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, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

Speaking and Listening Standards, Grade 8

2. Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

Lesson Objectives

The goal of this lesson is to increase student awareness and attentiveness to genre specific aspects of text, specifically purpose, audience, word choice and structure.

Students will:

- Identify and discuss intended audience and purpose of several informational and persuasive genre types
- Read, examine, and deconstruct (“unpack”) catalogue item descriptions
- Identify recurring features of writing in the catalogue item descriptions
- Identify and discuss purposeful and persuasive word choice and rhetoric
- Write an original catalogue item description using student-identified aspects of genre
- Revise and edit using peer and teacher conferencing.

Session One: Understanding Genre

1. Display several different informational texts for students to examine (auto manual, text book, cookbook, gossip magazine, test prep book, restaurant menu, etc.)
2. Ask students to identify the intended purpose and audience for each text (this could be done in small groups with reporting out or as a whole group activity).
3. Ask the students to explain how they were able to identify the intended audience and purpose of these texts. What evidence led them to their decisions?
4. Discuss how texts vary according to intended audience and purpose. Connect students' answers to the term “genre” and explain the concept that genre is a way to categorize text according to its intended purpose and audience.
5. Have students brainstorm different genres, and speculate on the possible audiences and purposes they serve.

Session Two: Using Knowledge of Genre to Analyze Text

1. Provide an example of street graffiti to examine as a group.
2. Have students identify possible author, intended audience, purpose, tone, and other features of the text.
3. Ask students: Is this a text? What is the genre?

Note: I chose to use graffiti because I knew it was a text with which my students would engage readily. This activity could be done with any number of texts for example an advertisement from a magazine, a picture of a billboard, the school dress code, etc.

Session Three: Analyzing Text to Understand Persuasive Features

Text: <http://www.traderjoes.com/fearless-flyer/>

Note: Fearless Flyer is available online, but also in free print copies in the store (and often in your mailbox). I simply tore the pages from the flyer and gave one to each student to examine. Each page has approximately eight item descriptions (4 on the front, 4 on the back).

1. Have students identify the purpose and intended audience for the publication.
2. Give students yellow colored pencils and ask them to underline specific phrases or words in the text that serve the purpose of persuasion.
3. List several of their findings on the board or on a poster.
4. Ask students to brainstorm categories under which their findings fall.
5. Create a graphic organizer (see example below) for students to sort their persuasive phrases, so they can readily see examples from each category.

Note: In this case, my students noticed that each product description had a bolded title that was a phrase or sentence designed to grab the reader's attention. They also noticed that these descriptions did things including: tell a little story, tell the history of the product, propose ways people could enjoy the product once they got it home (we called this "envision yourself"), descriptive words, words that made a picture in their mind, promises about how the product might make your life better, and finally what they called \$\$\$ words or "big money" words (big words, or words that sounded as if they were associated with money – for example, luxurious).

6. Discuss the power of persuasive language. Does the language in these descriptions persuade everyone? Who is it most likely to persuade? Why?

Graphic Organizer My Students Used:

Catalogue Description _____

Genre Features: _____

Grabber Title	
Cool Features	
Promises	
Tell a story /envision yourself	
Name Dropping	
\$\$\$\$ Words	
Colors	
Prices	
Contact Info	

Session Four: Analyzing Genre Features of Catalogue Writing

Text: <http://www.herringtoncatalog.com/info.html>

Note: You can access the item descriptions from this catalogue online, or you can order print copies by going online in advance. Several other catalogues could also be used for this activity, such as Deluth, Skymall, Sharper Image, J Peterman, etc. Look for catalogues with rich, interesting descriptions with identifiable types of persuasive language.

1. Give students time to read the item descriptions, and allow them to talk to each other about what they are reading.
2. Ask student to select one item description to examine more closely.
3. Have students identify the purpose and intended audience for the publication.
4. Give students yellow colored pencils and ask them to underline specific phrases or words in the text that serve the purpose of persuasion.
5. List several of their findings on the board or on a poster.
6. Ask students to brainstorm categories under which their findings fall.
7. Create a graphic organizer for students to sort their persuasive phrases, so they can readily see examples from each category. Students will be familiar with this process because they used it to examine the *Trader Joe's* flyer.

Note: In this case, students identified that each item had a "grabber title" that was a phrase or sentence, cool features, promises, big money words, little stories or anecdotes and ways of envisioning your future with that product. They also noticed that many of the descriptions included the name of a celebrity or famous character— we called this "name-dropping." Additionally, students also noted that each item included pricing, size and color availability (colors with names like cherry and midnight as opposed to red and blue), and contact/ ordering info.

Graphic Organizer My Students Used:

Catalogue Description

Genre Features:

Grabber Title	
Cool Features	
Promises	
Tell a story /envision yourself	
Name-dropping	

\$\$\$\$ Words	
Colors	
Prices	
Contact Info	

Session Five: Applying Knowledge of Catalogue Genre to Write Item Descriptions

1. Provide students with an assortment of magazines. Ask them to find an image of a product in the magazine for which they would like to create their own catalogue item description.
2. Scan selected images into computer and convert it to a Word document.
3. Students will write their own catalogue item description using as many of the previously identified types of persuasive language as is appropriate for their item.
4. Provide students with another copy of the graphic organizer created for the catalogue investigations. Ask them to use this to “unpack” their own description as a way to self-assess for revision. Did I write a “grabber title phrase”? Did I do any name-dropping?
5. Have students revise after using the graphic organizers, adding any language that may be needed.
6. Conference with students for editing
7. Publish/ Share in class/ Share in the Author’s Chair

Graphic Organizer My Students Used:

Catalogue Description

Genre Features:

Grabber Title	
Cool Features	
Promises	
Tell a story /envision yourself	

Name-dropping	
\$\$\$ Words	
Colors	
Prices	
Contact Info	

Reflections

Overall, I was pleased with the outcomes of this writing endeavor. Students were able to extract and name several different techniques used by the catalogue authors to persuade the readers. It took some time to get the students to talk specifically about the writing instead of the product being advertised. The work we did to unpack the texts became more focused with each attempt. Students became skilled at identifying certain types of appeals and recognizing powerful language. Taking the time to analyze the mentor texts helped the students to create for themselves a menu of writing style options that they were able to use when it came time for them to write their own pieces. The catalogue item descriptions that the students wrote were persuasive, effective and at times entertaining. Students had come up with their own terminology for the writing moves they unpacked in their analysis. This student-created terminology was used to create the graphic organizer used to analyze other examples, to brainstorm prewrite ideas, and for students to self-assess in the revision process. I believe that the students appreciated the authority given to the terminology they created, and that it gave them ownership of their choices as writers.

Although the student-generated catalogue item descriptions were the culminating product for this unit, the outcome I wanted most for these students was of a long-term change in the way they approach text, that is, a change in their habits of mind surrounding text. We repeated the process of “unpacking” different kinds of text several times, so that students could begin to take a more proactive stance as readers. The thing I want them most to take away from this work is an awareness that every text serves a purpose and is intended for a particular audience, and it is the reader’s job to question a text and its intentions. Moreover, within each text an author makes particular moves (with word choice, rhetoric, even the way a text is formatted) to achieve his intended purpose, and again an active reader will work to identify those moves. Further, student writers who have an awareness of the types of moves authors make, can use those moves when needed in their own writing.

The catalogue item descriptions we read included explanation, information, some narrative (in the form of the little stories embedded within the text), and, of course, a significant amount of argument or persuasion. This hybridization of text types is abundant in the writing that we see each day, yet somehow we strive to segment it into discreet categories and ask students to do the same. I want my students to see that writers draw upon all of the text types necessary to support their purpose and reach their audience. I want my students to become “text detectives,” to look at more than just overall message of the text, but to see how exactly the text is doing what it set out to do. This critical stance is what I will seek to assess as we move forward.

This strategy of looking at a text holistically to determine purpose and audience, followed by thoughtful unpacking of the language, rhetoric, and structure of the text can be utilized in a variety of ways with any genre. I have had students use the same process on movie reviews, poetry/song lyrics, and articles. I would love to see this type of approach used when reading primary source documents in history, for example the Declaration of Independence. Students could grapple with the ideas presented (complaints about Britain’s rule over the colonies), the language used (specific descriptions of infractions), and the format chosen (basically, a list). They could determine why these choices were made by the authors, as well as what the anticipated effect was on the reader (King George). Perhaps they could then try these moves on for size in a personal declaration of independence of their own. It is really all a matter of recognizing that every genre is purposefully designed to make a particular impact, and then investigating the components that make it so.

Extension Resources

Instructional Resources

See text resources.

Professional Resources

Dean, D. *Genre Theory: Teaching, Writing, and Being*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2008.

Fox, Tom. "Linking Genre to Standards and Equity." *The Quarterly of the National Writing Project*, 26.4 (2004).

Digital Resources

See text resources.

Student Sample A

Your Nails Grow Nice And Shiny.

Once I went to a nail salon I saw this product that says it makes your nails grow. It makes your nails grow nice and shiny without going to a nail salon and me your nails stop peeling. It can make your nails 49% stronger in only 4 days. It makes your nails grow fast. If you want great beautiful nails don't miss the 2 formulas. It is available in small and medium size. Show off the brightest nails. *Don't spend hundreds of dollars trying the newest formulas for making your nails look beautiful. USE POPULAR NAILS GROWTH*

Price: \$15.50

Price#E459

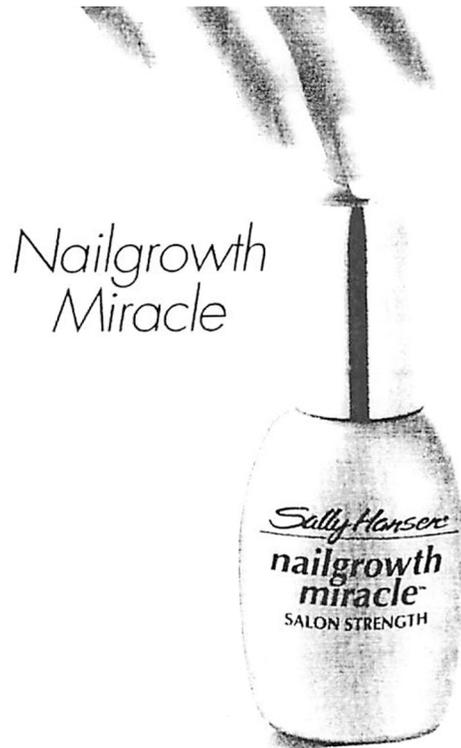
Phone Orders:

1-800-785-965

Fax Orders

(24hrs.):

502-486-9203



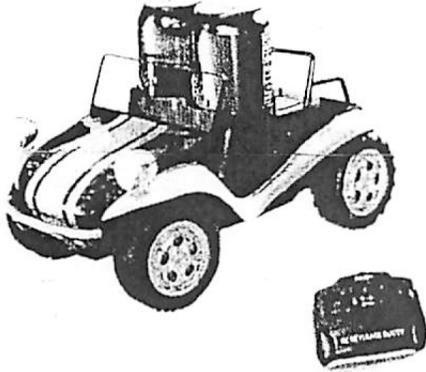
Student Sample A: Nail Polish Catalogue Description

Writing techniques used:

- Title — a promise about the product — *Your nails grow nice and shiny.*
- Narrative style — writer tells a little story about finding the product in a nail salon
- Promises desired effects — *without going to a nail salon*
- Names specific promises about effects of product — *make your nails stop peeling, 49% stronger in 4 days, makes your nails grow fast.*
- Promises beauty — *if you want great beautiful nails, Show off the brightest nails.*
- Warns against other products — *Don't spend hundreds of dollars.*
- Price and ordering information
- Use of bold, italics, and varied font size to meet observed formatting criteria

Student Sample B

You can drive this car anywhere even on high hills!



I was talking to Michael Jordan one time and giving him advice I was like, "Michael J, check out this cool thing I bought last week." When the car came around the corner he was like, "What is this?"

I was like, "It's a remote control car with sodas in it."

I gave him one of my sodas and he told me, "That's what's up!" After that night, the Chicago Bulls won the game and then he went to the NBA playoffs to get his fifth ring.

There are so many things you can do with this car. You can use it for parties, supervising people in other rooms, or driving your cats insane. If you're lazy and you don't want to get up to get a soda, just use your remote control car. Or, if you broke your leg or sprained it, just use your car. You can put it in the freezer so your sodas get cold. This car is amazing! It can go 200 miles per hour and it has nitrous. You need this car! It's awesome! **CALL NOW!**

PRICE: \$120	<u>SMALL</u>	<u>MEDIUM</u>	<u>LARGE</u>
BLUE COLOR	\$120	\$210	\$320
RED COLOR			
GREEN COLOR			
PINK COLOR			
GRAY COLOR			
PURPLE COLOR			
ORANGE COLOR			

Student Sample B: RC Car Catalogue Description

Writing techniques used:

- Title — a promise about the product - You can drive this car anywhere even on high hills
- Narrative style — writer tells a little story
- Dialogue with a celebrity — "Michael, check out this cool thing I bought last week."
- Celebrity endorsement of the item — He told me, "That's what's up!"
- Implied positive effects — Coincidentally, after seeing the RC Car, Michael won the NBA playoffs
- "Envision yourself" — the student names several ways you can enjoy the item once it is home
- Promises convenience – If you are lazy...just use the remote control car
- Lists features of product — 200 mph, nitrous
- Commands the reader to purchase – You need this car! It's awesome! **CALL NOW!** (use of caps, bold)
- Included available sizes and colors of product
- Use of varied fonts and text sizes for title, price info, etc