

Grade Level |

**K-2**

# California Writing Project

Which is the Best Book: Opinion Writing

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## From Teacher to Teacher

Students in first grade can be very self-centric and have a difficult time understanding that others have views and opinions that are different from their own. This lesson gives students a chance to hear and understand the points of view of others. The activity uses a real situation that students can connect with and gives them a purpose for their writing. The use of high-interest books and a real-life problem keeps the students highly engaged and motivated.

In this project, after listening to the teacher read out loud two California Young Reader Medal Nominee books, students will write an argument. Using a good lead sentence and citing evidence for their opinion, students will explain in writing why the teacher should purchase the particular book they like for the classroom library.

## Text Resources

California Young Reader Medal Nominee Books—We used the following two books:

Fucile, T. *Let's Do Nothing!* Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2009.

Noll, A. *I Need My Monster.* Brooklyn, NY: Flashlight Press, 2009.

## Teaching Context

This lesson was completed during the third trimester in a classroom of 20 first graders who attend a suburban school. Students had a wide range of instructional levels, academic needs, and language proficiencies.

This lesson is designed to take approximately one week, conducted in 30–45 minute intervals.

## Text Type, Genre, Writing Prompt

- Opinion/Argument writing that makes a case
- **Writing Prompt**  
After listening to *I Need My Monster* and *Let's Do Nothing*, use pictures and words to convince me to buy one of the books for the classroom library. Be sure to include a great beginning sentence, details about why it is the best book, and a concluding sentence.

## Instructional Strategies

- Engagement strategies
  - Think pair share
  - Thumbs up
  - Choral response—changed the word chorally
- Think-Aloud
- Modeled Writing
- Frontload vocabulary words
- Establish routines and procedures for think-pair-share and group discussions

### Common Core State Standards

#### CCSS READING STANDARDS FOR LITERATURE K–5

The following standards offer a focus for instruction each year and help ensure that students gain adequate exposure to a range of texts and tasks. Rigor is also infused through the requirement that students read increasingly complex texts through the grades. *Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year's grade specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades.*

2. Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.
- 3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.**
- 7. Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.**
9. Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

#### CCSS WRITING STANDARDS K–5

The following standards for K–5 offer a focus for instruction each year to help ensure that students gain adequate mastery of a range of skills and applications. Each year in their writing, students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas, and they should address increasingly demanding content and sources. *Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year's grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades.* The expected growth in student writing ability is reflected both in the standards themselves and in the collection of annotated student writing samples in Appendix C.

- 1. Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.**
5. With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers, and add details to strengthen writing as needed.

#### CCSS SPEAKING AND LISTENING STANDARDS K–5

The following standards for K–5 offer a focus for instruction each year to help ensure that students gain adequate mastery of a range of skills and applications. *Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year's grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades.*

- 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.**
  - a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion)
  - b. Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.
  - c. Ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion
2. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
5. Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
- 6. Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation. (See grade 1 Language standards 1 and 3 on page 12 for specific expectations.)**

## CCSS LANGUAGE STANDARDS K–5

The following standards for grades K–5 offer a focus for instruction each year to help ensure that students gain adequate mastery of a range of skills and applications. *Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year’s grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades.* Beginning in grade 3, skills and understandings that are particularly likely to require continued attention in higher grades as they are applied to increasingly sophisticated writing and speaking are marked with an asterisk (\*). See the table on page 16 for a complete list and Appendix A for an example of how these skills develop in sophistication.

1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
  - a. Print all upper- and lowercase letters.
  - b. Use common, proper, and possessive nouns.
  - c. Use singular and plural nouns with matching verbs in basic sentences (e.g., *He hops; We hop*).
  - d. Use personal (**subject, object**), possessive, and indefinite pronouns (e.g., *I, me, my; they, them, their, anyone, everything*).
  - e. Use verbs to convey a sense of past, present, and future (e.g., *Yesterday I walked home; Today I walk home; Tomorrow I will walk home*).
  - f. Use frequently occurring adjectives.
  - g. Use frequently occurring conjunctions (e.g., *and, but, or, so, because*).
  - h. Use determiners (e.g., articles, demonstratives).
  - i. Use frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., *during, beyond, toward*).
  - j. Produce and expand complete simple and compound declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences in response to prompts.
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
  - a. Capitalize dates and names of people.
  - b. Use end punctuation for sentences.
  - c. Use conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and frequently occurring irregular words.
  - d. Spell untaught words phonetically, drawing on phonemic awareness and spelling conventions.
6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using frequently occurring conjunctions to signal simple relationships (e.g., *I named my hamster Nibbles because she nibbles too much because she likes that.*)

## College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards for Writing

The K–5 standards on the following pages define what students should understand and be able to do by the end of each grade. They correspond to the College and Career Readiness (CCR) anchor standards below by number. The CCR and grade-specific standards are necessary complements—the former providing broad standards, the latter providing additional specificity—that together define the skills and understandings that all students must demonstrate.

### CCR Text Types and Purposes

1. **Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.**

### CCR Production and Distribution of Writing

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

### CCR Research to Build and Present Knowledge

9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### CCR Range of Writing

10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and of tasks, purposes, and audiences).

# English Language Development Standards

## Part I: Interacting in Meaningful Ways

### A. Collaborative

1. Exchanging information and ideas with others through oral collaborative conversations on a range of social and academic topics
3. **Offering and supporting opinions and negotiating with others in communicative exchanges**

### 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

11. Supporting own opinions and evaluating others' opinions in speaking and writing

## Part II: Learning About How English Works

### Structuring Cohesive Texts

1. Understanding text structure
2. Understanding cohesion

### Expanding and Enriching Ideas

3. Using verbs and verb phrases
4. Using nouns and noun phrases
5. Modifying to add details

### Connecting and Condensing Ideas

6. Connecting ideas

## Teaching Sequence

### Lesson Objectives

The goal of this project is to provide students with an opportunity to use strong language, cite evidence, and to support a claim in a meaningful context.

Students will:

- listen to two Young California Reader Medal Nominee books
- discuss with a fellow student the qualities of each book that make it a nominee
- identify which book should be selected as the winner and document reasons for the selection
- use a persuasive lead statement to sway readers to select their book
- cite evidence to support their opinion
- create an illustration that supports the reasons stated to select the book
- engage in peer discussions to facilitate revision

### Session One and Two: Making Predictions and First Reading of Books

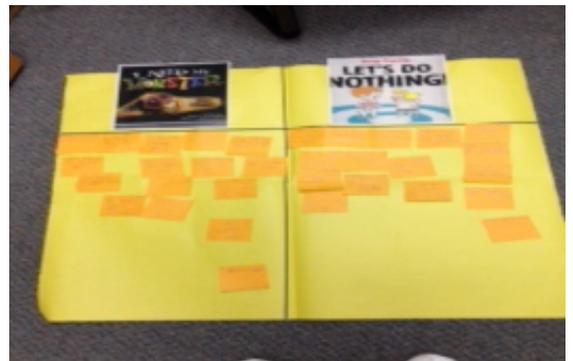
(Two Sessions of 20 minutes each)

1. In read-aloud sessions, read students one of two Young California Reader Medal Nominee books. I used *Let's Do Nothing* by Tony Fucile and *I Need My Monster* by Amanda Noll.
2. Prior to reading the book, be sure to frontload necessary vocabulary for students. Additionally, ask students to make predictions about the story before reading it to them.
3. After reading the story to them, give students time to confirm predictions and discuss story elements with a partner. This groundwork will help facilitate the discussions students will have during the lesson.
4. Repeat this process with the other book in a second read-aloud session.

### Session Three: Developing Positions and Citing Evidence

(40-minute session):

1. Begin with revisiting the stories, *Let's Do Nothing* and *I Need My Monster*. Before doing a picture walk, I encourage the students to think about each book and what they remember about the story.
2. Give students time to discuss with a partner what they remembered. Then have them share out their ideas with the whole group. Encourage students to share their partner's thinking along with their own.
3. After activating prior knowledge, continue with a picture walk of *I Need My Monster* to further develop the student's recollection of the story.
4. At the conclusion of the picture walk, give students time to think about what made the story great. Ask students to be very specific. I typically give them examples of how to explain their thinking. After sufficient wait time, have students share their ideas with a partner.
5. Next, have students return to their desks with a Post-it note to write one idea of what made the story a great story. After students complete a Post-it note for *I Need My Monster*, have them share their ideas with the class using a whip-around-the-room technique.  
**Note:** Whip-around-the-room is when you start with one student and quickly move around the room allowing everyone to share their idea.
6. After each student shares, I ask them to place the Post-it note on a chart paper under the title *I Need My Monster*.
7. Repeat this same process for the story *Let's Do Nothing*.



## Session Four: Writing an Opinion Piece

(40-minute session):

1. Next, explain that the school will buy one of the books for the classroom library and needs help choosing which book would be best.

**Note:** *When I taught this lesson, we had a discussion about whether it is okay to have an opinion that is different from your classmate. To explore examples of having different opinions, I asked whose favorite color is green—some students raised their hands. I continued the process by asking whose favorite color is red, blue, and so on. Students concluded that is okay to have a different favorite color than others. I then linked this understanding to the idea that it is okay for students to have different ideas for what book is best.*

2. Ask students to choose the best book and think about why they chose that book. Revisiting the Post-it-note chart may help students think of ideas. Have each student discuss the reasons why they chose the book they did with a partner.
3. After, provide students with time to create illustrations that demonstrate why the books they chose were the best. Have students share their illustrations with a partner to help them verbalize their ideas before they begin writing.
4. Before students begin writing, review ideas for good leads with them. I focused this discussion on using vivid language to convince the teacher that the book each student picked was the BEST one. I compared the writing students would do to watching a commercial for a toy.
5. Orally, lead students in a brainstorm of examples of good leads for this type of writing. I modeled some ideas by doing a think aloud for the students. I intentionally didn't write any examples on the board so that students would come up with original ideas.
6. Students then spend time writing their opinion pieces for the books they chose. I moved around the room—checking in with students and providing feedback when appropriate.

## Session Five: Revising and Making the Writing Public

(30-minute session):

1. After students complete the activity, model the format students will use for peer review. Each student will read their piece to a partner. The partner's job is to listen carefully to the opinion and provide feedback by telling the writer one "Golden Line" from the writing. (A golden line is a part of the writing that the students found exciting or interesting.) During this time, students can make revisions to their writing.
2. Ask students to read their writing once more to do a final check for capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.
3. Author's Chair: In my class, volunteers put their writing on my chair if they want to read their paper to the class. When a student reads, the class listens for one "Golden Line" from the author's paper. I then randomly select students to share their ideas about a "Golden Line." Important to note, even during this reading of the piece, some students are able to see and hear errors in their writing that they then fix after sharing.

## Session Six: After the Lesson

1. Read the student work and tally the opinions/votes. Select the book winner and then purchase the book and present it to the class.
2. In my classroom, I hung the student work in a place where other students could reread the pieces to see why the winning book was selected.

### What Worked

It is amazing what first graders can do! The students were very successful in generating ideas to get started on their argument for why the book they chose was best. The high-interest books and real-life connection made the activity meaningful and engaging. The multiple exposures to the text, along with the oral language development woven throughout the lesson, made it easy for the students to cite specific examples of why they chose a particular book. The students also had many opportunities to read and re-read their writing to aid in the revision and editing process. Spending time participating in peer review was also helpful in building clarity and confidence as the writing was revised.

### Modifications

I made several modifications for the different learning styles and abilities in the class. The following ideas are examples of ways to provide scaffolding to make any student successful: Each student was carefully paired with a student that could provide appropriate support during the think-pair-share sections of the lesson. I provided sentence frames to a few students to give them a concrete way to start their writing. I checked in with the struggling students after each idea was recorded on paper. I spent time one-on-one helping some students do sounding and blending words so they could be successful at getting their ideas written on the paper. Two students who were struggling completed the activity in the allotted amount of time and were excited to share their successes with other students.

### Extensions / What's Next?

An extension to this lesson would be to use the lesson format to have students convince you that one thing is better than another. For example, one sport is better than another, or one movie is better than another. Students could also write a short commercial trying to convince others to buy their favorite product.

## Extension Resources

### Instructional Resources

Two books of your choosing that are nominated for the California Young Reader Medal.

### Professional Resources

Anderson, J. *10 Things Every Writer Needs to Know*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2011.

Jackson, N. R. and P. L. Pillow. *The Reading-Writing Workshop: Getting Started*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 1992.

Ray, K.W. *In Pictures and In Words: Teaching the Qualities of Good Writing Through Illustration Study*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2010.

Ray, K.W. and L. B. Cleaveland. *About the Authors: Writing Workshop with Our Youngest Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.

Stead, T. *Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2001.

Spandel, V. *Creating Young Writers—Using the Six Traits to Enrich Writing Process in Primary Classrooms*. 3rd ed. Boston, MA: Pearson and Allyn & Bacon, 2012.

### Digital Resources

Not applicable for this lesson.

## Learning From Student Work

I annotated the student samples using the "5-Point Beginning Writer's Rubric for K-2" based on the Six Traits of Writing: Education Northwest. 2010. 5-Point Beginning Writer's Rubric.

[http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/772](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/772) (accessed July 10, 2012).

### Student Sample A - I Need My Monster



It was funny when the  
boy drop the pillow on the  
floor. It is the best.

I need my Monster is  
The best book ever! Because  
he gets difrent monster. The  
best monster is the whun  
with the long silile tung.  
That made the boy lagh.

I need my monster is the best book ever! Because he gets a difrent monster. The best monster is the whun with the long silile tung. That made the boy lagh. It was funny when the boy drop the pillow on the floor. It is the best.

#### Translation:

*I Need My Monster is the best book ever! Because he gets a different monsters. The best monster is the one with the long silly tongue. That made the boy laugh. It is funny when the boy drops the pillow on the floor. It is the best.*

## Annotation – Student Sample A

### Organization

The piece is focused, and the events are organized with a beginning, middle and end. The piece states how the writer felt (“It is the best!”). The tone reflects knowledge and enthusiasm, and grabs the reader’s attention (“different monsters” and “long silly tongue”) with a strong topic sentence (“I Need My Monster is the best book ever!”)

### Idea/Content, Voice, and Word Choice

This piece contains a central idea (“the best book”) and describes the story with some detail (“different monster,” “one with the long silly tongue,” and “made the boy laugh”). The tone reflects knowledge and enthusiasm, and grabs the reader’s attention (“long silly tongue,” “made the boy laugh,” and “funny”). The writing also began with a topic sentence (“I Need My Monster is the best book ever!”).

### Sentence Fluency

There are a variety of sentences types; simple to more complex sentences are evident. (“That made the boy laugh. The best monster is the one with the long, silly tongue.”)

### Conventions

The piece has complete sentences with proper spacing and punctuation. The student uses conventional spelling for most words and attempts unknown words using strong phonetic knowledge. The piece contains few errors, and they do not interfere with the reader’s understanding of the writing.

Presentation Handwriting is neat and easy to read, and proper manuscript is used

## Student Sample B - Let's Do Nothing



'and a lot of funny parts and  
also when they trent to  
stachows the birdlanded on francy  
then the ether boy it iss  
funny so so so so so so so so so  
FUNNY pick it!

If you like funny books  
then pick Let's do nothing  
it is vary funny it has  
a lot uv acshen in it and  
it tacks plase in trees in  
stachow in billding and and

If you like funny books then pick Let's do nothing it is vary funny it has a lot uv acshen in it and it takes place in the trees in stachow and and billding and ...a lot of funny parts and also when they turned to statues, the bird landed on Frankie and then the other boy. It is funny, so so so so so so so so so!...Funny pick it!

### Translation:

If you like funny books, then pick Let's Do Nothing. It is very funny. It has a lot of action in it. It takes place in trees, in statues and buildings. And....a lot of funny parts. And also when they turned to statues, the bird landed on Frankie and then the other boy. It is funny, so so so so so so so so so funny, pick it!

## Annotation – Student Sample B

### **Organization**

The writer has a clear focus, and the evidence to support the opinion being developed in the writing (“ . . . pick Let's Do Nothing”). Ideas are organized in a clear coherent manner. The piece ends with a final statement urging the reading to pick the story as the best one. (“It is so, so, so, so, so, so, so funny, pick it!”)

### **Idea/Content, Voice, and Word Choice**

The writer develops a central idea (“If you like funny books, then pick Let's Do Nothing!”) and clearly describes the reasons why this book is funny with specific examples and enthusiasm.

The writer’s voice is strong (“It is so so so so so so so so so funny, pick it!”).

### **Sentence Fluency**

Sentence structure varies—some variety in sentence lengths and beginnings.

### **Conventions**

The piece contains grade-level errors in conventions and spelling. The student is experimenting with punctuation.

Presentation Handwriting is neat and easy to read, and proper manuscript is used.