Take a Strong Position to Persuade Readers

1. Focus

Introduce Persuasive Letter Writing

Lead a classroom debate to demonstrate how we support a specific side of an issue. Divide the class into two equal groups. Explain that you will be discussing the subject of candy. Each group must come up with three arguments supporting why candy is acceptable or not acceptable for children to eat. You may wish to assign students with strong verbal abilities to each group to help lead discussion. Use the sample think-aloud below to introduce the debate.

Sample think-aloud. Say: I have heard many people argue over whether children should be given candy or not. We can have a classroom discussion about the two sides of this issue. When I talk about two sides of an issue, I use the words pro and con. Pro means “for.” Con means “against.” The pro group will think of three reasons that candy is acceptable for children to eat. The con group will think of three reasons that candy is not acceptable for children to eat. You can meet first as a group to come up with your reasons. Then we will gather as a class to have a debate. Allow student groups to discuss pros and cons. Then have a classroom discussion.

Say: When we discussed the pros and cons of candy as an acceptable food for children, we tried to be as persuasive as possible to get our point across. Each group worked to convince the other group that its reasons were correct. When we try to convince someone to think or do something, it is important that we use supporting arguments to make our point. We do this when we talk and also when we write to persuade people.

Introduce the Purpose and Audience for Persuasive Letters to the Editor

Ask: When do people write persuasive letters, and why? I write persuasive letters when I want to make my voice heard. A letter to a local official, such as the mayor or principal, can persuade someone to change something or do something important for the good of the community. A letter to the editor of a newspaper can do the same thing. I enjoy reading persuasive letters in the newspaper because it lets me know how people in my community feel about issues, and I learn a lot about those issues by reading their letters. The audience for a persuasive letter is anyone who can take action on an issue or who is affected by that issue.
2. Rehearse

Practice Supporting a Position Orally

Invite students to work with a partner. Encourage one partner to take a pro position and the other partner to take a con position on a topic of their choice. The issues can come from their own lives, such as a later bedtime or less homework. Remind students to use supporting arguments to persuade their partners to agree with their side of the issue.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Pro and Con Positions with the Class

Invite volunteers to share with the class the issue they discussed, their partner’s position on the issue, and his or her supporting arguments. Use one or more of the following questions to engage students in a discussion about the exercise.

Person telling the argument
- What were your partner’s supporting arguments?
- How convincing did you find these arguments? Why?

Listener
- How well did your partner explain your point of view on the issue? Explain.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Reading good examples of other people’s writing can help you make your own writing better. Over the next several weeks, we will read persuasive letters and learn ways to express our point of view and convince readers to agree with us. We can use these skills when we write our own persuasive letters.

Ask students to write a paragraph stating a strong position on a topic related to school.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud their strong positions.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Meet with beginning ELs one on one while other students work with partners in "Practice Supporting a Position Orally.” Review the concepts of for and against. Say: When you are for something, you agree. (Nod your head up and down agreeably and say “yes.”) When you are against something, you do not agree. Shake your head back and forth with disapproval and say “no.”

Intermediate
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner practice. Write simple sentence frames on chart paper and model how students can use them to talk about their topic. For example:

I am in favor of _____.
I am against _____.
My reasons are _____.

Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: opinion/la opinión, persuasive/persuasivo(a).