Brainstorm Using Problems or Issues at School

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn a strategy for brainstorming ideas for persuasive letters by using problems noticed at school.
• Work with a partner to share and discuss ideas.
• Contribute to a class web of ideas for persuasive letters.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Writer’s notebooks
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

A day or two before the mini-lesson, ask students to be aware of things in their school environment, both inside and outside the building. This could include the people, the rules and practices, the condition and suitability of the building and grounds, etc. Explain that they will be talking about what they noticed in a day or two as they brainstorm ideas for writing. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain the Brainstorming Process

Say: Brainstorming is a way to help us think of ideas. When we brainstorm, we open ourselves to all the possibilities for writing that are around us. To brainstorm for a persuasive letter, we can notice things at school that we think need to be changed or fixed—things that a persuasive letter might make happen. Let me show you how I brainstorm using problems or issues around me to discover ideas for writing a persuasive letter.

Model Brainstorming Using Issues Around Us

Use the sample think-aloud to help you develop your own brainstorming models to share with students. Demonstrate how to record ideas on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources as you model brainstorming.

Sample think-aloud. Say: When I write a persuasive letter, I need to make sure I choose a topic that I believe strongly about. One thing that I feel strongly about is whether kids should be allowed to have water bottles on their desks or not. I do agree that drinking water is important, but I see many ways that water bottles cause problems for both teachers and students. I think I can write a good letter outlining my point of view on this topic. Another thing that I feel strongly about is junk food. In the lunchroom yesterday, I saw so many people—kids and adults—eating junk food. Junk food is not good for anyone, and I think there needs to be a change! I’m going to list that as an idea for writing. Also, I went into the library on my way back from the lunchroom and noticed that people had left books everywhere. Books need to be returned to the shelves, not left on the tables. I think we need a rule or a procedure about that for everyone to follow. Oh! Here’s something else I think we should change. Before I left our campus late yesterday afternoon, I saw our school janitor taking out garbage. I noticed that our school doesn’t have recycle bins. Recycling is so important for the environment! I could write a letter about that also. I’ll add those ideas to my web.

Sample Brainstorming Web

- water bottles on desks
- returning library books to shelves
- too much junk food
- recycling our trash

Ideas for Persuasive Letter
2. Rehearse

Practice Brainstorming Using Issues Around Us

Invite students to work with a partner to discuss the problems and issues they noticed about their school that could become ideas for writing a persuasive letter. Remind students to record ideas for writing in their writer’s notebooks. Students should answer these questions as they work together:

- What problem did I notice?
- Why do I think it’s a problem?
- Would other people agree?

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

Share Ideas

Bring students together and ask them to share an idea they brainstormed, based on problems and issues they’ve noticed at school. Record their ideas on a class brainstorming web. Ask students which ones they agree with and why. Ask if anyone disagrees with an idea.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We’ve learned how to use the things we notice around us to discover ideas for writing a persuasive letter. As you brainstorm topics on your own, think about the issues and problems you see around you. Talk about them with other people. Get their perspective on the issue. Their feelings may help you understand or rethink your own.

Encourage students to think about problems around their school as they brainstorm during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share a problem that they feel strongly about.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Invite beginning ELs to draw a picture of a problem they have noticed around the school. If necessary, model drawing a picture of a problem you noticed. Ask students to talk about their drawings using whatever words or actions they can. Write key words they need for talking about their idea and help them use the words in simple sentences as they share.

Intermediate and Advanced

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners about their topic for a persuasive letter. For example:

- A problem I noticed is ______.
- I disagree with ______.
- I think ______.
- We should ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: persuasive/persuasivo(a); problem/el problema.