1. Focus

Introduce the Mentor Persuasive Essay

Say: In order to become a good persuasive essay writer, it’s important to read or listen to examples of other people’s persuasive essays. Today I’m going to read you a persuasive essay by a writer named C. F. Smithling. As we read the essay, we will look for some key features of the genre. You will be using many of these features when you write your own persuasive essays.

Say: The title of Smithling’s essay is “Lengthen the School Year Before It’s Too Late!” I know that there is a controversy in society today as to whether the school year is too short. That may be what this essay is about. What do you think the author means by ending the title with “Before It’s Too Late”? Allow students to share their predictions or “I wonder” questions.

If your class includes English learners or other students who would benefit from vocabulary or oral language development to comprehend the persuasive text, use “Make the Mentor Text Comprehensible for ELs.”

Read Aloud the Mentor Persuasive Essay

Read aloud the text, stopping at some or all of the places indicated (or at other points you choose) to highlight three key features of a persuasive essay:
1. Persuasive essays take a strong position on an issue.
2. They use facts and evidence to make a case.
3. They use powerful words and phrases to influence the reader.

Strong Position
Page 8, after second sentence. Say: I got a preview of the author’s position in the essay’s title, and the first sentence states her position even more strongly: “Students in the United States need to spend more time in school.” Persuasive essays always take a strong position on the issue they discuss. In the second sentence, the author begins to build her argument. She explains why students need to spend more time in school: If they don’t, they will not gain the skills they need to compete for jobs in the twenty-first century.

Powerful Words and Phrases to Influence Reader
Page 8, after first paragraph. Say: The author uses strong words in her critique of summer vacation. She characterizes students’ summer activities as “unsupervised, unproductive, and unhealthy.” The author knows that her views are controversial, and she predicts “vociferous objections” to them. The word vociferous means “marked by a strong outcry.” It creates an image in my mind of people shouting at the author, telling her why she is wrong. Writers of persuasive essays use powerful words and phrases to communicate their ideas.
Facts and Evidence
Page 10, after first paragraph. Say: Here is an interesting fact in the essay: “Child psychologists consistently argue that children who have structure in their lives are happier, healthier, and better-behaved.” Psychologists are considered experts on human behavior, so their ideas are taken seriously by most people. Citing information from an expert is one type of evidence that persuasive essays use to help convince the reader that the author’s argument is correct.

Facts and Evidence
Page 11, after first paragraph. Say: This paragraph describes more evidence from experts. According to an analysis of thirty-nine summer learning loss studies, students lose knowledge and skills during the summer break. They forget about a month’s worth of learning, and do worse on tests at the end of the vacation. This information was published in a periodical called the Review of Educational Research, so I feel that I can trust it.

2. Rehearse

Respond Orally to the Mentor Persuasive Essay

After reading, invite students to share their own ideas and reactions to the text by asking questions such as:

• Did you like this persuasive essay? Why or why not?
• Which words or phrases did you think were the most powerful?

If necessary, model the following sentence frames to support ELs and struggling students:

• I liked the essay because ______.
• The most powerful words were ______.

Make the Mentor Text Comprehensible for ELs

Beginning
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.”)
This author is for a longer school year.

Beginning and Intermediate
Say: The author of this persuasive essay thinks the school year should be longer. She thinks that summer vacation is a waste of time. (Point to the photos on pages 8 and 10.) Kids play video games and watch TV. They forget what they learned during the school year. Kids in many other countries have longer school years. Those students are better prepared to get jobs.

Intermediate and Advanced
Say: The author of this essay thinks that summer vacation is a waste of time for kids. She thinks that kids play video games and watch TV. Is that what you do? Tell me about your summer vacation. What do you do during the summer? Encourage a background-building discussion about this time of the year.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share the following English/Spanish cognates: economy/la economía; education/la educación; vacation/las vacaciones.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: Remember that when you write a persuasive essay, you have to take a strong position, just as the author did in the persuasive essay we just read. You also use facts, evidence, and powerful words and phrases to support your argument and make your point.

During independent writing time, encourage students to brainstorm strong words and phrases they could use in a persuasive essay. Invite students to use a dictionary and a thesaurus to find words. During student 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 their lists of strong words and phrases.