How to use this book

1. Learn about the genre by reading pages 2–3. Get background information on the controversy that prompts the letters to the editor by reading the newspaper article on pages 4–7. (Shared reading)

2. Read the persuasive letters for enjoyment. (Levelled texts)

3. Reread the persuasive letters and answer the questions on pages 13 and 21. (Shared reading)

4. Reread the last letter. Pay attention to the comments in the margins. See how an author writes a persuasive letter. (Levelled text)

5. Follow the steps on pages 22–23 to write your own persuasive letter. (Shared reading)

6. Complete the activity on the inside back cover. Answer the follow-up questions. (Shared reading)
FOCUS ON THE GENRE

Persuasive Letters

What is a persuasive letter?
A persuasive letter is a letter that tries to convince readers to believe or do something. A persuasive letter has a strong point of view about an idea or a problem. It includes facts and examples to support an opinion, and it usually suggests a solution.

What is the purpose of a persuasive letter?
People write persuasive letters to sway, or change the minds of, their readers. They want readers to see their points of view. They may want readers to take action, too.

Who is the audience for a persuasive letter?
People write persuasive letters to all kinds of people: parents, friends, citizens, business leaders, world leaders, and others. They write letters to make people understand their views.

Often they want to change their audience's opinions. For example, someone might write to a leader about a law they don't agree with. The writer might want the leader to change the law.

How do you read a persuasive letter?
Keep in mind that the writer wants you to support his or her position. Ask yourself, What is this writer's position, or opinion? Does he support it with facts and good reasons? Do I agree with him? A good persuasive writer knows his audience. He knows what facts and reasons might change his reader's mind.

FOCUS ON THE GENRE
The letter uses powerful words to influence the reader.

Features of a Persuasive Letter

The letter uses facts and evidence to make a case.

The letter has solutions or actions.

The letter has a specific audience in mind.

The letter has a strong position, or point of view.
THE CONTROVERSY

Mayor Supports New Mall

Says Old Oak Should Be Cut Down

Mayor Tom O’Shea today announced his support for the sale of Old Oak Park. Jack Abbot, a developer, wants to buy the Oakdale land. He plans to build a shopping mall. The mall would include a major department store, movie theaters, and restaurants. It would also include a grocery store, bank, and many shops. The mall parking lot would hold up to 300 cars.

O’Shea told reporters he supports the mall for two reasons. “The mall will bring new jobs to our town,” he said. “And the money from the sale will help us pay for town improvements.” At the top of O’Shea’s list of improvements is a new middle school.

Not everyone agrees with Mayor O’Shea and Councilman Adams. Many Oakdale residents think that Old Oak Park is too important to lose. In the middle of the park stands the oldest tree in the state, Old Oak. According to town records, Old Oak may be over 300 years old. The tree was there before the town was built.

Developer Jack Abbott and an artist’s rendering of his mall plans

City Councilwoman Maria Gomez wants the tree to stay right where it is. “Old Oak is the heart and soul of our town. It would be a tragedy to remove it. I plan to vote against the sale of the park. And I urge every resident to protest the mayor’s position.”
Linda Moore, who lives near the park, agrees with Councilwoman Gomez. “My children love the playground by the 300-year-old tree. Where are they supposed to play? In the mall parking lot?”

Runner Jeff Messina said that he and other runners use the dirt track around the park and don’t want to see it paved over.

Other residents look forward to the jobs the new mall would create. “I’ve been out of work for a year now,” said Lisa O’Brien. “I need a job to take care of my sick mother and my children.” Many residents who need work hope the mall is built quickly.

Everett Longbottom expressed little concern for Old Oak. “It’s already 300 years old. It’s probably going to die soon anyway. We need a mall more than a dying tree.” But his wife, Marilyn, disagreed. “Oaks can live eight hundred years. I don’t want anyone to harm that dear tree. I love it.”

Oakdale’s mayor and city council will vote on the sale of Old Oak Park next week.

Everett Longbottom and wife, Marilyn, have conflicting opinions.

Tools Writers Use

State and Defend Your Position

When writers state a position, they are expressing a strong opinion. Writers must make their opinion, or belief, very clear to the reader. They need to convince their readers to have the same opinions. To persuade, or convince, readers, writers support their positions in the following ways:

- They clearly state a position.
- They support their position with factual information (information that can be proven).
- They give concrete examples of why the position must be taken seriously.
- They may use language to get readers to share their emotions about the issue.
Dear Editor,

Mayor O'Shea has the right idea. Our town needs the new mall. Without it, we're dead. No town can survive without jobs, and a project this big promises many new jobs. Construction workers, carpenters, electricians, and plumbers will be needed. And the good news doesn't end there. Once the mall is built, stores will need clerks. Restaurants will need cooks and waiters. The mall will need parking attendants, security guards, maintenance workers, and more.

Let’s face facts. Our town has been in trouble for a decade. Look at the “For Sale” signs on every street. People can’t afford to live here anymore. There are no good jobs. Our young people go off to college, and they never come back. The future of our town is at stake. Forget about one old tree in a park. Let’s close the sale and start breaking ground. Give me a shovel. I’ll help.

Lawrence Freeman

To the Editor:

As the parent of a seventh grader, let me assure you this town needs a new middle school more than it needs Old Oak. If selling the land gets us a new school, I’m all for it. George Washington Middle School is seventy years old, and frankly, it should be condemned! The walls are crumbling. Plaster falls from the gymnasium ceiling like hail.

Most classroom windows don’t open. On hot days, our children swelter in the stagnant air. How can they focus on the causes of the Civil War or solve algebraic equations when they’re covered in sweat and trying not to faint?

But wait, the story gets worse! Two of the four children’s bathrooms have been out of commission for six months. According to the Board of Education, no funds are available to pay for the repairs. Last month, my daughter opened her locker and found a mouse crawling on her backpack. She was traumatized by this experience. She has not used her locker since. Mice have been spotted in classrooms, too, during lessons. The building is infested.

George Washington Middle School is a disaster, and our children deserve better. Sell the land and build a middle school where our children can concentrate and feel safe.

Vivian Spencer, irate Oakdale mother
Dear Editor:
Sell Old Oak Park to the mall developer, but please don’t squander my money on a new middle school. We spend too much money on education in this community as it is. I pay five thousand dollars in city taxes every year. Almost two thousand dollars of that goes to pay for local schools. And I don’t even have children! Let’s repair the middle school we have and use the money from the mall sale for town improvements that benefit everyone in the community. Our roads have more potholes than a war zone. You have to swerve around them so you don’t break an axle. Some of our streets are not lighted at night. We have no public transportation system, which hurts our elderly and low-income residents. Let’s bring together a civic planning committee and look for ways to improve the town for everyone—not just a few.

Benjamin Taylor

Dear Editor:
Personally, I could care less about a stupid old tree. And I have nothing against a nice new mall for our town. But I thought we lived in a democracy! Since when does the mayor get to decide what we do with the money our town makes from the sale? If the town is going to sell off our park, shouldn’t we all get something in return? How about a nice tax break for everyone? We’re all stressed these days about money. We could all use a break. With the extra money, we can go to the new mall, buy a new outfit, and have dinner out. We can enjoy a nice movie now and then. Everyone will be happy, and we’ll all be stimulating the local economy. Now that’s a win-win situation for every resident.

Martin Smith

Abbott’s blueprint for the new mall
To the Editor:

Last Sunday, my wife, Mimi, and I were taking our walk. My wife began to feel dizzy and short of breath. She is eighty-two, and I am eighty-three. As you can imagine, I was very concerned. Our doctor’s office is closed on the weekends, so I drove my wife to the hospital. The ride took more than an hour. We waited another twenty minutes before a doctor could see her. The good news is that my wife’s condition was not serious. She will be fine. The bad news is that if she had been seriously ill, she might not have gotten the treatment she needed in time.

How many deaths result each year because residents of this town have to travel too far to get the medical care they require? We need a hospital to serve our community. Many senior citizens and parents of young children share my concern. Councilman Adams says the mall will finance a hospital in a few years, but a few years is too long. We need a hospital now. If Jack Abbott wants his mall so badly, make him build a hospital next to it. Yes, our town needs stores, restaurants, movie theaters, and the jobs that come with them. But what’s all that if you’re not alive to enjoy it? I support the sale of Old Oak Park, but only if a hospital is part of the plan.

Seymour Lee, DDS,
68-year Oakdale resident

Long-time residents Seymour and Mimi Lee would like to see a new hospital instead of a new mall.

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**REREAD THE PERSUASIVE LETTERS**

**Understand the Letters**
- What are these letters about? Are they for or against the new mall?
- Lawrence Freeman and Benjamin Taylor want money made from the mall to be spent in different ways. How are their ideas different?
- Martin Smith seems somewhat upset about the process. What does he say that tells you he’s not happy?
- Seymour Lee wants something that the mayor has not mentioned. What does he want, and why does he want it?

**Analyze the Tools Writers Use: State and Defend Your Position**
Look at the letter written by Vivian Spencer.
- What position does the writer take in her letter?
- What facts and examples does the writer give to support her position?
- What emotion words does the writer use to share her opinion?

**Focus on Words: Emotion Words**
Some words make readers feel strong emotions. Writers use these words to influence their readers. For example, on page 8, Lawrence Freeman writes, bluntly, that the “town has been in trouble for a decade.” Below are several strong emotion words from the “pro” letters. Make a chart like the one below. Define each word and think about why the writers used them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Dictionary Definition</th>
<th>Why is it an effective word choice?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>condemned</td>
<td>definition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>disaster</td>
<td>definition</td>
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<td>squander</td>
<td>definition</td>
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<td>definition</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>concerned</td>
<td>definition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Editor,

I can’t believe this mayor would sell our park out from under us. Maybe he doesn’t use Oak Park, but plenty of Oakdale residents do. He should visit the picnic area some weekend and see families flying kites. He should interview the children who enjoy the rock-climbing wall at the playground. He should count how many runners he’s going to disappoint when he takes away their path around the beautiful oak stands. He needs to speak to the bird-watchers who spend their weekends looking up into the branches of Old Oak. What is he going to say to them? Sorry, the birds can find a new home?

And let the mayor meet all the park maintenance and security workers he will have to lay off. Let him speak to the sidewalk vendors who need the park to make a living. Is he going to promise all of them jobs at the mall? Somehow I don’t think that’s part of his plan.

What is a town, anyway? A town is people, not buildings. A town is people who work and play together and look out for each other. This mayor isn’t looking out for the people. If he has his way, he’ll destroy our community and make it one big commercial strip mall.

Justin Cooper

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Dear Editor:

If Mayor O’Shea lets Old Oak be cut down, then he is a murderer. Old Oak should never be destroyed. It is an ancient tree that has lived for over 300 years. And it can live for centuries to come, if we take care of it.

Veronica Mandel

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In Louisiana, there is an oak tree called the Seven Sisters Oak. It was named by the landowner, Carole Hendry Doby, who was one of seven sisters. Experts say that it is over 1,500 years old. It even survived the winds of the terrible Katrina hurricane in 2005.

And that is not the only old oak in the world. An oak tree called Angel Oak in South Carolina is more than 1,500 years old, too.

We should give Old Oak a chance to be 1,500 years old. Do we really want to be responsible for killing such an extraordinary living, breathing part of our community? Shame on us if we do!

Veronica Mandel
Dear Editor:

Our town is making a big mistake. There’s no need to destroy the park or Old Oak. If the town needs money, we can come up with other ways to get it.

First of all, we could charge admission to the park. People would be glad to pay money to use the park or see the tree. Especially if they knew they were helping to preserve this valuable treasure.

In addition, we could create Old Oak products to sell. We could develop postcards of Old Oak, like the one enclosed, and a history book about the town. We could also build a café with light refreshments. And why don’t we build a skating rink or miniature golf course? Families would take advantage of these recreational opportunities. And the city could raise money.

Mayor, don’t vote to tear up the park and tear down Old Oak. Think of other ways to get more money. Come on, be creative!

Laurie Oates

To the Editor:

Why do we always have to disappoint one group in order to satisfy the other? Yes, we need the mall, but we also need Old Oak. So why can’t this mayor negotiate a deal that lets us have both?

Isn’t it obvious that Old Oak Park is not where the mall should be built? It doesn’t take a real estate expert to see that there is other available land around this town. What about the undeveloped land by the river? How about the retired landfill two miles north of town? Both of those properties are big enough for a mall—and they’re both right near the highway.

Once in a while you really can make everyone happy, and this is one of those times. If Mayor O’Shea can’t come up with a way to save Old Oak and get us the mall, then he’s not much of a politician.

Alison Fremont

The retired landfill north of town is a possible alternative location for the new mall.
Dear Editor:

I have been a member of the Oakdale Historical Society for thirty years. For the past five years, I have been the president of this organization. As someone who cares deeply about our town’s history, I am shocked by the mayor’s decision to sell the park and cut down the tree.

Oaks have long been a symbol of strength and endurance. Many countries have made the oak their national tree—including the United States. The legendary Sherwood Forest, of Robin Hood fame, was an oak forest. I consider Old Oak to be the strength and endurance of our little town. By protecting it, we protect our collective history.

The writer states his position clearly and dramatically.

The writer has identified his audience as all people of Oakdale. He wants his readers to think about the oak tree in a new way. He asks them to think about what an oak tree represents.

Thornton Fennimore Singer, president of the Oakdale Historical Society, is “shocked by the mayor’s decision.”

Hundreds of years ago, Native Americans made their homes in the forest where our town now stands. If you visit the historical society (and it is open to the public from 1 P.M. to 4 P.M. on Tuesdays through Fridays), you can see the vast collection of arrowheads our town residents have gathered in Old Oak Park.

The story of a young soldier possibly dying near Old Oak helps readers connect emotionally to the history of the tree.

During the Civil War, soldiers from both the North and South marched through the tall old trees. Many young men shed their blood on that land. Some of them died near Old Oak. One young soldier wrote his last letter there. He wrote this letter to his mother. In the letter, he told her, “I will die in the company of giant oaks. They are watching over me.” Maybe that young soldier got some strength from Old Oak. His letter has been archived at the historical society, and you can read it there.

The writer provides examples of important historical events that have occurred during Old Oak’s life.
In 1871, Mayor Hopkins decided to turn the land into a park. A wonderful gazebo was built right near Old Oak. Newlyweds have had their wedding pictures taken there throughout the decades. Times have changed, but that small park has kept the past alive.

Old Oak Park is our town’s living history. Destroy it and the heart and soul of this town will disappear. We cannot do that to future generations. We have an obligation to the past as well as the present. Don’t destroy the town’s history for a mall. That would be a disgrace!

Thornton Fennimore Singer
President, Oakdale Historical Society

Understand the Letters
- What are these letters about? Are these letters for or against the new mall?
- Justin Cooper has a problem with the mayor. What does he think the mayor should do?
- Laurie Oates and Alison Fremont have alternative solutions. What are the solutions?
- Thornton Fennimore Singer writes his letter from a different angle. What is that angle? Do you think it is an effective angle? Will it work on the mayor?

Analyze the Tools Writers Use: State and Defend Your Position
Look at the letter written by Veronica Mandel and answer the following questions.
- What position does the writer take in her letter?
- What facts and examples does the writer give to support her position?
- What emotion words does the writer use to share her opinion?

Focus on Words: Emotion Words
Below are some strong emotion words from the “con” letters. Make a chart like the one below. Define each word and think about why the writers used them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Dictionary Definition</th>
<th>Why is it an effective word choice?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>disappoint</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>destroy</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>disgrace</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How does an author write a Persuasive Letter?

Reread the last letter and think about what Thorton Fennimore Singer did to write it. How did he state his position? How did he support it effectively?

1. **Choose a Problem to Write About**
Remember, the writer needs to state a position for or against something. Usually, the writer wants to talk about a problem that needs solving. For instance, Mr. Singer did not want the old oak tree to be destroyed. He had to prove that the tree has historical value.

2. **Identify Your Audience**
The audience is the group of people to whom you are writing—the ones you need to convince. Writers must present facts and reasons to persuade their audience. The writer of this letter was addressing all citizens of Oakdale (through the newspaper’s editor).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>The writer does not want the old oak tree cut down or a mall built on the park.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>citizens of Oakdale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Supporting Facts and Examples | • Oak trees are a symbol of strength and endurance.  
• An oak tree is the national tree of the U.S.  
• Arrowheads found in the park show it was once a Native American homeland.  
• History occurred there. Civil War soldiers from both sides passed through.  
• The park has existed since 1871; taking wedding photos in the park gazebo is an established tradition. |
| Solution | If you save the tree and park, you keep the town’s history alive. |

3. **Brainstorm Facts and Examples to Support Your Position**
Writers of persuasive letters support their position with:
- factual information (information that can be proven)
- concrete, real-world examples (things they have done, heard, or seen)

4. **Provide a Solution or Suggest an Action**
A writer may provide one or more solutions to a problem or present a specific call to action. In this letter, the president of the Oakdale Historical Society gave reasons why the old oak tree should not be cut down. The writer gave specific examples.
The Mayor of Oakdale wants a mall to be built on the Old Oak Park land. If that occurs, the town will lose its 300-year-old oak tree. The issue has spurred many people to write letters to the editor of the newspaper. Some are for building (pro), some against (con). Complete a graphic organizer like the one below to analyze perspectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Reasons For (Pro)</th>
<th>Reasons Against (Con)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence Freeman</td>
<td>new jobs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian Spencer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Taylor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Smith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Seymour Lansing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Cooper</td>
<td></td>
<td>park has and creates jobs for community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica Mandel</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Laurie Oates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alison Fremont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thornton Singer</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Analyze the Letters

- Lawrence Freeman and Justin Cooper are on opposing sides of the issue. Yet their letters discuss the same thing. How are their letters different? How are their letters similar?
- What conclusion can you draw about the pro and con reasons?
- What can happen that would make both sides happy?
Letters to the Editor: For and Against

Should Oakdale build a new mall on the town park that has a 300-year-old oak tree, or should the town save the park for future generations? Read the newspaper article that started the controversy. Then read letters to the editor for and against the new mall. Finally, learn how you can write a persuasive letter about something that is important to you.

Cynthia Swain lives in New York City with her family. Her twins attend middle school and love to read and write.