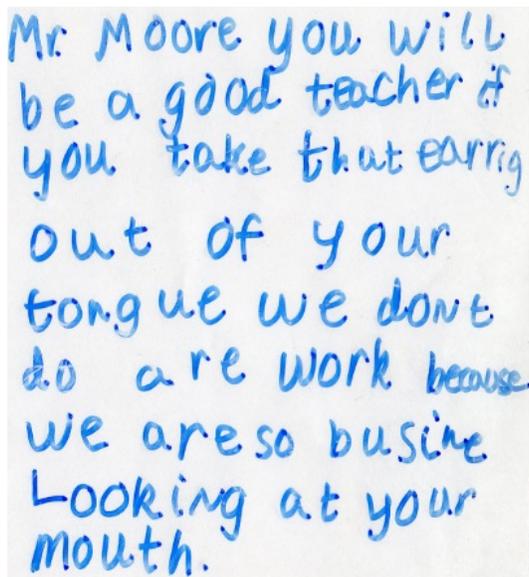


# The Power and Joy of Following the Opinion Writing Units Found in Being a Writer— Part One

By Kathy King-Dickman | Categories: Writing, From the Field

Children love to voice their opinions, and when taught how, will often share them in writing. Some will even share their written viewpoints with very little instruction or direction. The second-grade student who wrote the note shown below felt the need to offer his student teacher some advice on why he and his classmates worked harder for their usual teacher. This advice was not part of a structured assignment, but, rather, offered completely for free.



Mr. Moore you will  
be a good teacher if  
you take that earring  
out of your  
tongue we dont  
do are work because  
we are so busine  
Looking at your  
mouth.

(Translation: Mr. Moore, You will be a good teacher if you take that earring out of your tongue. We don't do our work because we are so busy looking at your mouth.)

The need to share opinions continues as children grow. My middle school classes often began with a student's complaint and my response to it put in writing:

"Mrs. D., it's not fair that we only have three minutes between passing periods!"

"I agree. Write a persuasive letter about that and you can send it to the school board."

"Mrs. D., it's not right that they called off our ball game so the high school could play."

"I agree. Why don't you write a letter to the athletic director about that?"

"Mrs. D., it's not fair that you let Emily turn in her assignment late and no one else."

"Oh Laura, you are so right! I think you have finally found your topic for your persuasive essay." (King-Dickman, 2010)

Donald Graves and Penny Kittle (2005) said that persuasive writing can "...convince the reader that he'd better get off his butt and get busy doing what the writer wants." I believe that to become responsible citizens who contribute positively to society, students need to be capable of arguing for causes that matter to them, both orally and in writing. These opinions will have a better chance of being truly heard by the intended audience if they are well written, supported by solid reasons, and armed with accurate evidence and research.

How do we teach students to write organized, reasoned arguments with sufficient supporting research? I know of no better way than following the Opinion Writing unit found in the Being a Writer program. Much learning about the opinion/argumentative genre, the writing process, and punctuation and grammar happens in this unit in order for a student to get to tell their reader to "get off their butt" and do what the student wants.

### **Unit Goals**

As with all of Collaborative Classroom's programs, each Being a Writer grade level contains clear and developmentally appropriate goals. In Kindergarten, the instruction begins the way units in all levels of Being a Writer begin—by hearing, exploring, and discussing anchor texts within the genre. Through these read-aloud sessions and discussions, these young writers learn what opinions are, learn to state their own clearly, and are encouraged to put them in letter format with reasons to support their thinking. Socially, they learn the important skill of respectfully listening to the opinions of others. This unit is smartly placed near the end of the year so that these students can use all that they have learned about letters and sounds during the year in order to share their views with the world.

By third grade, we see the letter format has grown to a true persuasive essay. Students hear and discuss many opinions, often written by other children. They brainstorm topics for strong opinions, learning to identify their purpose as well as identify their audience. In addition, they learn transition words to connect their arguments and study clear introductions and conclusions. This is all done while continuing to work on the social skill of receiving opinions different from their own in a respectful manner.

By sixth grade, the unit's name changes to "Argumentative Writing" as we see students learning to expand their opinions into argumentative essays where a claim is developed and supported with reasons and relevant evidence. Students learn many research skills such as evaluating the credibility of a source and taking notes. They use this research to back their opinions with evidence. Additionally, they learn to address counter claims, write in a formal style, and properly use direct quotes and paraphrasing.

In all grade levels and units of Being a Writer, students generate topics and write several rough drafts, choosing one piece to take to publication. They learn revision and proofreading skills along the way with the intent to make their meaning clear to their intended audience.

As I am reading these unit goals, I am wondering how much better that young student's persuasive note to his student teacher might have been had he benefitted from the Being a Writer Opinion units from kindergarten to second grade. Maybe he would have actually convinced Mr. Moore to take that earring out of his tongue!

In Part Two of this blog, I will explore various activities found in the Being a Writer Opinion Writing units from kindergarten to sixth grade.

### **References**

King-Dickman. (2010) *Writing that Changes the World: Persuasive Essays in Fourth Through Twelfth Grade* "The California Reader", Volume 44, Number 2, pp. 27-33.

Graves, D. & Kittle, P. (2005) *Inside writing: how to teach the details of craft*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

