

Literature/Writing Connection: *Dear Mr. Blueberry*

LESSON FOCUS: VOICE

Lesson Objective

Students revise their persuasive letters, focusing on revision for the writing trait voice.

Revising Persuasive Letters for Voice

Letter writing is an accessible vehicle for instructing early writers on the craft of persuasive writing. Letters help establish a clear audience who the writer wants to call to action. The early writer is able to tailor his or her opinion and supporting reasons specifically to that intended audience.

Persuasive letters can also be effective tools for teaching the trait of voice. Persuasion is something with which most students should be familiar: trying to coax someone to do something. Voice is an integral part of whether a piece of writing is truly persuasive.

The book *Dear Mr. Blueberry* by Simon James is an excellent mentor text for highlighting effective voice in persuasive writing. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your writing instruction as a part of revising persuasive writing for voice.

Story Overview

Emily discovers a whale living in her pond during the summer break. Knowing very little about whales, she begins writing to her teacher, Mr. Blueberry. Mr. Blueberry is happy to tell her all he knows about whales—but he must inform her that it is not possible for a whale to live in fresh water. She must be mistaken.

But Emily knows what she sees. And what she sees is a whale living in her pond!

A Politely Serious Voice

1. When your students come to the revising stage of the writing process, have your class put their persuasive letters to the side. They will begin their revisions after a discussion of the writing trait voice.
2. Define voice as the way a piece of writing sounds. If ideas are what you say, then voice is the way you say it. A strong writing voice sounds confident and knowledgeable about the subject. Specific to persuasive writing, a strong writing voice is serious about the opinion and polite in its delivery. Ineffective persuasive voice, therefore, might be inappropriately humorous or rude.
3. Read the book *Dear Mr. Blueberry* to the class. Afterward, discuss the use of persuasive voice in Mr. Blueberry's letters to Emily. Does he sound knowledgeable about whales? Does he sound serious as he tries to persuade Emily that there can't be a whale in her pond? Is he polite? Does it matter that Emily is not persuaded?
4. Ask your students to compare Mr. Blueberry's voice to the following: "Dear Emily, I think you're crazy. You say that you have a whale in your pond, but come on! Whales can only live in salt water, not fresh water. I'm afraid you must be mistaken."
5. The voice in this version is neither polite ("I think you're crazy") nor serious ("come on").
6. Ask students to retrieve their own persuasive letters and trade with a partner. Read the drafts aloud. Do they hear a voice like Mr. Blueberry's? Are there instances when the voice is not serious or polite? If so, have students revise their writing by changing or cutting words as needed to improve the letter's voice.