

## TRAIT FOCUS: IDEAS

## Lesson Objective

Students brainstorm and freewrite on topics for a problem-solution persuasive essay.

## Taking the Time to Prewrite

As is often the case, many student writers tend to jump right in to a writing assignment without the proper planning and forethought. Either they are overeager to put pen to paper and don't properly lay out their ideas, or they simply do not take the time to prewrite so that they have the strongest essay possible. Ultimately, students should be reminded to avoid writing without fully understanding their topics.

Incorporating literature lessons into your writing instruction is one useful way of exposing student writers not only to model texts but also to show them different strategies for tackling a writing project. Some may want to emulate their favorite writers. Some may be inspired to experiment completely on their own. Either way, the literature will motivate your writers to take time to reflect on their own work rather than jumping right in with little thought for prewriting and planning.

The essay "A Modest Proposal" by Jonathan Swift is an excellent mentor text with a quite interesting problem-solution model. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your writing curriculum as a way of developing student ideas for a persuasive essay.

## Story Overview

Published in 1729 during a time of English control and extreme poverty in Ireland, Swift's satirical essay seemingly offers a solution both to the poor and the hungry—eat the children. He goes on to describe how the starving children can be converted into something that truly benefits society. The problem thereby becomes its own solution. He even goes so far as to offer recipe ideas.

## A Not-So Modest Proposal

1. Incorporate the following exercise into your prewriting curriculum for persuasive essays. Begin by explaining that one type of persuasive writing is the problem-solution essay. In this type of essay, the writer starts by clearly stating what the problem is. He or she then gives a well-researched and well-thought-out solution to the problem.
2. Write the following sentence stem on the board or overhead: "The problem with the world today is..." Have your students complete the sentence three or four times with different topic possibilities. Once complete, have them put their ideas aside for later in the lesson.
3. Preface the reading by telling your students that the effectiveness of a persuasive essay hinges on having a convincing solution. With this in mind, read and discuss Swift's proposal. What is the problem? (poverty in Ireland) What is his solution? (selling the poor children for food)
4. Be sure to also discuss Swift's use of irony in the piece. How does the title play into the use of irony? (the proposal is not modest at all) Why does he not expect the reader to follow through with his solution? (no one would really eat children) What do you think is Swift's real proposal? (society or government help the poor)
5. Revisit the problem ideas from Step #2. Have your students complete their ideas with the following sentence stem: "And the solution is..."
6. Give your students time to complete the exercise of writing out problems and solutions. They may also benefit from some freewriting time to explore a topic further. If a writer wishes to go the "Swift route" and employ irony, let them, but only if they feel confident in their own ability to sustain the irony throughout the entire essay.