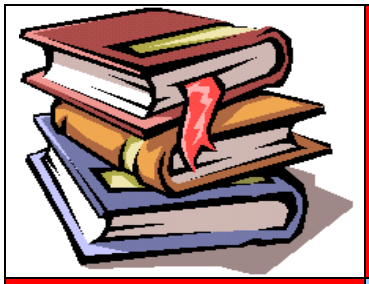

Literacy Links

November 2011
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Monthly E-Newsletter of
Maine Department of Education

Words—so innocent and powerless as they are, standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them.

~Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for writing include three distinct types of writing. This month, writing an argument is the focus of examination. The other two types of writing, explanatory and narrative, will be explored in the coming months.

Spotlight on…

Argument Writing in the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards place a great deal of emphasis on developing the ability to construct a well-supported argument (Writing Standard #1). The CCSS define argument as, "a reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer's position, belief, or conclusion is valid." (CCSS, 2010). Further, the CCSS assert that, "arguments are used for many purposes—to change the reader's point of view, to bring about some action on the reader's part, or to ask the reader to accept the writer's explanation or evaluation of a concept, issue, or problem" (CCSS, 2010). In the K-5 grade span, argument is introduced as opinion writing, in which the goal by grade 5 is that students can write opinion pieces on **topics** or **texts**, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. They should be able to:

a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which *ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.*

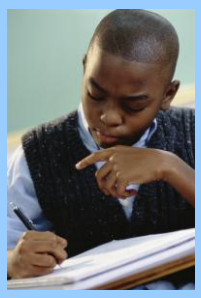
b. Provide *logically ordered* reasons that are supported by facts and details.

c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).

d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

Beginning in 6th grade, the focus of the standards shifts to students learning to write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. The progression of standards for writing arguments

across the K-12 span can be found at the following link: **http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/ela/documents/ELA_Break-Down/ccss-writing_811.pdf**.



Why is learning to write a well-supported argument critical? The ability to craft an evidence-based argument is a necessary skill for not only post-secondary study and careers, but also for everyday life. The Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates of the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California (2002) conducted a survey of writing skills highly valued by postsecondary educators and found that among the most important skills expected of incoming students were, "articulating a clear thesis; identifying, evaluating, and using evidence to support or challenge the thesis; and considering and incorporating counterarguments into their writing." Fulkerson (1996) asserts that crafting an argument leads to making decisions supported by evidence, as well as to being able to understand both sides of an issue before making decisions. These skills are particularly necessary for navigating the information-rich environment of the 21st Century (CCSS, 2010). To hear more about the focus on argument in the CCSS, listen to the two primary authors of the CCSS for ELA, David Coleman and Sue Pimentel, discuss this topic at the following link: **http://www.youtube.com/user/TheHuntInstitute#p/u/6/Jt_2jI010WU**.

Many educators ask, "Is writing an argument the same as persuasive writing?" According to the CCSS, they are not one in the same. Persuasive writing relies on the use of strategies that appeal to the audience's interests or emotions, or to the credibility of the writer, to sway their thinking. A logical argument, utilizes the reasonableness of the claim and the evidence to convince the audience of the position. Persuasive techniques may be part of constructing a logical argument, but a logical argument can not rely solely on persuasive techniques (see CCSS Appendix A).

The act of putting pen to paper encourages pause for thought, this in turn makes us think more deeply about life, which helps us regain our equilibrium.

~Norbet Platt

So what do teachers need to keep in mind when helping children learn how to craft arguments? Karen Caine (2008) advocates that the writer must have an *opinion* or position on the topic or issue and must also support this opinion with *evidence*. She also suggests that crafting an effective argument requires a convincing, intentional voice. Caine (2008) offers some guidance for helping students learn to develop written arguments:

- Help students choose topics carefully. The topics they write arguments about need to be topics they value and in which they are invested. Further, the topics students select should be arguable—have two opposing sides. It is also helpful if the topics are relevant and contemporary—does the topic matter to people right now?

- Help students research topic ideas so that they can narrow and focus their thesis or claim so that it is specific. This makes the topic manageable to defend and enables writers to gather pertinent evidence.

- Help students know their audience. Knowing the audience allows the writer to develop and organize the argument in a convincing way, as well as select a voice and tone for the argument that is appropriate for the audience. Writing an argument to convince a

peer could have an informal tone, rather than a formal tone required for an instructor or public audience. Additionally, the writer should consider how their audience will respond to the evidence and examples they use to support their claim.

- Help students research wisely. Arguments should be supported by credible, not inaccurate, information.

- Explicitly teach academic vocabulary associated with writing arguments, such as *claim*, *logos*, *kairos*, *evidence*, and *thesis*.

- Explicitly teach different formats for presenting arguments, such as book reviews, editorials, speeches, argumentative essays, letters, and petitions.

- Explicitly teach students skills and writing techniques that support the development of arguments. Examples of these skills/techniques include:

    - point of view
    - cause and effect
    - counterargument (opposing viewpoint)
    - writing a thesis statement or claim
    - crafting and selecting evidence-based reasons
    - using precise vocabulary
    - developing voice
    - using positive, negative, and neutral language
    - formal vs. informal language
    - using rhetorical questions
    - effective leads
    - smooth transitions
    - persuasive strategies

"I am heard when I write; I vote in the human community, registering my opinions, what I stand for, what I fear, what I stand against, and what I celebrate."

~Donald Murray

Check out the instructional ideas and texts suggested below for more resources related to crafting well- supported arguments.

Online Instructional Resources…

The online links listed below offer resources related to writing arguments.

Read-Write-Think

This website, sponsored by the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and Verizon, houses a number of instructional resources related to argument writing. Several to check out include:

Persuasive Writing Strategy Guide—A Collection of Resources for Writing Persuasive Arguments
http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/persuasive-writing-30142.html

An education isn't how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know. It's being able to differentiate between what you know and what you don't.

~Anatole France

UPCOMING EVENTS

USM Professional Development Center

Fall 2011 Courses and Workshops

www.usm.maine.edu/pdc

Book Review Resources
http://www.readwritethink.org/search/?sort_order=relevance&q=Book+Reviews&old_q=&srchgo.x=20&srchgo.y=5

Argument Writing Lesson Resources
http://www.readwritethink.org/search/partner.html?sort_order=relevance&q=Writing+Arguments&old_q=Book+Reviews&srchwhere=full-site&srchgo.x=22&srchgo.y=13

Opinion Paragraph Tutorial

This resource is a slideshow about writing an opinion paragraph. It offers students a description of the typical components of an opinion paragraph, as well as an example of how to construct an opinion paragraph.

http://www.slideshare.net/warisa/writing-an-opinion-paragraph-1871051

Instructional Idea….

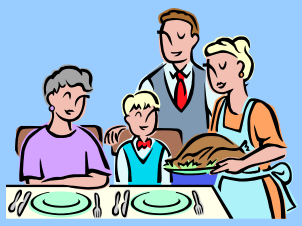
Counterarguments
(Caine, 2008)

In Writing to Persuade (2008), Karen Caine states "When writing persuasively, an author sometimes chooses to present the other side of the argument to tell why it's wrong. This is called counterargument. It's as if the author is saying, now some people think this, but let me tell you why that is wrong. Authors include counterarguments to show they have considered the opposing view." Caine suggests a good mentor text for teaching counterargument is The Cat in the Hat. Most students are familiar with this story, and can easily identify the arguments presented by both the cat and the fish. Have students create a 2-column chart to record the cat's argument and the fish's argument about why the children should or should not have company when their parents are not home. Have them work to identify ways in which both the cat and the fish could improve their counterarguments?

Caine also suggests it is helpful for students to know to know three things about the use of counterarguments in writing:

1. How to turn against your own argument for a short time using language like….
   It might seem that….
   Some might think….
   Of course….
   But what about….

2. How to tell why the counterargument is wrong using language like…
   But….
   Yet….
   However….



4th Annual Literacy Connections Conference

Children Succeed When Parents Succeed

Thursday, March 29, 2012
8:30-3:30
Thomas College

More Info:
www.mainefamilyliteracy.com

3. Where to place your counterargument in your writing.

Summary of Professional Texts…

The following texts offer resources to support argument writing

Writing to Persuade: Minilessons to Help Students Plan, Draft, and Revise by Karen Caine (Heinemann, 2008, ISBN #: 978-0-325-01734-1).

Karen Caine presents an easy to understand guide to teaching students how to write persuasive arguments. The CCSS Writing standards call for students to learn how to write persuasive pieces leading up to constructing convincing arguments. Caine's text offers a wealth of, including real world examples and explicit lessons.

A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K-2 by Sarah Picard Taylor (Heinemann, 2008, ISBN # 978-0325025971).

"Children have voices that need to be heard and ideas that need to be understood. Helping children form and share their opinions with evidence begins in the primary grades. Building on this premise Sarah describes why you should try a persuasive writing unit of study, describes two units of study for the primary classroom(one on persuasive letter writing and one on writing book reviews), and lists tips and ideas for helping students get their persuasive writing out into the world" (Amazon Review).

Children's Literature…

Mentor texts for opinion writing

Earrings!

By Judith Viorst

(Alladin Paperbacks, 1990, ISBN # 0-689-71669-9)

In this engaging tale, the main character presents a persuasive argument about why she should be allowed to get her ears pierced. Girls *and* boys will easily relate to this example of a child presenting an argument to a parent.

ASCD Spring Conference

Save the Date
April 30, 2012

Karen Caine
Persuasive Writing

University of Maine

Notebook Savvy: Taking a Close Look Inside the Reading and Writing Notebooks

Presented by
Aimee Buckner
The Lovett School, Atlanta, GA

May 10, 2012, 9:00-3:00 p.m.

Wells Conference Center
University of Maine, Orono

Contact:
Amy_Cates@umit.maine.edu

I Wanna Iguanna

By Karen Kauffman Orloff

(Putnam, 2004, ISBN # 978-0399237171)

This funny story is told through an amusing exchange of notes, as Alex tries to convince his seemingly unshakable mother that he should be allowed to adopt a friend's baby iguana. (School Library Journal Review).

Karen Kauffman Orloff also presents a persuasive argument in her sequel text, I Wanna New Room.

Content Area Strategy…

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers can be a useful tool for both improving reading comprehension of content material and for planning writing about that content. Graphic organizers are visual displays of information that help learners extend their understanding of concepts and see the relationship between concepts.

When used to support reading comprehension, graphic organizers can help scaffold students as they read, prompting them to read carefully for information or to reread to clarify understanding (Alvermann & Boothby, 1982). Students can also return to completed graphic organizers to review information they have read previously.

As a writing tool, graphic organizers can assist students in collecting ideas to include in their writing. They can also help writers organize their ideas in advance of writing.

Many forms of graphic organizers exist. Some of the most common include webs, concept maps, flow or tree diagrams, matrices, and story grammar maps. A wide array of concept organizers that can be adapted for use with content area reading and writing can be found at: http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/.

Fisher and Frey (2008) offer some suggestions for teaching the use of graphic organizers:

- Set the purpose for using the graphic organizer in advance.
- Connect the type of graphic organizer to the structure of the text or the characteristics of the task for which it is being used.
- Model how to use the graphic organizer with familiar texts.
- Introduce and practice one type of organizer at a time, building to a point at which students have an array from which they can select to match their needs or design their own organizers.

SNEAK PREVIEW

IN 2011-12 Literacy Links—

WRITNG

Online Literacy Modules

Comprehension Intervention

News from Maine's English Language Arts Team…

English Language Arts Webinar Series 2011-12

The Maine Department of Education's ELA Division is sponsoring a series of webinars during the 2011-12 school year focusing on a variety of aspects of the CCSS for ELA. The following is a list of the topics and dates announced so far:

Date	Topic
January 11	Literacy Modules for K-5
January 25	Common Core State Standards for Writing, Grades 6-12
February	Student Constructed Response data and instructional implications
March	Speaking and Listening
April/May	Taking Stock; finding and filling the holes in curriculum and instruction
Summer 2012	Summer Institute – Implementing the Common Core State Standards

For more information about these webinars, go to: http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/ela/online_pd.html.

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We still want your suggestions! As you peruse the monthly editions of *Literacy Links*, you might have topic ideas for the spotlight, instructional strategy, children's literature, professional text, or web site resource sections. We'd love to hear your suggestions. Please email them to: Leeann.Larsen@maine.gov.

For additional information about any of the items in this newsletter or to sign up to receive this e-newsletter, please email Leeann.Larsen@maine.gov

Click here to view back editions of *Literacy Links*
http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/newsletters/index.html

The professional development opportunities and materials are listed in *Literacy Links* for informational purposes only and are not necessarily endorsed by the Maine Department of Education.