

Brainstorm Controversial Topics

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Use controversial topics learned in science and social studies to brainstorm ideas for a persuasive essay.
- Work with partners to brainstorm ideas.
- Contribute to a class list of topic ideas for persuasive essays.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Writer’s notebooks
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.



1. Focus

Explain the Brainstorming Process

Say: *Brainstorming is a way to help us remember and think about ideas. When we brainstorm for a persuasive essay, we can think back to issues we’ve studied that are important and a source of discussion among people. Often these issues are controversial, because people feel so strongly about them. These are the ideas best suited for a persuasive essay. Let me show you how I use brainstorming to discover ideas for writing.*

Model Brainstorming Controversial Topics

Use the sample think-aloud to help you develop your own brainstorming models to share with students. Demonstrate how to record ideas using chart paper or the interactive whiteboard resources as you model brainstorming.

Sample think-aloud. Say: *Many of the concepts I studied in the past have helped me decide how I feel about important issues. Thinking about what I’ve studied about nutrition and lifestyle, I have an interest in whether fast food has to be bad for kids and adults. I think I could develop an argument that food can be fast but also healthy. I’ll add this idea to the chart. When I learned about genetic stem cell research, I realized that it’s an issue with many facets—medical, legal, economic, and for many people it’s also a moral issue. I’d like to write a persuasive essay on it because it’s something I feel strongly about. Something else I remember studying is how people’s thoughtless destruction of Earth’s native forests is affecting our environment. People are divided about how damaging its effects really are. I also remember learning in my history classes about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. That was a controversial issue in the 1940s, and many people think it has many implications for today. Should the personal freedoms of law-abiding citizens become less important during a time of war? I like all these ideas. I think they’d work well for a persuasive essay.*

Persuasive Essay Ideas

fast food and health
genetic stem cell research
destruction of native forests
internment of Japanese Americans during WW II

Sample Brainstorming List



2. Rehearse

Practice Brainstorming Controversial Topics

Invite students to work with partners to brainstorm issues from current or past studies that they have an opinion about. Remind students to record their ideas in their writer’s notebooks. Students could use the following questions to stimulate discussion:

- *What is a controversial topic that I learned about in science?*
- *What controversial topics have I learned about in social studies?*
- *Do I have an opinion on the topic?*

If your class includes English learners or other students who need more support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students together and ask them to share an idea they brainstormed based on problems and issues they’ve studied in science or social studies. Record their ideas on the brainstorming list you started earlier. Invite students to share why they believe an idea would or would not make a good topic for a persuasive essay.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Invite beginning ELs to use words and gestures to tell you about issues that concern them. Alternatively, students could draw about an issue. Write the key words they need to talk about their ideas on self-stick notes. Help them use the words in simple sentences as they share.

Intermediate and Advanced

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners about their topic for a persuasive essay. For example:

An issue I learned about is _____.
I feel strongly about _____.
I think _____.
We should _____.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: **controversial/controvertido(a); persuasive essay/el ensayo persuasivo.**



3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We’ve learned how to use the things we’ve studied to discover ideas for writing a persuasive essay. As you brainstorm topics on your own, think of what you’ve learned about our world—the issues we have faced in the past and those we face today. Think about how you feel about these issues.

Encourage students to think about issues they’ve read about in science and social studies as they brainstorm during independent writing. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.



4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share an issue they feel strongly about and explain why.