



## Understanding Persuasive Writing

This activity introduces your students to the concept of **civic engagement** and **direct action** through the use of **persuasive writing** techniques.

According to a 2021 NextGen Climate Survey, more than 80% of Gen Z youth are concerned about the health of the planet. By providing them with tools to take direct action, teachers can provide their students with a sense of **agency** and **optimism**, and equip them with **skills** they'll need to engage meaningfully (and eloquently!) in public life.

Following the activity, we recommend checking out another one of our activities centred around persuasive writing: Writing Persuasively About Climate Change.

### Preparation

Get students thinking about persuasive writing before they receive the hand-out. One way to do this is to write 'What makes an argument persuasive?' on the board. Before distributing the activity sheet, students can either 'Think, Pair, Share' with their neighbours or add their own thoughts to the board or their notebooks.

Next, introduce the activity's learning objective: 'Understand and apply techniques to persuade a reader.' Once students have received the hand-out, we recommend taking a moment to discuss the importance of civic engagement and how it can help to shape a country's politics.

### Instructions - Part 1

Students can complete the first part of the activity independently or in pairs. To activate their critical thinking, you could take some time discuss the concept of 'credible evidence' – what makes evidence credible (e.g. trusted institutions, experienced individuals, lack of bias or ulterior motive) versus unreliable (inexperience, lack of expertise, vested interests, profit-motives etc.)?

### Answer Key:

C – *credible evidence to support your arguments.*

D – *a call to action*

A – *a clear contention*

B – *appeal to both reason and emotion*



## Instructions - Part 2

In this part of the activity, students have an opportunity to study concrete examples of persuasive language.

Students are provided with four extracts taken from memorable speeches delivered by climate activists and environmentalists to audiences of world leaders (and in the case of Text D, to graduates at a university commencement address). Their task is to identify and label the persuasive techniques that the authors of these speeches have used in each underlined segment.

For guidance, they can refer to the terms provided in the handout (labelled 'Appeals to Emotion' and 'Other Persuasive Techniques').

Students can work individually, in pairs, or in groups to identify the techniques used in either one or all of the extracts.

Students should not be expected to list every possible persuasive technique used, but should be encouraged to identify as many as they can for each underlined segment. A space between two underlined segments indicates those segments should be considered separately. When reviewing their responses, emphasize the overall serious, passionate, yet reasonable tones of the extracts. Students should be aware that overly fiery or vitriolic writing can detract from their credibility and alienate the reader.

## Answer Key

### Text A: Hilda Flavia Nakabuye

Speaking at the C40 Mayors Summit in Copenhagen 2019

I am a victim of this climate crisis (*appeal to humanity*) and I am not ashamed to say so. After the massive effects of climate change in my home village — the heavy strong rains that washed away our crops and left the land bare, the constant dry spells that left the streams and wells dry — my parents had to sell off our land and livestock to sustain our lives (*anecdote/ listing/ appeal to humanity*). And when the money was over, it was a question of survival... I will not take this for granted. I made a decision to protect the only place I call home: Earth. And so I joined other young people all over the globe to protect our future... Because this our future (*inclusive language*).

You too can make a decision now. If you are willing to. (*direct address/ appeal to guilt & shame/ sense of urgency through 'now'/ compelling close*)

**Text B: Leonardo DiCaprio**

Addressing world leaders at the United Nations Climate Summit, 2014

Think about the shame that each of us will carry when our children and grandchildren look back and realise that we had the means of stopping this devastation, but simply lacked the political will to do so (*appeal to guilt & shame*).

We all know that the reversing the course of climate change will not be easy, but the tools are in our hands, IF we apply them before it is too late (*sense of urgency*). Renewable energy and putting a price on carbon pollution are beginning to turn the tide. This transition is not only the right thing for our world, but it also makes clear economic sense (*appeal to hip pocket nerve/ reason & logic/ self-interest/ sensible, factual tone*), and it is possible within our lifetime. My friends (*inclusive language*), look at the delegates around you. It is time to ask each other, which side of history will you be on? (*appeal to guilt & shame/ appeal to vanity & pride*).

After 21 years of debates and conferences, it is time to declare: no more talk, no more excuses, no more 10 year studies, no more allowing the fossil fuel companies to manipulate and dictate the science and policies that affect our future (*repetition/ listing/ sense of urgency/ appeal to guilt & shame/ inclusive language*). All of you, sitting in this very hall, the world is now watching (*vanity & pride/ fear/ self-interest/ compelling close*).

**Text C: Greta Thunberg**

Addressing the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, 2019

Our house is on fire. I am here to say, our house is on fire. (*analogy/ sense of urgency/ inclusive language*)

According to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), we are less than 12 years away from not being able to undo our mistakes. (*expert evidence/ sense of urgency/ fear/ inclusive language/ sensible, factual tone*) In that time, unprecedented changes in all aspects of society need to have taken place, including a reduction of our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by at least 50%.

Yes, we are failing, but there is still time to turn everything around. We can still fix this. We still have everything in our own hands (*inclusive language*). But unless we recognise the overall failures of our current systems, we most probably don't stand a chance.

Solving the climate crisis is the greatest and most complex challenge that *Homo sapiens* have ever faced. The main solution, however, is so simple that even a small child can understand it. We have to stop our emissions of greenhouse gases. Either we do that or we don't. (*reason and logic/ offering a viable solution/ vanity & pride – 'even a small child can understand it'*)

You say nothing in life is black or white. But that is a lie. A very dangerous lie. Either we prevent 1.5C of warming or we don't. Either we avoid setting off that irreversible chain reaction beyond human control or we don't. (*acknowledgement & refutation of counter-claims/ listing/ repetition/ reason & logic/ inclusive language/ appeal to fear*) That is as black or white as it gets. There are no grey areas when it comes to survival. (*analogy/ appeal to fear/ reason & logic/ refutation of counter-claims/ sensible, factual tone*)

**Text D: Paul Hawken**

Commencement address at the University of Portland, 2009

We have an economy that tells us that it is cheaper to destroy earth in real time rather than renew, restore, and sustain it. You can print money to bail out a bank but you can't print life to bail out a planet. (*analogy, direct address*) At present we are stealing the future, selling it in the present, and calling it gross domestic product (*analogy/ inclusive language/ appeal to shame & guilt*).

We can just as easily have an economy that is based on healing the future instead of stealing it. We can either create assets for the future or take the assets of the future (*sensible, factual tone/ inclusive language*). One is called restoration and the other exploitation. And whenever we exploit the earth, we exploit people and cause untold suffering (*appeal to guilt & shame/ inclusive language*). Working for the earth is not a way to get rich; it is a way to be rich. (*compelling close. Note: Not an appeal to the 'hip pocket nerve' – here, emphasis is on the metaphorical meaning of being 'rich' – an enriched life etc.*)

We welcome feedback and would be delighted to hear your thoughts on this activity. Feel free to send an email to [schools@climatescience.org](mailto:schools@climatescience.org) and we'll be sure to get back to you soon :)

