



Throughout the curriculum – and, indeed, throughout their lives – children will encounter issues on which there is more than one viewpoint, often fiercely-held opinions. They need help to avoid making rapid, uninformed judgments, and techniques for reaching a balanced assessment of the matter in hand.

Controversies may arise, for instance, in

- **PSHE**, e.g. bullying, smoking
- **history**, e.g. historical attitudes to race, gender, children, class, colonialism
- **geography**, e.g. pollution, effects of development
- **science**, e.g. space exploration, diet.

Controversy also regularly raises its head during the reading of fiction, e.g. children's opinions on an issue may be affected by the viewpoint of a particular character.

One way of helping children to see more than one point of view is to compile a for-and-against grid during class discussion. Apart from the valuable intellectual exercise of listing points on both sides of an argument, this also provides a reason for pupils to express their arguments as succinctly as possible – to be condensed into intelligible notes for the grid.

By the upper primary years, pupils should be introduced to

**discussion text** – the writing of a balanced argument. A completed for-and-against 'skeleton' can be used to bring issues from any area of the curriculum to the Literacy Hour, where teaching can focus on text organisation and language features.

Of course, discussion is not limited to controversial issues – although polarised views make it easier to teach. For example, critical evaluative responses to a text may lead to a discussion of subtleties within it.

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*As pupils become more adept at arguing a point, controversial issues can occasionally be used as the focus of a formal debate.*

## Find out more about discussion



Further case studies (Y1-Y6) can be found on the NLS website:

[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy)

See also pages 154-155, *Grammar for writing* and *Developing early writing*.

As part of their studies in Art, a Year 6 class visit a local gallery.

1

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Some pupils dislike the non-representational paintings, such as Bojewyan Farms.

2

During class discussion, they compile a for-and-against discussion 'skeleton'.

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In the Literacy Hour, the class studies samples of discussion text, with particular attention to

- organisation of paragraphs
- language features, especially 'balancing connectives' (e.g. *however*) and impersonal and formal language constructions.

In shared writing, the teacher uses another discussion topic to model

- writing an introductory paragraph
- expanding skeleton notes into a section of text
- writing a concluding paragraph.

# 4

Pupils then use their notes to complete their own writing on Bojewyan Farms .

## Is Bojewan Farms A Good Painting?

We saw Bojewan Farms at the Tate in St.Ives. It is a painting by Peter Lanyon, made in 1951-2. Some people in our class liked it very much but others hated it.

The ones who didn't like Bojewan Farms claimed that it didn't look like a farm, just like a mix-up of colours and shapes. They thought a landscape painting should look like the real place. The people who supported it pointed out that it is painting, not a photograph. The artist was using paint to put across an atmosphere and to show his feeling for the place. If you just want to know what somewhere looks like, you can take a photograph.

People also disagreed about the colours. Some people thought they were boring, sludgy and ugly. However,

other people said that the mixture of greeny-browns and blacks made them think about the land and the hard work and strength that went into farming. They pointed out some spots of contrasting colours (blue, red, gold and white). These break up the darkness, like the sea, flowers, corn and snow.

The ones who did not like Bojewan Farms thought it was confusing. The shapes were all mixed up and some bite were not finished off properly. They thought it looked like a baby had done it. On the other hand, those in favour said that the mixture of shapes gave an impression of animals, land, perhaps sea, machinery and people. You could look at it and see different things at different times. Probably different people would see it in their own way.

Having considered all the arguments, I think Bojewan Farms is a good painting. It gives you a strong feeling of the place and it makes you think.

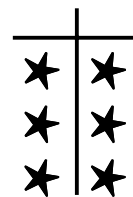
# 5

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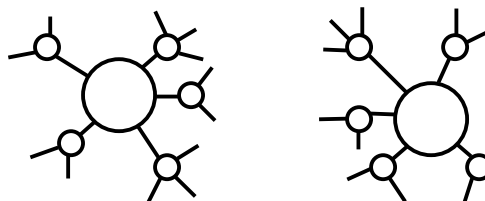
The children and teacher then review a finished piece and discuss how they could further improve the writing.

## Making notes for discussion writing

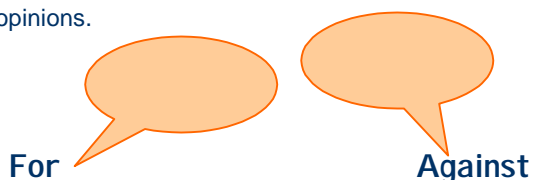
A **for-and-against grid** gives a clear indication of the balanced structure of discussion text, and is suitable for arguments where one point is countered by another.



A **double spidergram** can be used for brainstorming points (and, if necessary, elaboration) for two contradictory opinions or outcomes.



**For-and-against speech bubbles** can be used to collect and display opinions.



## PLANNING PROGRESSION in writing discussion text

There are no specific discussion writing objectives before Year 6. However, the writing of persuasion text (see Flier 5) prepares children to argue a particular point of view, and teachers can take the opportunity to help them see – and argue – both sides of contentious arguments.

### Year 4 Term 3 T21-23

**Objective:** Assemble and sequence points to plan the presentation of a point of view, using writing frames if necessary to present it in writing.

*Example*

**Shared writing:** Teacher demonstrates how to create skeleton notes for a letter to the press putting forward a point of view on an issue. (If possible, choose an issue on which there are two clear perspectives.)

**Individual/guided work:** Pupils choose issues on which to assemble information and create notes; use these to write letters to the press (if necessary using writing frame based on teacher's model).

### Year 5 Term 3 T17-19

**Objective:** Draft and write letters expressing a point of view for real purposes; write a commentary on an issue, setting out and justifying a personal viewpoint; construct an argument to persuade others, present and evaluate it.

*Example*

**Shared work:** Teacher demonstrates how to create skeleton notes on an issue and use to write a leaflet justifying viewpoint, a letter to a relevant agency, and a persuasive speech.

**Individual/guided work:** Pupils choose issues to research and write about in the same way. Where possible, two pupils may purpose conflicting viewpoints on the same issue (e.g. fox hunting, boxing, mobile phones).

### Year 6 Term 2 T15

**Objective:** To construct and write effective arguments.

*Example*

**Shared work:** Teacher demonstrates how to create skeleton notes on an issue and use to create a newspaper/magazine article.

**Individual/guided work:** Pupils choose issues about which to create notes and write similar articles.

### Year 6 Term 2 T19

**Objective:** To write a balanced report of a controversial issue.

*Example*

**Shared work:** Teacher demonstrates how to create skeleton notes on an issue and use to create an information leaflet.

**Individual/guided work:** Pupils plan, draft and write similar leaflets on another controversial issue.

### Year 6 Term 3 T22




**Objective:** Select appropriate style and form to suit a specific purpose.

*Example*

**Shared work:** Teacher (1) models how to select appropriate non-fiction text type for a piece of writing; (2) revises how to plan and write that text type, depending upon purpose and audience.

**Individual/guided work:** Pupils, given audience and purpose, select style and form for a range of pieces of writing, and plan and write one piece.

#### NLS Non-Fiction Fliers

-  5: Recount
-  6: Instructions
-  7: Non-chronological report
-  8: Explanation
-  9: Persuasion
-  10: Discussion

#### National Curriculum and NLS Objectives

The NLS objectives link with and support work in the rest of the curriculum in several ways. We can:

- Bring content knowledge and reading/writing activities from the curriculum into the Literacy Hour. Work in the Literacy Hour is then linked to real purposes for reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- Teach language and literacy in both the Literacy Hour and other subjects, weaving the work in subjects and the Literacy Hour explicitly together.
- Apply and practise the skills learned in the literacy hour in new contexts in the rest of the curriculum.
- Use language work done in other subjects to access children's English abilities.

#### Linking QCA Units of Work and NLS Writing Objectives

In order to help with planning, links have been mapped between NLS objectives and existing writing activities within QCA schemes of work for history, geography, science, religious education and design and technology.

Visit the QCA website:



[www.qca.org.uk/ca/subjects/english/literacy](http://www.qca.org.uk/ca/subjects/english/literacy)

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