



## **ePals Opinion Writing Mini-Lessons:**

### ***Sharing Your Opinion About a Book***

Move students beyond writing bland book reports into composing convincing, dynamic opinion pieces!

***Mini-Lesson 1: What is an Opinion?***

***Mini-Lesson 2: Forming an Opinion about a Book***

***Mini-Lesson 3: Writing a Clear and Convincing Opinion Statement***

***Mini-Lesson 4: Supporting an Opinion with Reasons***

***Mini-Lesson 5: Supporting Your Opinion with Evidence from the Text***

***Mini-Lesson 6: Writing an Effective Conclusion***

# Mini-Lesson 1: What Is An Opinion?



## Step One → Teach: *“I want to show you...”*

Begin by asking students what the difference is between a fact and an opinion. Build on their current knowledge, and correct any misconceptions as you give students information on how to differentiate an opinion from a fact.

**Recognizing an Opinion:** If a statement uses words such as always, never, should, all, none, most, least, greatest, best, and worst – then it most likely is an opinion because it represents someone’s personal feelings. An opinion is a view or judgment formed about something, which may be based on fact or knowledge.

**Recognizing a Fact:** A fact can be checked and proven to be true. No matter who says it, it’s true!

## Step Two → Model: *“Watch How I...”*

To model the learning activity, cut a picture out of a magazine and demonstrate composing 3 facts about the picture and 3 opinions about it. As you are writing your facts and opinions, think aloud about what distinguishes each as a fact and opinion. Start opinion sentences with phrases such as: **I think /I don't think, I believe (that) /I don't believe (that), In my opinion, I feel that /I don't feel that.**

## Step Three → Try: *“I invite you to...”*

Ask students to choose their own pictures to write about. Instruct them to write at least 3 facts about the picture and 3 opinions about it. After students complete their writing, ask them to pair up to exchange lists and check each others’ facts and opinions.

## Step Four → Connect and Conclude *“Now you know...”*

Wrap up by allowing students to share any insights, questions or concerns that came up in writing or sharing their work. Ask students to share in their own words how they would differentiate a statement as fact or opinion.

*In this mini-lesson students learn to distinguish fact from opinion with an engaging writing activity using magazine pictures.*

**Key Question:** How do you distinguish a fact from an opinion?

**Materials:** magazines to cut up

**Focus Activity:** Students write 3 facts and 3 opinions about a magazine picture

**Extension:** Read published reviews of restaurants, movies, tv shows, or books. Highlight facts in one color, opinions in another. Compare and discuss.

### Extra Resources:

Fact vs. Opinion graphic organizer:  
<http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/factopin.pdf>

Fact and Opinion sorting activity:  
<http://www.tips-for-teachers.com/Mini%20Lessons.htm>

Fact and Opinion WebQuest:  
<http://edujourney.net/Webquests/PolarBear/PolarBear.htm>

This mini-lesson addresses the following **Common Core State Anchor Standards** for English Language Arts:

Writing 1

Speaking and Listening 1

Language 6

# Mini-Lesson 2: Forming an Opinion about a Book



## Step One → Teach: “I want to show you...”

Many students are comfortable forming a general opinion about a book (either “I liked it” or “I didn’t like it”), but few know how to form a specific opinion that demonstrates critical thinking. To begin, title a piece of chart paper with “Book Opinions.” Brainstorm with students specific aspects of books (both fiction and nonfiction) that you could form an opinion about. As you record student ideas on your book opinion chart, discuss how many of the aspects may overlap the genres (such as qualities of writing like *ideas, design, language, or presentation* or even characteristics like *theme or connections*), others may be specific to fiction or nonfiction (such as *plot or informational accuracy*).

Keeping the common core reading standards in mind, be sure to include in your discussion any of the following that your students are ready to address: character/plot/idea development, word choice and its relationship to meaning and tone, point-of-view (or purpose) as it relates to content and style, validity of reasoning and sufficiency of evidence within the text, and what the reader can infer from the text.

Leave the chart hanging in your classroom for students to refer to when writing.

## Step Two → Model: “Watch How I...”

Using a familiar text, model forming an opinion about at least one aspect that you listed on your chart in step one. Think aloud about *how specifically* you are evaluating that aspect. *“When I am forming an opinion about the author’s purpose in writing this nonfiction book, I’m thinking about the different parts of the book that might tell me why he wrote this book about global warming. I can tell from the table-of-contents that most of the chapters are informational about the causes and process of global warming, so I could say that the purpose of the book is to inform people about global warming, but I’m going to look for evidence of a deeper purpose. I see here that the final two chapters are called “Believe It or Not” and “What Can I Do About Global Warming?” When I go to the chapter entitled “Believe It or Not,” I can see that he is convincing the reader that most scientists and most scientific research supports the concept of global warming. So, I’m thinking that his purpose in writing the book is to convince*

*In this mini-lesson students learn how to form a targeted critical opinion about a book.*

**Key Question:** How do you form an opinion about an important aspect of a book?

**Materials:** chart labeled “Book Opinions”, read aloud book

**Focus Activity:** Students used paired think-alouds to give their partner a window into how they search a text to form an opinion about a book.

**Extension:** Students work in pairs or small groups to create webs detailing what to look for when forming an opinion about different aspects of a text.

*the reader that global warming is occurring and that is a problem. But, let me take a look at the last chapter entitled "What Can I Do About Global Warming?." I see here that this chapter outlines how the reader can take personal steps to prevent global warming like turning off lights, planting trees and riding a bike instead of driving a car. So, after digging deep into this book, I think the authors purpose is to convince us to take action to prevent global warming. I think he gave us all the other information about global warming to support his argument that it is important to change our actions to stop global warming.*

Based on your think-aloud, compose a written opinion about the book. *"In my opinion, the book Kids Learn About Global Warming was written by Peter Lininger to convince his readers to take action to prevent global warming. While he does teach the reader about global warming and presents evidence to show that it is occurring and is a problem, he uses all that information to convince us to make changes in our lives that will help stop global warming.*

Remind students that this is your opinion, which expresses your point of view and the reasons for it, which may include facts. Emphasize that you thoughtfully constructed your opinion by examining the text, which is how they should go about forming opinions about books.

### **Step Three → Try: "I invite you to..."**

Ask students to choose their own aspect of a book to form an opinion about and spend five minutes searching their book and gathering their thoughts. Next, have students to get in pairs and "think aloud" for their partner (as you did) to show the thinking behind forming their opinion. After the paired think alouds, students should each write down their own opinion and a few thoughts about how they arrived at that opinion.

### **Step Four → Connect and Conclude "Now you know..."**

Wrap up by collecting and reading aloud several of the student opinions on different aspects of text. As a class, comment on the strengths of the opinions and make suggestions for strengthening the opinions. Make the point that while opinions are indeed personal feelings, they can (and should) be arrived at only through deep thinking and close examination of the text.

This mini-lesson addresses the following **Common Core State Anchor Standards** for English Language Arts:

Writing 1, 9, 10

Speaking and Listening 1

Language 6

Reading 1, 2, 4, 5, 6

## Mini-Lesson 3: Writing a Clear and Convincing Opinion

### Statement

#### Step One → Teach: *“I want to show you...”*

Once students have mentally formed their opinions, it’s time to get writing! To demonstrate effective vs. ineffective opinion statements, show students the same opinion expressed two ways:

I liked the book because it was funny.

Hilarious JoJo’s mishaps made *Camp Tales* the funniest book I’ve ever read!

Discuss which opinion is more convincing and why. Guide students in noticing that the qualities of **specificity** and **persuasive word choice** make the second opinion stand out.

The second opinion statement specifically mentions: the title of the book, the name of the character, what exactly was funny (the mishaps), how it compares to other funny books (the funniest), a descriptive word choice (hilarious)

Also point out the vivid word choice: “the funniest book I’ve ever read” and “hilarious” instead of “funny”.

#### Step Two → Model: *“Watch How I...”*

Talk students through how to take a general opinion statement and make it clear and convincing. Using the statement “The book was boring” show how you ask yourself questions to improve the specificity such as: “What book?” “What exactly was boring?” “Is there a more specific word than “boring” that could be used?”

#### Step Three → Try: *“I invite you to...”*

Read aloud a book and ask students to write a specific, clear and convincing opinion statement about the book. Give students time to exchange opinion statements and ask each other questions that help to make their statements even more clear and convincing.

#### Step Four → Connect and Conclude *“Now you know...”*

Remind students that *how* opinion statements are written heavily influences their degree of effectiveness. Then, look forward to the next step of opinion writing (supporting an opinion with reasons) by returning to the opinion statement from the introduction. Point out that when an opinion statement is more specific, (“Hilarious JoJo’s mishaps...”) it’s easier to provide reasons to support it (you can detail the mishaps of JoJo and what made each so funny).

*In this mini-lesson students learn how to use specificity and persuasive word-choice to compose a convincing opinion statement.*

**Key Question:** How do you make an opinion statement clear and convincing?

Materials: read aloud book

**Focus Activity:** Students compose an opinion statement and then use peer questioning to hone the specificity and word choice of their opinion.

**Extension:** Students read book reviews written by other students (either online, by trading with in-class peers or by trading with peers from another class) and list ideas for making the book review more specific and persuasive. (Try using: [www.spaghettibookclub.org](http://www.spaghettibookclub.org), <http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/swyar/>)

This mini-lesson addresses the following **Common Core State Anchor Standards** for English Language Arts:

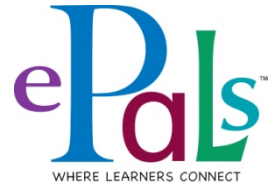
Writing 1, 9, 10

Speaking and Listening 1

Language 3

Reading 1

## Mini-Lesson 4: Supporting an Opinion with Reasons



### Step One → Teach: “I want to show you...”

Begin by reminding students that they are entitled to any opinion about a text (positive or negative), but their opinion needs to be substantiated with reasons. “That book was awful” as an opinion without reasons doesn’t carry much weight. An opinion needs to be:

- Supported by *two* reasons
- Followed with reasons that answer the question, “Why do you think that?”

So, a supported opinion should sound something like: “I would not recommend *True Sisters* by Fiona Jones **because** the plot was uneventful and all the characters were unrealistic. “

### Step Two → Model: “Watch How I...”

Using a brief newspaper or magazine article (or a book), demonstrate by thinking aloud how you form an opinion about the article and then support your opinion with two reasons.

I would recommend the article *Medical Grapefruit* by John Sears to anyone interested in the nutritional benefits of eating grapefruit because the article offered a current research review to support their point-of-view and the article offered practical advice on how to include more grapefruit in your diet.

### Step Three → Try: “I invite you to...”

Invite students to choose their own article (or book) to read. Give students time to write an opinion about the article with two reasons to support their opinion. Then, invite students to trade their opinion/reason writing with a peer for the peer to review. Discuss what students should be looking for as they review each other’s writing (a clear/convincing opinion supported by two reasons that explain their thinking).

### Step Four → Connect and Conclude “Now you know....”

Allow volunteers to share their opinions and reasons. Consider displaying some of the articles with their opinion/reason statements. Mention to your students that the next step of opinion writing is to provide evidence....and that students will need to be able to point to places in the text that support each of their reasons.

*In this mini-lesson students learn the characteristics of strong reasons.*

**Key Question:** How do you use reasons to support an opinion?

**Materials:** magazine or newspaper articles (such as those found in *Time for Kids*), or books

**Focus Activity:** Students write an opinion statement about an article substantiated by more than one reason.

**Extension:** Give students a try at using their reasoning skills as young activists. Let students choose an issue they are passionate about and write a letter sharing their opinion about the issue along with their supportive reasons

This mini-lesson addresses the following **Common Core State Anchor Standards** for English Language Arts:

Writing 1, 10

Reading 1, 10

Speaking and Listening 1

## Mini-Lesson 5: Supporting Your Opinion with Evidence from the Text



### Step One → Teach: “I want to show you...”

Start by reviewing that students have thus far learned *how* to form, write and support a clear and convincing opinion. Tell students that today, they will learn how to support their reasons with textual evidence.

For each reason used to support an opinion about a book, at least one piece of textual evidence should be given to support that opinion. Textual evidence comes directly from the book and answers the question, “What *specifically* in the book leads you to that opinion?” While your reasons tell why you have an opinion, your evidence shows why. Include these points as you teach students about textual evidence:

- Use key words or phrases to signal to your reader that you are going to provide evidence such as: for example, therefore, for instance, specifically, to illustrate, to demonstrate, take the case of
- Use page numbers whenever possible with your evidence
- Use direct quotes (in quotation marks) when possible
- Choose the strongest evidence that links most clearly to your reason
- An opinion about a book always should have evidence from that book, but a general opinion can get evidence elsewhere: (i.e. quoting experts, statistics, etc.)

### Step Two → Model: “Watch How I...”

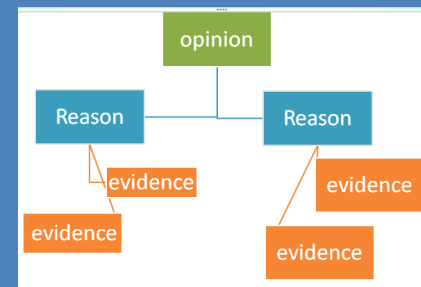
Draw a diagram to review the flow and organization of a supported opinion statement (such as the one shown on the right). Remind students that the number of reasons and evidence can vary, but for each there always must be more than one. Then, using a familiar text, complete the diagram. When you get to the evidence boxes, demonstrate how to go back to the book to locate and mark evidence to support your opinion. (Offer specific strategies such as: marking pages with sticky notes, highlighting, or recording page numbers and quotes on a bookmark.) Then, model for students explicitly how you turn your diagram into a written opinion piece. Be sure to emphasize the key evidence writing teaching points: using key words/phrases, using quotation marks and providing page numbers.

### Step Three → Try: “I invite you to...”

*In this mini-lesson students learn how to use textual evidence to support an opinion about the book.*

**Key Question:** How do you locate and reference textual evidence to support an opinion?

**Materials:** diagram of opinion argument (such as the one below)



**Focus Activity:** Students diagram an opinion including reasons and evidence and then use their diagram to write an opinion piece.

Invite students to diagram a book (or article) opinion of their own. Remind students that they should choose one of the strategies you mentioned to locate and record the evidence to support their reasons. Then, using their completed diagram as a reference, have them write out their opinion piece with supporting reasons and evidence.

### **Step Four → Connect and Conclude** *“Now you know....”*

Lead a discussion about today’s lesson and activity using these questions:

- Did the process of diagramming your opinion help you as a writer? How?
- What method did you utilize to locate and record evidence to support your opinion? Would you recommend your strategy to others? Why or why not?
- Did you run into any difficulties with finding evidence to support your reasons? How did you deal with those difficulties?
- When you had multiple pieces of evidence you could use to support your opinion, how did you decide which evidence to use?

Collect students’ diagrams and statements to review as an informal assessment of their progress with opinion writing. Use the diagrams and the information you collect during the discussion to plan follow-up lessons. Let students know that next they will learn the final step: writing a conclusion for an opinion argument.

This mini-lesson addresses the following **Common Core State Anchor Standards** for English Language Arts:

Writing 1, 4, 9, 10

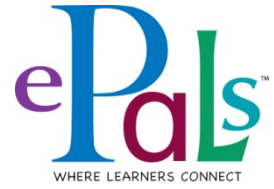
Reading 1, 5, 10

Speaking and Listening 1

Language 3, 6



## Mini-Lesson 6: Writing an Effective Conclusion



### Step One → Teach: “I want to show you...”

Once the opinion is written, the reasons are given and the evidence is provided, it’s time to wrap up the opinion piece with a conclusion. A conclusion should push the reader to think more deeply about the opinion. Teach students that a conclusion should:

- Start with a summary statement that tells how the reasons and evidence all work together to make the opinion both thoughtful and logical
- Demonstrate the strength of the opinion (use a strategy such as stating why the counter-opinion lacks merit)
- Push the reader to think more deeply about your opinion and to form his/her own opinion (using a strategy such as asking a question about the opinion)

To demonstrate how a conclusion should not just repeat the opinion statement, share the contrast between introductory opinion statements and concluding summary statements, such as:

**Introductory Opinion Statement:** Hilarious JoJo’s mishaps made *Camp Tales* the funniest book I’ve ever read!

**Concluding Summary Statement:** If you love to laugh at the comical outcomes of camp bloopers like mistaking bug spray for perfume or a confusing a skunk and a cat, you don’t want to miss the book *Camp Tales*!

Point out that while the concluding statement reminds the reader that the main focus is on the book being funny, it goes beyond that by reviewing the evidence, making it personal to the reader and varying word choice to keep the interest level high. Teach students that using a thesaurus is one way to find new and interesting words for your conclusion.

### Step Two → Model: “Watch How I...”

Share an opinion piece about a book that is missing a conclusion. Model how to consider the opinion, reasons and evidence as you write a conclusion.

### Step Three → Try: “I invite you to...”

After a class read aloud, work together to write an opinion piece, but stop before writing the conclusion. (You’ll need to use a highly visible format such as a projection screen or chart paper.) Send students to independently write a conclusion for the opinion piece you started together and remind them to refer

*In this mini-lesson students learn how to effectively conclude an opinion piece.*

**Key Question:** How do you write a conclusion that is effective and memorable?

**Materials:** read aloud book, projection technology or chart paper, opinion piece without a conclusion, online or print thesaurus

**Focus Activity:** Students work independently to write a conclusion to a whole-class written opinion piece.

**Extension:** Invite students to synthesize all of their opinion writing knowledge to create their own opinion piece checklists.

back to the reasons and evidence in the piece. Allow students to share their conclusions and form a class conclusion to add to your opinion piece.

### **Step Four → Connect and Conclude** *“Now you know....”*

Conclude today’s lesson by asking students to work in teams to come up with a “conclusion checklist” that they could use in future writing to make sure they have all the key components of a conclusion.

This mini-lesson addresses the following **Common Core State Anchor Standards** for English Language Arts:

Writing 1, 10

Reading 1, 10

Speaking and Listening 1

Language 3, 6