

# HOT TOPICS OF THE MISSISSIPPI

*Students identify a Mississippi River issue and write a well-developed critical essay.*

## TEACHER NOTES FOR DISCUSSION

Introduce the activity by discussing the difference between fact and opinion, and their uses in a persuasive essay. Spend some time discussing the skills needed to write a good persuasive essay.

It will be helpful for students to look at good examples of persuasive writing. Articles from the opinion page of your local newspaper work well. Discuss and identify the key features of these models before students begin their own research and writing. In addition, you may want to brainstorm topics with students and suggest possible arguments.

A five-step process outline is provided for you to use with the students. Depending on the skill level of your class or your time limitations, have students detail each step separately before combining the steps into one persuasive essay. As a follow-up activity, have students present their arguments to the class.

## Objective

By the end of this activity, student will be able to:

- use a five-step process to write a persuasive essay about an issue related to the Mississippi River.
- build an argument based on prior knowledge and information from a variety of sources.

## RELATED STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS

### Language Arts

#### Standard 1. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process

prewriting: uses a variety of prewriting strategies

drafting and revising: uses a variety of strategies to draft and revise written work

rewrites for different audiences and purposes, checks for a consistent point of view and for transitions between paragraphs, uses direct feedback to revise compositions.

- uses style and structure appropriate for specific audiences (e.g., public, private) and purposes
- writes expository compositions
- writes persuasive compositions
- writes compositions that speculate on problems/solutions

#### Standard 4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

- uses a variety of resource materials to gather information for research topics
- determines the appropriateness of an information source for a research topic
- organizes information and ideas from multiple sources in systematic ways
- writes research papers

#### Standard 7. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts

- applies reading skills and strategies to a variety of informational texts
- knows the defining characteristics of a variety of informational texts
- summarizes and paraphrases complex, explicit hierarchic structures in informational texts
- uses new information to adjust and extend personal knowledge base
- identifies techniques used to convey viewpoint
- draws conclusions and makes inferences based on explicit and implicit information in texts
- differentiates between fact and opinion in informational texts

### Thinking and Reasoning

#### Standard 1. Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument

- evaluates arguments that are based on quantitative data and mathematical concepts
- makes basic distinctions between information that is based on fact and information that is based on opinion
- compares and contrasts the credibility of differing accounts of the same event

## Time Considerations

Instructor preparation:  
15 minutes

Student activity:  
five classes

# HOT TOPICS OF THE MISSISSIPPI

## UNDERSTAND YOUR MISSION

In this activity, you will research a hot topic related to the Mississippi River and write a persuasive essay detailing your opinion.

### LEARN THE LINGO

argument	a reason given to prove for or against a position; a piece of information presented as having objective reality or truth
issue	a matter that is in dispute between two or more parties
opinion	a view or judgement formed in your mind about a particular subject

### Gather Your Supplies

- research material

## BACKGROUND

Essay is a broad term that refers to a short composition on a single subject. In a persuasive essay, the writer states views on an issue and then gives reasons or arguments for why he/she supports that point of view.

What issues are important to you? Does polluted water make you mad? Do you think forests should be clear-cut to supply America's need for lumber? Do you see other alternatives? Should farmers have the right to shoot timber wolves that steal farm animals? A persuasive essay, is way of conveying your opinion in a logical and persuasive manner. State an opinion; back it up.

# HOT TOPICS OF THE MISSISSIPPI

*Five-Step Writing Process*

## Introductory paragraph

The first paragraph grabs your readers' attention and tells them why they should read on. State your subject and why you are writing about it. Identify why you feel qualified to take a stand on this issue.

Also identify your audience and why they should be concerned about this issue.

Example:  
"As an avid bird watcher, I understand the importance of the river to birds."

Why should your audience agree with you? Give two reasons that support your argument. State your opinion in one or two concisely written sentences.

## Paragraph three: Development

Restate your first supporting statement. Go into detail and give examples that will prove to your audience that, for this reason, they should adopt your position.

## Paragraph four: Development

Restate your second reason. Go into detail and give examples that will prove to your audience that, for this reason, they should adopt your position.

## Concluding paragraph

Restate the subject of your essay. Tell them again that for the reasons you have outlined, they must adopt your position on this important issue. Summarize how your reasons support your position. Conclude with a summary of your opinion.

# HOT TOPICS OF THE MISSISSIPPI

## CHART A COURSE FOR EXPLORATION

Choose a topic to take a stand on. If you have already spent some time learning about the river, you will probably be able to point to an issue that sparks your interest. If you are new to the Mississippi River, here is partial list of hot topics:

- shrinking wetlands
- deforestation
- Mississippi Delta red tides
- pollution
- erosion
- run-off
- channel projects
- river manipulation
- nutria
- zebra mussels
- timber wolves

1. Choose a Mississippi River-related issue. If you need help choosing, use the provided list.
2. Research your chosen topic. What are the conflicting points of view on the subject? Which side do you agree with and why?
3. Use the five-step process to write your first draft.
4. Get comments from classmates and your teacher about how you can improve your arguments.
5. Revise your essay.
6. Turn in first and final drafts.

## Go Beyond

Redraft your essay into a letter to the editor of your local paper, your senator, or congressional representative. Send it to them.

# HOT TOPICS OF THE MISSISSIPPI

	EXPERT	PROFICIENT	NOVICE
FIVE STEP PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> used effectively as a tool to create a persuasive essay	<input type="checkbox"/> used	<input type="checkbox"/> not used to full potential
INTRODUCTORY AND SUPPORT PARAGRAPHS	<input type="checkbox"/> grabs readers' attention <input type="checkbox"/> states subject <input type="checkbox"/> states why writer is qualified to take a side <input type="checkbox"/> identifies audience <input type="checkbox"/> states why audience should be concerned <input type="checkbox"/> states two reasons that support opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> states objectives <input type="checkbox"/> argument is apparent <input type="checkbox"/> writer's opinion stated <input type="checkbox"/> audience is unclear	<input type="checkbox"/> issue is apparent <input type="checkbox"/> lacks arguments <input type="checkbox"/> lacks audience <input type="checkbox"/> opinion is included
DEVELOPMENT PARAGRAPH	<input type="checkbox"/> restates the first argument for supporting a point of view <input type="checkbox"/> gives several excellent examples that support the argument	<input type="checkbox"/> restates the first argument for supporting a point of view <input type="checkbox"/> needs better examples and more examples	<input type="checkbox"/> needs to restate the first reason for supporting a point of view <input type="checkbox"/> needs examples
DEVELOPMENT PARAGRAPH	<input type="checkbox"/> restates the second reason for supporting a point of view <input type="checkbox"/> gives several excellent examples that support the argument	<input type="checkbox"/> restates the second reason for supporting a point of view <input type="checkbox"/> needs better examples and more examples	<input type="checkbox"/> needs to restate the second reason for supporting a point of view <input type="checkbox"/> needs examples
CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH	<input type="checkbox"/> restates reasons for supporting the position <input type="checkbox"/> summarizes how the reasons support the point of view <input type="checkbox"/> concludes with a summary of personal opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> lacks one component of the expert's concluding paragraph <input type="checkbox"/> needs to improve the summary	<input type="checkbox"/> concluding paragraph lacks two or more elements of the expert's concluding paragraph <input type="checkbox"/> paragraph introduces new subject matter

## REFERENCES

McCarthy, Tara. *Persuasive Writing*. Scholastic Professional Books. 1998.

Kendall, John S. and Robert J. Marzano. *Content Knowledge: The McREL Standards Database*. <<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>>, April 4, 2000.