

Oakland Unified School District ♦ Process Writing Assessment
7th Grade Persuasive Writing: Single-Gender Classes?

Introduction

Have you ever worked or played with a group of just boys or just girls? Perhaps you've been on a single gender sports team. Maybe you've performed in a musical group or completed a project with partners of the same gender. In this activity, you will have an opportunity to think, read, talk, and develop your opinion about single gender classes in middle school. Then you'll write a persuasive letter or essay supporting your point of view. **In persuasive writing, it is important to take a clear position, and give convincing support for your position including response to the counterargument.** The counterargument is the opposing viewpoint.

Getting Started

To begin, reread the topic of this essay: *Single-Gender Classes?* This refers to separating boys and girls into different classes in school. Most middle school classes are coeducational; that is, boys and girls are together.

Before you read one person's opinion, think about your experiences working in single-gender groups and talk with a partner to answer these questions:

- Have you ever been in a single-gender class, team or group?
- Was it different than working in a coed group? How?
- Can you think of some reasons why someone might prefer single-gender education?

Now, write down some pros and cons about single-gender classes in the boxes below.

Some PROS and CONS about single-gender classes in middle school:

PROS <i>(these points support the idea)</i>	CONS <i>(these points oppose the idea)</i>
•	•
•	•
•	•



Share what you jotted down with your classmates. Did you write similar points?

Reading

Now read the following letters written by a concerned parent and a teacher. The writers are both interested in improving education for all students. As you read, look for and use numbers to mark these elements of persuasive writing in each letter:

- 1 = the writer's position
- 2 = ideas that support and develop this position
- 3 = the counterargument

Letter #1

Dear Principal,

As a mother of both a male and female student at your school, I have been trying to understand how to best meet their different needs. They both face challenges in the classroom. For example, my son is not a very strong reader but participates in class easily. My daughter loves to read and reads constantly but often feels too shy to raise her hand. I believe we would help all children succeed in middle school if we had single gender classes.

Single gender classes allow teachers to focus on the specific needs of girls and boys. In one book I read, *Boys & Girls Learn Differently*, author Michael Gurian points out that boys' and girls' brains work differently. Female brains, for example, develop more quickly than male brains and they take in more sensory data. Girls are often stronger than boys in reading and writing. Boys, on the other hand, have better spatial abilities. They excel in fields that require measuring, mechanical design, geography and map reading. Boys and girls would find it easier to work and succeed in classes with their own gender. The self-confidence of both boys and girls would increase if they were able to really succeed in the classroom.

Some argue that the classroom should reflect the real world where both genders live and play together; however, I believe that it is beneficial to create a space for learning that is different from the "real world." Discipline problems and discomfort get in the way of co-ed education. I have a friend who is a middle school teacher, and she says "Separate gender groups help girls concentrate. Grouping boys only with boys results in fewer discipline problems." Separating boys and girls is easier for students and helps them learn. Girls and boys are really more comfortable in separate learning groups, and when students are comfortable and engaged, they are less likely to act out.

I support separate gender education for all middle school students. I believe that single gender classes improve learning, behavior and self-development in a more orderly, comfortable, and safe way during this important time in life.

Sincerely,
A Concerned Parent

Letter #2

Dear Principal,

Throughout my career I have always taught classes that were co-educational. Sometimes teaching single gender groups has advantages, but overall I think single gender classes limit students' educational experiences. Co-ed classes are more beneficial when it comes to students' personal and academic growth.

How can teens learn how to interact appropriately with the opposite gender out in the "real world" if they are separated in class, the place where they spend the majority of their days? In the classroom, adolescents can learn to communicate respectfully and develop relationships with the opposite gender in a safe environment. For example, through writer's workshop students share their writing in mixed gender groups, and participate in guided conversations that sometimes lead to sharing their own experiences. In this way boys and girls can get to know each other personally by working on a project in class. Many eventually become friends. These relationships and the personal growth resulting from them would not have occurred in a single gender classroom.

Some people claim that single gender classes are better for students because they provide a learning environment with fewer distractions, however I disagree. On the contrary, I think that having boys and girls in the same class promotes more interesting classroom discussions and better opportunities for learning. Michael Gurian's book *Boys and Girls Learn Differently* explains how boys and girls' brains work differently, which I feel is an excellent reason to have them learning side by side; they will compliment one another's strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, boys and girls will learn from each other's unique viewpoints on the same topic. For those occasions when some students become too distracted by the opposite gender, I can always move them into single gender groups. But overall, students will grow academically stronger if they are exposed to the ideas and thinking of both genders.

Single gender classes will not help students get a better education. Separating boys and girls in class will not help them learn to interact appropriately and be comfortable together. Students will benefit most from appreciating the learning styles and life experiences of both genders, and mixed gender classes will keep academic discussions rich and interesting. I feel that coed classes are a must in middle school.

Sincerely,
A Concerned Teacher

Thinking, Talking and Planning

Work with a partner to complete this exercise.

1. Go back to the letters and review where you wrote

- **1** (where the writer states the position),
- **2** (where the writing supports and develops this position), and
- **3** (the counterargument.)

Did you agree with your partner?

2. How many arguments does the writer use to support the position? ____ What are they?

3. Check the persuasive strategies the writer uses to persuade the reader.

- ___ Personal experience
- ___ Outside expert knowledge
- ___ A counterargument

4. Does the writer persuade you to agree with her? Why or why not?

Writing

Here's the prompt:

Single-Gender Classes?

Teachers are interested in learning your position on the issue of single-gender classes in middle school. They want to know if students prefer coed classes like they have now **or** if students would be happier and more successful in single-gender groups.

Write a persuasive essay or letter in which you argue for or against single-gender classes in middle school. Support your position by using a variety of persuasive strategies, including addressing a counterargument. Use convincing reasons and language to persuade your reader. You may use notes from any of your prewriting activities.

Writing Reminders:

As you write, keep the following points in mind since you won't have time to rewrite.

- ___ Begin in an interesting way that leads to your controlling idea (position) of your essay.
- ___ Choose strong arguments to support your opinion.
- ___ Develop your arguments by including specific information through explanation, personal experiences, examples, and/or statistics.
- ___ Show in your writing that you know both sides of the issue, and why you disagree with the other point of view.
- ___ Use language and vocabulary that is persuasive, precise, and lively.
- ___ Organize the main sections of your essay into paragraphs so that the reader can follow your ideas.
- ___ End with a confident conclusion that restates your main point.

After You Write (Editing)

After you write, take time to review the items below. You may make changes right on your paper.

- ___ Give the essay a title (you can choose your title before or after you write the essay).
- ___ Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, and quotation marks appropriately.
- ___ Check your spelling.