

Up the Ladder: Accessing Grades 3–6 Opinion Units of Study

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And the Award Goes To . . . : Evaluating and Ranking

BEND |



A PREFACE TO

Bend I: And the Award Goes To . . .

This unit has been designed for children who may not yet have had many opportunities to practice writing opinion/argument pieces. The unit aims to help you support your students in writing various kinds of opinion writing, increasing in sophistication. The goal is to accelerate their growth in this genre.

If you have taught the other Up the Ladder units for narrative and information writing, then this is likely your third such unit. You may have taught the units in a row, or you may have interspersed grade-specific Units of Study. Either way, your students will have learned the routines and structures of writing workshop. They understand their role in the workshop and that when they go off to write, they are to continue working with fervor, drawing on a repertoire of strategies.

We hope that you are feeling increasingly at home with the writing workshop. Ideally, you are getting to more students during your conferencing, and pulling small groups of writers often. We encourage you to keep pushing yourself to outgrow what you can do. You will want to aim to gather small groups of writers several times a week.

At the start of the unit, you'll immerse your students in opinion writing by having them write their opinions of items in collections. Your youngsters will bring their own collections to the classroom—of hats, action figures, sports cards, photos of fashionable shoes, or titles of songs. Kids can actually hold these objects and physically compare them.

You'll teach your students to compare the items in their collections *fairly* to decide which item wins the award for the best, or the grossest, or the scariest. You'll notice we have given this work a kid-friendly spin

by likening this part of the unit to the Kids' Choice Awards. The unit will ask students to play the role of judges. In this role, students will imagine how to explain why they have made their decisions. Then they will write to explain and support their reasons for their choices.

A major goal of this bend is to support students in writing lots and lots of pieces. They will make multiple awards for the same collection (first prize, second prize, the worst), which will inspire different pieces of writing. They'll also write about each other's collections. High volume of writing, in this part of the unit, will come from the *number of pieces they write*, none of which will be very long.

You will note that as with the other Up the Ladder units, we have provided different paper choices in the online resources. The different paper designs support different levels of writing. Some paper designs channel students to sketch and then write a few sentences on each page, while others support substantially more text on each page. For writers who need more support, it can be helpful for them to plan and rehearse what they will write, then make a quick sketch to help remember and write the words. You can also decide to have some students write in booklets, with a different reason for why they like an object on each page. This would encourage them to write more about each reason. It's important to note that some of your writers may be ready for paper with many lines and you might give wide-ruled loose leaf to these students or have them work in their notebooks. Paper choice should never hold writers back from doing all they can. Expect that not all of your writers will need the same paper. As you progress from one week



to the next (and from one bend of this unit to the next), be sure to move students toward paper choices that support more demanding writing.

The major work your students will be doing is writing a clear claim and then supporting this claim with a reason or two. This bend will also support them to say more about each reason with details or examples, but that is not the primary focus at this time. The primary focus is to keep up a steady volume by writing a lot of pieces, each of which has a clear claim and some reasons to support that claim. If you find that students are not able to come up with multiple reasons, you will want to check that they are really going through the process of judging fairly, which we suggest involves looking at one trait across the various items in the collection, then looking at another trait. So if they are looking at a collection of dragon photos, they might study each dragon's wings, then feet, then head, then tail, and so on, and compare each trait across all the dragons in the collection. That process will lead a writer to be able to say that one item in the collection is great because of this trait, that one, a third one. ("One reason this dragon is the best is because it has the best wings . . . Another reason this dragon is the best is because it has the best claws . . .")

This bend also supports revision. You will want to see students going back to add more details to their pieces, to their drawings or their words or both. For example, kids will learn that they can add on by discussing why they did *not* choose a different item in the collection. They'll revise in concrete, manipulative ways through the use of revision strips, giant Post-its®, and flaps stuck off the edges of a page.

You'll see a focus on supporting spelling. You'll teach kids to pause as they write, to think whether a word is one they know by heart (or that can be found on the class or their personal word wall). If they don't know the word, you'll help them stretch it out slowly, listening for

sounds they hear in it and writing letters that match those sounds. Placing value on this work will help students see it as a priority. If you need to keep students' attention on this, you might take more time across your day to model not being sure how to spell a word and stretching it out, listening for the sounds, and writing letters that match those sounds. To help students see and learn this process, you may want to hold interactive writing sessions outside of the writing workshop in which the class composes a piece of writing with a focus on spelling and language conventions. In previous units, students worked to strengthen their language conventions—ending punctuation, use of commas. You'll want to hold them accountable for that learning in this unit, reminding them to draft with ending punctuation, for example, rather than waiting till they are done to go back and edit for it.

Across the bend, you will hope to see students writing a few pieces a day and revising those they have already written. By the end of the bend, their folders should be stuffed full of pieces—and you will also want to see evidence that these pieces have been revised. At the end of the bend, students will pick one of their awards to present and you can hold your own mini Kids' Choice Awards, complete with red carpet.

Across this unit you will see opportunities for celebrations. It is important for students to feel successful and to celebrate their progress. You want them to glory in their growth, as well as to rally them for the work to come. So, keep the celebrations mini, but do pause to let your students celebrate and to reflect on what they have done well and what they can do to get even stronger as opinion/argument writers.

In this bend, you'll want kids to produce a high volume of writing, while keeping up a high level of excitement. You'll spend only a bit more than a week in this bend before heading into Bend II, Writing Reviews—so keep the momentum going!



Session 1


To Judge Fairly, People Categorize Things and Make Judgments within Those Categories

IN THIS SESSION

TODAY YOU'LL teach students to judge fairly about what's best in a collection.

TODAY STUDENTS will study and write about items in their own collections. They will compare different parts of items, decide which item is the best, and support their opinions with specific reasons. They will write more than one award.

GETTING READY

- ✓ Prior to Session 1, invite students to bring in collections of things they care about in shoeboxes. They might bring in favorite toy cars, books, animal figures, or baseball cards (see Connection).
- ✓ Bring in the collection of five dragon images used in the lesson (available in color in the online resources). You could substitute your own collection but make it no more than five items (see Connection). ✨
- ✓ Consider the paper choices offered in the online resources. Channel students to paper that will provide them with a manageable level of challenge. Print a variety of kinds of nomination paper for students to use as they write. Leave a stack of these on each table (see Link and Mid-Workshop Teaching). ✨
- ✓ Provide index cards for kids to sketch or jot names of items in a collection if they forget to bring one in (see Connection, Link, and Conferring and Small-Group Work).
- ✓ Display anchor chart titled, "To Judge Fairly" (see Teaching, Active Engagement, and Link). ✨
- ✓ Scan the QR code to view the brief video to get a vision for how the work in this minilesson might sound. There is a video available for every minilesson.  hein.pub/UTLOP_1
- ✓ Review tips for additional support when working with English as a New Language (ENL) students at the end of this and every session.



MINILESSON

To Judge Fairly, People Categorize Things and Make Judgments within Those Categories

CONNECTION

Build a context for this bend by rallying kids to participate in a kids' version of the Oscars.

"Writers, if you remembered to bring a shoebox collection containing things you care about, will you put that collection on your desk? And if you didn't remember to bring a collection, I'm going to give you five index cards. After our minilesson, you'll either jot names of things or draw quick sketches of things that make up a collection you love. You might write the names of five musicians you love, or five kinds of pets. Either way, leave your collections and let's gather.

"Has everyone here heard of shows like the Oscars? The Grammy Awards? *Dancing with the Stars*?" As I spoke, kids called out that yes, yes, they knew those shows.

"They are all contests to choose the best, right?"

"How many of you have heard of the Kids' Choice Awards?" I scanned the room, seeing that many kids didn't know the award. "The Kids' Choice Awards go to things *kids* care about. Kids vote on their favorite song, their favorite movie. Kids have all the power.

"The unit we are starting today is a bit like the Oscars—or, because you'll have all the power, like the Kids' Choice Awards. You will use your own kid power to review and decide on and to proclaim your opinion about the best movie, the best song, the best app, the best anything. You'll also learn to make convincing opinions about things you care about—sports teams, school policies, even world politics.

"Writers, you know there are judges on awards shows—on the Oscars, on the Kids' Choice Awards. In this unit, *you* will be the judges. You'll decide on the winners and write the announcements that are pulled out of envelopes and read aloud at the awards assemblies. Let's get started."

◆ COACHING

Notice that these words are said while students are still at their seats, before they convene.

This is meant to be super exciting. Give this part of the minilesson with energy, aiming to pump your kids up.

❁ **Name the teaching point.**

"Today I want to teach you that people who know a lot about something look over a collection and ask, 'Which is the best?' To judge fairly, they look at just one part of each item—maybe starting with just the colors—and ask, 'Which has the best color?' Then they judge other parts of the things being judged so they can decide which is the best of all."

TEACHING

Show students your collection (ours is of images of dragons), and recruit them to join you in judging your collection.

"In a few minutes, you'll have a chance to study the items in your collection, and to ask, 'Which is the best?' But first, will you help me do that sort of thinking with my collection?"



"I have always been fascinated by dragons, so I have a collection of pictures of dragons. Here are a few."

I produced five pictures of dragons. "You're going to help me judge them in a second."

Get writers to imagine how judges of awards shows go about the process of judging.

"Here's the thing. Judges are fair. To judge fairly and to be able to explain decisions, a judge can't listen to a few songs and say, 'I like that one! I don't know why—I just like it!' You'd never trust that awards show if *that's* how the judges made their decisions.

"To judge fairly, the judge studies one *part* of each of the things being judged. For example, if there were a dragon awards show, the judge might think about each dragon's *wings*." I pointed to a few of the wings in the dragon photos. "How scary are the wings on one dragon, on another dragon, another? Then the judge might think about the *claws* on one dragon then another dragon." I pointed to the claws on the photos. "After she decides which dragon is best for wings, for claws, then she decides which dragon is the best overall. This way, when the judge makes her decision, she can explain her reasons, 'This dragon is the best because it has the best *wings and claws*.'"

I put up a chart and asked the class to read it aloud with me.

This unit is written as if the teacher has a collection of dragon pictures. The unit will be easiest to teach if you borrow these dragon pictures, but you are also welcome to make your own collection.

Involve students in watching while you model being a judge at the dragons show.

"Right now watch me be the judge at the dragon show. Let me follow the chart. Let me look at a part on each dragon and compare it." I pointed to the first step on the chart. "I think I'll look first at tails. Which has the best tail? Oh, I think this one has the best!" I pointed to the red dragon. "Oh, wait, the chart tells me I have to say *why!* This one has the best tail because . . . it's so spiky!"

Debrief, pointing out replicable steps.

"Did you see what I just did? I compared all the dragons and looked at one part and asked, 'Which has the best of *this* part?' Then I said why."

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Channel all students to act as judges for your collection, giving tips for how a judge goes about making fair decisions and leading them to choose the winner and to provide reasons.

"Now you try. Look at another part. You decide if you want to look at the wings or the claws or the color. Pick one part and compare that one part on each dragon, asking, 'Which has the best . . . ?' Like, think about which dragon has the best wings and why."

I listened to the kids as they talked. "The red dragon has good wings," Jasmine said. Since I knew she was new to learning English, I made a point to help her extend her language, "Oh, you think the red dragon has the best wings!" I repeated. Pointing at the wings on the photo, I said, "Wow, look at those wings! They are so *big* and *scary*, right!"

Gather students back and model the rest of the steps of judging. Pick your overall winner and give reasons.

"Writers, so many of you are saying that the red dragon has the best wings! Wow. It seems like a lot of you think the red dragon is the best! That's the second step" (I pointed to the chart).

"Now let's do the last step—support our opinion with reasons. Say 'Because . . .' Watch me first. I'll just do a little." I said, "The red dragon is the best dragon *because* it has the best tail. Its tail is so spiky."

Push students to name which dragon they think is the best and why.

"Now you try. Tell your partner which dragon *you* picked as the winner and give reasons to support your opinion. If you like the red dragon, give all the reasons. Go!"

Collecting the class's attention, I asked a volunteer to announce his or her choice. Shanice's hand shot up, and she said, "This one's the best." She pointed to the pink dragon.



Be sure to prompt, "This dragon is the best because . . ." if students need some starting language.

Teachers, if the child I called on was very new to the English language, I might instead prompt her to say, "This dragon is the best because . . ." If she said, "the wings," I might welcome that one-word response before extending it, pointing to the wings and saying, "Oh yes, those wings! They are so tiny." I'd use gestures to show what I meant. Then pointing, I might add, "And they are cool colors too, right?" That is, you can't just nudge the kid to say more, in interactions that can feel like pulling teeth. Pulling teeth hurts! You may need to provide some of the language for the child.

I said, “Shanice, is it enough for a judge to say, ‘This is the best’? Or does a judge need to give reasons? Try saying ‘This dragon is the best because . . .’” Shanice looked at the picture and said, “He is the best because his wings are good! This dragon has tiny, cute wings.”

“Go on,” I nudged. “Say, ‘Another thing . . .’”

“Another thing,” Shanice added, “is its wings have cool colors. Light pink and purple. You don’t usually think dragons have pink wings. And I like its eyes. They are looking right at you, so he seems friendly.”

“Some of you will have selected a different dragon, but I hope you all thought about reasons, like Shanice did. Those reasons will be different. For you, the best wings might not be the colorful ones, they might be the biggest ones. The important thing is that you have reasons for your opinions!

“Shanice didn’t just say, ‘It’s my favorite’ and leave it at that. No way! She gave reasons and details. She said, ‘This dragon has the best wings. They are tiny and cute and have interesting colors. Most dragons don’t have pink and purple wings but this one does! And also, it has friendly eyes!’”

LINK

Send students off to judge their own collections similarly, writing about the item they like best and their reasons for this judgment.

“So writers, today you have learned that people who have collections think, ‘Which has the best (of one part), which has the best (of another part)?’” As I spoke, I gestured to our list of ways to judge fairly.

“Many of you brought collections with you today. If you didn’t, I gave you index cards so you can jot and sketch things you could put in a collection. Either way, remember that to decide which is the best, you’ll want to use what you know about judging fairly. Once you have made a decision, you’ll want to write that decision and your reasons on the nomination paper that is in the middle of each table.

“These award nominations are a kind of opinion writing, and for this unit of study, you will learn to write all sorts of opinion writing really well. In your whole life, whenever you write an opinion, you will always need to explain your reasons, just like you are doing today. If you are ready, judges, off you go!”

When you ask, “Do you think it is enough for a judge to say, ‘This is the best’ or do you think the judge needs to give reasons?,” you are wording your coaching to make it applicable—transferable—to another day, another instance of judging. If you’d simply asked a situation-specific question such as, “Why do you like this dragon’s wings the best?,” that would not be transferable.

You crystalize your compliment by saying, “She gave reasons and details” because for now, that’s the point you want to drive home. Use those same words repeatedly.

Note the variety of collections kids can bring in. Welcome them all—ooh and ahh to help get your students fired up to write.



FIG. 1-1 Lining up wrestlers, preparing to rank and write.

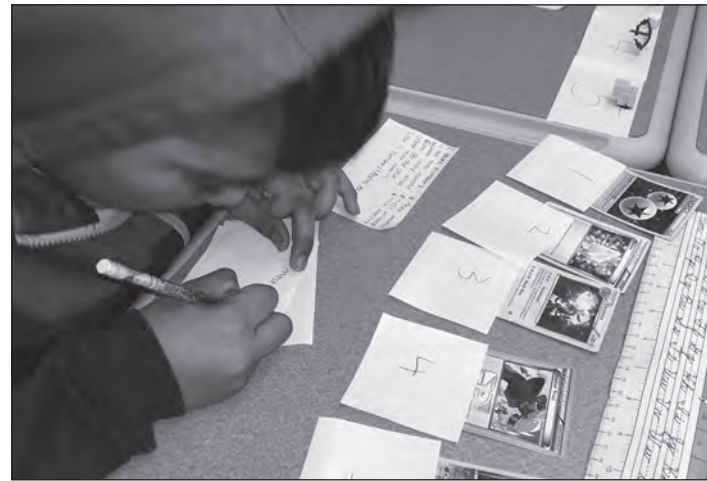


FIG. 1-2 A student ranks his card collection and jots.

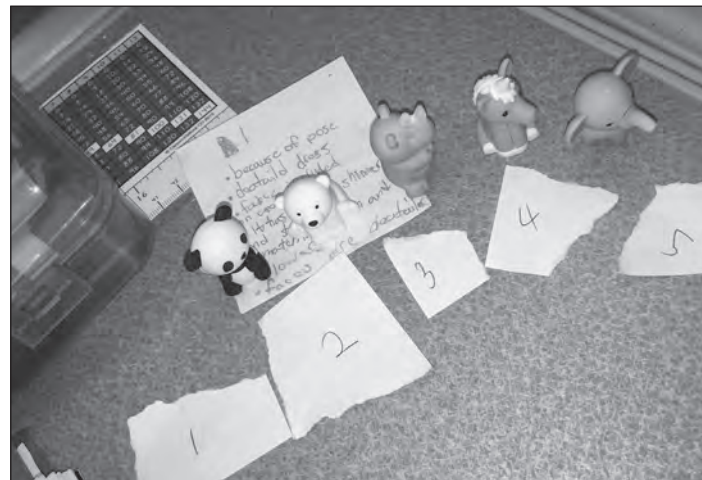


FIG. 1-3 This student has ranked and selected the best of her collection.



Predictable, Quick Interventions to Keep the Whole Class Writing Up a Storm!

Move quickly among your students, channeling them to work with energy and independence.

Expect that your students will spend the first few minutes laying out the contents of their collections and looking over the items they plan to judge. As you move quickly among them, encourage them to develop systems for recording their judgments. Will they label each item? Will they find a way to track the rankings for each distinct part? You may want to carry a few blank tally sheets to leave with youngsters who you believe will need extra help figuring out a system for recording the way they score different aspects of the items being judged.

Although you'll want to encourage your students to judge seriously and fairly, you will also want to coax them to work quickly so that after five minutes or so, they shift to writing their rankings. You will probably encourage that shift through a mid-workshop voiceover in which you ask them to write their decisions—this might come fairly early

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Shifting from Judging to Writing**

"Writers, if you have not done so already, push yourself to write your opinion. I'm putting paper for writing about your awards at your tables and at the writing center. There are different choices. Some have space for drawing. You might draw or not. For now, pick the paper that you think is best for you. At the top you can write 'And the Award for Best . . . Goes to . . .'. Rehearse what you'll say to your partner about which is best and why. Then you could write about your opinion. Remember to write not just your opinion, but also your *reasons*. So, I might write: 'The pink dragon is the best dragon. *I think this because* it has the best wings. They are tiny and cute and they are interesting colors.'" I showed my writing to the class.

"Then I'd go on and tell about our other reasons."

on. Remind them to give their reasons for each decision and to write in an organized way—making a claim, giving reasons, telling examples.

As mentioned in the Getting Ready, we have provided paper choice with space for both drawing and writing. For a student who might initially have a tougher time writing, rehearsing aloud what she wants to say with a partner, then making a quick sketch and adding and labeling more details can help the student have more to say when she writes and remind her what she wanted to write. If she writes a bit and wants to add on, she might first go back to add more details to the drawing. This can help her add more to the writing, perhaps on a revision strip or flap. For students who may not need this scaffolding you can give paper choice with lines only.

TIPS FOR WHISPERED COMMENTS AND VOICEOVERS:

Support kids doing a volume of writing.

- "I love how some of you have filled up two award envelopes so far! And I even see some others on your *third* envelope! Awesome!!!"
- "Your hands should be flying down the page! Keep your pens moving!"

Channel kids to write in ways that fit the genre.

- "Make those opinions big and bold. It can help to start by writing '——(blank) is the best!' or 'blank is the winner!' If you're unsure about some of your opinions, revise them."
- "Make sure you are saying *why* you think as you do! Use the word *because* . . ."
- "Really try to convince others. Don't give just one detail—give lots!"
- "Specific, exact details help you to be convincing!"

Build up your writers' identities as opinion writers.

- "You are such fair judges! I love watching you look so carefully at the same part on each item and then tally up your opinions on one part, another part, another."
- "I love how you are not just jumping to award the winner after looking at only one part! It's so important to have lots of reasons for why you declared one item the winner!"

Generating Ideas

"Writers, you don't seem as excited about your collection as I think you should be. I thought it might help if we brainstorm other possible topics for collections. If you get an idea for a collection that might interest you more, you can just use index cards to make a new collection. Let's brainstorm possibilities. I'll name a few, and will you say your ideas aloud, too? Jot down any that seem sort of interesting.

"Ready? Best all-around super-hero . . . best sport . . . grossest thing you can find on the cafeteria floor . . . most annoying thing your little brother does . . . best way to make your parents mad . . ."

(Teachers, note that we are staying away from best movie/book/restaurant, since judging those is what review writers do, and that is the focus on the upcoming bend. We don't suggest you explain that to kids, but steer them.)

"Oh, you've all got some you're interested in? Jot them down! And help me out . . . What are other ideas? . . . Best kind of dog . . . uh . . . How about this: best school lunch?!

"I know you've all got an idea for a new collection. On these index cards, sketch or jot down your five things and as you do, think about aspects of them that you'll judge. If you are judging school lunches, what will you judge for taste? Size of the meal? The variety of colors on your plate? Think about what parts of your thing you will judge so your drawings show those parts—or add labels to name the colors of the food, for example."

	warriors	pacers	OKC	cavaliers
best team	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★
best players	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★
best coaches	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★
	15 stars	8 stars	7 stars	12 stars

FIG. 1-4 Notice how students are trying out their own systems to assess their collections.

Making Systems to Assess Collections

"Writers, I gathered the six of you to show you a system that a kid named Marcus designed to help rate the dogs in his collection. He used blue Post-it notes to rate the hair, and has five stars for the dog with the shiny super-nice hair, and fewer stars for the dogs with hair that seemed matted or dull. Then on yellow Post-it notes, he rated the healthiness of the dogs. He gave five stars for the dog that seemed most alert and strong, and fewer stars for the dogs that seemed more out of shape. Will you and your partner come up with a way to keep track of how you judge the different parts or aspects of your things?"



FIG. 1-5 Sophia starts to write about the coolest car in her collection.



SHARE

“And the Award Goes To . . .”

Stating Opinions Boldly

Let students know it’s time to announce winners in a symphony share. Channel them to announce winners boldly, not in a wishy-washy way.

“In a minute, let’s gather for a symphony share. You know how these go. I’ll be the conductor and when I point at you, you’ll announce one of your awards, saying, ‘The award for . . . goes to . . .’ in a bold way, proclaiming your award proudly and loudly.

“When presenters announce the winner at the Oscars or the Kids’ Choice Awards, they don’t announce the winner like this” (I hunched forward, shoulders bent, and made my voice squeaky and unsure): “I think the award for best dog should sort of, kind of, maybe go to . . . the flat-coated retriever?” The kids laughed. “No way. The presenters announce the awards in a bold, clear way. Like this” (I straightened my shoulders and sat tall) “And the ‘award for best dog’ goes to . . . the flat-coated retriever!

“Ready?” As I pointed at kids, they announced their results, including, “And the ‘Award for Grossest Thing You Can Find on Cafeteria Floor’ goes to . . . squashed tuna sandwich!”

WORKING WITH ENLS

This session is already very supportive for ENL students:

- ◆ Bringing in objects or pictures for collections allows ENL students to study concrete attributes like parts, size, shape, color, and so on.
- ◆ Notice the tips around extending language in the coaching text during the active engagement portion of the minilesson. These tips will hold true across the entire unit.
- ◆ Throughout the minilesson you refer to the anchor chart several times. Don’t miss the opportunity for students to hear the language and practice the work of the judging process.
- ◆ The mid-workshop and share provide repeated practice for students with the language of judging: “_____ is the best. I think this because . . .”

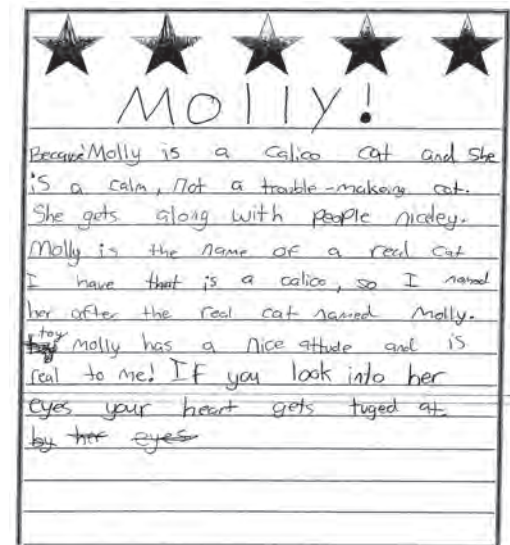


FIG. 1–6 Emma judges her cat collection and writes to support her opinion.