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# PERSONA WRITING—Teacher's Guide

## What is Persona Writing?

Quite simply, PERSONA WRITING is imaginative writing with a focus. Although we teachers may recognize the ease with which young people move in and out of the world of pretense and fantasy, we sometimes overlook the relationship it has with writing maturation. Whether we label it day-dreaming, projection, or just fanciful thinking, imagining oneself to be another person or participating in an event vicariously has always been a part of creative development. Just as actors and actresses mature in their craft by assimilating and internalizing the characters they portray, so, too, PERSONA WRITING widens each student's range of expression—through invention, experimentation, and refinement of roles or rhetorical guises. Students discover that for each new identity they assume for their writings, there is a corresponding growth in and expansion of their imaginations. What professional writers have learned—that they must adjust their voice for each writing context—can be taught to students through PERSONA WRITING. For PERSONA WRITING offers focused writing activities, each requiring students to be aware of and in control of the relationship they have with their subject matter—or simply, in control of their voice.

PERSONA WRITING teaches voice by offering students more than 80 stimulating selections: new events, poetry, novel excerpts, advertisements, descriptions of scientific phenomena, historical accounts, essays and anecdotes. Each selection is accompanied by a series of "personas," or rhetorical guises, and it is through these personas that students practise and perfect their imaginative voices. The search for the Titanic, and the possible existence of a tenth planet, are some of the writing stimuli that fill the pages of this program. As your writers work their way through each of the following activities, they will be asked to crawl into the skin of others, think as they might think, act as they might act, and write as they might write. In doing so, they will gain the confidence, growth, and experience that will lead them successfully through future writing activities.

## How shall I present the concept of Persona Writing to my students?

One way is to present an example of a persona to the entire class. Choose a well-known character from Australian History e.g. Robert O'Hara Burke. Tell students that if they are to be Burke, they will need to know a few things about him:

- How old is he?
- What sort of family does he have?
- Who are his friends?
- What are his friends like?
- What pleases and displeases him?
- What motivates him?
- What is life in Australia like for him?
- What does he think of his fellow explorers?

In fact, to really appreciate and write convincingly about the experiences or dilemmas of any character—Anne Frank or Huck Finn, for example—one must become Anne or Huck, and view the world through that character's eyes. For it is by assuming the persona of a character, and thereby expanding one's experience and perspective, that voice is learned. With voice, the young writer discovers the entire world of creativity opening up to him or her.

## Will Persona Writing replace my current composition program?

No, but it can supplement and strengthen your current writing program. PERSONA WRITING works especially well as an introduction to letter writing, narration, description, script and dialogue writing, and persuasion. It can also enliven your present curriculum by offering timely and stimulating assignments that engage the reluctant as well as the gifted writer. In addition, PERSONA WRITING offers opportunities to integrate literature, science, social studies, psychology, health, art, and music with writing. Most importantly, it is a highly flexible approach to writing with limitless application in the English classroom.

# Letter Writing • 2 •

## Have Your Own Wonderful World of Living Sea Dogs

### A BOWLFUL OF FUN—INSTANT PETS— FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT!

Just add WATER—That's all! In seconds, your SEA DOGS will come ALIVE! They grow, do tricks and BEST OF ALL they bring joy to your home.

### TRAIN THEM TO PERFORM TRICKS!

That's right. These frolicsome pets swim, do stunts, and play games with each other. You'll never tire of them. So easy to raise that a 6-year-old can do it. All they need is love and attention. Teach them to obey your commands. What a way to surprise your friends! Send just \$1.00 and 60¢ postage and handling. Act now and receive as a bonus a year's supply of Sea Biscuits. GUARANTEED TO WORK.



Exotic Pets Dept. 19-G  
700 Maroondah Highway,  
Ringwood, Vic. 3171.

IT SOUNDS GREAT! Please send my Sea Dog Kit and FREE Supplies. I must be 100% satisfied or you will refund my money.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State..... Postcode .....

### Sea Dogs

When you first read this ad, Sea Dogs seemed like a wonderful idea. Instant pets. No mess. Hours of fun. But something was wrong with the water or their food because they began growing rapidly—so rapidly, in fact, that you had to move them to the bathtub. They soon outgrew it and moved into the neighborhood swimming pool, but no one quite bought your argument about them being out-of-town relatives.

- Persona **1** You tried to pack the Sea Dogs into crates to ship them back, only they refused to go. You send off a frantic letter requesting help from Exotic Pets. Include all the details of your adventures with the Sea Dogs.
- Persona **2** Neighbours are angry, the police are chasing Sea Dogs up and down the street, cats are screeching mercilessly, and your family has thrown you out. This is more than you bargained for, and you send a letter of complaint to Exotic Pets.
- Persona **3** When word of your remarkable pets reaches the media, you are invited to appear with the Sea Dogs on "Good Morning, Australia" and "The Today Show." You decide to travel by Ansett and send a letter to the airline requesting special room and eating arrangements. Write the letter, but you must get the necessary food and accommodations without letting them know you are bringing such exotic animals. Skill is required here.

### Super Challenge

- Persona **4** This ad is similar to many found in comic books and pulp magazines. The ads are careful to avoid making any claims or promises while letting the reader reach his or her own conclusions. Find any five similar ads, examine them for misleading claims and then compose a letter to the Advertising Standards for your city or state outlining your findings.