

Concepts

- Encouraging others to be organ and tissue donors is a worthwhile goal given the imbalance between the supply of donated organs and the number of people waiting for a life-saving organ transplant.
- Writing a letter to friends or loved ones that is supported by well-researched points and written in a persuasive manner can help convince them to be donors.

Overview

Students read a true story about a family’s decision to donate a loved one’s organs and the reactions of this donor family and the family of one of the recipients. Students do a persuasive-writing activity by writing to a friend or loved one to encourage him or her to sign up to be an organ and tissue donor.

Instructional Objectives

By writing a persuasive letter encouraging a friend or loved one to be an organ and tissue donor, students will show an understanding of—

- how to use written language to accomplish a purpose and to communicate effectively with a specific audience.
- how to conduct research on an issue by gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing data from a variety of sources to communicate their ideas in a way that suits their purpose and audience.
- issues surrounding the decision to become an organ and tissue donor.

Assessment

- Distribute copies of the scoring rubric to students when you present the assignment and carefully review this rubric with them. Suggest that they use the rubric to assess their own work.
- Use this rubric to assess students’ work or consider having students use the rubric to peer-evaluate a classmate’s letter.



Materials

Black-line Masters

- Student Packet (4.9)
- Scoring Rubric (4.10)

In this lesson you will:

- Read a true story about a family’s decision to donate a loved one’s organs and the reactions of this donor family and the family of one of the recipients.
- Write a persuasive letter to a friend or loved one encouraging him or her to sign up to be an organ and tissue donor.

Background

The following story is true. It is based on a story that appeared at www.organdonor.gov, a site sponsored by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and dedicated to the promotion of organ and tissue donation.

A Tale of Two Families

Gloria—The Recipient

In the fall of 1992, Gloria was an active 37-year-old wife and working mother of two small children. When ongoing fatigue sent her to the doctor, she was sure that she was just “stressed out.” So, Gloria was amazed when her doctor reported that her blood work indicated the possibility of hepatitis. Gloria was told to go home and rest; she left work early and went home to take a nap.

Weeks later, Gloria awoke from a coma to discover she had a new liver. “I was angry and frustrated when I woke. I thought someone had taken my liver and given it away. I was in a hospital, and I knew nothing about how or why I was there! My husband’s hair had turned gray. My mother looked 10 years older. I learned that my children had been told their mother was not coming home. Then came the grief as I realized that someone’s death had made my new liver available for transplant. And as I looked at my family’s faces, their pain, I knew that somewhere another family was going through the same thing . . . and I grieved for them.”

Bobby—The donor

The week before Thanksgiving, 1992, Bobby collapsed at work with a brain aneurysm—a rupture in a blood vessel in the brain. His wife, Suzi, and their children, Melissa and Matt, rushed to his side at a hospital just a few miles from where Gloria lay in a coma. As Bobby was being prepared for surgery, another aneurysm destroyed his brain stem, causing his death. Offered the option of donation, Suzi found comfort in the idea that Bobby “would be walking with us somewhere on this earth.” Sixteen-year-old Melissa opposed the idea. But after imagining that another girl’s father might be helped, Melissa reconsidered and the family consented to donation.

Their Story

Months later, Melissa wrote to the recipients of her father’s organs, using only her first name. The organ procurement organization that had helped coordinate the donation of her father’s organs also arranged the delivery of the letters in order to protect Melissa’s privacy and that of the recipients.

Melissa received only one response—a letter from Gloria, the recipient of her dad’s liver. Melissa and Suzi were moved by the warmth and sensitivity of Gloria’s letter. Melissa and Gloria continued to correspond, but had no plans to meet. Fate intervened the day both families attended a ceremony honoring donor families. Suzi recognized Gloria, whose picture and story had appeared in a brochure. Suzi gathered up her family and walked forward to meet Gloria and her family. In a way, Gloria’s family had become a part of her family’s life three years earlier when Gloria became a recipient of one of Bobby’s organs.

In the years since Gloria and Suzi met, they have spoken together many times of the benefits of donation and transplantation—in both public and private presentations. Often, they hold hands as they talk. Gloria has told Suzi of her grief over Suzi’s loss and her intention to be sure she is deserving of Bobby’s gift. Suzi says that her grief “turned to joy when I discovered that my husband’s death was not final but had given five people a chance to live.”

In her first letter to Gloria, Melissa had written that she hoped one of her dad’s organs had gone to a child who could now live to grow up. Melissa now understands that the gift that saved Gloria’s life also “saved” the lives of Gloria’s children, son Arylon and daughter Aquia, who, at ages 9 and 6, came so close to losing their mother. Gloria and her family attended Melissa’s wedding, and have since celebrated with Suzi the birth of Melissa’s little boy, Robert.

Procedure

1. Having read this true story about the experiences of a donor family and a recipient family, your task is to write a persuasive letter to a friend or loved one to convince him or her to sign up to be an organ and tissue donor. Your letter should be one or two double-spaced pages and should include the following:

- An opening statement that clearly states the issue and your position on this issue. Several paragraphs that include specific evidence, examples, and statistics about organ and tissue donation organized in a meaningful way. Each sentence must be related to the topic and to the sentence before it. Avoid broad generalizations and stereotyping of any kind. Sources of information should be varied and stated in your letter.
- A minimum of three Internet sites that contain compelling information on organ and tissue donation should be listed. In addition, include a link to the web page of www.organdonor.gov that contains a donor card.
- A conclusion in which the topic is restated and the one or two most compelling arguments are summarized. This is the last chance in the letter to convince your friend or loved one to be an organ and tissue donor. Nothing new should be added in the conclusion.

2. Due dates are as follows:

_____ : Draft of persuasive letter

_____ : Final copy

Purpose of assignment:

Write a persuasive letter that convinces a friend or loved one to sign up to be an organ and tissue donor.

A thoroughly developed persuasive letter that fulfills the purpose by including the following:

- a valid, clearly focused, and well-defined issue
- relevant, sufficient, documented support from several valid sources, including at least three Internet sources
- precise organization of evidence and implications to enhance purpose
- effective use of appropriate technology tools for research, analysis, and communication
- careful attention to audience understanding and interest
- effective form and sequence

4 points

A well-developed persuasive letter that fulfills the purpose by including the following:

- a valid, focused issue
- relevant, specific, documented support from valid sources, including at least three Internet sources
- effective organization of evidence and implications to achieve purpose
- sufficient use of appropriate technology tools for research, analysis, and communication
- attention to audience knowledge and interest
- suitable form and sequence

3 points

An incomplete or oversimplified persuasive letter that only adequately fulfills the purpose by including:

- a valid issue
- irrelevant, inconclusive support from limited sources; includes fewer than three Internet sources
- inconsistent organization of evidence and implications
- insufficient use of appropriate technology tools for research, analysis, and communication
- consideration of audience awareness and interest
- inappropriate form and sequence

2 points

A poorly-written, inadequate essay/presentation that fails to fulfill the purpose including only the following:

- an unfocused or invalid issue
- incomplete, irrelevant support; internet sources not listed
- unclear organization of evidence and implications
- a lack of appropriate technology tools for research, analysis, and communication
- a weak sense of audience awareness and interest
- inconsistent, unclear form and sequence

1 point

