

Clean up this mess

from 'Voice of the Mirror' (*Daily Mirror* website)

P
159

Background

This is another editorial from the *Daily Mirror* website from June 2005. The preceding few days had seen a succession of extreme weather events in the UK. The cause was being hotly debated and many argued that global warming was to blame. The editorial states that this was *at least partly* the cause. It then goes on to argue that people need to take personal responsibility for the problem and its solution. The editorial includes several concepts that are likely to need discussion with the class.

What's on the CD-ROM

This skeleton plan maps out the ideas raised in the editorial and develops the point about travel. This represents the underlying argument in three steps (problem, cause, solution) and shows how each is elaborated. This plan can be used as an introduction to the core text and/or to highlight the argument. It can also be used to illustrate the 'basic point plus elaboration' structure – an important strategy for planning and writing persuasive texts.

Discussing the text

- Tell the class where the text comes from and outline the background. Read the headline and first two paragraphs and ask the children to explain the point the author is making. As part of this, discuss the meanings of *lifestyle*, *luxury*, *great boons* and *heavy price tag*. Note the importance of the connective *But*, prominently placed at the start of a paragraph, in linking the ideas.
- Read the next three paragraphs and ask: *What does the text say is the cause of the extreme weather? What two things does the text say cause global warming?* Check that the children understand the terms *convenience shopping* and *attractive marketing*.
- Ask the children to predict how the text will develop and read the remaining paragraphs. Confirm that the text goes on to try to persuade readers of the seriousness of the problem and of the action they need to take to help solve it. Refer to the causes of global warming identified earlier and ask the children which one is followed through (rubbish, not travel). Note again the connective *But*, used twice at the start of sentences.

- Now shift your focus to the language of the editorial. Ask: *How does the author try to persuade readers that they need to take the problem seriously and do something?* If necessary, provide a clue by highlighting the phrase *destruction of the planet*, and then prompt the children to identify other powerful words and images, such as, *extraordinary extremes of weather*, *overwhelming mass of packaging*, *gigantic garbage heap*, *mess*. Point out too how the comforts of contemporary lifestyles are emphasised by words and phrases like *luxury*, *great boons of modern living*. Draw out the idea that the author is trying to provoke the reader into action by making him or her feel guilty; the editorial is a kind of 'telling off'.

- For a word-level focus, highlight the words *responsible*, *attractive*, *destruction* and *generations* as starting points for work on the suffixes *-ible*, *-ive* and *-tion*. Ask the children to suggest more words ending with these suffixes and to identify their word class: *-ible* and *-ive* are endings for adjectives; *-tion* and *-ation* for nouns. Then highlight the issue of meaning and use by asking the children to use root and derived words in pairs of sentences. For example, *The wind was strong enough to destroy buildings. There was much destruction.*

Talk, read and write

- Ask the children if they think the editorial will succeed in making people change how they live. Focus their attention on strengths and weaknesses in the argument and the use of evocative language.
- In shared writing, compose additional paragraphs for the editorial about the need for people to travel less. Choose language carefully in order to persuade readers to make changes in their lives.

Extension

Invite the children to write a letter to the newspaper in response to this editorial. Most will probably want to agree and then say what they will do, but you could challenge others to think of arguments against. For example, it's better if recycling is left to big organisations like councils; future generations will just have to look after themselves.