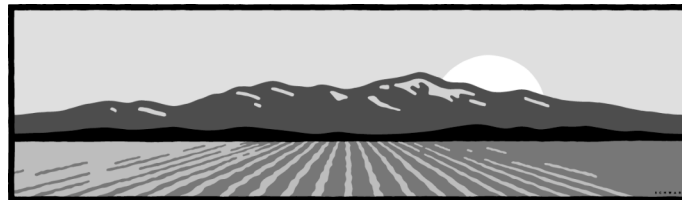


CALIFORNIA WRITING PROJECT  
TEACHER-TO-TEACHER CURRICULUM RESOURCES

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*CALIFORNIA STORIES UNCOVERED  
IN THE CLASSROOM*

WRITING OUR HERITAGE, OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR PROMISE



C A L I F O R N I A  
S T O R I E S

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*The California Council for the Humanities*

A JOINT PROJECT OF THE CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES  
AND THE CALIFORNIA WRITING PROJECT AND PART OF COUNCIL'S  
STATEWIDE *CALIFORNIA STORIES UNCOVERED* CAMPAIGN

AMERICANIZATION AND SUCCESS:  
WHERE DO YOU STAND?  
WRITING A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE ESSAY

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NORMA MOTA-ALTMAN, TEACHER CONSULTANT  
UCLA WRITING PROJECT, UCLA

“The more Americanized you are, the more successful you’ll be.” This statement, made in an English learner classroom becomes the foundation for a writing assignment that asks students to explore and research this assertion and to take a stand in response to it. In order to form their own opinions, students read and discuss immigrant memoirs, which serve as scaffolding for their own ideas, as expressed in speech and writing.

Genre: controversial issue essays

Recommended grades: 7-12 intermediate, advanced, and transitional English learners

### Overview

Immigrant students from around the world come to the United States, hoping for a better life and for an opportunity to further their education. Because the majority of the country’s immigrant students reside in California, teaching these English learners to speak and write well is an imperative. Unfortunately, the acquisition of English is a formidable task for all of these students. In addition to learning a new language, English learners must also adjust to a new culture and to a new way of looking at the world.

Two of the biggest questions that students must answer for themselves are these— “How Americanized must I become in order to be successful? How much of my culture and language am I willing to give up in order to be successful?” These questions and my students’ ongoing dilemmas in adjusting to a new country and to a new language form the basis of this writing assignment.

In discussing a topic that is so central to their own experiences and to current situations, students are completely engaged in their learning. Students want to discuss the texts and the questions that they generate because the texts talk about what the students know or have experienced. There are no discipline problems or wasted class periods because the students have opinions, and they have important ideas they want to express, both in classroom discussions and in their writing. This lesson gives students real reasons for improving their critical reading and their academic writing. It also provides authentic and interesting topics for discussion that engage students and offer them opportunities to practice their oral language skills.

In my classroom, I encourage and celebrate the beauty and power of being bilingual. After the students have read and discussed Elizabeth Wong’s piece, “The Struggle to Be All-American,” I tell them that I, too, have written about the importance of language in our lives and that I would like to share my piece with them. By reading and discussing these two memoirs, students find ideas that they can discuss and later embed into their own persuasive essays. These memoirs provide language scaffolds for English language learners.

## Objectives

### Students will:

- elevate their awareness about the importance of language in our lives
- connect characterizations in literature to characterizations of themselves
- form opinions and orally participate in philosophical discussions
- identify the purpose for writing memoirs
- use reflective narratives as informal writing and scaffolds for controversial issue essays
- study the structure of argument in writing a controversial issue essay.

## Applications to the California English-Language Arts Academic Content Standards

### Reading

- 2.3 Generate relevant questions about readings on issues that can be researched.
- 2.4 Extend ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.
- 2.8 Evaluate the credibility of an author's argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author's intent affects the structure and tone of the text.
- 3.5 Compare works that express a universal theme and provide evidence to support the ideas expressed in each work.

### Writing Strategies

- 1.0 Write coherent and focused texts that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly reasoned argument. Student writing demonstrates writing awareness of audience and purpose and use of the stages of the writing process, as needed.

### Organization and Focus

- 1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of discourses (e.g., purpose, speaker, audience, form) when completing narrative, expository, persuasive, or descriptive writing assignments.
- 1.3 Structure ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way and support them with precise and relevant examples.

### Evaluation and Revision

- 1.9 Revise texts to highlight the individual voice, improve sentence variety and style, and enhance subtlety of meaning and tone in ways that are consistent with the purpose, audience, and genre.

### Written and Oral English Conventions

- 1.1 Demonstrate control of grammar, diction, and paragraph and sentence structure and an understanding of English usage.

## Teaching Sequence

### ❑ Pre-reading: Accessing prior knowledge:

- Ask students to think about the following: “What are some of the difficulties of being an immigrant?”
- Brainstorm with the class and list two or three on the board (i.e. leaving family and friends behind; not knowing the new language).
- Ask students to list at least three more difficulties.
- Ask students to discuss their lists in cooperative groups.
- Ask students to select one or two items from their list and do a Quick Write about “The difficulty of being an immigrant” (5-7 minutes).

### ❑ Reading and responding:

- Review what a “memoir” is and why people might write one.
- Give the students the short story, “The Struggle to be All-American” by Elizabeth Wong.
- Read the story aloud. Have the students highlight any words that are unfamiliar to them.
- Discuss the words that were unfamiliar with the class. Have the students reread the story in cooperative groups.
- Ask the class to respond to the question, “How did this girl feel about herself?” As they answer, chart their answers on the board.
- Ask students to copy the responses that were generated by the class. For homework, they will write a short piece about how the girl felt about herself and support their opinions with quotes from the text OR write a narrative about how they personally feel about being an immigrant.
- If you do not have access to this particular story, I have included some alternatives in the recommended instructional resources at the end of this unit.

## Student Samples

### Living in Two Worlds

Even if I'm an Americanized person, I still believe that losing your own culture is like losing a part of yourself. Although I'm living here in the "English" world, I still love and respect my culture. Therefore, I must also understand that there are differences between the "English" world and the "Filipino" world.

There are so many differences between the two worlds. Here in the United States, different laws apply to every state. But in the Philippines, the law applies to the whole country. Being called "the land of the immigrants," America has a more diverse population. In terms of behavior, Filipinos are more conservative than Americans, though we act aggressively sometimes. In the Philippines, you work for your family. Filipinos are close-knit and family oriented people. Here in the United States, people live to work. Filipinos are hospitable and warm, most especially to visitors. They're also religious and they love to celebrate every religious occasion such as Christmas, Easter, or the birthday of a saint. People here in America have different religions and some are atheists. These are some of the differences I've observed in my last seven months of staying here in the United States.

Despite the fact that I'm living here in America, I can never ever forget how wonderful the Philippines is. And I can also never forget my culture, though I'm becoming Americanized. I'm looking forward to return home again to the Philippines because I love the people, the culture, and the environment. Also, I still have my relatives and friends there and I miss them so much. As our national hero Dr. Jose Rizal said, "He who does not love his own country is worse than an animal and smelly fish."

By (anonymous)

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### My "Americanization"

I, being Asian, consider myself Americanized though I was born and raised in the Philippines. I was brought up with American influences and culture. My country, colonized by different cultures, is one of the biggest reasons why America has had tremendous influence in my everyday life.

It's true that the Filipino culture still dominates my personality but America was just all around me as I was growing up—music, movies, T.V., language, books, etc. All of these everyday influences reflect American culture. In fact, I was listening to American mainstream music and watching American shows all the time.

If you go to my country, everybody knows how to speak English, as well as our native language, Tagalog. In fact, the Philippines is the third largest English speaking country after the United States and United Kingdom. I honestly think that growing up having both cultures is having the best of both worlds. I certainly enjoy the carefree American environment as well as the warm and close-knit family oriented Filipino culture. Therefore, I consider myself Americanized-Filipino.

By Joseph

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## The Differences Between Viet Nam and the USA

"Did you get used to life in America yet, nephew? Do you still miss your friends?" my aunt asked me.

"Um...I am pretty used to it, but I still miss my friends sometimes, a little," I answered. Living in the United States, I realized that there were some similarities between the two countries, Viet Nam and the U.S.; however, the differences seemed to be more dominant.

Among these differences, U.S. schools were completely strange to me, compared to the ones in Viet Nam. One of the biggest differences was the school fees. In Viet Nam, students had to pay the school fees if they wanted to begin their studies in that school. However, in the USA, schools are free for students from kindergarten to high school, and every student is welcome at school. They do not have to pay anything; moreover, they will be rewarded with lots of money if they do really great in schools.

The next difference was the time for school. In Viet Nam, students started their classes at 7:00 A.M. and left school at about 11:45 A.M., but in the USA, students begin at 7:00A.M. and leave school at about 3:00 P.M. Each period lasts about 45 minutes in Viet Nam and students do not eat lunch at schools while students in the USA do at midday. The teaching program in Viet Nam was much harder and longer than in the USA, I thought. Students in Viet Nam spent more time taking notes than practicing what they had been taught. Yet, students in the USA focused more on practicing with lab experiments, field trips, etc.

Uniforms are another difference between schools in Viet Nam and schools in the USA. In Viet Nam, students were forced to wear uniforms in the school regulations. If they did not wear the uniforms the school requested, they would be sent to the dean's office and the school would ask their parents to come and talk. If the situation got worse and worse, the student would receive corporal punishment or be suspended for good. On the contrary, students in the U.S. are free to choose their own ways of dressing as long as the school allows them. They do not have to wear the same kind of uniforms as the students in Viet Nam did.

Living in America for almost 10 months, I feel pretty familiar with this lifestyle. If someone asks me where I would rather be, in Viet Nam or in the U.S., I may answer "The USA," because I prefer the schools in the USA and I feel comfortable with what I am doing right now.

By Phu

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### I Remember...

I remember the place  
where I used to live,  
the warm weather  
and the kind people.  
There was a certain  
fraternity and respect.  
It was a special bond  
as we were a real family.  
I remember the diversity  
of people on the streets.  
Some of them were going  
to the market, others

on their way to work.

Now, all that seems remote to me  
I live in a new place  
with people unknown.  
People with beliefs and  
customs contrary to mine.  
The streets and sidewalks  
look deserted but clean,  
there's only the whispering  
of the car engine  
continuously all day and night.  
Nevertheless, I am getting  
used to these American ways,  
sometimes I wish to go back.

By Wu Liu

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### **My Americanization**

Sitting in a corner and thinking of what my mother had said to me, I felt like crying. That was the very first time my mother had ever gotten so mad at me.

"Stop behaving that way! Don't you remember our traditions?" My mother's questions echoed in my mind.

Living in America has changed me a great deal, from my way of dressing to my mannerisms, from my point of view to my privacy. When I was in Vietnam, I had a simple view of getting dressed, but when I came here, things gradually changed with me day by day. I took more time looking at myself before going somewhere. I dressed in a way that many people might think of as being Americanized, the way which made my mother hit the roof. There was also one more thing that didn't satisfy my mother and my whole family. It was when I went to a new school and I had a girlfriend. We used to talk to each other on the phone, but it didn't last long because they didn't want me to have a girlfriend or my female friends call me. They kept telling me to stay at home and to study all the time, but I just couldn't do that because it was not what I wanted. Sometimes I broke the rules, and of course I was in trouble every time.

"Why are dressing like that? You look like hell," my mom yelled at me before I headed for the school bus.

"This is a new fashion, mom." I replied. My mom gave me an angry look, which had never happened to me before. After that day, things became very complicated for me, really.

"Shut up! It's nothing to do with you," my father raised his voice and shouted at me.

"What did I do wrong?" I asked. I just wanted to express my opinions in the conversation between my father and his guests. "Do I have any rights of freedom of speech?"

"In our country's traditions, it is considered rudeness, son," my mother explained to me.

"But we are living in America and we should have a different way of thinking, Mom," I resisted.

"Stop talking about America or you'll get into trouble," said my mom, being serious.

Going to school in the United States, I learned many different and new things such as Americans, their culture, their society, and so on. As a result, I was easily influenced, and that was why my mother got so mad at me. Since then, I started to behave differently, pretty much like an American, not like me before. I made friends with Americans and went out with them. I had meals at American restaurants. I spent most of my time with them; therefore, I learned lots of things from them. Having American friends helped me a lot with my English, so I had no reason for not being their friend.

"Confused" was the first thing I felt. I was feeling as if I were in between. I just couldn't imagine or figure out what kind of person I wanted to be in the future. I also felt a little sadness because my mother never treated me like this before. Now I'm not really close to my mom like we used to be. I spend less time with her, and she is not happy about what I am doing. I want to share my feelings, but I don't have the confidence to do that. I just hope one day she will understand me and forgive me.

By Phu

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### My Americanization

"Stop giving me a history lesson about you, and stop living in the past, Mom. It's bothering me!" I told my mom.

"When did it all change? Everything is so different now." My mom was very angry and screaming at me. The whole street could hear!

Mom doesn't understand me, because I always talk back to her since I came to America. She never gave me reasons and blamed me when I did something wrong. I never cared about it when I was in Cambodia, but now it is different. I'm growing and I know what is going on in society and what is happening in the modern world. I know that I am changing. Even my thinking and my appearance are changing.

I always stand at the mirror and study my clothes, my hair and my posture. Mom doesn't like it, she doesn't want me to wear make up or dress sexy like American girls. She thinks it is wrong for a Cambodian girl.

I know Mom cares for me and for my good, but this is a different country with different problems. I think she could hear what I have said. I might be right once in a while. I want my parents to listen to what I have to say instead of interrupting me and telling me, "The answer is no." They treat me like a baby, and they like to control me. They think that I can't make my own decisions. I have a brain, the one that my mom gave me and I know how to use it.

In Cambodian culture, we have to put ten fingers together (It looks like praying) to the elders when we see them, but I never did it. When I saw my mom's friends, I just said "Hi!" to them. Mom really got mad and yelled at me, "Don't act like an American."

In my opinion, I think acting and speaking like an American can help me to find a better job. People will have different thoughts about me, and I will also have more opportunities than other people who can't speak English.

By Julia

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## Teaching Sequence Continued

### ❑ Critical reading and responding:

- With the whole class, discuss what it means to be an American while also being an immigrant. Chart students' responses on the board and have them copy them.
- Ask students to write their answers the questions, "To you, what does it mean to be successful?" "What does it mean to be 'Americanized'?" Explain that they will discuss these definitions with their groups after the reading.
- Explain that they will be using these discussions and Quick Writes to help them later when they write a controversial issue essay.
- Give students a copy of the article, "Con Respeto, I am not Richard Rodriguez" (available at <http://www.writingproject.org/pub/nwpr/voice/2003no5/mota-altman.html>), to help them think more about the issue of becoming an American.
- Before reading "Con Respeto, I am not Richard Rodriguez," aloud to the class, I briefly explain who Richard Rodriguez is and what is meant by Basic Interpersonal Communications Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.

Note: I explain BICS and CALP to my students because I think it's important for them to understand that it takes EVERYONE, 5-7 years to learn a language well. Many of my students studied English in their own countries and feel really discouraged when they come to American high schools and find they have such a hard time in their academic content classes. By explaining BICS and CALP, I see students breathing a sigh of relief and feeling better about their own struggles. I tell them, "You are doing great. This is what everyone goes through."

- Ask students to underline unfamiliar words and annotate the text with questions or comments as the teacher reads.
- Read the text aloud, stopping to discuss the main points of each section.
- At the end of the reading, review the vocabulary that students were unfamiliar with. Ask the students to reread the text again and discuss any new questions or insights that emerge from this reading.

Note: I use this "Splash" activity to introduce unfamiliar vocabulary, but I use teacher read-alouds--sometimes to introduce the text but sometimes after the students have read the text themselves. For my students, they often want to hear the inflection and rhythm of the words, so I have good readers read aloud or I read.

- Put students in small groups. Tell the groups to develop group definitions for what "Americanized" and "successful" mean. The recorder for each group will write the group's definitions, which will be turned into the teacher.
- Each group selects one person from the group to report to the whole class on the group's definitions. As they do so, the teacher charts their definitions on the board.

### ❑ Forming an opinion:

- Ask students, for homework, to think of three things that people who support the statement, "The more Americanized you are, the more successful you'll be," would say and three things that people who disagree would say.

Note: This was not the first time students had worked with the "Forming An Opinion" worksheet. The class had previously read about junk-food vending machines in school. They had completed the "forming an opinion" template, and the teacher had modeled how to write an essay using the information, and students had copied the essay to use as a model.

- Students brainstorm in their groups what people on either side of the issue might say to support or oppose the statement. They fill in the Forming an Opinion worksheet as they brainstorm and/or complete it for homework. (5-7 minutes)

**Forming An Opinion**

How do you feel about “The more Americanized you are, the more successful you’ll be”?  
Think about the articles/stories you read. Then use the sentence starters below to form your own opinion.

**The “Yes” side:**

People who think the “more Americanized you are, the more successful you’ll be” say—  
(try to think of at least three things people might say to support this belief)

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**The “No” side:**

People who think you do not need to be Americanized to be successful say—  
(try to think of at least three things people might say to support this belief)

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**Think about both sides:**

Who do you think is right?

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**Your opinion:**

I think \_\_\_\_\_

One reason why I think this is \_\_\_\_\_

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**Philosophical discussion:**

- Students have a philosophical discussion. The discussion topic is written on the board: “The more Americanized you are, the more successful you’ll be.”
- Students who support the statement sit on the left hand side of the room. Students who disagree with the statement sit on the right hand side of the room. Students who are undecided sit in the middle and are free to ask questions of either side. All the students are free to move and change their positions whenever they hear a powerful statement. This visually demonstrates the power of language and how expressing an idea well can influence people. The teacher’s role is to clarify statements and to moderate the discussion. He/she does not express a personal opinion.

**Philosophical Chairs**

Philosophical Chairs is a forum where students can express their agreement, disagreement, or undecided feelings about controversial issues in the world. Students share their opinions and respect the opinions of their classmates.

Rules for Philosophical Discussions:

- Be open-minded. Listen to all statements made and consider both sides.
- Move to the other side if a particular statement or argument seems to sway your thinking.
- No one acknowledges any move. This is NOT a contest.
- Do not raise hand or speak while another person is speaking.

Tips:

- Statement should be written on the board.
- The mediator must be neutral.
- When necessary, mediator paraphrases or restates statements for clarification (in an unbiased manner).
- Modify the statement or switch topics when the discussion becomes stagnant.
- For closure, consider allowing each student thirty seconds to express an opinion.
- A writing assignment is an appropriate follow-up to this activity.

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### Philosophical Discussion Report

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Topic:

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My original position: Pro \_\_\_\_\_ Con \_\_\_\_\_

How many times I changed positions: \_\_\_\_\_

My ending position: Pro \_\_\_\_\_ Con \_\_\_\_\_

My explanation and comments:

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How open-minded was I as I listened to other people talk?

Mostly open-minded \_\_\_\_\_

Halfway open-minded \_\_\_\_\_

Not very open-minded \_\_\_\_\_

Why?

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Note: Philosophical discussions are VITAL for EL students because, in many classes, EL students are never heard from or asked to participate. These discussions help scaffold academic language for my students because I give

them the protocols to practice (i.e. "I think; I disagree with them; Your statement makes me think, etc.") Asking students to voice their opinions: 1) engages them immediately and 2) forces them to access higher order thinking skills by having them analyze and/or synthesize different opinions. These discussions also give my students the confidence they need to try to speak in other classes. EL classes must give students opportunities to speak!

**□ Writing a controversial issue essay:**

- Drafting the essay: After discussing the issue, students list 3 arguments in support of and 3 arguments against the statement while the teacher lists her own on the board. Students are to share their lists with a partner. The teacher discusses her own list and adds or deletes items based on the students' input. Using the lists as a guide, the teacher models and writes an opinion essay on the board. (The students are free to copy it or not.)
- Ask students to write an opinion piece for homework, being sure to include arguments in favor of and arguments against the statement, "The more Americanized you are, the more successful you'll be."

Note: This was not the first time students had written a controversial issue essay. The class had previously read about junk-food vending machines in school. They had completed the "forming an opinion" template and the teacher had modeled how to write an essay using the information. Students then copied the essay and kept it in their binder for use as a model and as a reference.

**□ Revising the essay:**

- The next day, students do a "read around" in their groups with their essays. (Students sit in cooperative groups throughout the year. At times, the teacher selects the members of the groups and at other times, the students self-select their group members.) The cooperative groups are made up of four students. When they do "read-arounds", they read everyone's paper at the table (so they read 3 papers). The students respond to each other's work by writing on the back of the essay one thing they liked about the piece and one thing they thought the author might add or clarify.
- After the students get their papers back, the teacher, together with the students, cooperatively creates a 4-point rubric on the board that students can use as they do their revisions and create a final draft.
- For homework, students revise and write their final draft of the opinion essay.

**□ Final activities with the opinion essay:**

Students do a final read around with their piece at their tables and, depending on the purpose of the assignment, can:

- Choose the one piece they feel is the strongest from their group to read aloud to the class.
- Read their piece aloud in an "Author's Chair"

Note: Author's Chair is an opportunity for students to share their writing publicly with their classmates and to experience how their writing can affect others. Students volunteer to read their writing pieces aloud to the class and to listen to their classmates comments about their piece, once they have finished. It's an opportunity for students to experience writing for someone other than their teacher!

- Read and score the essays at their table, using the class-created rubric.

### Recommended Instructional Resources

❑ Cisneros, Sandra. "No Speak English." *The House on Mango Street*. New York: First Vintage Contemporaries, 1984.

❑ Gadda, George and Faye Peitzman, eds. *Teaching Analytical Writing*. Los Angeles: California Academic Partnership Program, 1988

Note: In Appendix B of this book, you will find an excerpt from Maxine Hong Kingston's book, *Woman Warrior*, which focuses on Americanization in terms of language and school.

❑ Mota-Altman, Norma. "Con respeto, I am not Richard Rodriguez." *The Voice*. Vol. 8, No. 5 2003 (available at <http://www.writingproject.org/pub/nwpr/voice/2003no5/mota-altman.html>).

❑ Mora, Pat. "Elena." *My Own True Name*. Houston, TX: Piñata Books, Arte Público Press, 2000.

❑ Wong, Elizabeth. "The Struggle to be All-American." *Elements of Literature, Third Course*. Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2000.

Note: I searched the web, bookstores, and Wong's own website but it seems her piece has ONLY been published in the *Elements of Literature* textbook!!

### Recommended Professional Resources

❑ Cummins, J. "The Role of Primary Language Development in Promoting Educational Success for Language Minority Students." In California State Department of Education (Ed.), *Schooling and Language Minority Students: A Theoretical Framework*. Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center, California State University, Los Angeles, 1981.

### About the Teacher Consultant

After teaching at the elementary and middle school levels for over twenty years, Norma Mota-Altman currently teaches ESL and Spanish for Native Speakers at San Gabriel High School in Alhambra, CA. She is also an Associate Director of the UCLA Writing Project and a member of the ELL (English Language Learners) Leadership Team of the National Writing Project. She provides staff development on a variety of topics, in both English and Spanish.

## Forming An Opinion

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**Think about both sides:**

Who do you think is right?

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**Your opinion:**

I think \_\_\_\_\_

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One reason why I think this is think \_\_\_\_\_

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**Philosophical Discussion Report**

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Topic:

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My ending position: Pro \_\_\_\_\_ Con \_\_\_\_\_

My explanation and comments:

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How open-minded was I as I listened to other people talk?

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