



Focus: “Convince Me”!: An Introduction to Argumentative Writing Common Core Writing Standard 1

Overview

This lesson is intended to introduce students to the art of argumentative writing by familiarizing them with basic terms; allowing students to practice establishing the relationship between claims, reasons, and evidence; and analyzing an author’s use of argument in a text.

Standards

9-10.WS.1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claim(s) and create an organization that establishes clear relationship among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns.
- c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
- d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Objectives

- Differentiate between persuasion and argument
- Introduce (or review) language of argumentation
- To recognize argumentative techniques in a variety of text
- To formulate an argument with a claim and counter-claim
- To reach a logical conclusion



Materials

- Access to the Internet for [the Interactive Persuasion Map](#) exercise
- Access to the Internet for this helpful information on [organizing claims and counter-claims](#)

Activity 1: What is an Argument?

Discussion

Solicit students’ answers to the question, “What is an argument?” Put answers on board. Answers may range from “a fight” to “trying to get someone to believe your point of view” or other possibilities.

For the purposes of English, an argument is defined as follows:

An argument is a reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer’s position, belief, or conclusion is valid. In English, students make claims about the worth or meaning of a literary works, defending their interpretation with evidence from the text, for example.

In short, arguments seek to make people believe that something is true or to persuade people to change their beliefs or behavior.

What is the difference between argument and persuasion?

| An argumentative essay | A persuasive essay |
|--|--|
| Makes claims based on factual evidence | May make claims based on opinion |
| Makes counter-claims. The author takes opposing views into account. | May not take opposing ideas into account |
| Neutralizes or “defeat” serious opposing ideas | |
| Convinces audience through the merit and reasonableness of the claims and proofs offered | Persuades by appealing to the audience’s emotion or by relying on the character or credentials of the writer – less on the merits of |



| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Often compares texts or ideas to establish a position</p> <p>Logic-based</p> | <p>her or his reasons and evidence.</p> <p>Emotion-based</p> |
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Lecture, Continued

Define important terms for argumentation below. Ask students to generate independent examples of all of the following and put them on the board for discussion and reflection.

Key Terms for Argumentation

- **Claim** – Your basic belief about a particular topic, issue, event, or idea
- **Counterclaim** – A solid and reasonable argument that opposes or disagrees with your claim
- **Rebuttal** – A written or verbal response to a counterclaim. The object of the rebuttal is to take into account the ideas presented in the counterclaim and explain why they aren’t persuasive enough, valid enough, or important enough to outweigh your own claim.
- **Support** – Your specific facts or specific evidence used to support why your claim is true
- **Refute** – Argue against a position or prove it to be wrong
- **Qualify** – A “partly-agree” stance in which you agree (in part) with another person’s argument or position but also disagree with part of it.

If students are reluctant to participate, ask someone to make a claim regarding the dumbest video on Youtube (or some other student-friendly topic). Have others make counterclaims, rebuttals, offer support, refutation, qualification, et cetera.

As discussion continues, teachers may need to clarify understanding and emphasize the need for evidence – that is, specific facts, not hypothetical situations (e.g., “Let’s say you have a guy who...”), not opinions, not generalities (e.g., “Well, people always...”). Without solid evidence, an argument lacks merit.



Teachers may also need to emphasize an idea many students may resist: that their argument is made stronger by introducing a good, solid counterclaim. (Note: Some students will think this idea is whackadoo – why, they’ll reason, should you put words in the mouth of your opponent?) Teachers will need to demonstrate the value of the “preemptive strike,” the virtue of framing the other person’s argument to one’s own advantage.

Conclusion

Review crucial terms and discuss the progression of the unit from this point, giving a preview of the use of argument in the classroom. Rapid question-and-answer in a “class *Jeopardy*” format to review key terms might also conclude the class.

Activity 2: Playing With Arguments

Discussion

Review key terms or ideas (e.g., *claim*, *counterclaim*, *argument vs. persuasion*, etc.) before proceeding.

Persuasion Map

For this activity, students will need independent use of computers and access to the Internet. In order to play around with (and reinforce) the idea that argumentation needs to be based on facts, students will play with the [Interactive Persuasion Map](#) on the linked site.

Students should be encouraged to have fun with the site. The purpose (as of now) is to familiarize students with the logical process of thought involved in creating an argument. Students may generate deliberately silly topics to defend (e.g., “Boxing dinosaurs is far superior to all other summertime sports”) or choose more serious ones if they choose.

Conclusion

Have students print their Persuasion Maps on the website for future reference. The graphic on the site is helpful as a way of visualizing the relationship between the thesis, the evidence, and the explanations.

Later Use

As students develop (more serious) argumentative essays later, the Interactive Persuasion Map site may be a very helpful tool to aid students in outlining or brainstorming.



Activity 3: Analyzing Arguments

Opener

Teachers will choose an appropriate speech from the resources below to read aloud. Note: Provide students with copies of their own to follow along with during the reading. Teachers may choose to read examples or short selections from several speeches instead of just one, making sure that each selection presents sufficient information for students to discover in the group-work activity below (i.e., the selection should contain a claim, reasons, facts, et cetera).

Small Groups

Following the reading, students can separate into small groups to discover the following information:

1. What is the speaker's claim? What does s/he want you to believe?
2. What reasons does s/he give for his claim?
3. What facts, quotations, evidence, or specific details does s/he give to support those reasons?
4. Is there a counterclaim? What is it?

Whole-Group Discussion

Following the group-work, the entire class can reconvene. Some groups will disagree about the claims and counterclaims, et cetera. The teacher's focus should be to get students to use specific evidence from the text to support their points, e.g., "Okay, Billy, what do you think Patrick Henry is arguing? Can you point out the part of the speech that made you come to the conclusion you did? Can you read it for us, please?"

Great Speeches

- Patrick Henry "Speech to the Second Virginia Convention"
<http://www.history.org/almanack/life/politics/giveme.cfm>
- Thomas Jefferson "Declaration of Independence"
<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/AMERICA/DECLAR.HTM>
- Edgar Allan Poe "Sonnet—to Science"
<http://library.thinkquest.org/11840/Poe/science.html>
- Theodore Roosevelt "The Proper Place for Sports"



<http://examplesofrhetoric.wikispaces.com/campianickanaphora2-16-10>

- Billy Collins “The History Teacher”
http://www.billy-collins.com/2005/06/the_history_tea.html
- Martin Luther King, Jr. “Address at the March on Washington—August 28, 1963”
www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihadream.htm
- Nelson Mandela “Inauguration Speech 1994”
http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_2/mandela.html
- *Invictus* DVD (clip only)
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt “State of the Union—January 1944”
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=463>

(Note: Many of these speeches are from the Common Core list; all are readily available on-line. Also, many can be accessed (and listened to) on the “American Rhetoric” web site—explore it!)

Conclusion

Draw students’ attention to the fact that we use argument throughout our lives. Learning to assemble arguments, fairly deal with opposing ideas, and support those ideas with facts is crucial. Praise students for identifying elements of argument in professional speeches and alert them to the idea that writing, like many other things, is a game of strategy.

Activity 4: Making Arguments

Opener

Have students read the example student essay from p. 57 of the [Common Core State Standards, Appendix C](#) on the true meaning of friendship. Building on the skills from the previous lesson, have the students identify the writer’s claims, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.



Writing

Assign topics or let students choose from a list of possibilities such as the following:

Compare a book you have read with the movie version of that same book. Prove which one was better.

Some books, such as *Fahrenheit 451*, *Of Mice and Men*, or *Huckleberry Finn* arouse controversy when they are taught at the high school level. Think of a high-quality piece of literature with controversial elements and prove it should be included in the high school curriculum.

Students may need to use the Interactive Persuasion Map or refer to [this very helpful site that gives several different organizational strategies for argumentative essays](#).

Conclusion

As a follow-up to this exercise, students can switch papers and identify crucial elements (claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence) in each other's papers. Emphasize the importance of thinking of themselves not just as writers, but active strategists who choose approaches and deal with opposing ideas in writing.

Resources Included:

Inaugural Address speech by Nelson Mandela

May 10th 1994

Your Majesties, Your Highnesses, Distinguished Guests, Comrades and friends:

Today, all of us do, by our presence here, and by our celebrations in other parts of our country and the world, confer glory and hope to newborn liberty.

Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud.

Our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity's belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all our hopes for a glorious life for all.

All this we owe both to ourselves and to the peoples of the world who are so well represented here today.

To my compatriots, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld.

Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal. The national mood changes as the seasons change.



We are moved by a sense of joy and exhilaration when the grass turns green and the flowers bloom.

That spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland explains the depth of the pain we all carried in our hearts as we saw our country tear itself apart in a terrible conflict, and as we saw it spurned, outlawed and isolated by the peoples of the world, precisely because it has become the universal base of the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression.

We, the people of South Africa, feel fulfilled that humanity has taken us back into its bosom, that we, who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil.

We thank all our distinguished international guests for having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, a common victory for justice, for peace, for human dignity.

We trust that you will continue to stand by us as we tackle the challenges of building peace, prosperity, non-sexism, non-racialism and democracy.

We deeply appreciate the role that the masses of our people and their political mass democratic, religious, women, youth, business, traditional and other leaders have played to bring about this conclusion. Not least among them is my Second Deputy President, the Honourable F.W. de Klerk.

We would also like to pay tribute to our security forces, in all their ranks, for the distinguished role they have played in securing our first democratic elections and the transition to democracy, from blood-thirsty forces which still refuse to see the light.

The time for the healing of the wounds has come.

The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come.

The time to build is upon us.

We have, at last, achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination.

We succeeded to take our last steps to freedom in conditions of relative peace. We commit ourselves to the construction of a complete, just and lasting peace.

We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people.

We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity--a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

As a token of its commitment to the renewal of our country, the new Interim Government of National Unity will, as a matter of urgency, address the issue of amnesty for various categories of our people who are currently serving terms of imprisonment.

We dedicate this day to all the heroes and heroines in this country and the rest of the world who sacrificed in many ways and surrendered their lives so that we could be free.

Their dreams have become reality. Freedom is their reward.

We are both humbled and elevated by the honour and privilege that you, the people of South Africa, have bestowed on us, as the first President of a united, democratic, non-racial and non-



sexist South Africa, to lead our country out of the valley of darkness.
We understand it still that there is no easy road to freedom.
We know it well that none of us acting alone can achieve success.
We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world.
Let there be justice for all.
Let there be peace for all.
Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.
Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfil themselves.
Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world.
Let freedom reign.
The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement!

God bless Africa!

The Inaugural Address speech
by Nelson Mandela

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:



I am the captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley