Teaching Argument:

Writing as a Form of Inquiry across the Grades and Disciplines

From the book

*Oh Yeah? Putting Argument to Work both in School and out*

By Smith, Wilhelm, Fredricksen

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FIVE KINDS OF COMPOSING/ MEANING-MAKING NECESSARY TO ACHIEVING UNDERSTANDING

PRE-WRITING

Composing to Plan (knowledge of composing, context and purpose)

***Composing to Practice*** (procedural knowledge of substance and form – declarative knowledge of substance and form)

DRAFTING AND REVISING

Composing to Draft

Composing to Finalize and Represent

***Composing for Transfer –*** formative assessments, self-assessments, process analysis and planning for the future

**5 Kinds General Heuristic for Composing**

**Composing to Plan:** develop knowledge of context and purpose

* Brainstorm relevant background; e.g. past experience with an informational thought pattern
* Action research monitoring for a day, e.g. how often do you see this thought pattern at work?
* Search and Find with newspaper, media, popular culture
* Reading mentor texts – think alouds and annotations

Summarize Purposes and Contexts

Come up with tentative topic ideas for your composition. Why are these compelling to you? How do they address the inquiry question? Where will you get data? What will be achieved?

**Composing to Practice** – getting and shaping the data:

-Continue finding, generating, and recording data

-Practice the crux moves and Name these crux moves and thought patterns

-Practice shaping and patterning of thinking in writing (use short writing, drama activities, visualization, graphic organizers, invention strategies)

-Name linguistic markers

**Composing to draft** – putting all five kinds of knowledge together:

-Articulate critical standards

Train peer responders to apply criteria

-Practice moving, deleting and adding data and text structures to enhance coherence and global meaning

**Composing to finalize and represent/share**:

-Proofreading and editing at local sentence level, and word choice level

-Attention to transitions and navigational devices, multimodal reinforcement

**Composing for Transfer:** reflecting on what has been learned and how to carry it forward, when to use it in the future:

-All formative assessments

-Process analyses

-Reflective writing

-Reflecting through drama, art

-Imaginatively rehearsing for future problem-solving and living

**Gut check!**

Using the five kinds of knowledge and composing to plan instruction basically boils down to these three moves:

1. Ask: What *activities* will I use to foreground the **purpose** of the immediate meaning-making and composing and the purposes of composing this text structure in the future?

 Ask: How am I providing an **immediate context** of use (like inquiry) that will require and reward the learning of the new text structure through both reading and composing?

THIS IS HOW THE PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE OF PURPOSE AND CONTEXT IS ACHIEVED.

1. Ask: What *activities* will I provide to help students **activate relevant background knowledge** and to **develop new knowledge** that will be necessary to composing (or comprehending)?

b) How are these activities helping students to *access* and *generate* the necessary material for their composing?

THESE ACTIVITIES ARE HOW PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE OF SUBSTANCE IS ENACTED. DECLARATIVE KNOWLEDGE OF SUBSTANCE NECESSARILY FOLLOWS.

1. Ask: What *activities* will I provide to help students **select and shape the material** into a composition that has specific meanings and effects?

b) How are these activities helping students to explore the ways of **structuring and shaping material in ways that fit the conventions of the text structure**, and that lead to particular meanings and effects?

THESE ACTIVITIES ARE HOW PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE OF FORM IS PRACTICED AND ENACTED. DECLARATIVE KNOWLEDGE OF FORM NECESSARILY FOLLOWS, AND SO DOES DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF HOW A PARTICULAR TEXT STRUCTURES PARTICULAR CONTENT FOR SPECIFIC MEANINGS AND EFFECTS.

**FRONTLOADING for Argument**

Ponder this: why do people bother to argue? List three

reasons why you've gotten into an argument recently:

Think about times you've lost arguments, and times you've

won arguments. What makes a good argument? How do

you win people over to your side? List three ingredients to a great argument:

Why should you care about arguments? Feel free to use an

example from your own life, from politics, from science, law, medicine, from history:

How can a good argument be powerful?

How can a bad argument be powerful?

TYPES OF ARGUMENT

**1. Arguments of Interpretation (units that move from local inferences leading to global/structural ones)**

**2. Arguments of Definition and Evaluation (units that move from developing extended definition into making judgments using them)**

**3. Arguments of Fact, Judgment, and Policy (units that move from establishing arguments of fact [doing inquiry], weaving them into judgments, and using those to inform policy choices)**

**Toulmin’s Model of Argumentation**

CLAIM: The starting point for an argument. Good claims must be debatable, defensible, and insight-yielding.

DATA: Answers the question: “What makes you say so?” or “What do you have to go on?” For an argument to move forward the audience must at least provisionally accept the data. Data provide a safe starting point. AKA Evidence. DATA is WHAT YOU SHOULD NOTICE AND ATTEND TO.

WARRANT: Answers the question: “So what?” or “What allows you to move from those data to that claim?” Warrants are almost always some kind of general rule or principle. Warrants typically must be supported with backing until the audience would both see and share

the value of the warrant. A WARRANT IS A “RULE OF NOTICE” FOR INTERPRETATION.

***Arguments turn on warrants. Warrants are the reasoning and the thinking about the data. Without warrants, there is no argument.***

BACKING: Answers the question “How do you know [ that . . . (the warrant) is something we should value/believe?]” Backing is required

until the point that the audience shares the value of the warrant.

RESPONSE TO RESERVATION/REBUTTAL: Good arguments

proactively consider what someone might say who disagrees with any

portion of the argument. The response cites the reservation and

addresses it.

VOCABULARY OF ARGUMENT

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| COMMON CORE | TOULMIN | TIRE |
| argumentclaim(s)limitationsevidencereason(s)/(reasoning)Strengthscounterclaimconcluding statementobjective tone  | argumentclaimqualifierevidencewarrantgrounds/backingreservationsrebuttal/qualifierconclusion/implicationsCulminating claim | **T**hesis**I**deas**R**efutation**E**nding |
|  |  |  |

**Heuristic for Claim Writing**

Plus – what positives or pros might follow from the

claim?

Minus – what negatives or cons might follow from

the claim?

Interesting – What new insights or angles might be

revealed through a consideration of the claim?

Something you might not have considered

previously?

All cars should be yellow.

All faculty and students should wear mood rings.

Special training and certification from the state should be required prior to marriage/ to bearing children.

All marriages should go back to being arranged.

**Evidence Extraction/Citation**

Finding Good Data: Is It Safe?

Each item in the worksheet describes an argument. Rate how likely it is that your audience would regard each piece of data as a safe starting point. Remember, one piece of data is never enough to be persuasive. You’re just thinking about whether the piece of data is **safe**, that is, whether or not the audience would allow you to move on from the data or whether they’d challenge the data and require you to establish it.

1. Claim: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows—Part 2* is the best movie of the year.

Audience: Classmates

A. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows—Part 2* made much more money on its first weekend than any other movie ever has.

1 1 1 1 1 1

completely unsafe completely safe

B. When I saw the movie, most of the people didn’t leave their seats until after the credits were completely finished.

1 1 1 1 1 1

completely unsafe completely safe

C. Over 180,000 people gave it an average rating of 4.5 out of 5 stars on the Rotten Tomatoes movie review site.

1 1 1 1 1 1

completely unsafe completely safe

D. Joe Morgenstern of the *Wall Street Journal* calls it “The best possible end for the series that began a decade ago.”

1 1 1 1 1 1

completely unsafe completely safe

2. Claim: Our school should not require summer reading.

Audience: The principal

A. Most students hate the summer reading books that our school chooses.

1 1 1 1 1 1

completely unsafe completely safe

B. Adults get to choose what they want to read.

1 1 1 1 1 1

completely unsafe completely safe

C. If you read the assigned books too early in the summer, you’ll forget them by the time school starts, so athletes who want to do the reading before practice starts during the summer are at a disadvantage.

1 1 1 1 1 1

completely unsafe completely safe

D. According to Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm in their book “*Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys”: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*, young people do quite a bit of reading on their own when they are allowed to choose what they read.

1 1 1 1 1 1

completely unsafe completely safe

**Evidence Extraction**: For each claim below there are three pieces of data you might use to support it.

Rank the three pieces in order of their power as evidence, critiquing each as you

do so. We will build a heuristic for powerful and convincing evidence as we go

through this exercise.

1. Elvis Presley is the best singer in history.

a. He sold fifty million records, more than any other musician in the history of

music.

b. He had a unique combination of singing ability and personal magnetism.

c. His movies are still being shown today.

2. Mr. Wilhelm is a terrible teacher.

a. He gives too much homework, more than any other teacher.

b. One student of his, Joe Zoblotnik, explains it this way: “I went in to see

him after school for extra help three times. The first time he yelled at me

for bugging him. The second time he left after only five minutes because

he said he had to get home. The third time he stayed all right but he made

fun of me for needing extra help. He said I must be stupid if I can’t catch

on in class.”

c. Each year, 10% of his students fail English.

3. Jem, a main character in To Kill a Mockingbird, is a very caring boy who

expresses Harper Lee’s theme about the necessity of caring for each

other as human beings.

a. Throughout the novel he is nice to everyone he meets.

b. Pauline Kael, a literary critic from Temple University, writes that “Perhaps

Jem’s most positive attribute is his sensitivity to others, a quality he

displays throughout the work.”

c. After the trial of Tom Robinson, an innocent black man who the jury found

guilty, Jem wept uncontrollably.

What warrants would be necessary to make the best evidence promote the

claim?

Heuristic for strong and safe evidence?

**Warrant Workouts**

Procedural knowledge of form/Evidentiary Reasoning – logical reasoning

State your viewpoint on the issue of whether Atticus is characterized

as a good parent and briefly explain why you think so.

The following evidence could be used to argue either side of the

issue. After thinking about how the other side would use this

evidence, write a warrant for each that explains how this evidence

supports your conclusion about Atticus as a parent.

(could also have students write warrants for both sides, or also write

responses to reservations)

A. Atticus says he has threatened to whip Scout but has never

actually hit her.

B. When Scout uses profanity in front of Uncle Jack, Atticus tells

him that if he doesn’t’ pay attention to her, she’ll get over this

“stage”.

C. When Scout says she is never going to school again, Atticus

makes a compromise with her, saying: “If you’ll concede the

necessity of going to school, we’ll go on reading every night just

as we always have . . . By the way, Scout, you’d better not say

anything at school about our agreement.”

D. Atticus allows Scout to wear overalls; Aunt Alexandra suggest

that he should encourage her to wear dresses so that she will

become a lady.

Juliet has a purer and more mature love than Romeo does.

A. She is not compromised by prior relationships like Romeo’s

love for Rosalind.

B. She consciously goes against her father, mother, nurse,

extended family, and ultimately her religion because of her love

for Romeo.

C. She withstands Romeo’s bungles and mistakes like his killing of

Tybalt.

**Semantic Scales:**

**Analyzing Evidence**

**SAFETY OF EVIDENCE/ACCEPTABILITY AND VERIFIABILITY**

Is Safe, can be agreed upon, or can be verified Unsafe, will not be accepted or cannot be verified

**AUTHORITY OF SOURCE/s**

Positive and Strong Negative or Weak

**REPLICABILITY OF EVIDENCE**

Repeated/Replicable Not repeated/Not replicable

**Relevance of Evidence – ON-POINTNESS**

Clearly Relates to Topic/Claim Does not relate to topic or will require lots of work to relate

**Validity of Evidence – COLLECTION OF DATA IS SOUND**

Sound methodology/collection of data for purpose suspect collection/methodology

**Sufficiency of Evidence**

Enough Evidence to convince this audience Not Enough Evidence

**Response to Reservations**

**Yes / No                              But…**

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

No, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

No, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* students’ arguments tend to be one-sided
* students should recognize that most effective arguments tend to be qualified to some degree  should recognize and acknowledge the other side
* **Yes/No/But analysis:**
	+ go through text and pick out all points agreed with/disagreed with and try to find an opposing argument for each one

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Yes / No** | **but…** |
| YES – students should have a sense of development of literature over time | there is some good new stuff that is written specifically for kids in their current state of being |
| YES – student interest should not always drive selections | students should have opportunities to select independent reading to study based on their interests |
| YES – literature is a discipline just like math | literature is not as much a sequential discipline as math, where specific elements cannot be skipped; the nature of our subject is selective |

**Reviewing the Process/Bringing it all together: Sell Your Junk**

Now that we've broken down the persuasive arguments in

T.V. commercials, it's your turn to practice convincing people

by using warranted arguments. I've given each group three

items. They might be strange, or seemingly useless, or even

broken, but it's your group's job to sell them. For each item,

start with the claim, "You should buy (Your item here)

." In order to support that claim, come up with two pieces of

data, and connect each piece of data to your claim through a

warrant.

Ex) Claim: You should really buy this empty CD case.

Data: The case is still very functional for holding CDs and keeping

them safe.

Warrant: If you buy the empty CD case, you'll have a spare the next

time you find an unprotected CD. After all, a protected CD lasts longer,

and you'll be able to enjoy it for years to come!

Item 1: Claim: You should really buy

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Data:

Warrant:

**Talkback Guide for Argument**

1. Does the argument report the data?

*The data and evidence presented are . . .*

a. Asks if the data are persuasive? Is more information needed to establish the data?

(An argument can’t be advanced unless the audience accepts the data as compelling)

*The information is persuasive/unpersuasive or sufficient/insufficient because*

2. Cites the warrants?

*The data are linked to the claim by these warrants and explanations . . .*

a. Asks if the warrants are clear? Does the warrant justify the leap to the conclusion?

*The warrants are clear and convincing/unclear and unconvincing because . .*

3.. Cites the backing for warrants, if necessary?

*The backing for the warrants is/are . . .*

a. Asks if the backing supports with specifics the truth or acceptability of the warrant.

*The warrants are shown to be true in the form of backing that . . .*

4. Qualifier or Reservations are listed.

*The reservations to the argument are . . .*

a. Has the arguer considered all of the objections which the audience can make against the claim? Have the reservations been adequately responded to?

*The reservations are adequately/inadequately addressed by . . .*

5. Claim is cited.

What is it you should believe or do? What is it you lack? What threatens you? What is it your need?

*The claim is clearly stated as . . . /is implied to be . . .*

a. Whether the argument is convincing and why is explained. What worked and did not work for you as a reader? Where was the author convincing and not convincing?

What will you do or think in the future as a result of this argument?

*I was convinced/unconvinced by the argument because . . . and this argument will*

*inform my thinking and action in the future by . . .*

**“Slip or Trip”**

**THE FACTS:** After Queenie had a heated argument with her (now-dead) husband Arthur, she ran off to the country club to hang out with friends while she calmed down. Her friends complimented her on how well her dress fit her slender figure and this made her feel much better. She left the club shortly before 1 AM and invited some family friends over to her home to have one more drink. Queenie’s family friends arrived about ten minutes after her. When they arrived, she met them at the door and said, “Something terrible happened! Arthur had his glass and was coming downstairs for another drink, and he slipped and fell on the stairs. I think he’s dead. What shall do I do?!” The autopsy confirmed that (1) Arthur had died from a wound to the head, and (2) he was drunk. What do YOU think happened?



**SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DETECTIVES**

Could a head wound have come from a fall? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No

Do you think Arthur had his balance when he started to go downstairs? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No

In which hand do you think he was holding his drink when he fell? \_\_\_Left \_\_\_Right

What was Queenie cooking?

Can you find a probable murder weapon?

**NOW SOLVE IT:** Who do you think killed Arthur and how? Make an argument with claims, sub-claims, data, and warrants.

**A Sample of Debatable Cases in the News**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Focus/Emphasis*** | ***Case/Problem*** | ***Related Literature*** |
| **Must we *obey authority*?** | “Build a Wiffle Ball Field and the Lawyers Will Come,” *NY Times*, July 10, 2008:Should teens be allowed to violate a city ordinance? | *Things Fall Apart**The Giver*“Letter from Birmingham Jail*The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*“Essay on Civil Disobedience” |
| **What is *honor*?** | “Judge Is Asked to Let 2 Join Honor Group,” *NY Times*, Nov. 27, 1998:Do these students deserve to be classified as “honor students”? | *To Kill a Mockingbird**The Odyessey**Julius Caesar**All the Pretty Horses* |
| **Are we free to *choose*?** | “Health Panel Approves Restriction on Sale of Large Sugary Drinks,” *NY Times*, Sept. 13, 2012:Do we have a right to choose our own behavior, even if it is dangerous or unhealthy? | *Anthem**The Hunger Games**The Dispossessed (LeGuin)**Native Son* |
| **What is *justice*?** | “Tale of Dead Texas Dog Bites Mayor Who Told It,” *NY Times*, Feb. 13, 2008:How do we respond to reprehensible behavior? | *King Lear**Native Son**Monster (W.D. Myers)**Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor)*Warriors Don't Cry* (Beals) |
| **What do we *value* most?** | *“Worker Who Hid Lottery Win Must Share $38.5 Million Prize,”* NY Times*,* March 14, 2012:What values guide our decisions? | *The Pearl**Treasure of Sierra Madre**Great Expectations**Great Gatsby**The Piano Lesson* (Wilson) |