Constructing Text-Based Arguments About Social Issues

Grade 8

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Unit Overview and Rationale

When students are engaged in the topic, they are likely to produce better writing. This is the premise that grounds this 8th grade integrated reading and writing module. The students deconstruct videos and texts on Prohibition in the 1920s United States, in the process learning about both the language and craft of argument. Students then move to locating relevant information to support a position on another social issue. Finally, they compose their own argumentative letter, modeled after a collaboratively written letter on Prohibition. The intensive modeling and scaffolding, combined with engaging topics of interest to students, generated high-level student responses, including work produced by traditionally struggling and/or unmotivated students. Follow the VoiceThread link below to hear more from the English and social studies teachers who created this module:

https://voicethread.com/share/3433496/
Constructing Text-Based Arguments About Social Issues
Acquisition Lesson #1 – READ Like a WRITER

Acquisition Lesson Plan Concept: Identifying and applying relevant information to support a position on a social issue.

Length of Lesson: 4 days

Length of Module: 2 weeks

Prerequisites:
Students have had previous instruction in:
- Difference between "persuasion" and "argument" (CCSS)
- Reading for main ideas and key details
- Basic research skills (grade 7 standards)
- Authors’ and readers’ purposes for reading and writing
- Understanding the basics of the composing process

Common Core Standards:
- 8R18 – Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.
- 8R11 – Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- 8R12 – Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

Essential Question:
How do we identify and use relevant text to formulate a position and support an argument?

What do students need to learn to be able to answer the Essential Question?
- Assessment Prompt #1: Identify relevant pro and con information for an issue.
- Assessment Prompt #2: Analyze details to determine position.
- Assessment Prompt #3: Identify relevant pro and con details for an issue.
- Assessment Prompt #4: Generate claims to support a position based on relevant details.
- Assessment Prompt #5: Connect evidence to back appropriate claims.
### Introduce the Unit:
The teacher will begin by introducing the pre-assessment at [Attachment A: Pre-Assessment](#) and saying, “Today we are going to introduce a unit on finding details in a text and using them to create an argumentative piece of writing. Throughout the unit, I am going to

- Model how to identify relevant details in informational text;
- Decide if details support proponents or opponents;
- Choose a position;
- Create an argument using information from texts to support my position;
- Organize the writing; and
- Produce a written argumentative essay.

Before we begin the video, I would like to find out what you already know about material we will cover in our unit. This is only a pre-assessment and will only be used so that I can see what you already know about certain topics. It will not be included in your grades. If you are unsure of an answer, you may guess.”

The pre-assessment may be done in writing, orally, or via hands and symbols such as red (no knowledge), yellow (some knowledge), or green (a good deal of knowledge). If the teacher uses a non-paper assessment, be sure to have a student record the results for comparison later.

### Teaching Strategies:
- Model Reading Strategies
- Collaborative Pairs
- Collaborative Groups
- Exit Tickets
- Brainstorming
- Listing
- Modeling

### Graphic Organizers Used:
- In a Nutshell Organizer
- [Attachment C: Rocket Outline](#)

### Key Vocabulary Words to Preview:

#### Content Vocabulary:
- Prohibition
- “Wet” and “Dry”

#### Standards-Based Vocabulary:
- Relevant/irrelevant
- Context
- Audience
- Position
- Bias
- Argument
- Proponent/opponent
- Claims/counterclaims
- Reasons/evidence
### Instructional Sequence 1: Relevant Pros and Cons of an Issue

1. **Activating and providing prior knowledge:** The teacher will then say, “Now we are going to take a look at a video that will provide some background knowledge on the Prohibition Movement. Before we do, it is important to understand the concept of Prohibition. When I say that certain items are prohibited on an airplane, what do I mean by that? What are some behaviors that are prohibited in schools? When we talk about the Prohibition Movement, we are talking about prohibiting, or banning, alcohol.”

2. **Guided viewing for pro and con information on an issue:**
   - Introduce terms **pro** and **con**, being sure students understand that for and against are relative terms. One can be pro (for) or con (against) homework, for example. But, if the question was are you for or against banning homework, and the position would be reversed.
   - Explain note-taking procedure by distributing graphic organizer at [Attachment B: Nutshell Organizer](https://video.pbs.org/video/2022470300) and saying, “I am giving you a graphic organizer so that you can organize your thoughts as you are watching the video. As we watch, I want you to look for reasons that people supported Prohibition (proponents or Pro Prohibition) and reasons that people opposed Prohibition (opponents or Con Prohibition). We will view for about 6 minutes before discussing some of what you have found.”
   - The teacher will need to decide where to pause for understanding if using this preview. If the teacher uses the actual DVD, there are recommended pausing places listed below. If using the DVD, it is recommended that you pause at the following places to check for student understanding:
     - Watch the introduction and the entire first segment.
     - Skip to approximately 38 minutes and watch for approximately the next 10 minutes.
     - “Hatchetation” is optional—it deals with Carrie Nation the “bar smasher”. The kids found her to be fascinating, but it is not necessary to watch.
     - Skip to 1:04 and watch to about 1:17. This section deals with tax dollars, the 16th Amendment (income tax), and eventually the passage of the 18th Amendment (prohibition).
   - **Identifying pro and con information:** After the first section, the teacher will pause the video and begin a **Think Aloud**, sharing his details with the students. He will **model** listing details in the nutshell organizer by using the ELMO, Smart Board, MOBI, or projector, taking extra time to think-aloud why he chose certain details for Proponents and others for Opponents. He will then ask for information students listed, as well as clarify details in the video and answer questions. The teacher will then continue the video, pausing at the second interval and asking the students to share what they have listed. The emphasis here should be on **repeated modeling** of how to choose details from a resource and adding them to the organizer. The teacher may also reinforce here that the notes do not require complete sentences. The teacher or a responsible student will add the details to the teacher nutshell, again allowing time for clarification and questions.

3. **Debriefing the video:** At that point, the teacher will ask students to indicate by hands how many students might have been proponents of Prohibition (Pro Prohibition = “Drys”) and how many might be Opponents of Prohibition (Con Prohibition = “Wets”) if they had been alive in the 1920s. He may also ask students about the possible origins of the terms “wet” and “dry” to identify opponents and proponents of Prohibition.

4. **Determining relevance:** This lesson will begin with a short PowerPoint presentation ([Attachment C: Relevance, Audience, and Context](http://video.pbs.org/video/2022470300)) about how the relevance of details depends on the context (the situation, including the audience) of the argument.
   - **Directions for viewing PowerPoint:** The teacher will ask the students to look at a series of slides and decide if each statement would most likely be said by a 4-year old, a 40-year old, or both. After each slide, the teacher and class will discuss the choices. The teacher should guide the discussion toward the idea that the relevance of the statement depends on the both the **context** and the **audience**.
5. **Identifying pro/con in model text – Prohibition:** Prohibition reading passage from Digital History, [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display_printable.cfm?HHID=441](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display_printable.cfm?HHID=441). The teacher will begin by having students share the arguments proponents have for Prohibition and the arguments opponents have against Prohibition, as discussed in yesterday’s video. He will use the discussion to review and clarify the terms “proponents” and “opponents.” It would be useful at this point to have students generate class definitions for “proponent” and “opponent.” These can be posted in the classroom for reference during the remainder of the unit.

- The teacher will then introduce a passage on Prohibition that examines both sides of the issue. He will say, “Yesterday, we looked at a video that gave us some reasons for and against Prohibition. Today, we are going to dig a bit deeper into the question of Prohibition. We will be reading a passage that looks at both sides of the issue. As we read, we are going to complete an organizer similar to the organizer you completed yesterday. I will begin by reading the first page of the article and showing you how I picked information for each side of my organizer.”

- Each student will be given a copy of the passage. The passage will also be projected via the ELMO, MOBI, or Smart Board so that students can see the teacher underline or highlight important/relevant information. This will allow the teacher to model how to take phrases from the text and list them on the nutshell organizer. It will also reinforce the idea that the organizer does not require complete sentences.

- The teacher will then read the first page of “Digital History: Prohibition,” pausing after each paragraph to identify relevant details. Using a Think Aloud, he will then list any relevant information on the Nutshell organizer. He will continue with subsequent paragraphs identifying relevant (and possibly one or two irrelevant to elicit student response) details. For example, the teacher might note that the date of the amendment banning alcohol is important but not really relevant when looking for reasons alcohol was being banned. He will also continue to use the Think Aloud strategy to reinforce the process, referring constantly to context and audience and position to ground thinking in the language of argument and to justify choices.

- The teacher can post his own “In a Nutshell” organizer for Prohibition (see Attachment D: Model Nutshell for Prohibition, for sample organizer) using the headings “Proponent/Dry” and “Opponent/Wet” so that students can refer to it as a model throughout the unit.

- After the first page of modeling, the teacher will read page two but ask the students to help supply relevant information that should be added to the organizer. It is recommended that the teacher read only one or two paragraphs before asking for student suggestions and asking them to defend their choices, using the language of “relevant/irrelevant” and “context/audience/position.” This will allow students to keep up and also to focus on finding relevant details for the arguments. This will also be an excellent time to clarify and help identify the most important information. Again, the teacher will model adding the details to the organizer using phrases and keywords rather than requiring complete sentences.

- By the third page of the passage, the students should be able to work alone or with partners to read the remaining information and pull out important details for the organizer. Some students may even be the task of finding a limited number of details, for example four arguments for Prohibition and four arguments against Prohibition. This may simplify the assignment for those who struggle with the length of the text.

**Assessment Prompt #1:** Identify relevant pro and con information for an issue. Teachers should check students’ success with page 3 of the article to assess students’ understanding of identifying important details that are relevant to the issue.

**Homework/Extension:** Students will identify themselves as a “wet” or a “dry.” This may be done as a paragraph, a bulleted list, or even a short speech that can be given to the class the next day.
### Instructional Sequence 2: Understanding Relevant Pro and Con Information

1. **Relevant/irrelevant – review:** The teacher will begin the lesson with a quick activating strategy for relevant/irrelevant details. (See Text-Messaging Scenarios in Attachment E: Texting Details.)

   - The students will have to pick out the most important details of the story to include in their text messages. They will also define relevant and irrelevant. The teacher will begin by reading the first scenario from the handout. He will **model** how he will choose the keywords to communicate the main idea in a text and ask for ideas about why certain words could easily be omitted but others are critical, again using the words context, audience, position to justify choices. He might say something like, “The audience would need to know they had to be there soon,” or “The audience would not need to know there was a baseball game going on because….”
   - As the class works through the remaining scenarios, the teacher should reinforce the concept of relevance based on audience, context, and position. He might indicate that not everyone will agree on all ten words but that most will contain very similar messages.
   - As a group, the class will work to explain the terms at the bottom of Attachment E: Texting Details and explain how the texting activity might relate to identifying relevant details in an article. The teacher and class can then generate definitions for “relevant” and “irrelevant” and place them alongside posted definitions of “proponent” and “opponent.”

2. **Choosing relevant details:** The teacher will then remind students how creating the “In a Nutshell” chart required them to identify the relevant details from the text and omit those that were irrelevant, based on the position, context, and audience.

   - He will then **model** the practice using the Prohibition passage from yesterday on the projector/ELMO. The teacher will say, “Now I am going to show you how I decided what was relevant and what was irrelevant in the Prohibition passage we worked on yesterday.”
   - As he **models**, he will highlight the relevant details in one color and the irrelevant details in another. The teacher may actually choose one or two details that are not really important and ask the students if he should highlight them as relevant or irrelevant. This will allow for some discussion about how context, audience, and position help determine the relevance of any detail. After several paragraphs, the students will assist in identifying the most relevant items. For the last three to four paragraphs, students will continue reading the passage in collaborative pairs. Students will distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information by underlining important information and crossing out irrelevant information (or by making a T-chart of irrelevant and relevant information to conserve paper). The teacher will then field the class for their answers to check for comprehension and will clarify any misconceptions that might arise.

3. **Reviewing proponent/opponent:** There will be a quick activating strategy using political cartoons to determine if the author of the cartoon was for or against the topic. The teacher will use a PowerPoint presentation to introduce the concept of using political cartoons to judge an author’s attitude toward a subject. The teacher will use the first cartoon to model how he would determine the author’s position. The teacher will then display each remaining cartoon on the projector and ask the students for the author’s position on the subject. The teacher should also be sure to ask students what information from the cartoon helped them decide as this will be a key concept in the coming lessons. (See Attachment F: Political Cartoons.)

   - **Possible sources for political cartoons:**
     - [http://www.consumerfreedom.com/cartoons.cfm](http://www.consumerfreedom.com/cartoons.cfm)
     - [http://blsciblogs.baruch.cuny.edu/his1005spring2011/tag/prohibition/](http://blsciblogs.baruch.cuny.edu/his1005spring2011/tag/prohibition/)
4. **Introducing issues:** Finally, the teacher will share an overview of the three issues for discussion this week: Same-Sex Marriage, Gun Control, and the Death Penalty. **(Teacher Note:** Teacher can select topics and materials for other topics he feels will be more appealing/appropriate depending on needs of students). He will simply introduce each concept and ask students what they think about each, being certain to explain that one’s personal opinions on an issue are important but, when they get ready to write their argument, they will need to use verifiable evidence for support. *(See Attachment G: Three Current Issues.)* Students must be prepared to choose one issue for the next day. They may also be encouraged to do some independent research on the topics for home study before the next class.

- Topics and possible sources:
  - Gun Control Reading Passage – [http://www.policyalmanac.org/crime/archive/crs_gun_control.shtml](http://www.policyalmanac.org/crime/archive/crs_gun_control.shtml)

**Assessment Prompt #2:** Analyze details to determine position. The final cartoon can be done individually or in pairs, but students’ ability to identify the position and defend that answer should serve as an assessment of their understanding.
## Instructional Sequence 3: Generating Claims

1. **Analyzing the task:** The students will then select an issue (from the previous day) and be given a text about the chosen issue. Students will be working independently or in cooperative groups to identify the relevant details for **both sides** of their chosen issue. The teacher should remind students that for persuasion, they just have to “deal with” information that supports their position. But for argument, they need to “deal with” (or at least be aware of) the support for the **opposing** position.

2. **Active reading:** Students will read the article independently, in pairs, or with text-to-speech assistance highlighting details with two colors (one for pro information and one for con information). They will complete an “In a Nutshell” organizer for their text.

### Differentiation:
- Students needing a challenge will be given no additional support.
- On-level students will be given a summary of the main arguments for each of the informational texts to use after they have read and annotated the text. The summary will serve to reinforce relevant reasons found in the text and point them toward others they may have missed.
- Struggling learners will be given the argument summaries before reading the texts (to preview information) and the option of hearing the passage read aloud to increase comprehension.

- Same Sex Marriage Summary Sheet – [http://www.balancedpolitics.org/same_sex_marriages.htm](http://www.balancedpolitics.org/same_sex_marriages.htm)
- Gun Control Summary Sheet – [http://www.balancedpolitics.org/gun_control.htm](http://www.balancedpolitics.org/gun_control.htm)

### Assessment Prompt #3:
- Identify relevant pro and con details for an issue. Complete “Nutshell Organizer” for the chosen issue. This organizer should be collected so that the teacher may briefly review for accuracy and understanding.

3. **Reviewing/revising concepts:** The teacher will return the “In a Nutshell” organizers with comments or suggestions. The teacher will explain that the next task will allow students to clarify understanding of their chosen issue in small groups. He will say, “Now, you are going to have the opportunity to review your ideas and choose your strongest reasons/evidence to create our claims. Remember, the claims are the supports, and evidence is what backs up the claims. As you work in groups, be sure to listen for relevant details and add them to your organizers. Also, if you decide that a detail is irrelevant, be sure to remove it from your organizer.” Students will be grouped by topic. The students will have 5-10 minutes to work together to compare notes within their groups adding relevant details they missed or removing items deemed irrelevant. In the event that the class has access to the internet or supplemental materials, now may be a good time to look for additional information for the arguments. The teacher will serve as resource during these discussions.

4. **Categorizing/classifying pro/con information to generate claims:** The teacher will help students gain understanding of how to group reasons/evidence into logical categories, which will become claims for their argumentative letters. “We will begin by looking at the Top 25 Internet Searches of the First Decade 2000-2010. (See Attachment H: Classifying Information – Top 25 Google Searches.) As you look at the list, what are some ways you can group some of the items? Are there any items that go well together?” The teacher will also ask for alternative groupings and discuss headings and ways to group the items on the list, making it clear that there is no “right” way to group the items but that grouping them allows you to organize your reasons or evidence into logical categories or claims. The teacher can then lead the class in a discussion of how this grouping activity might apply to the topics in the Nutshell Organizers.
5. **Categorizing/classifying supporting information**: While the students are still in groups, the teacher will return to Political Cartoons PowerPoint and the third Prohibition Cartoon. Using the protest signs, the teacher and class can discuss how to group the signs under common themes or subjects. He will then distribute Attachment I: Prohibition Arguments. The students will work in pairs to group the reasons or evidence under any possible headings (claims) they can create. This may be done on the paper, using colored highlighters, on another sheet via copying, or the reasons may even be cut into strips and grouped as a word sort. The whole class should then discuss the various groupings and headings before the teacher models how he would use his Prohibition organizer (Attachment D: Model Prohibition Nutshell) to group the arguments into three separate categories (claims).

6. **Defining claims**: He will explain that these are the claims for his argument. The teacher will then demonstrate the use of the Rocket Outline, located Attachment J: Rocket Outline, as a means of organizing thinking. He will use the prohibition article and his graphic organizer to model how to use the details to create an argument with three reasons/claims. (Teacher note: “three” is a standard but arbitrary number for supports. Some students may only complete 2 solid claims with evidence; other students may have more than 3 defensible claims.)

**Assessment Prompt #4**: Generate claims to support a position based on relevant details. The teacher checks students’ categories-turned-into-claims for appropriateness (section 1 of the Rocket Outline).
**Instructional Sequence 4: Evidence to Back Claims**

1. **Adding evidence to support claims:** Teacher models, returning to Prohibition topic, how to pull information from Nutshell to “back” (prove) the claims. Evidence goes under the claims on the Rocket Outline. Students then move to apply understanding to their own issue by completing their Rocket Outline. The students needing a challenge will independently complete a Rocket Outline (Attachment J: Rocket Outline) for their topic that chooses a position and supports with at least three claims backed with reasons/evidence from the reading (consulting Nutshell). On-level students and struggling learners will work in topic groups to create an organizer. They will be encouraged to help one another with the organizers, particularly with naming the headings/claims. The teacher will collect these outlines and check for reasonable claims and relevant reasons and evidence to support those claims.

**Assessment Prompt #5:** Connect evidence to back appropriate claims. The teacher will collect these outlines and check for reasonable claims and relevant reasons and evidence to support those claims.

**Differentiation:** Different students have success with different kinds of outlines. Teachers should support students who want to use a different type of organizer for the writing.
Attachment A: Text-Based Writing in the Content Area Pre- and Post-Assessment

Name: ______________________________________
Date: ______________________________________
Period: ______________________________________

Directions: THIS IS NOT A TEST!!! This assignment is designed to assess your knowledge of certain topics and terms for our current unit. We will complete this assessment both before and after covering the material so that I can understand what you know, what you need to know, and what you have learned.

Part One: For each of the following terms, decide if your understanding of the topic is 0 (no idea), 1 (I might have heard of it), 2 (I know something about it), or 3 (I know a lot about it).

1. _________ Prohibition
2. _________ Irrelevant
3. _________ Argument
4. _________ Temperance
5. _________ Bias
6. _________ Proponent
7. _________ Relevant
8. _________ Claims
9. _________ Refutation
10. _________ Opponent
Part Two: For each of the following, explain the difference between the pairs of words.

Relevant/Irrelevant

Claims/Counterclaims

Proponent/Opponent
Attachment B: In a Nutshell

Name: ____________________________________
Date: ____________________________________
Period: __________________________________

Question:

Proponent

Opponent
Attachment C: Relevant or Irrelevant?  
You decide!

Directions:
Number your warm-up paper 1-10
Decide if each statement is relevant for
✓ A 4-year old
✓ A 40-year old
✓ Or both

• Number One: Car insurance rates are going down.
• Number Two: The ice cream truck is coming!
• Number Three: Dora the Explorer is coming to our school!
• Number Four: Newt Gingrich has taken the lead in the Republican primaries!
• Number Five: The pool is open from 8 am to 8 pm.
• Number Six: My mom just bought me a video game.
• Number Seven: Government spending is a very serious issue.
• Number Eight: Disney Land is open 365 days a year.
• Number Nine: The Simpsons are on!
• Number Ten: Daddy gets mad when you put his wallet in the toilet.
• Summarizing Activity: How do we determine what makes information relevant?
Question: Should alcohol be prohibited?

In a Nutshell

**Proponent**
- Alcohol linked to wife beating and child abuse
- Industrialists concerned about the impact of drinking on labor productivity
- Prohibition seemed patriotic during World War I (grain should be used to make bread not liquor)
- Alcoholism was cut by 80% by 1921 from pre-war levels
- Alcohol-related crime dropped markedly
- Alcohol consumption declined dramatically during prohibition by 30% to 50%
- Deaths from cirrhosis fell
- Half of the nation’s homicides today are related to alcohol
- Alcohol is still linked to domestic violence today

**Opponent**
- Many Ethnic Americans viewed drinking beer and wine as part of their culture
- The wording of the 18th Amendment only banned the making and selling of alcohol illegal, not possessing and drinking it
- The government only had 2,500 agents enforcing laws
- Cost of enforcing was too high
- Lack of convictions on those that were caught breaking laws
- Deaths from bad liquor rose
- Deaths from cirrhosis fell
- The number of speakeasies rose dramatically
- Bootlegging increased and organized crime grew
- Homicides increased in cities due to gang wars and drunkenness
- Prohibition hurt the nation’s brewing industry
- Failed to eliminate drinking and made drinking popular among the young
Attachment E: Relevant and Irrelevant Details

Part One:

You are out shopping one day when you see some amazing sights. You want to tell your friends, but your phone will not make calls and you are only able to put ten words in a text.

After you read about each amazing sight below, choose the most important words to use to write your ten-word text.

1. The bakery on Arch Street is giving away free doughnuts to all teens from 12 noon to 3 p.m. They have glazed doughnuts, chocolate ones, sprinkles, and more. In order to get the free doughnuts, you have to be wearing your school gym shirt and have a school ID. There is a long line already.

Ten-Word Text:

2. You are passing the memorial fountain when you notice your gym teacher wearing a pink bathing suit and splashing in the water with a monkey. You are not sure, but you think your teacher is singing a song by Justin Bieber. There are some people watching but most are watching the soccer game on the nearby field.

Ten-Word Text:

3. You see a person dressed as a giant corndog, carrying a sign, and handing out coupons for 10% off any purchase at The Hotdog Hut. The person keeps repeating the phrase, “The Hotdog Hut makes me hot-dog happy!” As you walk by, you realize the giant corndog is your math teacher.

Ten-Word Text:
Part Two:

Answer the questions below about choosing relevant details.

1. Explain how you decided which words were relevant (important) for use in your ten-word text.

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

2. Explain how you decided which words were irrelevant (not necessary) for use in your ten-word text.

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

3. If you were teaching a friend about relevant and irrelevant details, how would you explain the difference?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
Attachment F: Political Cartoon PowerPoint

- **Prohibition cartoon – The Liquor Octopus**
  - Do you think this cartoon was for or against Prohibition?
  - List 2 relevant details that support your answer.

- **Prohibition cartoon – Hun Rule Association**
  - Do you think this cartoon was for or against Prohibition?
  - List 2 relevant details that support your answer.

Answers:

THE TWO SIDES OF PROHIBITION

- **Opponents:**
  - Alcohol was part of our customs and traditions
  - It violated our freedom
  - It was unenforceable etc. etc.

- **Proponents:**
  - It was needed to help cure the ills of American society
    (alcoholism, domestic abuse, homelessness, unemployment, etc. etc.)
  - Alcohol related deaths and crime dropped
THE ISSUES:

- The Death Penalty
- Same Sex Marriage
- Gun Control

WITH YOUR PARTNER

- Turn your paper over
- Discuss each topic with your partner
- List two relevant arguments for and against each issue (be sure to label each)
  - The Death Penalty
  - Same Sex Marriage
  - Gun Control
Attachment G: The Issues

The Two Sides of Prohibition

- Opponents:
  - Alcohol was part of our customs and traditions
  - It violated our freedom
  - It was unenforceable, etc., etc.

- Proponents:
  - It was needed to help cure the ills of American society (alcoholism, domestic abuse, homelessness, unemployment, etc., etc.)
  - Alcohol-related deaths and crime dropped

The Death Penalty

- What are the two sides of this issue?
- Proponents (those for) would say …
- Opponents (those against) would say …

Gay Marriage

- What are the two sides of this issue?
- Proponents (those for) would say …
- Opponents (those against) would say …

Gun Control

- What are the two sides of this issue?
- Proponents (those for) would say…
- Opponents (those against) would say…
**Attachment H: Classifying Information – Top 25 Google Searches**

1. Facebook – [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
8. Shakira – [http://0.tqn.com/d/websearch/1/0/Q/t/shakira.png](http://0.tqn.com/d/websearch/1/0/Q/t/shakira.png)
11. Lindsay Lohan – [http://movies.about.com/od/lohanlindsay/Lohan_Lindsay.htm](http://movies.about.com/od/lohanlindsay/Lohan_Lindsay.htm)
17. Star Wars – [http://scifi.about.com/od/starwars/Star_Wars.htm](http://scifi.about.com/od/starwars/Star_Wars.htm)
22. Pamela Anderson – [http://gossip.about.com/od/celebrityprofiles/p/Pam_Anderson.htm](http://gossip.about.com/od/celebrityprofiles/p/Pam_Anderson.htm)
25. Ringtones – [http://websearch.about.com/od/freedownloads/tp/find-free-ringtones-online.htm](http://websearch.about.com/od/freedownloads/tp/find-free-ringtones-online.htm)
Attachment I: Prohibition Arguments

**Directions:** Have the students cut out the list of reasons/evidence. Then the students should sort the reasons/evidence by something they have in common. The idea they have in common should become one of the claims that could be made in an argument in favor of Prohibition.

---

Alcohol linked to wife beating and child abuse

---

Industrialists concerned about the impact of drinking on labor productivity

---

Prohibition seemed patriotic during World War I
(grain should be used to make bread not liquor)

---

Alcoholism was cut by 80% by 1921 from pre-war levels

---

Alcohol-related crime dropped markedly

---

Alcohol consumption declined dramatically during prohibition by 30% to 50%

---

Deaths from cirrhosis fell

---

Half of the nation’s homicides today are related to alcohol

---

Alcohol is still linked to domestic violence today
Directions: Have the students cut out the list of reasons/evidence. Then the students should sort the reasons/evidence by something they have in common. The idea they have in common should become one of the claims that could be made in an argument against Prohibition.

Many ethnic Americans viewed drinking beer and wine as part of their culture

The wording of the 18th Amendment only banned the making and selling of alcohol illegal, not possessing and drinking it

The government only had 2,500 agents enforcing laws

Cost of enforcing was too high

Lack of convictions on those that were caught breaking laws

Deaths from bad liquor rose

The number of speakeasies rose dramatically

Bootlegging increased and organized crime grew

Homicides increased in cities due to gang wars and drunkenness

Prohibition hurt the nation’s brewing industry

Failed to eliminate drinking and made drinking popular among the young
Attachment J: Rocket Outline

Thesis Statement

Evidence
Claim One

Evidence
Claim Two

Evidence
Claim Three

Refutation/Counterclaims Conclusion
Constructing Text-based Arguments about Social Issues
Acquisition Lesson #2 – WRITE Like a READER

Acquisition Lesson Plan Concept: Writing the Argument

Length of Lesson: 4 to 6 days

Length of Module: 2 weeks

Prerequisites:
In addition to previous prerequisites –
- Understanding basic essay structure, including introductions and hooks, topic sentences, transitions, and conclusions.

Common Core Standards:
- **8W1** – Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence:
  - Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
  - Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
  - Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
  - Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
- **8W4** – Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **8W8** – Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- **8W9** – Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- **8RI1** – Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **8RI.2** – Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

Essential Question:
How do we use relevant text to formulate a position and support an argument?

What do students need to learn to be able to answer the Essential Question?
- Assessment Prompt #1: Write an effective introductory paragraph for an argumentative essay.
- Assessment Prompt #2: Write a support paragraph that includes a claim that is backed by reasons/evidence.
- Assessment Prompt #3: Write an effective concluding paragraph for an argumentative essay (including acknowledging the opposing point of view).
### Activating Strategy:
The teacher will activate the lesson with two scripted scenarios. (See [Attachment K: Doctor’s Office](#).) In one scenario, the doctor will jump right in with a diagnosis. In the other, the doctor will make an introduction, get some basic information, and then begin the examination. These scenarios should reinforce the importance of a good introduction.

### Key Vocabulary Words to Preview:
- Opposing point of view
- Counterclaim
- Evidence

### Teaching Strategies:
- Collaborative pairs
- Collaborative groups
- Exit tickets
- Brainstorming
- Listing
- Modeling.

### Graphic Organizer:
- [Attachment B: Nutshell Organizer](#)
- [Attachment C: Rocket Outline](#)
### Instructional Sequence 1: Introducing the Task and the Position

1. **Introducing the prompt**: The teacher will first describe the final product for this lesson—a letter to the President that identifies and supports one side of a current political issue. He will share and review the rubric so that students are aware of how the work will be scored. [http://www.doe.k12.de.us/aab/English_Language_Arts/ELA_docs_folder/Gr8_Argument_6-12.pdf](http://www.doe.k12.de.us/aab/English_Language_Arts/ELA_docs_folder/Gr8_Argument_6-12.pdf)

2. **RAFT**: Students will RAFT the letter (See Attachment L: Understanding the Writing Assignment)
   - **Role**: Newly elected Senator from Delaware
   - **Audience**: The President of the United States
   - **Format**: Letter
   - **Topic**: Based on student topic/issue choice
   
   [Teacher can once again model using the Prohibition topic]

3. **Reviewing the rubric**: Introduce the students to the writing rubric for argumentative writing—Attachment M: Argumentation/Opinion Text-Based Writing Rubric – Grade 8. Highlight keywords in the 4 category, emphasizing that the work students have done so far matches what the rubric is requiring. [Teacher note: Teachers may need to make parts of the rubric more “student friendly” if this is students first exposure to it].

4. **Hooks**: After reminding students of the activating strategy and the need for a good introduction, the teacher will then ask students to brainstorm a list of “hooks” (or refer to classroom posters, etc.) and provide an example for a variety of audience hooks (an interesting fact, rhetorical question, etc. Students will need to be reminded that the audience is the President of the United States).

5. **Writing the Introduction**: Teacher will then use his previously created Rocket Outline for Prohibition, to model how to create an introductory paragraph that engages a reader and clearly delineates his argument. Struggling writers will be provided with a generic Introductory Paragraph Template (see Attachment N: Introduction and Conclusion Template). The Rocket Outlines will be returned to the students, and they will be asked to create an introduction for their letter. 

   **Differentiation**: Here and throughout the remainder of this EATS lesson, students may use speech-to-text technology in the drafting of their responses.

   **Assessment Prompt #1**: Write an effective introductory paragraph for your argumentative letter to the President. [Teacher checks introductory paragraphs for required elements (hook and clear position)].

6. Peers will assess the introductions as a summarizing activity. The students will be given a checklist for strong introductory paragraphs, based on the Argumentation/Opinion Text-Based Writing Rubric for argumentative writing. They will read another student’s introduction and share appropriate feedback.

7. **Students can revise their paragraphs based on peer feedback.**
**Instructional Sequence 2: Writing Supporting Paragraphs**

1. The teacher will begin by again reviewing the RAFT and Argumentation/Opinion Text-Based Writing Rubric (especially the parts relevant to development), allowing for questions and clarification, highlighting keywords in the rubric, etc. Then, the teacher will model how he would complete his first supporting paragraph for his Prohibition letter, making sure to incorporate specific information from his rocket outline and nutshell organizer. **Teacher note:** One key feature of CCSS writing standard 1 and the argumentative rubric requires that writers: “Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.” Students need to explain how the claims and evidence are connected, which is more than just adding transition words.

2. The teacher will say, “Now, I am going to show you how I would write a supporting paragraph for my Prohibition letter. I first refer back to my rocket outline. I look at my first claim and write a topic sentence that explains my thinking. Then, I am going back to my prohibition article where I highlighted relevant details. I am going to choose the reasons and evidence from the text that support (or back up) my claim. I will add them to my text with quotation marks. I am then going to explain how this information supports my idea.”

3. The teacher, with suggestions from the class, will write the paragraph. The teacher and class will review the writing rubric for development, and the class can assess the teacher’s paragraph together.

4. Students will then work on one supporting paragraph for their selected topic.

**Assessment Prompt # 2:** Write a support paragraph for their selected topic that includes a claim that is backed by reasons/evidence. Highlight the claim in one color and the reasons and evidence that support it with another color. [The teacher then checks to be sure that students have correctly included a claim and relevant evidence/reasons to back up the claim]. Optional: consider having students write a written explanation of why and how the evidence supports the claim for this paragraph.

5. Students will then review the first paragraph by sharing in pairs with a student who is working on a different topic. After getting feedback via the rubric, the students will then complete the other supporting paragraphs. **Alternative:** Hold peer review until after all support paragraphs have been completed.
Instructional Sequence 3: Concluding the Letter

1. The teacher will activate the lesson with a quick activity in which a patient leaves the doctor’s office (see Attachment K). In one scenario, the patient is just told he is done and sent on his way. In the second, the doctor reviews the symptoms, makes a diagnosis, recommends a treatment, warns of the dangers, and wishes the patient well.

2. The teacher will guide the class to the idea that a good conclusion is much like the second scenario. After reviewing the RAFT and writing rubric again, the teacher will model writing a conclusion to the Prohibition essay, being sure to address the concept of counterclaims and refutations.

   **Teacher note:** For 8th grade, CCSS expects students to address counterclaims. For this unit, the teacher will model how to acknowledge opposing positions in the conclusion. This is certainly not the only strategy: students could write a rebuttal paragraph, usually the next to last paragraph. Or, students can rebut an opposing point of view at the end of each claim paragraph. The teacher can also use rebuttal strategies as a differentiation for students who need an additional challenge.

3. The teacher will then use the model conclusion paragraph at Attachment N to write a conclusion to his Prohibition argument. He will then have the class assess his conclusion, using rubric language, before assigning students to draft their own conclusions. Struggling writers will be presented with a generic concluding paragraph template (Attachment N).

   **Assessment Prompt # 3:** Write an effective concluding paragraph for an argumentative letter (including acknowledging the opposing point of view). [Teacher checks concluding paragraphs for required elements including acknowledgment of opposing point of view.]

4. Once these conclusions are completed, students will work in pairs or small groups to assess one another’s concluding paragraphs and offer suggestions.

5. Students revise their conclusions based on peer feedback.

**Assignment:** Before submitting the essays, students will use the Attachment M: Argumentation/Opinion Text-Based Writing Rubric to score their own work.

**Summarizing strategy:**

On the final day of the lesson, the students will complete a post-assessment on the essential question and the assessment prompts. This should be the same as the pre-assessment.

Next, the students will wrap up the unit with a Living Opinion Poll. The teacher will ask all students to stand in the front of the room. He will briefly review the issues with Prohibition and ask students to move to the right side of the room if they are proponents of Prohibition, to the left side of the room if they are opponents of Prohibition, or somewhere along the continuum to indicate their preferences. He will then ask for some explanations to assess whether the students use textual information to support their thinking.

He will repeat the same activity with the remaining topics, continually soliciting feedback and explanations for stances. The students will be called up in groups according to the argument topics. The process will be repeated with the focus again being on assessing student use of textual information to support their thinking. Students not part of the opinion poll may also ask questions of those who researched a particular topic.

**Extension activities:**

1. Students create a fictional letterhead for their essay as if they were the newly elected senator.
2. Students edit and revise drafts before sending them to the President of the United States.
3. Students create oral reports, PowerPoint presentations, or informational posters about their topics.
4. The class learns about formal debate and then engages in a debate on the issues.
Resources/Citations:

- Free Preview of Ken Burns’ “Prohibition” http://video.pbs.org/video/2022470300
- Video – Introduction to the Temperance Movement and Prohibition. This is the link to the website. It is not the actual documentary http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/prohibition/
- Same-Sex Marriage Summary Sheet http://www.balancedpolitics.org/same_sex_marriages.htm
- Death Penalty Summary Sheet http://www.balancedpolitics.org/death_penalty.htm
- Gun Control Summary Sheet http://www.balancedpolitics.org/gun_control.htm
- Same Sex Marriage Reading Passage (First Two Pages Only) http://www.pewforum.org/Gay-Marriage-and-Homosexuality/A-Contentious-Debate-Same-Sex-Marriage-in-the-US.aspx
- Death Penalty Reading Passage http://policyalmanac.org/crime/death_penalty.shtml
- Gun Control Reading Passage http://www.policyalmanac.org/crime/archive/crs_gun_control.shtml
- Prohibition Reading Passage http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display_printable.cfm?HHID=441
- Political Cartoons
  - http://editorialcartoonists.com/cartoon/browse.cfm/
  - http://www.consumerfreedom.com/cartoons.cfm
  - http://blsciblogs.baruch.cuny.edu/his1005spring2011/tag/prohibition/
**Attachment K: A Visit to the Doctor**

**Part I**

**Directions:** Read the scripts below. When you finish, decide which you would rather experience and then consider the questions below.

**Scenario One**
- Doctor: Good Morning, I'm Doctor Bob.
- Patient: Hi, Doctor. My name is Pat.
- Doctor: How have you been feeling, Pat?
- Patient: Well, I've had a fever for a few days and I have red spots on my ear.
- Doctor: OK, that is a good start. I am going to give you an examination. I will also ask you some questions to see if we can figure this out.
- Patient: Thanks, Doc. Let's get started.

**Scenario Two**
- Doctor: I'm the doctor. Please take off your pants.
- Patient: But the problem is with my ear.
- Doctor: Nurse, bring me my needles!

**Questions for Reflection**
1. How were Scenarios One and Two different?
2. What did the doctor in Scenario One do well?
3. What did the doctor in Scenario Two do well?
4. Which scenario would be the better doctor visit?
5. How do these scenarios connect with writing an introductory paragraph?
A Visit to the Doctor

Part II

Directions: Read the scripts below. When you finish, decide which you would rather experience and then consider the questions below.

Scenario One
Doctor:  OK.  I know what it is.  Take these pills.  See ya!
Patient:  Huh?

Scenario Two
Doctor:  Well, Pat, it looks like you have a slight infection and a rash.  Your temperature is up and the spots are definitely related.  I want you to take all of this medicine over the next 5 days.  I also want you to use this cream at night until it is gone.  Be sure to take all of the medication.  It may not work if you miss a dose.  If you follow these directions, you'll be back to normal in no time.
Patient:  Thanks, Doctor Bob.  I am feeling better already.
Doctor:  I am glad I can help.  You take care now!
Patient:  You bet, Doc!

Questions for Reflection
1. How were Scenarios One and Two different?
2. What did the doctor in Scenario One do well?
3. What did the doctor in Scenario Two do well?
4. Which scenario would be the better doctor visit?
5. How do these scenarios connect with writing a concluding paragraph?
Attachment L: Understanding the Writing Assignment

R.A.F.T.

**Role** – From whose point of view will you be writing? (Who are you as the writer?)

**Audience** – To whom are you writing? (The person/group you are writing to.)

**Format** – In what form are you writing? (The style or manner in which you will be writing.)

**Topic** – What are you writing about?

Your R.A.F.T

**Role** – A newly elected US Senator from Delaware

**Audience** – The President of the United States

**Format** – Letter

**Topic** – Death penalty, gay marriage, or gun control, and you will write in support of or against the topic.

Your Letter

Dear Mr. President,

Then indent and write your introduction

First Supporting Paragraph

The reason I am writing, Mr. President, is that I am very concerned about this issue because…. [This should include your first claim and be supported by your evidence from your Rocket Outline.]

Second Supporting Paragraph

Mr. President, I am also very _____________ about…. [This should include your second claim and be supported by your evidence from your Rocket Outline.]

Third Supporting Paragraph

Finally, Mr. President, I am deeply concerned regarding the issue of…. [This should include your second claim and be supported by your evidence from your Rocket Outline.]
### Attachment M: Argumentation/Opinion Text-Based Writing Rubric
#### Grade 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading/Research</th>
<th>Score of 4</th>
<th>Score of 3</th>
<th>Score of 2</th>
<th>Score of 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                  | - The writing –  
|                  |  • makes effective use of available resources  
|                  |  • skillfully/effectively supports an opinion with relevant and sufficient facts and details from resources with accuracy  
|                  |  • uses credible sources*  | - The writing –  
|                  |  • makes adequate use of available resources  
|                  |  • supports an opinion with relevant and sufficient facts and details from resources with accuracy  
|                  |  • uses credible sources*  | - The writing –  
|                  |  • makes limited use of available resources  
|                  |  • inconsistently supports an opinion with relevant and sufficient facts and details from resources with accuracy  
|                  |  • inconsistently uses credible sources*  | - The writing –  
|                  |  • makes inadequate use of available resources  
|                  |  • fails to support an opinion with relevant and sufficient facts and details from resources with accuracy  
|                  |  • attempts to use credible sources*  |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Score of 4</th>
<th>Score of 3</th>
<th>Score of 2</th>
<th>Score of 1</th>
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</thead>
</table>
|             | - The writing –  
|             |  • addresses all aspects of the writing task with a tightly focused response  
|             |  • establishes the significance of a claim or proposal  
|             |  • effectively acknowledges and distinguishes the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims  
|             |  • skillfully supports claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence  | - The writing –  
|             |  • addresses the writing task with a focused response  
|             |  • establishes a plausible claim or proposal  
|             |  • acknowledges and distinguishes the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims  
|             |  • supports claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence  | - The writing –  
|             |  • addresses the writing task with an inconsistent focus  
|             |  • attempts to establish a plausible claim or proposal  
|             |  • inconsistently supports claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence  | - The writing –  
|             |  • attempts to address the writing task but lacks focus  
|             |  • attempts to establish a claim or proposal  
|             |  • supports claim(s) using evidence that is insufficient and/or irrelevant  |

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<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Score of 4</th>
<th>Score of 3</th>
<th>Score of 2</th>
<th>Score of 1</th>
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</table>
|              | - The writing –  
|              |  • effectively introduces the claim(s)  
|              |  • organizes the reasons and evidence logically in a manner that supports the writing task  
|              |  • effectively uses words, phrases, and/or clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence  
|              |  • provides an effective concluding statement or section that follows from and skillfully supports the argument presented  | - The writing –  
|              |  • introduces the claim(s)  
|              |  • organizes the reasons and evidence logically  
|              |  • uses words, phrases, and/or clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence  
|              |  • provides a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented  | - The writing –  
|              |  • introduces the claim(s); however, may fail to distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claim(s)  
|              |  • organizes reasons and evidence in a manner that may lack cohesion (ideas may be rambling and/or repetitive)  
|              |  • inconsistently uses words, phrases, and/or clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence  
|              |  • provides a sense of closure  | - The writing –  
|              |  • identifies the claim(s)  
<p>|              |  • has little or no evidence of purposeful organization  |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Language/Conventions</th>
<th>Score of 4</th>
<th>Score of 3</th>
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<td></td>
<td>The writing –</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• demonstrates an exemplary command of standard English conventions</td>
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<td>• skillfully employs language and tone appropriate to audience and purpose</td>
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<td>• has sentences that are skillfully constructed with appropriate variety in length and structure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• follows standard format for citation with few errors*</td>
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<td>The writing –</td>
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<td>• demonstrates a command of standard English conventions; errors do not interfere with understanding</td>
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<td>• employs language and tone appropriate to audience and purpose</td>
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<td>• has sentences that are generally complete with sufficient variety in length and structure</td>
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<td>• follows standard format for citation with few errors*</td>
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<td>The writing –</td>
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<td>• demonstrates a limited and/or inconsistent command of standard English conventions; errors may interfere with understanding</td>
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<td>• inconsistently employs language and tone appropriate to audience and purpose</td>
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<td>• has some sentence formation errors and/or a lack of sentence variety</td>
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<td>• follows standard format for citation with several errors*</td>
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<td>The writing –</td>
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<td>• demonstrates a weak command of standard English conventions; errors interfere with understanding</td>
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<td>• employs language and tone that are inappropriate to audience and purpose</td>
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<td>• has frequent and severe sentence formation errors and/or a lack of sentence variety</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• follows standard format for citation with significant errors*</td>
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* If applicable
Attachment N: Argument Introduction and Conclusion Template

Introduction:
There are many opinions on ________________. Opponents believe ____________, but proponents argue ______________. In my opinion, ______________. I think this because ______________, ______________, and ______________.

Don’t forget your three body paragraphs!
Conclusion:

Some people might claim that ______________________ is not ______________. They might argue that _________________________________.

Still, I believe ________________________________ because ________________, ________________ , and _________________. I will always ________________ ___________________.

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________
Middle School Argumentative Writing Revision and Editing Checklist  
(Can be modified as appropriate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVISION</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Getting There</th>
<th>Not Yet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development</strong></td>
<td>The writing develops –</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a clearly stated position on a well-defined issue</td>
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<td>• distinguishing between pros and cons (cons–grade 8)</td>
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<td>• explaining the issue’s significance</td>
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<td>• claims that support the position with</td>
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<td>• logical reasons and</td>
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<td>• relevant evidence from credible sources</td>
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<td>• an acknowledgment of alternate/opposing views (grade 8)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>The writing has –</td>
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<td>• an effective introduction that</td>
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<td>• states the position clearly</td>
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<td>• hooks the reader</td>
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<td>• provides background on the issue</td>
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<td>• body paragraphs effectively organized to advance the argument</td>
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<td>• linking words, phrases, and clauses that</td>
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<td>• create cohesion and make clear the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims (grade 8) reasons, and evidence</td>
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<td>• guide reader smoothly to next paragraph, section, point, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• an effective (convincing) concluding statement or section</td>
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</table>

**EDITING**

| Language/Sentences and Conventions | The writing - |  |  |
|  | • shows complete command of standard English conventions including |  |  |
|  | • spelling |  |  |
|  | • grammar |  |  |
|  | • punctuation |  |  |
|  | • uses language (well-chosen words and phrases) and establishes a tone that will convince audience |  |  |
|  | • uses varied sentences to strengthen the argument |  |  |

**OPTIONAL (Text-Based/Research-Based)**

| Reading/Research Sources | The writing – |  |  |
|  | • integrates information from the reading material or other resources accurately and effectively |  |  |
|  | • addresses the credibility of sources |  |  |
|  | • cites sources accurately and avoids plagiarism |  |  |
Sample Student Work

Dear President Obama,

If your entire family was brutally murdered by a serial killer who slit their throats and divided them into pieces, would you be content to keep him (or her) alive? Of course not—that would be injurious to your innocent kin. Yet many people are against the death penalty, and wish it to be banned. They believe that the death penalty is immoral—but when your wife and children are all dead, wouldn't sentencing the murderer to life in jail, only to have taxpayer dollars pay for their welfare, be even more unethical?

Citizens who are against the death penalty often argue that the high rates of error in the law system could lead to innocent people being executed, and that even killing guilty inmates is a violation of the Eighth Amendment. However, since the death penalty was reinstated in 1977, there is no evidence that any innocent individuals have been executed. Additionally, keeping guilty inmates alive is sometimes unfair to the general populace—if that inmate escapes, which is entirely possible (although, admittedly, fairly unlikely), many more innocent lives could be cut short. In addition, justice sometimes demands harsh punishments; if an 'eye for an eye' is a reasonable statement, then why not a life for a life?

Criminals guilty of capital crimes had rights, but those rights were lost to them the moment that they decided to kill another human being—a savage, unsavory crime. Also, executing criminals who are guilty of capital crimes causes lives to not be cut short.

According to several studies (and contrary to the belief held by people who are in opposition to the death penalty), murder rates in a certain area tend to fall as the death penalty is more frequently applied. Additionally, for each executed inmate, three to eighteen murders are prevented. While I am sure that those who oppose the death penalty dislike having any inmate executed, not executing criminals guilty of a capital offense could lead to a greater occurrence of murders, and, therefore, more convicted murderers in jail.

This leads me to my third and final point: keeping these inmates alive is a flagrant waste of money. In order to keep murderers alive—in relative comfort—taxpayer dollars are squandered. I'm sure that even opponents of the death penalty would despise their hard-earned cash going towards the support of a serial killer who had disposed of their entire family; they would probably prefer that money to go towards the support of local libraries and school [who, as a side note, could educate children about why criminals guilty of capital offenses, such as murder, could possibly be executed for their crime].

I am aware of the fact that you support the death penalty, and for that, I thank you. However, we must explain to those who refuse the death penalty why removing the law would be harmful for not just themselves, but the entire country. Justice can't always be 'nice and neat', but it is always necessary to maintain fairness to the general populace—and I'm almost certain that spending money on criminals, instead of on more worthwhile outlets, is entirely unfair.

Sincerely,

Senator _ _ _ _ _
**Annotation:** Grade 8 Prohibition annotated student work

For argument, it is important to remember to avoid relying on emotional appeals as support. This writer does so, reserving pathos for the introduction. It hooks the audience but does not substitute for “substantive” claims and evidence. Similarly, persuasive devices such as rhetorical questions are effectively used to hook the reader, but again, they do not substitute for support in the body of the essay.

Supporting paragraphs present clear claims with text-based evidence. For example, in paragraph 2, the evidence is appropriately qualified (“possible” if not “likely”) and warrants are clear (“if an ‘eye for an eye’ is a reasonable statement…” or implied). The writer effectively refutes some counterclaims (“innocent people executed”) with text evidence (“since…1977…no evidence…”), and then the writer uses the rebuttal as segue to the additional backing about the potential risk of keeping convicted murderers alive. The paragraph ends with a logical conclusion (rather than a restatement of previous information) that acknowledges the “rights” of criminals but concluding that those rights are limited because of their crime.

The conclusion to the letter addresses the audience (president), acknowledging the common ground and then calls for action, effectively addressing the grade-specific standards for argument.

While this essay clearly demonstrates exemplary performance for 8th grade, it is not flawless. For example, in at least one place, the writing lacks clarity (“…causes lives to not be cut short”). However, the subsequent explanations clarify the writer’s intent (the deterrent argument) so that the reader can still follow the argument. In addition, there are places where the argument would be stronger if the writer had included more specific information from the resources (e.g., “…no evidence that…,” “…taxpayer dollars”), and/or the writer could have found concrete support in lieu of hypothetical evidence based on assumptions (“I’m sure…opponents…would despise…”). Another word of caution for argument concerns word choice: the CCSS does not address “word choice” for argument, stating instead that well-grounded arguments are objective. This essay has obvious strong word choices (“squandered,” “unsavory,” “flagrant”); however, because this essay does not try to substitute strong word choices for solid argument, it is not an issue in this case.