Unit Map 2011-2012
Columbia University Teachers College
Collaboration / Writing* / Grade 5 (Elementary School)
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Unit 04 Research-Based Argument Essays (Week 14, 3 Weeks)

Unit Rationale

This unit focuses on teaching students to craft arguments based on research. It is meant to be taught in concert with a nonfiction reading unit, giving students ample time to build up nonfiction reading skills and to read across a topic, gathering evidence for an argument. In this writing unit, students will learn to develop an argument and support it with outside source material derived from multiple sources.

Before students begin this unit, you'll probably want to give students an opportunity to do so on-demand in which they stake an opinion on a controversial topic and then write to support that opinion. If you study what your students produce, you will probably see that many of them enter fifth grade with some experience and knowledge writing thesis-driven ‘boxes and bullets’ essays. Many of your students will be accustomed to stating an argument and supporting it in several support paragraphs. Students will probably be far less skilled at drawing on sources and writing in ways that cite passages from two texts. Those that do draw on sources will probably approach the essay as if the challenge is to convey information about a topic, not to advance a stance. They will draw only loosely on texts, probably doing so without acknowledging differing perspectives and claims, but instead merging information from texts as if they form one homogenized body of knowledge.

Granted, as part of their test-prep work for the 4th grade ELA exam, some students will have learned to read two texts that advance different positions, angling themselves towards the expectation that they will need to take a stance, and they will have done some intensive, short-term drill writing essays in which they open the essay with an introductory sentence stating their position on a topic, and then proceed to provide a citation from a text that supports this opinion. They will have been taught to acknowledge the counter argument, starting a later paragraph with a transition such as, “You might argue instead....” However, this is months after the ELA and students may be rusty at writing essays in which they defend a position. The stance and structure of argument writing will feel alien to most of the class members, and their thinking and writing within such a structure will feel very much like a paint-by-numbers activity.

This unit aims to give fifth graders additional practice working with texts that are written as arguments. Students will be working in a reading unit that is aligned to this writing unit, and during the reading workshop, they will be reading a small collection of texts that are arguments, coming to see that different authors who all write about a particular topic often do so by advancing different opinions, and by selecting and highlighting evidence that supports their opinion. During the reading workshop, then, writers will note ways in which authors choose words, sequence information, elaborate or skim so as to make readers think or feel certain things. Although this work will not be specifically aimed to support writing, the reading-writing connections will be important.

Within the unit, students will learn that writing argument essays involves not only writing an essay in which they make a clear claim and then shift towards including evidence. Students will learn that the challenge is also to reach and influence readers. There will be evidence that students write with readers in mind—sometimes directly addressing readers, sometimes writing in ways that show they are trying to evoke a response in readers, sometimes using voice to try to win friends and influence people. Students will not only cite evidence, they will also interpret the evidence for readers. The form of the writing will begin to feel more like it is a natural extension of the writer’s purpose—that of arguing, of influencing.
Essential Questions
How can I learn to write research-based argument essays in which I analyze different literatures on a topic, weigh the different perspectives and develop my own claim to write an argument essay defending that claim?

Guiding Questions
How can I teach my students that they can invent ways to use writing as a powerful tool for learning, inventing their own systems for note-taking and altering these so any one day’s note-taking fits with the student’s purpose and the text?

How do I help students to not only glean information as they read nonfiction texts, but to also analyze the sources of information, thinking about an author’s perspective on a topic in order to weigh multiple perspectives in ways that inform students’ own arguments?

How do I help research essayists develop an arguable claim and build a well-structured, well researched argument essay?

How do essayists look at their essay with a critical lens in order to revise and publish a strong argument?

Common Core Standards and Indicators
NY: CCLS:ELA & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects K–5, NY: 5th Grade, Writing
Text Types and Purposes
1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
   - 1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
   - 8. Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.

Content
By the end of this unit, students should be able to:
- Take notes based on something they feel strongly about and develop their position
- Take notes that will prove their claim
- Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and important details
- Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g. consequently, specifically, etc.).
- Look at their claim through multiple perspectives
- Look at their topic with a critical lens
Use domain specific vocabulary to help prove what they are saying
Grow their thesis and build their claim

Skills

Novice

- The writer may introduce a main topic, but does not explicitly state a claim.
- May launch directly into supporting information without any introduction.
- Relays information on a topic related or unrelated to a claim in a haphazard fashion.
- Ends the essay seemingly in the middle of a section, with no sense of closure.
- The included facts and details do not, in themselves, support any particular unstated claim.
- May provide very little or irrelevant information.
- May present reasons without supporting facts and details. Or may not connect these supports to each other or to the claim.
- Does not use transitional phrases to link opinion and reasons.

Intermediate

- States a claim that is related to the topic, but some of the evidence provided (details, etc.) may only be tangentially related.
- May introduce the topic briefly.
- Creates a loosely connected organizational structure that may or may not carry throughout the essay.
- May conclude briefly: conclusion may feel abrupt or insufficient.
- The reasons, facts, and details mostly support the stated claim, or an unstated claim that can be easily inferred.
- Provides only one or two pieces of relevant supporting evidence.
- May in some way connect reasons, facts and details to the claim, but makes some inaccurate connections or fails to account for some information.
- May use some transitional phrases but may use the same phrase in every instance. May use lower level transitions.

Proficient

- Clearly states a claim that takes a position on the topic.
- Orients the reader with an introduction to the topic and sometimes to the claim.
- Creates a structure that links the parts (reasons, examples, etc) to the claim in a coherent, often parallel fashion.
- Provides a concluding statement or section.
- The reasons, facts and details support the stated claim, or an unstated claim that can be easily inferred.
- Includes reasons for the stated claim and supporting information from relevant sources.
- Makes clear the connections between the reasons, the supporting facts and details, and the claim.
- Uses a variety of transitional phrases to link opinion and reasons, and reasons to supporting facts and details.

Key Terms/Vocabulary

Key Argument
Sequenced Learning Plans/Mini Lessons

Guiding Question / Bend One: How can I teach my students that they can invent ways to use writing as a powerful tool for learning, inventing their own systems for note-taking and altering these so any one day's note-taking fits with the student's purpose and the text?

- Essayists take research notes in precise, thoughtful ways because we expect to use these notes later when we begin drafting an essay on this topic. We record the most important information about a topic and also some of our questions and reactions to this information.
- Researchers’ notes don’t look the same even when we’re making notes from the exact same texts. Each one of us is an author of our own notes, so we can make choices about whether we want to make sketch-notes or lists, timelines or webs, idea clusters or Post it charts, tables or Venn Diagrams.
- While making notes, researchers discover that a specific note-making format often works best in a certain situation. For example, if the text is expository, it makes sense to use boxes and bullets to record it; if it is narrative, it makes more sense to make a timeline. If we’re comparing and contrasting or listing pros and cons, we might make a T-Chart. If we’re comparing three or more categories, we may make a table with three or more columns.
- Research notes are short and to the point. While making notes, researchers try to paraphrase and shorten text, using our own words where we can. We certainly don’t lift extensively from the text—and where we do lift a quote, we make sure to

Assessments

Initial Assessment
Other: Performance Assessment
You will want to give your students a performance assessment before the unit, so that you can hone your instruction to what they already know how to do, and what they’ll need not only instruction but extra practice with. TCRWP has available a performance assessment which provides students with a few texts on the same subject, and which asks them to gather and evaluate information and then draft a persuasive essay staking a claim and supporting it with evidence from the texts.

Formative Assessment
Other: Teacher Observation
As you continue through the unit, you will confer with students one-on-one and monitor their progress in writing. You will note whether they state a clear claim and give reasons and supporting evidence. If necessary, you can create a small group for students who need extra support in developing one clear stance. You will also note their structure and organization. A group (or perhaps the whole class) may benefit from extra instruction on strategically ordering the sections of their essay and the information presented within each section. You will also probably find some students that need support with introductions, conclusions, and/or transitions to make the ideas in the essay flow smoothly.

Final Performance Task
Other: Performance Assessment
At the end of the unit, you will administer the performance assessment a second time. This assessment will be an on-demand – that is, it aims to assess kids’ ability to independently read informational texts and construct a written argument that incorporates multiple sources of
use quotation marks and cite the source.

- Research notes don’t just record what the text says. They also contain our responses to this text. We are the authors of our notes, so we make sure to include our own ideas, feelings and questions alongside the information that we’re recording. We do this because we know that when we use these notes to write essays, our opinions will be as important as the information we’re gleaning from texts.
- Researchers treat our notes as valuable tools. We store and organize these notes efficiently; we constantly revisit and categorize old notes as we add new ones. We take care to keep them in a folder or notebook from where we may easily access them when we need to.

**Guiding Question / Bend Two:** How do I help students to not only glean information as they read nonfiction texts, but to also analyze the sources of information, thinking about an author's perspective on a topic in order to weigh multiple perspectives in ways that inform students' own arguments?

- When we know a topic well enough (when we’ve read enough about it), researchers begin see all its sides. We can then ask, “Are there two ways to look at this topic?”
- A way to uncover two sides of a topic is to note that various authors can have different positions while writing about it. We ask questions such as “What is this author trying to make me feel about the topic? Why is the author trying to make me feel this?” In our notes, we note and compare the feelings that different texts evoke and we list the craft choices or illustration details of each text that contribute to making us feel this way.
- Another way that researchers cover the many faces of a topic is to think, “How might different groups of people see this topic? How are different groups of people affected by this topic?” For example, if our topic is Forests, the different groups associated with this topic would

information. The assessment will probably take 3 class periods, though we recommend that it be two days – one hour on day one for reading/research and writing an essay plan. The second day will include a period for reading/research and a period for writing.
include: environmentalists, timber businessmen, carpenters, consumers, local residents and nesting animals. In our notes, we try to think and jot how each of these groups might see certain elements about this topic differently.

- Researchers consider the two faces of a topic to ask ourselves, “What is MY stance, MY position on this?” We don’t just pick any old stance to call our own, we look over our notes and all we’ve read about the topic to find a stance with the most compelling reasons or evidences to believe in and list these.

**Guiding Question / Bend Three:** How do I help research essayists develop an arguable claim and build a well-structured, well researched argument essay?

- Once researchers have enough notes on a topic to compare and contrast its different faces and issues, we start to look at the bigger picture of this topic and ask, “What are some of the big issues and ideas that are important to write more about?”

- One way to find a strong arguable claim for our topic is to look across our notes to study the many faces of our topic that we’ve recorded, or the different feelings that writers have tried to inspire for this topic, or the perspective of different people on this topic. We pick the most compelling of these and try to jot more arguments in its favor.

- When possible arguments about a topic begin to occur to us, essayists capture these in a claim or thesis statement. One way to write the thesis statement (claim) of an argument essay, is to start by stating something that an opposite side might say but then add what we would like to argue instead. (Although some people believe...it may actually be argued that...)

- Once we know the argument that we want to forward, essayists look back at all our notes to come up with a list of reasons or examples that may serve as evidence of our argument. We jot each of these down and
elaborate them further to form
different paragraphs for the essay.

- Essayists also look at the possible
evidence to support the opposite
side's argument. We jot all possible
evidence that may support the
counterclaim, adding a transition like:
Nevertheless, But, However, Despite
this...to refute each argument,
showing that it is inaccurate,
incomplete, not representative of all
situations, or deficient in some other
way. In this way, essayists develop a
paragraph or two in which we
discredit the counterclaim.

**Guiding Question / Bend Four:** How do
essayists look at their essay with a critical
lens in order to revise and publish a strong
argument?

- Essayists revise the order in which we
  present the reader with information.
  We wonder what to put first, what to
  present next and what to reveal at the
  end.
- Sometimes essayists paraphrase and
cite portions from texts. When we do
this, we use our own words to
summarize a point in the book. At
other times, we quote directly from
the text, in which case we use
quotation marks. In both cases, we
make sure to cite the book and author
that we're referring to.
- Essayists write like an "insider" to a
topic by using domain-specific
vocabulary. We stay on the lookout
for places where we might need to
define vocabulary words that are
connected to the topic that might be
hard for readers to understand.
Writers keep in mind common ways
that information writers teach
important words and decide which
way will be best for each word.
- Essayists sometimes insert an
anecdote (narrative writing) into our
essays to create a powerful impact on
the reader by providing an example of
something compelling about our topic.
- Essayists revise the introduction of
our information books, thinking about
how we can set readers up to be
experts in the topic and how we can
draw readers in right from the start.
Essayists revise our concluding section, taking care to sum up the important information and also leave readers with some big ideas.

**Resources**

**Texts Used** (fiction, non-fiction, on-line, media, etc...)
Leveled texts for the five different topics, social studies text books, historical society trip, website research, podcasts, video clips

**Websites and Web-tools used**

- [http://www.sustainabilityed.org/](http://www.sustainabilityed.org/)
- wcs.org
- teachertube.com
- storyworks.scholastic.com
- podcast: a moment in time

**Differentiated Instructions: Small Group**