



Lesson Plan

Unit Name: Big Questions Debate

Topic: Constructing an Argument

Essential Questions:

1. What are the component parts of a complete, well constructed argument?
2. What is the difference between a claim, warrant, and impact? Why should an argument contain each of these components? What contribution is made to an argument by each of these parts?
3. How can one analyze a given document (a piece of text, something presented as an argument in a debate round, etc.) in order to locate the claim, warrant, and impact structure it contains?

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to explain the difference between a claim, warrant, and impact, and explain the importance of each one within an argument.
2. Students will be able to “break down” or reformulate a text that provides an argument into the claim, warrant, and impact format.
3. Students will be able to construct and revise their own arguments, so that they contain claims, warrants, and impacts.

Instructional Materials Needed:

One to three passages that each contain at least one complete argument for one side of the Big Questions debate topic. Optional (for homework): one or more articles on the Big Questions debate topic, which you can assign students to read, identify one or more arguments, and rearticulate those arguments in claim, warrant, and impact form.

Overview of Lesson:

This lesson has three main parts: (1) an introduction of the claim, warrant, and impact structure through lecture, example, and large group discussion; (2) a small group activity where student groups work to structure an argument in claim, warrant, and impact form from passages provided to them, followed by a larger group review; (3) individual/small group work time where stands are asked to generate/revise complete arguments on the topic.

Detailed Step-by-Step Lesson:

Introducing the three parts of an argument: claim, warrant, and impact [25 minutes].

Here is the structure you will be introducing to students. You could outline it on the board ahead of time, or lay it out piece by piece as you elicit it in the discussion/activity outlined below. A **claim** is the assertion that you are trying to argue for the truth of or prove. A **warrant** is the reasoning or evidence that you are providing in order to justify, verify, or support the claim. An **impact** is why it matters that your claim is true, why your claim is significant, and/or what (further) conclusions we can draw from your claim being true.

Students might be familiar with rules for formal essay writing that are parallel to the claim, warrant, and impact structure. An essay begins with an introduction that contains a topic sentence or thesis statement, which is the central **claim** they will be advancing and defending in their essay. In the heart of their essay, students provided arguments and evidence in support of their topic sentence/thesis statement—they provide **warrants** for their claim. Finally, an essay ends with a concluding paragraph in which they tie their essay together by explaining what they have demonstrated, the significance of the claim that they have advanced, and/or what else of interest might follow from what they have demonstrated (the **impact** of the essay).

A nice way to introduce students to the structure of an argument is to solicit discussion from them by asking them to generate arguments for an example topic. You can choose any topic, but it can help get the conversation going (and avoided getting bogged down in the substantive details of a topic area) if you choose a somewhat silly and/or familiar topic as your example. For instance, “It is better to eat an apple than a candy bar as an afternoon snack” or (if your school has a uniform) “Our school should maintain its school uniform policy.” The important thing is to choose a topic that you think your students will be able to quickly generate ideas about.

Introduce the example topic and give students a moment to come up with one argument on each side of the topic. You can then call on a student to state their argument. Your goal is to bring out the claim, warrant, and impact structure through discussion of the proposed argument. Often, you will find that a student’s “argument” is primarily only a claim. So, you can introduce this as the first part of an argument: the claim. You can then solicit ideas for *why* that claim might be true. What might be reasons for believing the claim? What types of evidence might one provide to support the claim? This will generate ideas of *warrants* for the student’s claim. You can then use these examples to introduce the second part of an argument: the warrant. Lastly, ask students what conclusions can be drawn from the claim being true? In other words, why does proving the claim true help prove one side of the topic? (Of course, if a student happens to propose a complete argument, you can take what they said, break it up into parts, and use each part to introduce the claim, warrant, and impact structure. You can also reinforce the point by asking for additional warrants/impacts in support of the student’s argument).

You will now have an example argument on display, with each part of the argument (claim, warrant, and impact) identified for the students. It might also be helpful to write out definitions of each of these parts next to that argument.

If students seem to need additional reinforcement, you might work through this process again with another student’s argument, this time asking other students to identify the parts of the argument proposed and/or to supply additional parts to complete the argument.

This group discussion is also a good place to introduce the idea that there might be multiple warrants that could be provided from one claim, that one warrant might provide justification for more than one claim, and that a claim might have multiple impacts.

Partner review, if needed [10 minutes]

Now that students have been introduced to the structure of an argument, they should be able to generate arguments on each side of your example topic. You can have each student do this by partnering students and asking each student to write an argument, review their partner's argument to ensure that it has the complete claim, warrant and impact structure, and then to revise their own argument in light of partner feedback.

Application: identifying arguments in a passage [20-30 minutes]

Break students up into partners or small groups. Provide each group with a passage that makes one or more arguments for one side of the current Big Questions debate topic. You should of course select passages that present a clear argument. Depending on the level of your students, you may pick a passage that advances multiple arguments and/or arguments with multiple examples of each part (e.g. a passage that provides three different kinds of warrants for one claim).

Each individual in a group should read the passage and annotate it with the claim, warrant, and impact structure. Students might find it helpful to read the passage through once, and then go back and re-read it in order to mark out the claim(s), warrant(s), and impact(s) in the passage. Then, as a group, students should compare notes, and construct an argument that is based on the argument in the passage. They can quote the passage where appropriate, but they can also supplement it with their own explanation. Alternatively, you can ask students to rewrite the entire argument, with each of its parts, in their own words.

Once each group has a version of their argument, you can return to the larger group and discuss one or two of the groups' arguments. This larger group discussion could be an opportunity to brainstorm further warrants or impacts for a claim made by a group's argument. It will be helpful for students to see that they can often make the best use of source material if they contextualize it within their own reasoning (amplifying the argument of the passage by adding their own ideas, conclusions, and justifications to it).

Conclusion (or assignment for homework)

Depending on whether your students have already produced arguments on the Big Questions topic, you can now ask students to either *revise* their existing arguments—checking to make sure that they are complete—and/or to write a few new arguments of their own that contain the claim, warrant, and impact structure. To standardize later review, you might provide students with passages or articles from which to construct new arguments, or you could choose to couple this assignment with a research assignment and ask students to find their own source material.

Informal Assessment Strategies:

You should be able to informally assess student understanding through the larger group discussions, monitoring of smaller group discussions, and the arguments and revisions that students produce in small group, partner work, and/or individual work.

Formal Assessment Strategies:

Formal assessment can be done of the homework you assign students' at the end of the lesson. In addition, students will have generated materials at several points during the lesson: the arguments they revised with a partner on the example topic, their annotated passage from group work, and the groups' final arguments. You can ask students to turn in any or all of these materials for your review.

Reflection/Review for Future:

This lesson leads logically into the next lesson on refuting an argument. The structure of an argument itself can be referred back to whenever you discuss or review arguments, assign case writing and revision, or set goals for research assignments.