



Approaching Argumentation Playfully in the English Language Arts Classroom

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Introduction

In the lesson presented in this chapter, teachers guide students in developing the skill of argumentation, which prepares students for success on both their state standardized assessments and their college gatekeeping exams. Additionally, the content and organization of the lesson encourages teachers to maintain evidenced-based best practices in their instruction even as they engage in preparing students for their examinations (Slavin, 2008). The lesson draws on Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld's (2010) research, published in *TESOL Journal*, in which they report ways that teachers deliver highly engaging, culturally relevant instruction that simultaneously functions as effective preparation for necessary examinations.

Standardized testing has been the preeminent mechanism for school reform in the United States since the imposition of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as law in 2001 (Au & Hollar, 2016; Malsbary, 2016). These unfair and arguably invalid instruments wield outsized influence over instructional decisions from the level of state departments of education down to classrooms (Reyes & Villarreal, 2016). It is not an exaggeration to say that teachers typically hold standardized testing in disdain and are loath to engage in test preparation. In fact, many probably relate to this statement about standardized testing, made by one of the participating teachers in Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld's (2010) study: "It just sucks up all the oxygen in the room" (p. 487). Unfortunately, teaching to the test feels nearly unavoidable, especially in schools and classrooms serving English learners (ELs), regardless of how uncomfortable teachers may feel about allowing tests with dubious levels of validity for diverse learners to drive instructional decisions (Menken, 2006). However, as graduation is increasingly tied to test performance, teachers find themselves in a double bind, caught between their desire to pursue innovative and culturally responsive teaching and their awareness that the tests hold power over the trajectories of students' lives.

This lesson, which covers a unit plan, offers a way out of that bind through a playful approach to the skill of argumentation. By creatively approaching instruction for this ubiquitously tested skill, teachers are able to implement culturally relevant practices which are supported by research while helping students build the linguistic and rhetorical skills necessary for success on their standardized tests. This approach is accomplished primarily through a shift in materials and topic selection. Rather than bombarding students with the standard materials (e.g., released tests), in this unit, teachers present the skill set necessary for composing a logical argument through debatable topics that invite laughter and connection.

Synopsis of Original Research

Giouroukakis, V., & Honigsfeld, A. (2010). High-stakes testing and English language learners: Using culturally and linguistically responsive literacy practices in the high school English classroom. *TESOL Journal*, 1, 470–499. doi:10.5054/tj.2010.240193

The testing culture in U.S. schools is all but impenetrable (Reyes & Villarreal, 2016). Researchers have established the harm testing has inflicted on teaching and learning, and no group seems more negatively affected than ELs (Bahruth, 2000; Bartolomé, 1994; de la Luz Reyes, 1992; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Franquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; Giroux, 2010; Huerta, 2011; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Since NCLB became law, ELs' scores have not changed, nor has the so-called achievement gap closed significantly (Menken, 2008; Olson, Matuchniak, Chung, Stumpf, & Farkas, 2017). The literature detailing the negative effects of testing on ELs has yet to shift policy; thus, Enright (2010) argues that researchers would do well to embrace efforts aimed at “finding niches and practices” where teaching and learning within the current context can be optimized (p. 805). Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld's (2010) study illustrates that teachers have managed to maintain and embrace practices designed to foster authentic, meaningful learning while preparing ELs for particular assessments. Though condemning the current test-centric climate in U.S. schools, the four English and ESL teachers in the study designed instruction that afforded both test preparation and authentic learning. They accomplished this in large part by selecting materials inflected with the cultural and linguistic background of their students in spite of the overwhelming presence of the state tests as the driver of curricular decisions.

The impetus for Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld's (2010) research was Menken's (2006) article, in which she reported on the ways that standardized testing was shaping language policy in education from the classroom to the highest political platform. Though Menken's (2006) work focused primarily on urban schooling, Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld's work indicates similar results in suburban communities where the EL population is perhaps smaller but nonetheless significant. Their aim was to document how teachers, in spite of the pressures and power of the test, “challenge themselves to offer both pedagogically appropriate and culturally and linguistically responsive instruction while . . . teaching to the test to various degrees” (p. 489).

The design of their study included classroom observation and interviews of four teachers with English or English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) certificates or both. All four teachers taught in public high schools in Long Island, New York, USA; all were tenth-grade teachers whose students were tested by the New York Regents exam, which students must pass to earn a New York state diploma. Thus, curriculum in their classes was explicitly designed to prepare students for this specific test. Over a 5-month period, Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld (2010) observed at least three lessons per teacher and interviewed each teacher three times. They also collected instructional documents from the teachers and had them respond to an online survey designed to elicit their personal teaching philosophy. These data were used to answer three research questions probing (1) the literacy tasks the teachers implemented in their classes and the degree to which those tasks were connected to the exam, (2) the type of test preparation materials the teachers used in their classes, and (3) the effects of the high-stakes exam on the teachers' beliefs about high-stakes testing and about their EL students.

Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld (2010) found that all four teachers acknowledged teaching to the test and observed them delivering instruction that focused on tested content and skills, including presenting specific test items and explicitly teaching test-taking strategies. Teachers admitted that certain parts of the school year were dominated by test preparation and that the content and pacing of their classes were fundamentally driven by the high-stakes Regents exam. Through interviews and observations, Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld were able to identify specific "test-preparation practices" their focal teachers enacted, including test-vocabulary instruction; analysis of and practice with released test questions; explanation of test rubrics; instruction on test-taking strategies; and intentional confidence-building activities connected to students' "test-taking self-concept," which one focal teacher considered the most challenging test-preparation practice to teach (p. 481).

However, even as teachers bemoaned the power of the exam over their instructional practices, they discussed their efforts to construct lessons built on culturally and linguistically sensitive pedagogy aimed toward authentic learning. Classroom observations confirmed that the four teachers did, in fact, systematically implement pedagogical practices (e.g., scaffolding and modeling) accompanied by various language accommodation strategies (e.g., sentence frames and graphic organizers). They also drew on culturally relevant teaching practices by including students' funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), encouraging the use of students' first languages in the classroom and drawing from culturally responsive literature. Though the teachers did use released exam materials to encourage "test-savviness," they often adapted and augmented these materials with teacher-created materials designed to render test tasks more comprehensible and engaging to ELs. The teachers used authentic materials, drama and music, creative writing, and film to generate engagement with culturally relevant literature. These materials, which honored ELs' unique cultures and communities, facilitated connections between school tasks and the real world.

Teachers' careful reflection on the test's power in their students' lives coupled with deep concern for their students' unique needs drove efforts to prepare students for the powerful exam without abandoning the teachers' fundamental beliefs

about grounding student learning in culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction and materials. These teachers were able to develop and deliver test preparation addressed through culturally responsive materials and tasks by implementing a purposeful instructional approach, nurturing a supportive learning environment, and providing meaningful instruction and materials aligned with research-based best practices for their diverse learners.

Based on their observations of and interactions with their four focal teachers, Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld (2010) posited that, in the current educational climate in the United States, teaching almost inevitably involves varying measures of test preparation. However, they stress that culturally and linguistically responsive high-stakes test preparation is possible when teachers integrate culturally appropriate literacy tasks and materials. This reflective, intentional teaching practice builds responsiveness into the pedagogy that can facilitate students' success on the test and engagement in learning through high-interest, culturally connected texts; performance-based products with written and oral components; and creative instruction designed to guide students' reading comprehension and nurture their voices. Further, they recommend teachers support students' linguistic development as they help them become test-smart through test-vocabulary development and analysis of test instructions and questions. This practice is enhanced when teachers embrace well-established practices, such as wait time, differentiated instruction, first language use, and peer interaction as part of a nurturing classroom culture built on encouragement and respect.

Rationale

Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld's (2010) study suggests that, though test preparation may alter good teaching, it does not negate it. They demonstrate that highly engaging, culturally relevant instruction does not have to fall by the wayside, victim of the hegemony of the test. In fact, in light of testing, creative approaches to literacy teaching and tasks are perhaps more vital than ever before.

The argumentation unit presented in this chapter explores one such creative approach. Here, teachers are invited to implement playful pedagogy in spite of the quite serious tests their students face, acknowledging that laughter and joy are central components of the particular set of cultural, linguistic, and social factors that make up students' profile (Fine, 2014; Herrera, Perez, & Escamilla, 2015). Research has shown that a playful approach enhances learners' self-esteem, affords authentic learning, builds community, and affords language acquisition (Conklin, 2014; Patte, 2012; Silver, 2010). Teaching is playful when it draws on the joy of learning, which lives at the core of human development across the lifespan (Göncü & Perone, 2005; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Playful teaching involves the intentional selection and presentation of content, assignments, and structure and the delivery of materials in imaginative, open-ended, and active ways.

This approach to teaching has deep, though often overlooked, empirical support. Sawyer (2015), for example, echoed Csikszentmihalyi (1990) when he claimed that

happiness and well-being are linked specifically to participating in creative classroom activities. Chang, Hsu, and Chen (2013) found that playful classroom environments resulted in increased student creativity. He, Prater, and Steed (2011) pointed out that effectively teaching ELs involves not only a knowledge of language domains but also requires an understanding of how to connect across cultures and that playfulness offers an avenue through which to forge such a connection. Silver (1999) intentionally added play to his students' daily agenda and found that, when he did, ELs both developed their English skills and created deeper connections to their classmates.

This lesson, then, seeks to present a way to teach argumentation through joy and creativity. In terms of Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld's (2010) recommendations, this lesson values students' out-of-school experiences, culturally embedded ways of knowing, and knowledge of pop culture. The tasks generate performance-based products of learning that spring from a creative experience with building and writing arguments. Giouroukakis and Honigsfeld (2010) also recommend linguistically responsive practices, which are represented in this unit as well: Students are presented with step-by-step instruction, plenty of peer interaction, essay and sentence frames, oral practice before writing, and interpersonal support via teamwork and coaching.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan Title	Playing With Arguments
Grade/Subject Area	Grades 9–12 ; English language arts, English as a second language
Duration	≈ 2 weeks
Proficiency Levels	WIDA (2007): Levels 2–5 (Beginning to Bridging)
Content and Language Objectives	<p>Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define and differentiate fact, opinion, and logic as they apply themselves to developing arguments by surveying and conversing with their classmates on a position and organizing their responses. (Content) • orally state their reasons for taking a position and support those reasons with examples, logic, or fact by participating in paired and group debates. (Content) • write an argumentative essay stating a clear position and providing reasons along with examples, logic, and fact as support by using essay, paragraph, and sentence frames. (Content) • use the terms <i>argument</i>, <i>argumentation</i>, <i>fact</i>, <i>opinion</i>, and <i>logic</i> accurately in a class discussion as they complete a graphic organizer labeling their peers' responses to "Would You Rather" questions. (Language) • participate in paired and small group debates in which they will take a position and support that position with fact and logic by using sentence frames. (Language) • write an argumentative essay (both with a group and individually) in which they take a position and support that position through logic and fact by using essay, paragraph, and sentence frames. (Language)

(continued on next page)

Lesson Plan *(continued)*

Alignment to Standards

Common Core State Standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010)

Standards for argumentative writing; listening comprehension and collaboration; problem-solving through research, logic, and cooperation; presentations of reasonable arguments; and source evaluation. For example:

- *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1*: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1*: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1*: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2*: Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.
- *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4*: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.
- *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4*: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3*: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.
- *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3*: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

Lesson Plan <i>(continued)</i>	
Outcomes	<p>Students will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participate in a debate and write both a group and an individual argumentative essay with at least three points of argument and one of counter argument. • internalize the basic elements of a quality argument and of writing an argumentative essay, which will serve them both as they craft timed essays in testing situations and as they build on these foundational skills toward more sophisticated persuasive essays.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overhead projector or document camera • Appendixes A–D (available on the companion website for this book): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Which Would You Rather handout (Appendix A) — Questions for Speed Debate handout (Appendix B) — The Argument Builder handout (Appendix C) — Handouts of essay frames (Appendix D) — Sentence stems for posting (Appendix E) — Timed Essay: Steps to Essay Writing worksheet (Appendix F) • Copies of Frank Stockton’s (1882) short story “Lady or the Tiger?” for each student

This lesson plan was developed for Grade 11 students who were being prepared for success not only on their state’s standardized assessment but also on college-entrance exams (e.g., the SAT). Designed to support students who are developing their English language skills as well as those whose academic background may have some gaps, the materials were presented with language support, yet students at higher levels of English development or with more experience in writing argumentative essays may need fewer scaffolds.

Highlighted Teaching Strategies

This lesson utilized the following teaching strategies:

- Thematic question: “How can you change someone’s mind?”
- Oral argumentation around low-risk, silly questions that nonetheless demand the production of logical, fact-based arguments
- Sentence stems
- Paragraph and essay frames
- Peer interaction

Procedures

Day 1

For warm-up, have students pick up the Which Would You Rather handout (Appendix A) as they walk in the room. Once seated, they follow the instructions on the handout, selecting one answer only to the “Would you rather . . . ?” questions presented. Allow them a few minutes to complete their answers.

Call the group to attention, and, using a copy of the handout projected on the overhead projector or document camera, take a survey of the students’ responses. For example, you might ask, “Who said they’d rather not use their phone for a month? Who’d rather eat bread and drink water for a month if you still had your phone?”

Write down the number of responses to each position offered by the question. Create a table with the questions and answers for and against clearly marked. Ask a few students who respond, “Why did you choose that?” Allow whole-class discussion among the students as they offer one another support and/or disagree. Debate is sure to break out!

Explain to the students that they have (1) taken a position and (2) supported their chosen positions by creating arguments. Have them think about how they are forming their arguments. Ask them to consider the basis of their arguments. Elicit the terms *opinion*, *facts*, *emotion (feelings)*, *logic*, and *reasons*. Write the terms on the board, having students record them in their notebooks or vocabulary lists if keeping them are routine in your classes.

Together with the students, write definitions for the terms. Ask students to help you rank which elements create the most convincing arguments and explain their selections. You can use YouTube videos to help students understand these concepts. For example videos and questions, see the companion website for this book.

Return to the table you created showing positions and explanations. Label each explanation as fact, reason, emotion, opinion, and so on.

For homework, have students ask friends or family members two or three “Would you rather . . . ?” questions from the handout. They may write down the answers or video- or audio-record themselves asking them, and then they should write or record their analysis considering how their interviewees supported their positions.

Day 2

The main activity of Day 2 is a “speed debate.” This works best if students are able to stand or be seated facing one another. They will need to shift positions (one line move to the right, one to the left) in order that pairs change for each question. Depending on the space in your room or the way it is furnished, you may be able to line up the desks facing one another, having students configure themselves as shown in the video, “Inside/Outside Circles” (www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/inside-outside-circles), from TheTeacherToolkit.com. Print the Speed Debate Questions (Appendix B). You will need two copies of each question, one for each facing desk. The cards should be exactly the same, but you should circle opposing answers. For example, both cards will say, “Which would be easier to take care of: a pet dragon or a pet blue whale?”; on one card, circle “dragon” and, on the other, circle “blue whale.” This will be the position the students will take in paired

debate. Place cards on facing desks. Students will move, but the cards will remain on the desks. This will allow for students to pair with new partners and to debate new questions with each turn.

Seat students in the facing desks and have them show one another portions of the videos they recorded last night for homework. Then, ask them two more “Would You Rather” questions. As soon as they answer, have their speaking partner ask, “Why?” and agree or disagree, providing their own reasons. Here are some ideas for questions:

- Would you rather have three hands or three legs? (See the Huffington Post article on the companion website for this book.)
- Would you rather always be 20 minutes late or always be 10 minutes early?
- Would you rather lose your money or all of the pictures you have ever taken?
- Would you rather be able to see 10 years into your own future or someone else’s?

Briefly review the terms introduced in the last class (*argument, argumentation, opinion, facts, emotion, logic, reasons*, etc.). Add the term *counter-argument* with its definition: “A counter-argument is someone’s reason to oppose an idea or to see the logic in a different way.” Explain that today students will be engaged in a “speed debate” with their classmates in which they will defend a position through argument and counter-argument.

Give students the following instructions:

At each desk, you’ll find a card with a question and a preselected position. You will have 2 minutes to read the question, consider the position, and develop two or three reasons that the position selected on your card is the better choice of the two. You’ll need notebooks and pens or pencils to write down a few notes. Then, one of you will have 2 minutes to argue your position to your partner. Next, your partner, with the opposing position, will have a chance to deliver their argument for 2 minutes. Finally, each of you will be given 1 additional minute to explain to your partner what is missing from their argument and to reinforce why your own position is the better one.

This final minute often gets entertainingly animated. If you are not comfortable with elevated volume in the classroom, go over some ground rules before beginning the debates.

Post and go over the following sentence stems for arguing for and against positions:

- I think that X is the better choice because . . .
- One reason that X is a better choice is that . . .
- I argue that X is the better choice because . . .
- You’re ignoring the fact that . . .
- Your argument isn’t logical because . . .

- You may be right about X, but you're not considering Y because . . .
- I find your explanation/evidence/reasoning/logic weak because . . .

Have two students come to the front of the class and perform one speed debate with you as a model. Appoint another student the timer. Model the debate process, supporting your student partner by cueing the sentence stems and helping them to develop arguments and counter-arguments. If necessary, repeat the process or have a pair of students model a debate in front of the class.

Begin the debate, having students shift seats (one side moves left, one side moves right in order that students are paired with every other student) at the end of each 5-minute session. At the end of each session, playfully ask students, "Who won?"

At the end of class, discuss what about arguing was easy or hard. Ask whether anyone felt convinced by their debate partner's arguments or counter-arguments.

Assign the following for homework:

Write a paragraph (or entry on the class blog or on another online resource, such as Padlet or Edmodo) stating what you think was your best argument today. What did you say that really made sense?

Days 3–4

For warm-up, have students discuss what they wrote for last night's homework. Tell them to explain to someone who has not yet heard their argument. Challenge the new listener to come up with a counter-argument that might make the original arguer change positions. Have a few people share with the class.

Explain that today, students will prepare arguments for a group debate. Present the debate format and new sentence stems for oral debate. Depending on your class size, you may have four groups of two or three students and hold two debates on the same topic simultaneously or simply hold one debate after another on distinct topics and have the other groups serve as judges. Your decision will depend in part on the space and time available. Alternatively, this activity can be extended, allowing students to debate two different topics to build and practice their skills.

Define necessary terms (initial argument, rebuttal, concluding remarks) and explain to students that the debate format will be:

- Initial argument: 2 minutes each
- Follow-up argument: 2 minutes each
- Rebuttal: 2 minutes each
- Concluding remarks: 1 minute each

Decide together as a class the judging criterion. Ask students, "What makes a strong argument?" and "What sort of argument should earn points/lose points?" Sketch out a system for awarding points on the board or document camera.

Explain that each group will have the rest of today's class to develop their arguments and prepare their remarks. Offer the follow paragraph frames:

- We strongly believe X for three reasons. The first/second/third reason is . . .
- Our position is that . . .

- When you argue that X, you neglect the fact that . . .
- We concede that X is maybe true, but your argument ignores . . .
- Our opponents have argued that X . . . but our view is that a more logical conclusion is Y because . . .

Present students with the following debate topics.

- *Debate 1: The superhero that the worlds needs now is _____.*
- Fact in this debate comes from superhero movies, comic books, and books. Students may nominate specific heroes and then limit their selection to two opposing options.

- *Debate 2: Which are fiercer: unicorns or house cats?*

Fact in this debate comes from books, movies, and folklore.

- *Debate 3: Which would create a better future: a machine that would wrap every car and plane in an impenetrable cloud of safety or a machine that would slap anyone who tried to say something mean?*

The quality of logical connections to facts about the real world will determine the winner of this debate.

- *Debate 4: Who would make a better friend: Minnie Mouse or Pikachu?*

Characters for this debate could be nominated by students or could reflect literature that students have read in class or studied in social studies (e.g., Jay Gatsby vs. Tom Sawyer, Abraham Lincoln vs. Wild Bill Hickok). Fact in this debate comes from books and film—the characters’ stories, whether fictional or factual.

Assign students to groups based on the debate topic they select. These are just a few selections. It is always an interesting approach to have students formulate the debate topics and to determine what counts as fact. They do however, often need guidance to see that arguments of pure opinion (e.g., Which tastes better: Coke or Pepsi?) are not topics that can be conceptualized logically because any argument would be based purely on personal preferences—this discussion in itself is a vitally important one. Topics of local interest also work well, though be cautious in choosing debates that may be too emotionally charged or too connected to some students’ personal identities (e.g., sports teams, sides of town, gender) because this can jeopardize the spirit of fun and discovery. It is key that topics are light and novel or at least framed in a novel way. (E.g., We are about to colonize Mars: Should people in the settlements be allowed to own property or should all property be owned collectively?)

Assign the following for homework:

Write or video record a report of what you think was the best debate of the day. Explain your choice and comment on your experience of debating or listening. Did you change your mind based on the arguments made by any team? Why or why not? Post your paragraph or your video on the [class blog/Facebook page/Padlet/Edmodo] or bring in a written copy.

Day 5

As students come in, they encounter a question posted on the board with instructions to write down their initial answer along with the reasons for their choice. The question should be something that demands a choice based on a certain criterion (e.g., Which would make a person happier: unlimited love or unlimited money?)

Explain that today's assignment will be to write argumentative essays in groups. Introduce or review the terms *thesis statement*, *reasons*, *evidence/support*, *counter-argument*, and *rebuttal*. Explain that, step-by-step, you will lead the class in developing an essay outline. On the overhead or document projector, follow The Argument Builder handout (Appendix C), constructing an outline based on the position the students select and the reasons, support, evidence, and counter-arguments they provide.

Assign groups of three students and offer them new questions or questions they have already encountered in the debates (students who are at earlier levels of English development will benefit from maintaining the same question they defended in the debate). Allow time for the group to read the question, select a position, and begin to develop their support. They should use the Argument Builder to create their outline.

For homework, groups should divide the paragraphs of the essay, and each member should bring in a first draft of their assigned paragraph.

Day 6

Have students reassemble in their groups and read through the drafts each brought as homework.

Present the essay frame and corresponding sentence stems (Appendixes D and E). The essay frame should broadly cover what the function of each paragraph/section should accomplish and provide some guidance for wording.

Model by providing examples of how this frame and these stems would be used: Compose portions of text on the overhead projector or document camera using the outline the students created in concert during Day 5. It is also a good idea to post frames and stems in the classroom:

- Introduction: Create interest, explain the importance of the issue, and establish any background necessary to understand the selected position.
- Thesis statement: Reword the question including your reasons.
(Your choice of positions) would make a person happier than (the other position) because (briefly state reasons one, two, and three).
- Body paragraphs: Present reasons and well-connected evidence; place counter-arguments in paragraphs where they fit.
The first reason that _____ would make someone happier is that _____. [Explain why this reason makes sense.]
Some may argue that _____, but they are ignoring _____.

- Conclusion: Restate thesis and answer the question, “Why should the reader care?”

A clear consideration of the evidence indicates that (restate your thesis).

Understanding that _____ is vitally important, because _____.

Allow time for student groups to compose their essays, revising the drafts they brought as homework in light of the frame and stems provided. Assign the following for homework:

In an email to your teacher, reflect on your essay writing in groups today. Write about what is easy and hard about creating an argumentative essay. What questions do you still have?

Day 7

Prepare essay tests that align with the style of questioning and formatting of the argumentative essay question in the test your students are facing. Use another silly question in the style students have been writing to mimic the testing situation. Leave all classroom posters and notes up and available for student use. Appendix F offers a timed-essay form that provides further support as students internalize both the essay-writing process and the features of argumentation.

Discuss briefly with students any strengths and weaknesses you observed in their group essays written during Day 6. Explain that today’s assignment will follow the same process but will be completed individually and within a specific time frame.

Pass out the question and remind students both what their thinking process should be (this was visualized on The Argument Builder handout) and what to write (this has been practiced through the essay frames and supported by posted sentence stems). Give students an appropriate amount of class time to write their timed essays.

Day 8

For warm-up, have students pick up a handout of the short story, “The Lady or the Tiger?” by Frank Stockton (1882). Links to the story can be found on the companion website for this book; there is a link to an unabridged version and, for students who may need a recorded, reduced, or guided version of the text, a Voice of America version.

Explain that, today, groups will read a story that will ask them their final argumentative question for the unit. Allow students to choose their favorite way to read—whether alone, listening to a read-aloud, or reading in a group. Organize the various types of readers into groups and allow them to read, instructing them to debate the question the story asks in their groups.

Once all groups have finished reading and are in the midst of debate, explain that their final essay, an individual argumentative essay, will answer the question posed by the story. Depending on how your students respond to the story, you may allow them to determine a third way that the story could end—neither the lady nor the tiger but a conclusion that they develop themselves and support from the text. In this

The Argument Builder
 Name [redacted] Group Bees

Support your position with solid evidence—fact, examples, logic, etc.

My position is that ...
 The lover opened the door of the tiger but it was dead - poisoned!

Strongest reason
 She was barbaric + impulsive + a brute
addn = passion
WHY DOES ANYONE MARRY?

Counter-argument and Rebuttal
 Some might argue that ...
 She would not go against her father.
 ...but they are ignoring ...
DO YOU HAVE AN ALTERNATE ENDING? OF SOMEONE LIKE EXCHANGEABLE - THIS FILE CONTAINS

Third reason (Ask yourself: Why do I think so?)
 The princess would never let him be with that other girl.
 Evidence: Her jealousy was already stirred up by the thought.

Second reason (Ask yourself: Why do I think so?)
 The princess could get someone to poison the tiger.
 Evidence: She had "gold" and a woman's (a barber's) will

First reason (Ask yourself: Why do I think so?)
 The princess is just like her dad! She is going to just let it all happen. She knows she can control the area.
 Evidence: She didn't hesitate to sign.
CAREFUL! THIS NEEDS MORE EXPLANATION
 She was just as impulsive as him - she would not allow her life to be decided by his rules! - but "chance"

Also → These stories always have Princess Bride Frog Princess + the Little Mermaid

Figure 1. Student sample of Argument Builder handout showing alternate ending option, with teacher annotation.

case, they must logically argue why neither the lady nor the tiger would be a logical conclusion and explain a plausible third way the story could end. You could develop a specific essay frame for this answer format if students require the support.

Distribute another round of Argument Builder handouts and allow students to begin to form their opinions. Explain that logic (i.e., appeals to what we know about human relationships and human nature) and the text itself will serve as sources of evidence.

For homework, have students complete the Argument Builder handout.

Days 9-10

Days 9 and 10 are writing workshops. In a writing workshop, you act as a mentor as students move through their writing process. Students may need assistance from you and peers as they work to construct their argument and to defend it through logical reasoning. You may pair students who have opposing positions to help them generate arguments and to develop their thinking through speaking. Additionally, you may present mini-lessons addressing areas in which students appear to need support.

Closing

You may wish to hold a final debate in which students defend their “Lady or the Tiger?” positions, or you may want to publish the essay after students have a chance to read your comments and revise. In any case, students are often eager to talk about their answers and enjoy debating the story’s ending.

Extensions

If your school has a debate club or team, it would be a great time to schedule students from the team or the team’s sponsor to present their club/team to your students. Evidence indicates that ELs or those who struggle with standardized tests often are not given adequate exposure to extra-curricular activities, even though participation in extracurricular opportunities has been connected to academic achievement and socioemotional well-being in ELs (Oikonomidou, 2009; Pérez, 2009).

Caveats

You may want to make argumentation more connected to sources. This lesson can be easily modified toward that purpose without sacrificing the element of fun connected to the use of silly topics. A question like, “Which would make a better president: a beaver or an otter?” requires source work as students discover (1) what it takes to be a good president and (2) the characteristics of both beavers and otters that might lend themselves to an effective presidency. This approach maintains the light-hearted spirit of the lesson along with its power to avoid plagiarism and push genuine logical thinking.

Assessment and Evaluation

Student assessment is both formative and summative in this unit. You are able to provide real-time feedback through the speed debate and the group debates. Students turn in their Argument Builders, their group essays, their timed essays, and then, of course, their final essay for evaluation and feedback.

Reflection on and Analysis of the Lesson

Before creating this unit, I used to dread teaching the argumentative essay. I was constantly frustrated because student papers would be either awash with plagiarism or dead-ended by students’ sincerely held but poorly defended opinions. Classroom discussions were characterized by a few vocal students sounding off, while others took offence or shrunk from the conflict. The playful lesson outlined here, on the other hand, incites laughter, good-natured banter, and conversations that linger out the door and down the hallway. Groups giggle as they develop logical arguments that three legs would be more beneficial to the average person than three arms. Students come back in the next day eager to continue, having finally figured out the best way to defend their position. Because no one is emotionally invested in the answers, students cocreate fresh, vibrant arguments from the ground up. Students learn to process information in the way they will need, in the future, to question assumptions

they may or may not be developmentally or linguistically ready to encounter at the moment. The thinking skills will be there, though, when they are ready.

The appendixes and additional resources for this chapter are available at www.tesol.org/practices-highschool.

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