Grade 6 Playlist: Tracing and Evaluating an Argument

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.8:

- Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

Welcome

Nancy is reading an article about the solar system in a science magazine. The article includes many facts that Nancy did not know before, such as, "The Sun is the largest object in the solar system. It contains over 99 percent of the entire solar system's mass." While Nancy already knew that the Sun was larger than any of the planets, she never would have thought it was *that* much larger. She also read in the article, "The Earth is the only planet that is capable of harboring life because it is the only planet whose atmosphere contains oxygen." Nancy knew that animals need oxygen to breathe, so this statement definitely makes sense. And she read, "The solar system was formed when a massive molecular cloud collapsed billions of years ago." Now, this is interesting, but it leaves Nancy wondering how scientists learned this. What evidence supports this claim?

As a reader, Nancy can evaluate, or think about, the argument in the article to determine the author's claims and whether or not these claims are supported and accurate. Nancy can also judge the importance of evidence and reasons in supporting a claim. She can distinguish claims that are properly supported from those that are not.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- trace and evaluate an argument and specific claims in a text.

- distinguish claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

Review

Key Terms

- In an **argument**, an author states a position on a subject and explains why the reader should share that position. The author makes **claims**, or statements that he or she wants the reader to believe. An author's claims must be:

  ◦ **credible**, meaning that they can be easily believed and trusted.

  ◦ free from **bias**, which is a point of view based entirely on opinion rather than on facts.

- Authors use **evidence** to support their claims so that readers are more likely to believe them. Evidence can take many forms: statistics, expert opinions, and quotes from documents and studies, for example.

- When reading an author's argument, the reader first **traces** the argument to determine the claims the author makes and the evidence that supports those claims. Then, after the claims and evidence are determined, the reader **evaluates** the argument, determining whether or not it is strong enough to convince the reader to agree with the author's position.

Exploring the Standard

A Closer Look: Tracing and Evaluating an Argument

An author can make many claims in a text, but most texts have one main argument that these claims support. These three steps show how to trace an argument:

1. Identify what is being argued.

2. Determine which claims support the argument.

3. Determine which evidence supports these claims.

Hint!

If a text is several paragraphs long, the author may include one claim in each paragraph. Readers should know that the sentences in a text that do not state the author's argument or make claims usually provide support for the argument or claims.

A reader can evaluate an argument by looking carefully at the evidence that supports both the claims and the overall argument. The evidence that supports a claim or argument should come from a credible source that is not biased. The most credible sources are academic journals, university websites, and materials published by institutions such as hospitals, museums, and government agencies. Newspapers and news magazines are usually credible sources, but in some cases, articles can include bias. Blogs and other personal websites are not as reliable, for the most part, unless they are owned and written by people who are experts in the subjects they write about. In these cases, the information contained in blogs and personal websites is usually trustworthy. When writing a text, the author wants his or her own text to be credible also. Using evidence from sources that are not credible can hurt an author's credibility and weaken his or her argument.

Watch!

This video further discusses claims, reasons, and evidence and how each is used in an argument:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3571UcZlFyc

Read the following example, which is a newspaper editorial asking whether or not students should be allowed to bring their cell phones to class. While reading, follow the three steps: identify the argument, determine the author's claims, and determine the evidence and reasons that support those claims. Are any claims not supported by evidence and reasons?