

Table of Contents

Introduction

An Opening Argument from the Author: The Rationale to Support the Contention: If They Can Argue Well, They Can Write Well.....	5
An Overview of This Book for the Teacher: Research Findings that Support Using Debate to Teach Argumentative Writing	10
Curriculum Connections: Australian Curriculum Content Supported by Debate and Writing Processes	18

Part 1: Learning to Argue	21
Learning to Argue, Teacher's Directions	22
Letter to Parent or Guardian	25
Topics for Debate	26
Step 1: Learning the Language of Debate.....	28
Step 2: Marking a Sample Argumentative Essay	32
Step 3: Separating Fact from Opinion	33
Step 4: Analysing an Opinion or Claim	34
Step 5: Identifying Opposing Arguments and Rebuttals	35
Step 6: Reading the Research	36
Step 7: Choosing Your Contentions	38
Step 8: Fighting Their Counter-arguments	40
Step 9: Understanding the Steps of a Debate	42
Step 10: Taking Notes on a Debate	43
Step 11: Choosing Your Topic to Debate	44
Part 2: Learning to Research	47
Learning to Research, Teacher's Directions.....	48
Step 1: Learning the Language of Research.....	49
Step 2: Using Online Reference Sites	53
Step 3: Researching with Search Engines	55
Step 4: Practicing Boolean Searching	57
Step 5: Evaluating a Website.....	58
Step 6: Learning About Surveys.....	62
Step 7: Conducting a Survey	64
Step 8: Analysing Your Data	66
Step 9: Researching Your Topic	69
Step 10: Researching Their Counter-arguments	70

Part 3: Learning to Think Critically	71
Learning to Think Critically, Teacher’s Directions	72
Step 1: Learning the Language of Critical Thinking	74
Step 2: Understanding Reasoning	78
Step 3: Understanding Logical Fallacies	79
Step 4: Identifying Logical Fallacies	81
Step 5: Understanding Argumentative Techniques	83
Step 6: Identifying Argumentative Techniques	84
Step 7: Analysing Bias and Loaded Language	85
Step 8: Applying Your Critical Thinking Skills	86
Step 9: Building a Strong Case	88
Step 10: Planning Your Debate Offence	89
Step 11: Building a Strong Rebuttal	91
Step 12: Planning Your Debate Defence	92
Step 13: Following the Steps of a Debate	98
Step 14: Note-Taking During a Debate	99
Step 15: Evaluating a Debate	101
Part 4: Learning to Write Argumentatively	103
Learning to Write Argumentatively, Teacher’s Directions	104
Step 1: Learning the Language of Writing	106
Step 2: Organising Your Essay	109
Step 3: Outlining Your Essay	111
Step 4: Varying Your Sentences	117
Step 5: Grabbing Your Reader from the Start	120
Step 6: Paraphrasing, Not Plagiarising	121
Step 7: Revising Your Essay	125
Step 8: Citing Your Sources	126
Additional Resources	
Teacher’s Final Marking and Conference Rubric	131
Crossword Puzzles Answer Key	132
Works Cited	133
About the Author	134

An Opening Argument from the Author: The Rationale to Support the Contention: If They Can Argue Well, They Can Write Well

If you've ever raised or taught a teenager, you've probably heard or taken part in a conversation like the one below:

"Sarah, have you done your homework?"

"Mum, I have to go to the shops!"

"Why?"

"Because I HAVE to."

"What does going to the shops have to do with your homework?"

"Because all the other girls said they'd meet me there."

"Yes, but what about your homework?"

"Mum, the sale started today. Do you want me to look like a Neanderthal?"

"Where did you learn the word Neanderthal?"

"Mum, I'm not totally stuuuupid. I learnt it in band."

"Band?"

"Yeah, Mr Douglas said I played like a Neanderthal."

"And what did you say?"

"I said, 'Thanks'. You taught me to be polite. Okay, I'll see ya later."

"Homework?"

"I promise to do anything you ask when I get back. Bye!"

Let's face it. One thing teens can do, and often do, is argue. They argue with their siblings, with their peers, with their teachers and especially with their parents. Have you ever listened to a teen give myriad reasons to do, or not do something? You were probably thinking one of two thoughts:

One – "That last reason made absolutely no sense."

Two – "Why doesn't she put this kind of energy into her schoolwork?"

The intent of this book is to tackle these two issues – to encourage students to think logically and to put more time and energy into their schoolwork. More specifically, it involves teaching them to think critically about taking a stance and to structure their arguments into powerful, convincing essays.

Arguing is natural to teens and begins early in childhood. In *We're Friends, Right?*

(2003), his comparative study of young children, William Corsaro notes that

conflict contributes to the social organisation of peer groups, the development and strengthening of friendship bonds, the reaffirmation of cultural values, and the individual development and display of self.

These same characteristics of conflict appear in adolescents. Any parent can tell you that sometimes teens seem to argue just for the sake of arguing. Adolescence is a time when teens define themselves by seeking independence from their parents and guardians. They are often influenced more by the interests, beliefs and values of their peers than by their parents. Teens also argue to defend who they think they are. If a teen says he's a vegetarian, he may use argumentation to define, explain and even

persuade others about his lifestyle choice.

Teens argue as a form of problem solving in order to understand how life works in their cultural and social environment. What teen hasn't argued the question of "fairness"? For example, a teen may say, "You said if I did my homework that I could go to the mall. All of my friends are going. Now you say you need me to watch Jamie. How is that fair?"

Most prominently perhaps, adolescents use argumentation to determine their status among their peers. In the movie *8 Mile* (2002), Eminem enters rap "battles" to win a place of respect among African American rappers. Teens may "diss" or "disrespect" each other by using put-downs. The "winner" gains a place of power among peers because few teens – or any of us for that matter – want to be humiliated in front of others.

Argument and Academics

When we overhear teens argue in school, whether it is part of a classroom discussion or a hallway clash, it is often no more than one assertion followed by a lot of ad hominem name-calling – not unlike certain talk shows. Most of our students don't even know how to argue well. Deanne Kuhn at Columbia University states in her book *Education for Thinking* (2005),

Argument is ubiquitous in people's lives, and the case is compelling that students need to learn to argue well, that doing so is critical education for life. Yet relatively little attention has been paid to the path from arguing to arguing well that we would like to see students navigate.

Our students' inability to reason and argue well is captured by Gerald Graff in his book *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* (2003). The author points out that in many social situations people aren't even sure if they are having a conversation, a debate or an

argument. As an example, he presents this famous Monty Python comedy sketch titled "The Argument Clinic" from the British TV show of the 1970's.

A man appears at a clinic and announces that he is looking for an argument. He is directed to Office 12, whereupon opening the door he is met with a stream of insults and invective from the functionary behind the desk:

"You snotty-nosed piece of parrot-droppings...Your type makes me puke. You vacuous, toffee-nosed, malodorous pervert."

"What's this? I came here for an argument."

"Oh, I'm sorry. This is Abuse. You want 12A next door."

Going to the office next door, the client asks the man at the desk if this is the Argument Department.

"I told you once..."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did."

"Did not."

"Did."

Finally, the client objects that "this isn't argument, just mere contradiction."

"No, it isn't."

"Yes, it is. An argument is a connected series of statements leading to a definite proposition."

"No, it's not."

"Argument is an intellectual process, not an automatic gainsaying of anything the other person says."

"Not necessarily."

Kuhn argues that the lack of students' ability to reason and argue well is partly a reflection of our society. Politicians, marketing

specialists, pollsters and the media inundate our young with *what* people think rather than *why*. Reasoned argument, including counter-arguments and rebuttals, are not highly valued, and careful debate doesn't fit the evening news time slot as well as a sound bite.

Kuhn points out that many teachers may be uncomfortable with discussion because they are unable to control its direction or goal.

Teachers' concern to ensure students "learn something" is fed, perhaps, by their uncertainty as to what discussion itself has to teach them. One possibility to consider is that teachers would be more comfortable with a wider range of discussion topics – some "academic" and some not – to the extent that they had a clearer sense of the goals to which these discussions should aspire.

Teachers may also be fearful of initiating discussions about high-interest topics because of pressure to cover curriculum standards. The desire to "cover the material" creates a school culture in which "breadth" outweighs "depth". Giving students time to research topics and develop thoughtful arguments does not always fit neatly into the curriculum. Teachers who sense they have limited instructional time and abundant content resort to promoting superficial memorisation of concepts or procedures rather than deep student discussion and critical analysis. Thus, "chalk and talk" pre-empts "research and reflect".

A further outcome from rapidly covering large amounts of material is the loss of student engagement. In the study *The Silent Epidemic* (2006), funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 47 percent of students claimed they dropped out because they were bored, while 69 percent said they were "not motivated or inspired to

work hard". Nearly 90 percent were passing their classes when they quit.

Mike Schmoker, in his book *Results Now* (2006), cites a study of 1500 classroom observations in which 85 percent of the classes had fewer than one-half of the students paying attention. Students today see little connection between memorising subject matter to pass a test and the technological world in which they live – a world that entertains with continuous choices, feedback, relevance and challenges at their fingertips.

Keeping argument out of the classroom is just another indication to students that school is artificial and doesn't represent the real world. As Graff notes,

Schools should be tapping far more than they do into students' youthful argument cultures, which are not as far removed as they look from public forms of argument...instead of taking advantage of the bridges between youthful argument worlds and those of public discourse, schools generally make it hard for students to recognise their argumentative practices in those of academia. At worst, students get the impression that to do well in school or university they have to check whatever argumentative inclinations they have at the classroom door.

Channelling Confrontation in the Classroom

The question then arises: Is there a way to rethink our curriculum in such a way that argumentation, critical thinking and standards can be met in an engaging format? Mark Felton and Suzanne Herko addressed this question in the 2004 article "From Dialogue to Two-sided Argument: Scaffolding Adolescents' Persuasive Writing", which appeared in the *Journal of Adult and Adolescent*

Literacy. In their study, Felton and Herko created a sequenced method to use a teen's natural desire to argue in the classroom as a lead-in to writing, or as they state, "to build on students' oral debating skills to strengthen their written assignments" (page 672).

The idea of using debate as a lead-in to writing makes sense on a number of levels. First, debate is engaging because it is competitive. Gary Fine writes in his book *Gifted Tongues: High School Debate and Adolescent Culture* (2001) that "the model of debate as a game (or sport) challenges and motivates adolescents for whom the spice of competition enlivens the presentation of arguments".

For teenagers, knowing that they will be standing in front of their peers to compete against each other is a powerful motivator. Research in genetic gender differences in brain development indicates that boys' brains are drawn to competition. (Sax, 2006; Gurian, 2007) Since males make up the vast majority of our school failures and dropouts, finding ways to engage them makes sense.

Like Fine, Kuhn found in a study that using debate in two middle years classrooms heightened engagement for many reasons.

Students were engaged and attuned to a shared activity in a way that was not typical during other class periods. One factor certainly was the competitive one – one team was going to win and the other lose. But beyond that, I think, was the satisfaction most of these students derived from being able to express an opinion and be listened to, in a context that was officially sanctioned – they were not 'talking out of turn', as was usually the case whenever they expressed themselves during class time. Most of the school

day for these students was about being quiet, following instructions and complying with demands. Rarely in their school lives, and most likely in their lives outside of school, did they have the experience of expressing a significant idea and being listened to and taken seriously.

Giving students an opportunity to express a significant idea implies that they must also have time to prepare, research, analyse data and present their findings. In other words, when preparing for a debate, students must exhibit many of the same skills required to prepare a good argumentative essay. According to Fine,

Debate involves not only the acquisition of knowledge, but a set of verbal and research skills that all persons, not only debaters, use: techniques of persuasion and reasoning. To be competent, one must acquire information-processing skills: the ability to gather, organise, and present information. To induce another to ratify one's claims demands facility with words and line of discourse, and to counter alternate arguments. Learning how to talk – to argue, to counter, and to persuade – is such a critical skill that an explicit focus on how this skill is acquired seems valuable but, surprisingly, has been largely ignored.

Schmoker agrees.

Given a good text, an arresting issue, students like to argue, in small groups or as a class. We're daft if we don't see that argument teaches them to think and is about the best inducement we have for getting them to read purposefully and write with passion and energy – in class, where they can feel the energy of one another's ideas and worldviews.

But will it work? Does implementing structured argumentation actually build critical thinking and increase student engagement and achievement? Perhaps one of the best examples of success is Deborah Meier's work at a secondary school in New York City. Meier made intellectual issues and debates a core part of both faculty and student work, placing them on a level with sports and adolescent socialisation.

In her book, *The Power of Their Ideas* (2002), Meier describes how this challenging academic perspective worked with her 450 students in Years 7–12. The result was that 90 percent of students went directly into tertiary education and stayed there. In contrast, the average graduation rate in New York City was only 50 percent.

In a 2007 article in *Educational Leadership*, Schmoker describes the successes of Tempe Preparatory Academy in Phoenix, Arizona – an independent school whose population consists mostly of middle- and lower-middle class families. When Arizona administered its first state-wide standards test, Arizona students scored terribly low. However, 100 percent of the Tempe students passed. What is different about Tempe's curriculum? In two words: “argumentative literacy” (Graff, 2003).

As Schmoker notes,

Students analyse and argue, agree or disagree with the ideas they encounter, and evaluate the ethics of various characters' actions. And – significantly – students' work incorporates mastery of Arizona's standards for language arts: displaying logic and clarity, making inferences, doing character analysis, supporting one's arguments, synthesising, evaluating, and discerning an author's bias or perspective (page 64).

Based on evidence that reasoned debate might be one answer to developing critical thinking, engaging adolescents and raising levels of achievement, I began workshoping the concept with secondary school faculties across the country. During these workshops, I asked English and humanities teachers, debate coaches and assorted specialists to help me modify the original concept – to give it the additional scaffolding that students need in order to move from an oral debate to a well-crafted argumentative essay.

This book is the result of that input and my own teaching experience. The lessons are designed to be immediately useful to the teacher. The process of taking students from a debate to a well-written essay is provided almost completely in copy master form. The lessons, which are based on brain research, are designed so that students are physically and emotionally engaged throughout the process, not just staring blankly at a sheet of paper or a computer screen for long periods of time. The four parts of the book are described on the following pages along with relevant research that helps confirm the instructional steps as best practices.

LEARNING TO ARGUE

In **Learning to Argue**, students will evaluate a student's sample essay, read research on the death penalty, learn to take notes on research, debate this issue in front of one another and finally, pick a topic they will research and later write about. (You may want to copy the Teacher Directions pages to use as a guide.)

Teacher's Directions

Before you begin this lesson, read the *Important Note to Teachers* (page 24) and the letter to parents/guardians (page 25) that follow these directions.

Step 1: Begin by teaching the academic vocabulary students must know to understand the debate process. Step 1 provides the directions for doing a Word Wall activity with these words. Reproduce the activity sheet (page 29) **Learning the Language of Debate, Vocabulary Record Sheet** so that students can record the definitions. Use the two practice activity sheets for reviewing these definitions (pages 30 and 31).

Step 2: In order to implement a "backward design", reproduce and distribute the activity sheet (page 32) **Marking a Sample Argumentative Essay**. Have students read and score the essay about off-campus lunch.

Step 3: Now have students analyse the student essay. Have them fill out the activity sheet (page 33) **Separating Fact from Opinion**. (Students will find few facts as they do their analysis.)

Step 4: Tell students that opinions are fine if they are well supported. Pass out the activity sheet (page 34) **Analysing an Opinion or Claim** and have students look for facts, research, surveys, quotes by experts and real-world examples. (Again, they will find few.)

Step 5: Explain to students that a good argument acknowledges counter-arguments and offers rebuttals to them. Reproduce and distribute the activity sheet (page 35) **Identifying Opposing Arguments and Rebuttals** for students to fill out. (Again, they will find few.) Now ask students to re-evaluate the student essay. (Most will give it a lower score.)

Step 6: Tell students they will now read a well-supported argument on the death penalty. First, however, they are going to determine where they stand on this issue. Ask students to think about whether they believe in the death penalty and to write down two reasons they believe the way they do. Now ask students who **Strongly Agree** with the practice to move to one corner. Ask students who **Somewhat Agree** to move to a different corner. Ask students who **Strongly Disagree** to move to a third corner. Finally, ask students who **Somewhat Disagree** to move to the final corner. Call on students from each corner to give some reasons why they believe the way they do.

In order to complete **Reading the Research**, reproduce and distribute the two articles (pages 36 and 37). Give the article "Death Is What They Deserve" to those who agree that murderers should be

executed. Give the article “The Death Penalty IS Cruel and Unusual” to those who disagree.

Step 7: Have students read their articles independently. Distribute copies of the activity sheets **Choosing Your Contentions** (pages 38 and 39). Pair up like-minded students to complete this worksheet, deciding their four strongest points, or contentions, and what evidence they have to support those contentions.

Step 8: Tell students that they need to prepare for what the other team will say to tear down their arguments. Students should now read the essay that opposes their view on the death penalty. Then, distribute the activity sheets **Fighting Their Counter-arguments** (pages 40 and 41). Tell students to consider what the opposing team will say against their ideas and how to answer those arguments as they complete the activity sheet.

Step 9: You are now ready to hold a “20-Minute Debate”. Distribute copies of the activity sheet **Understanding the Steps of a Debate (page 42)**. Allow all students to rehearse their responses for a few minutes. Then choose two opposing pairs to debate and walk them through the following sequence. (Choose students who will probably be successful so that students see a good model of debating.) Here is the best procedure to follow:

- 1) The first **affirmative** speaker states and briefly explains two contentions (reasons) to support the proposition.
- 2) **IMPORTANT:** The second **affirmative** speaker writes these two contentions on the board.
- 3) The first **negative** speaker **FIRST** counters the two contentions given by the affirmative side, then gives two reasons for opposing the proposition. Allow the two teams to confer. (You may also want the nonspeaking member of each team to copy down

the other team’s counter-arguments. Writing the arguments in another colour is visually helpful.)

- 4) **IMPORTANT:** The second **negative** speaker writes that team’s two contentions on the board.
- 5) The second **affirmative** speaker counters the new opposing positions of the negative side, then gives two final contentions for supporting the proposition.
- 6) The first speaker of the **affirmative** side writes that team’s new contentions on the board.
- 7) The second **negative** speaker counters the final two contentions of the affirmative side, then gives the final two contentions for opposing the proposition.
- 8) The first **affirmative** speaker states any counter-arguments, offers final rebuttals of all negative claims, and gives a final argumentative summary.
- 9) The first **negative** speaker refutes the affirmative team’s claims and gives a final argumentative summary.

Step 10: **BEFORE** the debate begins, distribute copies of the activity sheet **Taking Notes on a Debate** (page 43). Tell the students that they are required to fill out this sheet during the debate. Now begin the debate. Feel free to stop the teams at any time to help them follow the sequence. Allow opposing teams to discuss how to refute the other team’s contentions.

Step 11: Once the debate is finished, have students vote for the team they think won. Then tell students they are going to choose a topic they will debate in front of their classmates. Distribute copies of the activity sheet **Choosing Your Topic to Debate** (page 44) and follow its instructions. Pair up students for debate topics, using information from your tally sheets of student topic choices (pages 45 and 46).

Setting up teams: You will need two pairs of students to debate each topic. Because each student chooses five topics, you should be able to build the teams easily. Try to let them be on the “agree” or “disagree” side

they chose. This creates more emotional engagement. Place any extra students on a team of three and let the teammates later decide which two will actually debate. Pair students who can work well together.

IMPORTANT NOTE TO TEACHERS

You are about to embark on one of the most dynamic units you may ever implement with your students – teaching them how to think thoughtfully about important ideas and express those ideas coherently in the form of debate. Such instruction may seem frightening to some parents. Parents are often fearful that teachers could preach a particular stance to their children. This is NOT the intent of this unit. It is designed to show students how to evaluate and express two sides of an issue.

To ensure your lessons run smoothly, please do the following before teaching this unit:

1. Notify your principal that you will be teaching a unit on debate that includes a few controversial issues. Tell them that students will choose their topics and parents will approve them.
2. As you move through the unit, always make sure multiple points of view are given equal time for expression, unless those comments are rude or inappropriate.
3. Never let students feel ostracised for taking a particular position or pressured to accept a particular point of view as their personal belief.
4. Never disclose your personal feelings on an issue in school. At one point, students will vote on who wins their debates. The program is set up so that students will vote by secret ballot, thus safeguarding their confidentiality.
5. Have students take home to their parents/guardians a copy of the letter on page 25. The letter explains the value of this unit. Give your principal a copy of the letter. Ask parents/guardians to sign the letter and return it to you. Attach a list of the debate topics (pages 26 and 27).
6. If a parent/guardian objects to a child taking part, offer the child an alternative activity during a particular debate, or if necessary, another way to complete the research, critical thinking and writing of the argumentative essay.