Unit 4--Research-Based Argumentative Writing

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s): **English Language Arts**
Time Period: **Marking Period 3**
Length: **6 to 8 weeks**
Status: **Published**

Unit Overview

Similarly to the research-based projects students completed for informative writing, in this unit students will choose pro or con topics for which they will formulate a thesis supported by factual argument. Students will once again, come up with a research question. From there, they will conduct research in support of their positions and integrate their findings into an essay. A critical component of this process will involve addressing an opposing argument for any given topic. This counterpoint, or concession/denial, strategy is explicitly mentioned in the standards of the Common Core. Students will draft both handwritten pieces as well as pieces using appropriate technology.

In another parallel to the unit on informative writing, the eighth grade research-based argumentative writing unit is an extension from a similar unit from grade 7. As students learned last year, attribution is critical--in this unit not so much to avoid plagiarism as to add credibility to assertions. This places added importance of not only reliable but authoritative sources, and grade 8 students will have to provide substantiation from at least five sources for this essay. And, as in the informative writing unit, students will understand that sources merely provide fragmentary facts; it is up to a writer to add his or her own synthesis in order to give body and continuity to the written piece.

The ELA teachers have placed this unit fourth in a sequence of six units. Having this unit come two units after such a similar unit on informative writing allows for practice on many parallel skills during both the first and second halves of the school year--an important priority concerning the reinforcement of concepts and practices.

Standards

LA.W.8.1.A	Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
LA.W.8.1.B	Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
LA.W.8.1.C	Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
LA.W.8.1.D	Establish and maintain a formal style.
LA.W.8.1.E	Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
LA.W.8.2.A	Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts, and information, using text structures (e.g., definition, classification, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, etc.) and text features

	(e.g., headings, graphics, and multimedia).
LA.W.8.2.B	Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
LA.W.8.2.C	Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
LA.W.8.2.D	Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
LA.W.8.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, voice and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
LA.W.8.5	With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
LA.W.8.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.
LA.W.8.7	Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
LA.W.8.8	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
LA.W.8.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, metacognition/self correction, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.
LA.SL.8.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
LA.SL.8.1.B	Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
LA.SL.8.1.D	Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.
LA.SL.8.2	Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.
LA.SL.8.4	Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
LA.SL.8.5	Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.
LA.SL.8.6	Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
LA.L.8.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
LA.L.8.1.B	Form and use verbs in the active and passive voice.
LA.L.8.1.D	Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb voice and mood.
LA.L.8.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

LA.L.8.2.B	Use an ellipsis to indicate an omission.
LA.L.8.2.C	Spell correctly.
LA.L.8.4.A	Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
LA.L.8.6	Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Essential Questions

1. Evaluating my previous experiences in writing argumentative essays, what goals should I set for myself in terms of my topic's depth, choosing the best sources for my research, and generating my own ideas and conclusions from research?

2. How do I develop a thesis statement based on my research question or topic?

3. What kinds of sources command the most respect and trust from my readers?

4. How should I organize my essay in order to support my thesis statement consistently and present information coherently?

5. How might I manipulate sentence structure as well as the voice and mood of verbs in order to add nuance and style to my writing?

6. Which conventions and habits define argumentative writing--and which habits should I avoid?

7. How and why should I make use of my skills, resources, peers, and teacher as my work takes shape?

Application of Knowledge: Students will know that...

- A verb's voice can be either active or passive; its mood can be indicative, subjunctive, or conditional.
- Acknowledging an opposing argument enables a writer to undermine or discredit it.
- Arguments become more cogent when backed up with attributions to authoritative sources.
- Basic skills such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation apply to all writing.
- Clear and coherent writing illustrates development, organization, and style that are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Conferences are two-way discussions whose frank interchange of ideas facilitates good writing.
- Daily practice in writing is essential for development of skills and enjoyment.
- Sources of information have potential biases and varying degrees of credibility and authority.
- The research process gains significant momentum when a researcher formulates a research question from the topic.
- Writing is a process that unfolds over time, beginning with ideas, taking refinement over several drafts, and improving with inspiration from outside texts as well as with consultations with peers and teachers.

Application of Skills: Students will be able to...

- Acknowledge an opposing argument as a first step toward dismantling it and exposing its flaws.
- Apply the basic skills of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation properly to their writing.
- Assist and receive assistance from peers in developing ideas, writing, revising, and editing.
- Back up assertions with information from credible, authoritative sources.
- Complete at least the final phase of their work using digital and cloud capabilities and produce final products in digital form.
- Evaluate the authority of a source of information and assess the source for bias.
- Find information from print and online sources.
- Include a clear introduction, an ample body, and a thorough conclusion in an essay.
- Include pertinent facts and add their own appropriate analysis and synthesis to their topics.
- Insert an ellipsis to indicate omitted words in a quote.
- Observe formal writing conventions, suiting vocabulary and tone to an academic audience.
- Participate in meaningful peer and teacher conferences, providing and evaluating advice and applying it as appropriate.
- Spell, capitalize, and punctuate correctly.
- Use a research question as the basis for investigation, research, articulation of a thesis, and composition of an essay.
- Use appropriate transitions to optimize continuity.
- Vary the voice and mood of verbs in order to enhance nuance in their writing.
- Write on a daily basis toward the completion of an extended research-based project.

Teaching Points and Suggested Activities

The following teaching points address the objectives of this unit, as well as the standards in the Common Core:

- Generating ideas for argumentative topics
- Developing a pro or con research question
- Credible sources and appropriate support of positions
- Types of media sources
- Developing an explicit, cogent thesis statement
- Employing compelling supporting points and substantiating them with resources
- Organizing everything into an introduction, body, and conclusion -all with transitions
- Review of writing conventions and style guidelines
- Review: using quotes; using the ellipsis to indicate omitted words
- Attribution, citation, and listing sources
- Priorities for peer conferences
- Review of verbs: tense, voice, and mood
- Digital and cloud resources for composing, revising, editing, and publishing

Typical Daily Activities

- Mini-lesson (teaching point, modeling, active engagement, sharing)
- Daily writing
- Conferences (between peers and with the teacher) and sharing

Critical Phases of Student Activity

- Developing topics
- Research
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Publishing

Also, the following teaching points and activities are adapted from the "Position Papers: Research and Argument" unit in *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grades 6-8* (Calkins et al., 2014) and serve as a resource for teachers with students who demonstrate an aptitude and interest in journalistic writing.

This resource guides teachers and learners through two argumentative topics: whether violent video games are harmful (Bend 1 of the unit of study) and whether child soldiers should receive amnesty (Bend 2).

Teaching Points

Bend 1

- Debating positions to develop a complex argument
- Flash drafting
- Angling evidence
- Using connotative language
- Setting ambitious goals and publishing powerful conclusions
- Revealing underlying issues
- Preparing for publication
- Preparing argumentative speeches

Bend 2

- Grappling with issues of intensity

- Preliminary positions and reviewing thinking
- Debating to develop arguments
- Strengthening, framing, and pacing evidence
- Attending to counterarguments
- Organizational structure
- Using position papers as letters for activism

Assessments

Assessment in this unit takes three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Assessment rubrics are available in Lucy Calkins's Reading and Writing Project resource kits, but teachers may also develop their own rubrics in order to include more specific elements of knowledge and skills listed in this unit summary.

Additionally, student self-assessment and peer assessment should take place whenever possible--again, in all three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Removing the traditional emphasis on teacher assessment enables students to take more initiative and become self-directed.

Also, whenever possible, teacher assessment should take place in the context of a conference, or at least be followed up by a conference. This reinforces expectations, advice, assistance, and ultimately, growth.

Diagnostic Assessments

Review of student's portfolio from the previous school year, particularly persuasive and argumentative writing projects

On-demand argumentative essay (e.g. "Think of a topic or issue that you know and care about, an issue around which you have strong feelings. Tomorrow, you will have forty-five minutes to write an opinion or argument text in which you will write your opinion or claim and tell reasons why you feel that way. when you do this, draw on everything you know about essays, persuasive letters, and reviews. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source, you may bring that with you. Please keep in mind that you'll have forty-five minutes to complete this, so you will need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting. In your writing, make sure you: write an introduction, state your opinion or claim, give reasons and evidence, organize your writing, acknowledge counterclaims, use transition words, and write a conclusion." - Taken from *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, 6-8"*

Formative Assessments (Informal)

Daily observation of students' participation and products during the active participation segment of each mini-lesson.

Students' questions, comments, suggestions to teacher

Comments, corrections, and records from peer conferences between students

Formative Assessments (Formal)

Teacher-student conferences

Summative Assessment

Summative writing will take the form of both handwritten pieces and pieces generated using appropriate technology.

Published research-based argumentative pieces

On-demand argumentative pieces

Activities to Differentiate Instruction

The Writing Workshop framework enables students to generate research topics based on their own interests and experiences. The inherently self-directed nature of developing initial concepts requires continual reinforcement, however, at all phases of instruction during the unit.

This particular unit on research-based argumentative writing also enables students--based on interest and ability--to choose in consultation with their teachers from a range of approaches to organizing their pieces. Struggling students may choose the more basic structures suggested by the argumentative writing guide provided by the ELA department. Teachers will encourage other students to move beyond the basic formula, providing additional exemplars. Highly imaginative students effective writers will often develop their own approaches, as they are influenced not only by exemplars provided in class but also by their own research, passion, and activism.

The active participation component of mini-lessons enables a teacher to move around and observe students at work on concepts and strategies that were presented in a whole-class format. The teacher can intervene at his or her discretion.

Likewise, a sharing component of many lessons will allow for a sampling of work from multiple students. A greater flow of ideas and products brings about a more thorough appeal to the individual dispositions and learning styles of students listening. Also, this unit will culminate in a publishing/celebrating day on which students put their individual skills and products on display.

Supplementing this, multiple exemplar texts in varying styles will broaden the appeal and accessibility of the

knowledge and skills students are developing.

Due to varying dispositions and learning styles, teachers promote various strategies during all phases of the writing process. Students will have opportunities to work alone, in pairs, and in groups. They will choose either to compose in a traditional pen-on-paper mode or to compose, revise, edit, and publish digitally.

Conferences also provide a critical opportunity for students to receive individual attention and instruction. Small-group conferences with a teacher will allow for a diverse mix of ideas and advice that students can apply to their work whether it was specifically given to them or not, and the discussion is often easier to follow and takes place in closer proximity to individual students than whole-class instruction. Of course, at several stages in the writing process, the teacher will hold conferences with individual students for formative and summative purposes.

In compliance with 504 plans and IEP's, teachers will review applicable documents, consult appropriate personnel connected with special-needs students' cases, work closely with inclusion teachers and classroom aides, and communicate with parents in an effort to see to the specific needs of all students.

In some cases, most often in GATE classes, teachers may elect to have students compile their research-based argumentative pieces into a true publication, requiring many individual students to work in specialized capacities such as copy editors, section editors, editors-in-chief, and layout and design specialists. Over several instructional units, additional students will serve as archivists.

Integrated/Cross-Disciplinary Instruction

Consistent with the concept of differentiated instruction, students should learn the knowledge and skills of this unit in conjunction with concepts from various content areas. The topics and research questions for argumentative writing span far beyond the middle school curriculum. Here are some possible research questions for argumentative writing and the content areas to which they apply:

- Should all high school students be required to study calculus? (mathematics, social studies)
- Is the American political system a true democracy? (social studies)
- Is global environmental policy adequate to overcome our current ecological crisis? (science, social studies)
- Does Mozart's music have any relevance for composers today? (social studies, music)
- Should the U.S. government even attempt to address the concern of exaggerated income inequality? (mathematics, social studies)
- Should space exploration be a priority for world governments? (STEM, social studies)
- Should genetically modified foods have special labels? (health/PE, social studies)

While some teachers will provide instruction that includes specific concepts from various content areas, all should direct students to specific text and online resources pertinent to various content areas. Also, teachers will consult grade-level content area teachers on concepts covered in their classes, allowing subjects, lessons, and experiences to reinforce each other.

Suggested Mentor Texts and Other Resources

Mentor Texts:

Sample essay from the GBMS Argumentative Writing Guide

Sample essays from the "Position Papers: Research and Argument" unit of study from the Reading and Writing Project

"We Need GMO Wheat" by Jayson Lusk and Henry Miller (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/03/opinion/we-need-gmo-wheat.html)

"Worse Than the Supremes: Obamacare Economics" by Larry Kudlow (http://www.nationalreview.com/article/420418/obamacare-economics-supreme-court)

Resources:

"30 Ideas for Teaching Writing." The National Writing Project. (http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/922)

"Argumentative Writing Guide." GBMS ELA Department.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Modern Language Association, 2009.

MLA website (www.mla.org)

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (owl.english.purdue.edu)

"Style Guidelines for Formal Essays." A resource composed by GBMS ELA teachers and distributed to students.

Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing:

- *"Position Papers: Research and Argument." Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade 8.* Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop, Intermediate Grades*. Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *Writing Pathways, Grades K-8, Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions*. Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *If...Then... Curriculum*, Grade 8 (Assessment-Based Instruction). Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *Resources for Teaching Writing* (DVD). Lucy Calkins, TCRWP

21st Century Skills

CRP.K-12.CRP2.1	Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.
CRP.K-12.CRP4.1	Career-ready individuals communicate thoughts, ideas, and action plans with clarity, whether using written, verbal, and/or visual methods. They communicate in the workplace with clarity and purpose to make maximum use of their own and others' time. They are excellent writers; they master conventions, word choice, and organization, and use effective tone and presentation skills to articulate ideas. They are skilled at interacting with others; they are active listeners and speak clearly and with purpose. Career-ready individuals think about the audience for their communication and prepare accordingly to ensure the desired outcome.
CRP.K-12.CRP11.1	Career-ready individuals find and maximize the productive value of existing and new technology to accomplish workplace tasks and solve workplace problems. They are flexible and adaptive in acquiring new technology. They are proficient with ubiquitous technology applications. They understand the inherent risks-personal and organizational-of technology applications, and they take actions to prevent or mitigate these risks.