Argument Unit Scope

**Essential Questions:**
1. What is an argument?
2. Where do we see arguments in our daily lives?
3. What makes an argument effective?
4. How can arguments affect change?
5. What role can we personally play in using arguments to affect change?

**Unit Goals:**
1. SWBAT recognize that arguments are all around us
2. SWBAT define the similarities and differences of argument in academic and personal contexts
3. SWBAT evaluate an argument’s effectiveness based on the Toulmin structure and use of rhetorical devices
4. SWBAT explain how arguments act as social critiques and affect change
5. SWBAT discriminate between arguments that reinforce structures of power and those that critique them
6. SWBAT designate a clear position on an issue, support the claim with research, anticipate a counterclaim and refute it

**CCSS:**
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
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  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1a Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1b Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1c Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1d Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 11–12 here.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

Unit Trajectory:

Week 1—What is an argument?
- Defining what argument means to us: personal and academic contexts
- Students will create their own definitions of argument in small groups and brainstorm words that they associate with it
- Create a working definition as a class for academic contexts
- Where do we find arguments? Recognizing pervasiveness/forms
- Discuss how any writing can be political (has the potential for someone to agree/disagree)
- Arguments in writing (fiction and nonfiction), ads, self-presentation (clothes, personal style, etc), social media

Week 2—How do we construct effective arguments?
- Basic components we’re noticing (explicit or implicit claims, supports, appeals to audience, hooks)
- Toulmin structure: explanation and practice (worksheet practice)
Rhetorical devices—examining speeches, ads, political cartoons (logos, pathos, and ethos; parallel structure; imagery; figurative language; repetition)

**Week 3—What are the implications of arguments?**
- Power of ads: implicit and explicit effects on buying, spending, perception of gender/social norms
- Social critiques: parody/satire (Jonathon Swift, clips from *The Office*)
- Power structures: how arguments around us explicitly and implicitly reinforce or break down power structures and hierarchies
- Proposals, legislation, and letters; methods of making bringing your view into the public sphere

**Week 4—What will we argue?**
- Choosing a topic of interest (what do students care about?)
- Researching claims/annotated bibliography/MLA practice
- Making a clear claim/taking a stance

**Week 5—How will we put together the pieces?**
- Letter drafting
- Peer Review
- Final drafts

**Potential Texts:**
- “This is just to say…” William Carlos Williams
- “A Modest Proposal” Jonathon Swift
- “I Have a Dream” Martin Luther King Jr
- Titanic political cartoon
- Argumentative essays for and against school uniforms
- Dr. Pepper commercial—“It’s not for women”
- *The Office*
My unit on argument is part of a 12th grade world literature course. The main theme of the course is interrogating our understanding of the “truth”, from both an objective and aesthetic standpoint. Essential questions include: What does it mean to tell the truth? Who defines truth, and how do we determine its legitimacy? How might the answers to these questions affect literature, politics, and society as a whole? These questions will be addressed by examining the intersection of perspective, point of view, and understandings of truth in world literature. Through a seminar style class, students will read and discuss texts of differing genres and mediums that will inform their understanding of narrative perspective and the concept of truth. I imagine that my class would take place in either a rural or suburban environment, and would be made up of a diverse community of learners.

The argument unit will be the second half of a larger unit on truth and justice in society. This overall unit will demonstrate how different points of view and perceptions of the truth have real social and political manifestations/consequences. It will be preceded by two other units; the first will briefly examine the Romantic, Transcendentalist, and Gothic literary movements to explore how writers of the past understood universal truth and reality. The second section of the course will specifically address first person point of view as a literary device and further challenge students’ conception of truth and reality. The third unit, which contains the argument section, would focus specifically on how perceptions of the truth affect law, policy, and justice. Students will read a variety of texts that synthesize their previous consideration of both different literary movements and associated critical lenses and differing perspectives. Following this coursework, students will be well versed in different ways of viewing the truth, as well as its intersections with perspective and power. This foundation will adequately prepare them to begin investigating how they can apply their critical thinking skills to fiction as well as nonfiction texts of varying mediums. This unit assessment will demonstrate their learning and their ability to apply it to a real life context and affect change.

Teaching argument is important for several reasons. It is not only a skill that students will be tested on and expected to perform in other classes, but it can also be applied to other contexts. The focus in this assignment is on affecting change, especially in concern to a student chosen topic. Peter Smagorinski notes “Nothing kills enthusiasm like teaching topics and books that you don’t like” (135). Similarly, nothing kills student interest more than an assignment that they don’t find relatable, applicable, or intriguing. This assignment allows my students to choose for themselves which issue they will argue about. My goal is that they will choose something that they find relevant, whether it is on a small or large scale. As Jessica Singer-Early points out in Stirring up Justice, “Activism work starts from the kinds of activities and relationships we encounter every day rather than from distant ‘larger than life’ causes”. Although I would not limit students from exploring a large topic (i.e. the example I give in my prompt, which is about testing products on animals), I would like for them to pick an issue and craft an argument that is specific and personal enough that they would be able to and would want to actually mail their letter somewhere. Overall, the goal is to have “students experience the powerful relevance of reading and writing by exploring their own convictions (Singer-Early viii).
Another important reason for teaching argument to high school students is to help them learn how to craft other types of writing, especially analytical essays. As my class is geared towards seniors, this is an especially relevant topic as they make the shift from high school to college writing standards. I think my unit does an excellent job of scaffolding students into writing effective arguments. Ultimately, my goal is to push students to recognize the pervasiveness of arguments in their lives in various forms—media, self-presentation, ads, novels, speeches, etc., and to push them to question the validity and agenda of these arguments. Gaining these skills will help them critically engage with both other texts and the world. I move from recognizing these arguments to analyzing their effectiveness to show students how successful arguments are made, and the effect, for better or for worse, this has had on various societies in the past. Finally, I ask students to construct their own arguments, using their new knowledge of what makes an argument effective, to argue about something that they find interesting. Although they may not realize it, this is exactly what critical essays will ask them to do—they will be given a prompt, and they will have to formulate a claim or argument based on what they found most provocative about a text, issue, or data set. Within my unit, I utilize a variety of different types of texts, ranging from media ads, political cartoons, nonfiction essays, satire, and TV clips. The diversity of these texts reinforces the idea that arguments are present in all types of writing, as well as that students will be expected to apply their analytical and critical thinking skills to a variety of mediums in both further education and life in general. In his book Mechanically Inclined, Jeff Andersen recognizes that “Reading provocative, very short text brings about surprising, thought-provoking student writing, especially when the readings are used as stimuli to writing” 17). Throughout my unit and throughout the rest of their educational and professional careers, my students will be exposed to various different forms of texts that they will have some form of reaction to. This unit gives them the tools to express that reaction and also potentially take action.

I set up my argument portfolio into manageable pieces that build off one another and scaffold student learning. Although students may initially think the assignment is long or overwhelming, each piece will help them build an effective argument. I want this assignment to model how real research, citation, and outlining works. By asking students to complete a rationale statement, I’m helping them organize their own ideas and setting them up to write either a strong introduction or “so what” piece that they can use to contextualize their claims. I think that the annotated bibliography piece is especially useful, as it teaches students great organization habits as well as critical thinking skills. They will not only practice citing their sources (and do so as they research, rather than later), but also critically engage with them and summarize them as they read them. I included the outline/argument handout as a way for students to further organize their thoughts in a format that we will have previously gone over in class. Using their research, the outline should be fairly easy to fill out, and will give them a few “easy” points for the portfolio while also setting them up to write a good letter. The letter portion of the portfolio is the culmination of all of these pieces, and will demonstrate student learning in terms of integrating research, opinion, and counterarguments/rebuttals. My students will not only make claims, but back them up with data, or “something that the audience will either have to accept or will be willing to stipulate to” (Smith, Wilhelm, and Fredericksen 13). Overall, the project will help students identify something that matters to them, make an argument about that issue, and to back it up with evidence that they themselves have located and researched—giving them a sense of self confidence and ability that they can apply to their future endeavors.