

**TE 848 Final Project**

**Final Draft:**

**Option 2: Writing Instruction / Assessment Portfolio**

**By: Danielle Couture**

**Due: June 26, 2014**

**TE 848 – Writing Instruction and Assessment**

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June 24, 2014

Mr. Dan Haas  
Principal at Scripps Middle School  
Lake Orion Community Schools  
385 E. Scripps Road  
Lake Orion, Michigan 48360

Dear Mr. Haas,

I am writing this letter to express my interest in modifying the way that writing has previously been taught in 6<sup>th</sup> grade social studies here at Scripps. In a recent article I read in the Berkeley Review of Education (by educators from Oakland Schools and the University of Michigan), a poll of secondary students from five different schools showed that “only 44 out of 720 respondents named social studies as their favorite class” (Stockdill & Moje, 2013, p. 47). When you couple that with the extra shift towards more intensive writing in social studies due to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and consider how many students struggle with writing and have an aversion to it in general, there is reason to give pause. If we want our students to learn, grow, and become intelligent and active members of society, then we need to change from the way that we currently teach writing in the content areas to a way that builds students up and grows their confidence while helping them to learn from their mistakes without penalization. Therefore, I believe that we should be focusing more on teaching the writing process in social studies as a means by which to improve our student’s writing products.

Often times in social studies and science we give our students a prompt and ask them to write about it. In doing this, we assume we are “teaching” writing, but really we are only grading writing. We assume that our students must already know how to write multiple types of essays as it is a part of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade language arts curriculum, but we need to remember that our 6<sup>th</sup> graders are only 11 years old. Many of them do not have the metacognitive skills yet to make

the connection that what they are learning in language arts can, and should, be applied to social studies and science as well. We must build that bridge for them, review and/or re-explain the writing styles and process, and guide the students through the writing process as they apply it to and across other content areas.

Though the writing process applies to all forms of writing, I'd like to focus on the form of argumentative (or persuasive) writing for the purpose of this proposal. The CCSS specifically state that all 6<sup>th</sup> grade social studies students should be able to state a claim, and support it with evidence from reputable sources. One important step that I think we as teachers often gloss over is our students' ability to understand the expository text and content. "Children need more than exposure to informational texts; they need instruction that familiarizes them with its organization and structure" (Moss, 2004, p. 711). It is nearly impossible to write about something which you do not understand, so before any writing even begins, we should be taking the time to review how the textbook, chapter, or section is structured, as well as modeling retellings of readings, offering guided practice for students to engage in their own retellings in small groups, and asking questions of our students about what they have read in order to check for student understanding. "Retellings are an important precursor to helping students develop summarization skills, both oral and written. In addition, retellings let teachers see *how* as well as *how much* information children retain after reading or listening to a text" (Moss, 2004, p. 711-712). It is only once students have grasped the text structures and content of an expository piece that we should move on to teaching the actual writing process using that piece as a reference.

According to authors Erica Lindemann (2001) and Donald Murray (2009), the three main parts of the writing process are prewriting, writing, and rewriting (or revision). Since we are looking at writing a persuasive piece, it will have a few more specificities. Many students do not know how to organize their thoughts in preparation for writing, so I have created a few graphic organizers (See Appendix B, C, and D) to model for my students how to gather information from

the text and organize their thoughts. The first organizer (See Appendix B) pertains to a specifically assigned topic, and allows the students a space to compare and contrast different rainforest groups. One of the topics I ask my students to write about is the Amazon Rainforest. Currently there are a number of groups in Brazil vying for control of the rainforest. After reading about each, I ask my students to choose which group *they* believe would benefit Brazil more by being in control of the rainforest. Some groups benefit Brazil more economically, but destroy the environment. Other groups protect the environment, but would cause Brazil's economy to suffer greatly by halting deforestation. I do not tell my students which choice is better or worse, as there is no right answer. Instead, I guide them to form their own positions and support their position with information from the text in the form of pros and cons for each group. In a survey, many students more actively engaged in topics about group/community struggle for change. It appeared they "valued struggle as a means of equality and a better life" (Stockdill & Moje, 2013, p. 58). Sixth graders are always very in tune with what is fair and not fair, so I think they will really get into this topic, and even debate their claim against that of their peers if given the opportunity.

The second prewriting tool that I've provided is a graphic organizer (See Appendix C) that can be used in preparation for writing any persuasive essay. I suggest modeling for the students how to use it, but I would use a different topic, one, because I believe an easier more relatable persuasive topic will help them to better understand how to formulate this type of writing, what the author's voice should sound like, and how to persuade an audience, and two, because I want to save the "real topic" for the students' own discovery. I don't want to spell out an answer for them using the same rainforest topic. "When you tell [a student] what to say and how to say it, you thereby cheat your student of the opportunity to learn the process of discovery we call writing" (Murray, 2009, p. 5). Additionally, "young adolescents have a strong need to construct their own meaning as opposed to merely consuming information" (Daniels & Lowery, 2007, p. 15). We only mean to help them, but it doesn't always work out that way. In this case,

they need to learn by doing. For these reasons I chose to complete the persuasive writing organizer using the topic: “Why my mom should let me get a puppy this summer.” I stated a claim as to why, did a think-aloud with my kids and laid out my ideas on the graphic organizer for them to see (See Appendix D). Next I provided them time to complete their organizer as it pertains to the rainforest. Having this time set aside in class for prewriting allows student the opportunity to examine what they know. They “recall ideas, relate old and new information, assess the reader’s expectations, and generally explore the problem from many angles” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 25). This is a step that I feel time must be allotted for in class, as many students may simply gloss over it or skip it all together and jump right to writing their essay if it were a homework assignment. Furthermore, with providing one or more prewriting activities, “writing the first draft becomes easier because some writing [and brainstorming] has already taken place” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 110).

Similarly, we should also be providing ample in-class time for students to complete the next two steps of the writing process: writing and rewriting (drafting and revision). At this point it may be beneficial to introduce the students to a mentor text, or sample of good persuasive writing for them to model their own after. This does not have to be the published works of a professional to be beneficial to students. In fact, I have completed my own persuasive piece to share with my students that is based off of our graphic organizer sample (See Appendix E). I used to think the best time to incorporate this piece was after the prewriting and before the first draft writing. However, I have recently learned that the best time to share a mentor text with students is actually after they have completed their own first draft, but before the revision process has begun. “That is when they are most likely to appreciate the rhetorical problem an assignment poses and to benefit from discovering how another writer addresses similar difficulties” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 127).

Many teachers may feel that there is not time to allow for all the steps of this process to take place in the classroom. I too feel the push to fit all the content in within a given school year, but I think the important thing to consider is the benefits of taking this time. When we give group work we stop and take time to first set expectations. We clearly state that all group time needs to be on task, that everyone needs to be respectful and contributing, that everyone's ideas are valid and should be heard, etc. Yes, this takes up some time, but we do it anyway. Why? Because in setting those clear expectations at the beginning, we make up that time later by not having to stop, correct, and redirect multiple off-task group behaviors during work time. All group work time is used wisely per our directions, and so it balances out. I believe the same is true of teaching writing. If we take the time to teach the process, allow time for drafting in class, and build in revision mini-conferences for student-student feedback and student-teacher feedback, then there will be less to correct, less misconceptions, more students engaged, and lots of time saved the next time students need to write a persuasive essay, as they will then be very well versed in the process.

The last part of the writing process that I'd like to address is rewriting (or revision). "The successful reviser must note deficiencies and think of a good way to change them" (Hillocks, 2007, p. 126). This is exceptionally hard for students as well as adults. Rewriting requires us to shift from the perspective of writer to the perspective of intended audience (Lindemann, 2001). Since this is not always possible for students, I suggest peer group revisions and one-on-one mini-conferences with the teacher. This would provide the students with ideas to consider from both their peers and their teacher, along with praise from both for the things they did well. According to author Maja Wilson, specific feedback is one of the most important ways to help students become better writers (2007, p. 63). By the time feedback is given on a rubric, it is too late for the student to use the feedback to improve the essay. Creating an opportunity for both peer and teacher feedback ahead of time provides for the writing to be improved *before* it is

graded. Please see my attached lesson plan (Appendix A) for a more detailed description of what this would look like in the classroom.

As a culminating activity and a celebration of all the hard work and effort put into the writing process, I'd also like to try to implement a modified version of a new idea that I recently read about called "Literacy Café." "Literacy Café is a celebration of writing in which students sit at tables, snack on refreshments, and share finished writing with classmates, teachers, administrators, and family without judgment or evaluation" (Daniels & Lowery, 2007, p. 12). My first attempt at Literacy Café may be a little more informal and include only my students and myself, but I see so much importance in letting those who are comfortable doing so shine and share their hard work. Maybe they could even debate their conflicting claims?

It is very clear that writing is quickly becoming such an essential part of all of the content areas in middle school. Therefore I thank you for taking the time to review this letter and its attached supplementary materials, and I encourage you to take a look at both how we currently teach and assess the writing process in the social studies content area, and how I've proposed we modify it to better meet the needs of students and help them succeed. I believe with just a few minor additions and changes for next year, both student interest and student achievement will greatly improve. Thank you for your consideration.

Kind Regards,

Danielle Couture  
6th Grade Social Studies Teacher  
Olweus Bully Prevention Committee Chair  
Scripps Middle School



## LESSON PLAN

**Lesson 1:** “Persuasive/Argument Writing”

**Subject:** Literacy / Language Arts & Social Studies

**Grade Level:** 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Date:** June 12, 2014

**Duration:** 4-5, 50 minute class periods

**Lesson Objectives:** Students will learn the process for constructing argumentative writing, and have the opportunity to participate in each stage of the writing process as they draft their own argumentative/persuasive essay in regards to conflict in the Amazon Rainforest.

**GLCEs:**

- **R.CM.06.01** connect personal knowledge, experiences, and understanding of the world to themes and perspectives in text through oral and written responses.
- **R.CM.06.03** analyze global themes, universal truths and principles within and across texts to create a deeper understanding by drawing conclusions, making inferences, and synthesizing.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.1** cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.1.B** support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.5** 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.

**Materials:**

- Geography Alive textbook
- Amazon pros/cons worksheet (class set)
- persuasive writing planning sheet graphic organizer (class set)
- teacher written mentor text
- overhead projector with markers
- overhead transparency of graphic organizer planning sheet
- argumentative writing rubric (class set)
- (optional – student laptops for Day 4 only)

**Rationale/Background:** In this lesson, students will first be posed with the question, “Of the groups we read about today, which one do you think should be given control of the Amazon Rainforest because they will benefit Brazil the most? Students will read about the many groups in Brazil vying for control of the Amazon Rainforest. Next they will work in groups to identify the pros and cons of each rainforest group. Following that, the teacher will engage the students

in a prewriting activity by modeling the steps to creating a good persuasive essay. Students then have the opportunity to draft their own essay, work in peer groups and one on one with the teacher to revise and edit their work, and then create their final draft. Following the final draft students may volunteer to share their work with the class in the author's chair.

### **Day 1: Intro. to Persuasive Writing and Textbook Reading**

- Begin by telling students that this week they will be learning about how to write a persuasive or argumentative essay. Explain what an argumentative essay is and discuss examples: (T.V. commercials, newspaper articles, etc.)
- Tell the students that for their persuasive essay they will have to decide which one group they believe should be given control of Brazil's Amazon Rainforest and why. Their choice should be the group they believe is "in the best interest of Brazil." (This may mean, but it not limited to: in the best interest of Brazils environment, in the best interest of Brazil's economy, in the best interest of Brazil's people, etc.)
- Read sections 12.4, 12.5, 12.7, and 12.8 in Geography Alive (each are one page long)
  - Begin by reading together and discussing each section, model retelling and allow students to aid in retelling as well.
  - Pass out the "Rainforest Groups" graphic organizer and complete the pros and cons together for each rainforest group while reading.
    - Accommodations/Extensions: For lower classes, the teacher may read all the sections together and discuss as a direct instruction lesson. For more advanced classes, the teacher may break students into groups and allow them to read, retell, and complete their graphic organizers together while he/she circulates from group to group observing and interjecting when appropriate.

### **Day 2: Prewriting and Beginning First Draft Writing**

- Briefly review and discuss the purpose of persuasive/argumentative writing.
- Pass out a persuasive writing planning sheet / graphic organizer.
- Complete a think-aloud with the students and model how to plan the claim and come up with evidence for the essay.
  - Make sure to use a different topic than the one they will be using so as not to influence their ideas.
  - Using a more simplistic topic such as "Why I should be allowed to get a puppy this summer" will aid the students in better understanding the purpose of this type of writing so that they may apply it to the more difficult concepts in their social studies textbooks.
- Students may have the rest of this class period to complete their own persuasive writing graphic organizer and start writing their rough draft.
  - Note: Have students show/submit their planning sheet for approval before they begin their rough draft. This is simply to make sure that they are on the right track in terms of choosing a relevant claim and supporting evidence.

- Most students will be close to finishing by the end of the class period. A few may need to finish up their rough draft for homework so that they are ready for “revision day” tomorrow.

### **Day 3: Peer Group Sharing, Feedback, and Revision**

- Read the teacher mentor text to students so that they can see how the original sample planning sheet evolved into a comprehensive persuasive essay.
- Pass out the final draft rubric and compare it to the mentor text looking for strengths and weaknesses. Allow students to share what they liked about the mentor text and what could be improved.
  - In this way, the mentor text not only serves as a model of good persuasive writing, but also as a model of what to do when participating in a peer sharing/revision/feedback group.
- Break the students into groups of about four, and allow them time to take turns sharing and providing feedback. (everyone must contribute)
  - Note: Make sure all students have completed first drafts before participating in group feedback.
  - During this time, call students up one by one for a brief student-teacher mini-conference in which the teacher can offer praises and make suggestions for the final draft.

### **Day4: Final Editing/Revising and Final Draft Writing**

- Students may have the whole hour to work on revising and editing their draft based on their own choices as well as comments made yesterday by teacher and peers.
- Some students may prefer to type their final draft while others may prefer to write it out longhand. Both options are acceptable.

### **Day 5: Finish Final Draft & Share in the Authors Chair (optional)**

- This day will be a celebration of all the hard work the students have done on their first persuasive/argumentative essay. Students (who feel comfortable) will have the opportunity to sit in the “teacher chair” at the front of the class and read their essay aloud to us. This will be a day of positive feedback only, and students can bring in treats, juice, and other refreshments to enjoy while listening and sharing.

**Assessment:** The effectiveness of this lesson will be assessed in three ways: One, through direct teacher observation during the lessons and group activities; two, teacher/student mini-conferences during the drafting process; and three, by completing the rubric assessment for the student’s final drafts.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

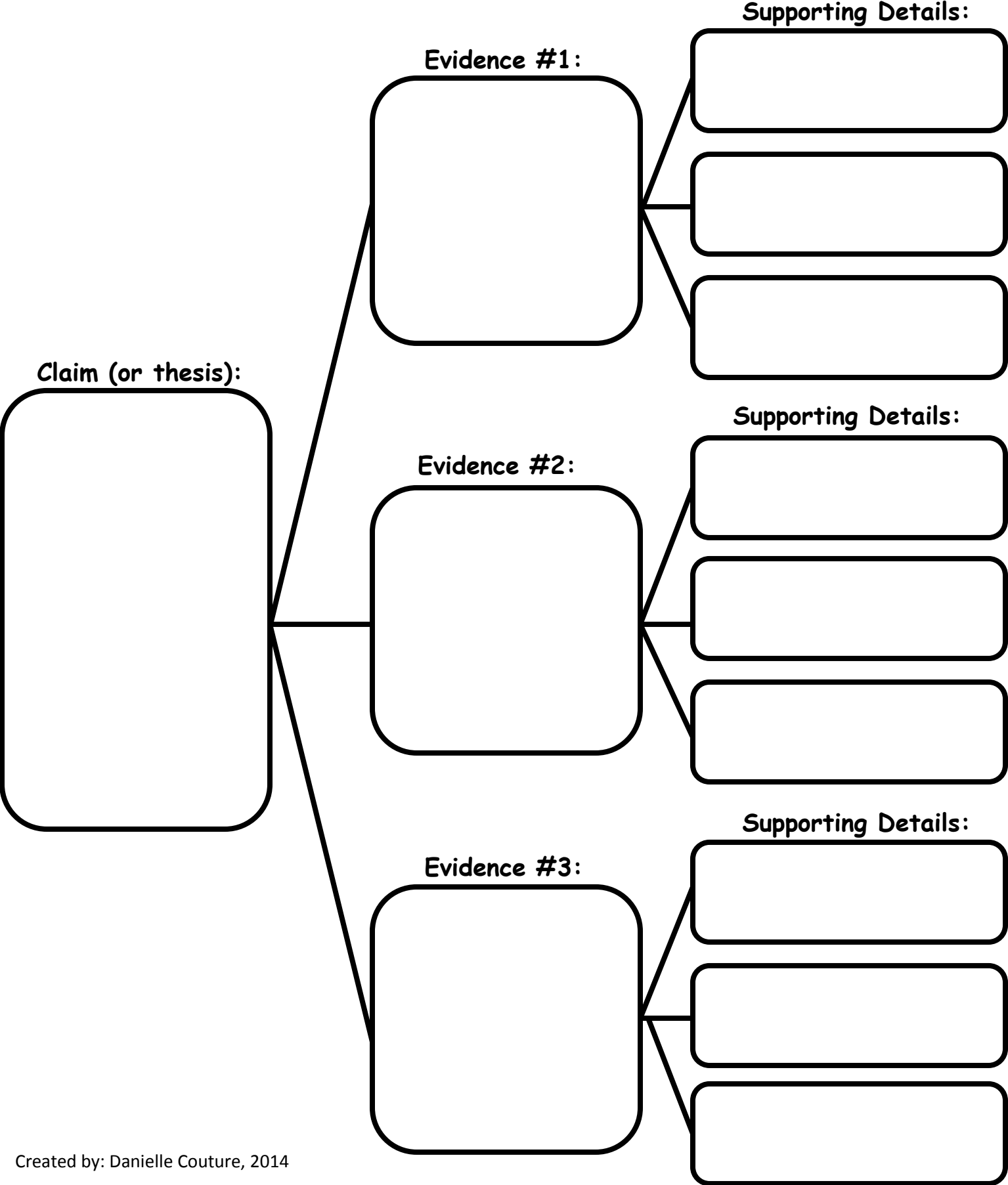
# Mapping Expository Text

Directions: After reading each section, stop and consider the pros (positives) and cons (negatives) of that group having complete control of the rainforest. List the pros and cons on the chart below before going on and reading about the next group. (Reviewing these pros and cons later will help you to choose your claim: Which group would benefit Brazil most by being given control of the rainforest?)

<u>Group:</u>	<u>Pros (positives):</u>	<u>Cons (negatives):</u>
Rubber Tappers		
Loggers		
Cattle Ranchers		
Environmentalists		

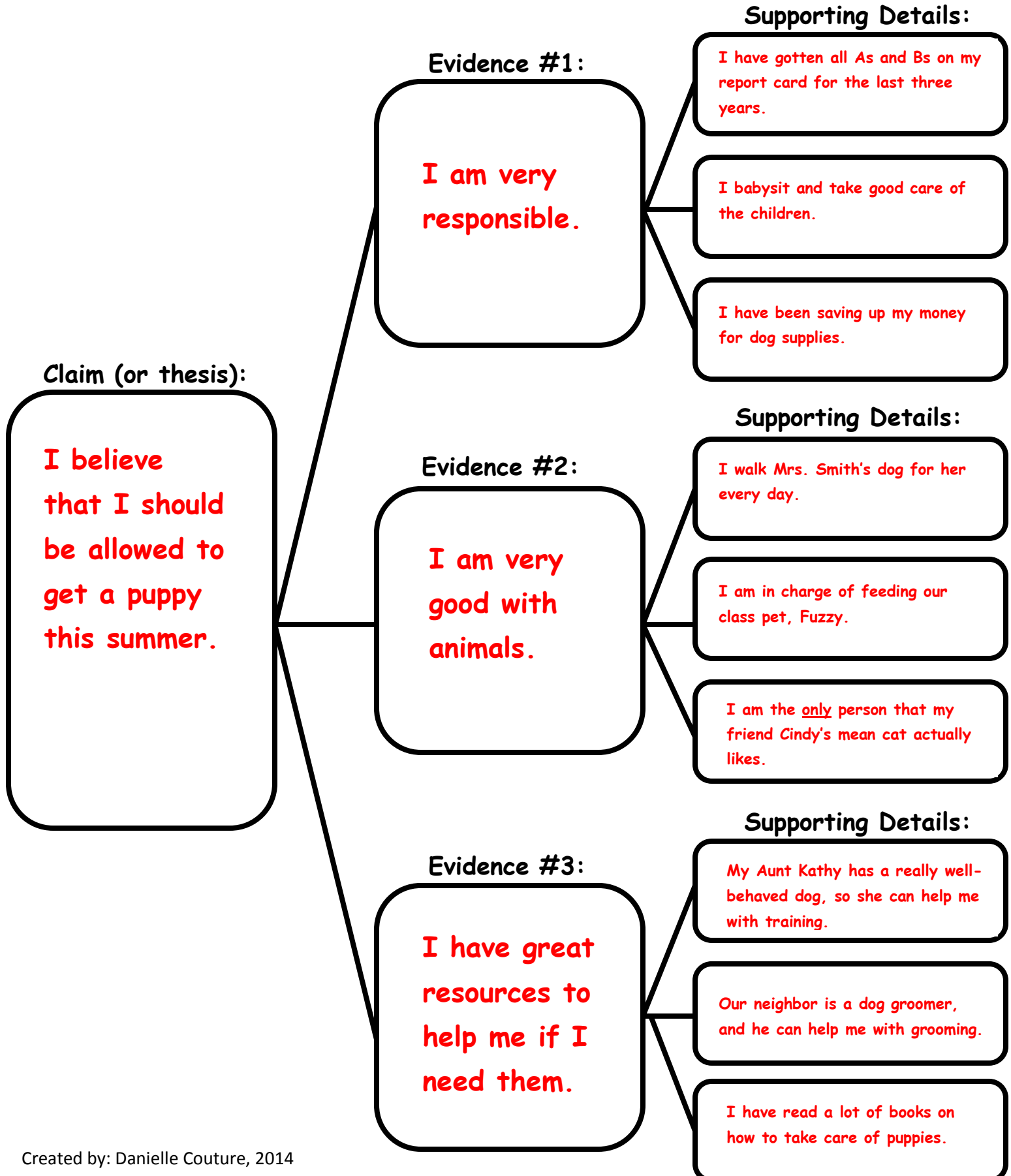
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

# Argument Writing Organizer



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

# Argument Writing Organizer



**MENTOR TEXT – Argumentative/Persuasive Writing**

Dear Mom,

I am writing you this letter because there is an important issue affecting our whole family that I feel needs to be addressed. I have given this a lot of thought, and I really think our whole family would benefit if we got a puppy this summer. I'm sure you're worried that this might not be a good decision, but I can assure you that because I am very responsible, very good with animals, and have a number of friends and family members to help guide me along the way, that it is a great idea! Mom, I believe that I should be allowed to get a puppy this summer, and I'm confident that after reading this you'll feel the same way too.

First off, I'm sure you've noticed that I've been working very hard to become (and stay) very responsible. I have gotten all As and Bs on my report card for the past three years, and I've been saving up all of my money for dog supplies. I plan on using all my own money to take care of a pet since it should be my responsibility and not yours. Also, I have been doing a lot of babysitting this year and I'm really good at it. The kids always have fun with me and I keep them safe. If people trust me to take care of their toddlers and infants, I'm sure I'm responsible enough to take care of a puppy.

Another reason why I think you should let me get a puppy this summer is because I'm so good with animals. I walk Mrs. Smith's dog for her every day. She even told me she would write me a letter of recommendation to give to you if I'd like her to! Additionally, did you know that out of ALL of the students in my class, my teacher chose only ME to be the one in charge of feeding our class pet, Fuzzy? It was such an honor to be chosen, and I know she wouldn't pick someone she did not think would take the best possible care of Fuzzy. Finally, do you remember

my friend Cindy? Well she has a cat, and everyone says he is an evil cat, but did you know that I'm the only one that he will be nice to? I can even pet him. You don't know him, but trust me mom, this is a really big deal!

The last reason why I believe you should let me get a puppy this summer is because of the great support system I have for learning about, raising, and taking care of a puppy. For starters, I already talked to Aunt Kathy and she said that she would be more than happy to help me train our puppy since she already has a really well behaved dog and is good at dog training. I will also have help with grooming. As you know, Mr. Nichols down the street is a dog groomer, and I'm sure if I asked him he'd show me exactly what to do to groom my puppy properly. I would groom him or her every day, and you would never have to worry about fur around the house. Lastly, I have been doing a lot of research on my own. I have read a lot about the different breeds of dogs so that we can choose one together that is the best fit for our family. I have also read many books on how to take care of puppies and what they need so that I will be prepared.

I am confident that I will do a great job taking care of a puppy if you are just willing to give me the opportunity to prove it to you. I will show you that I am responsible and good with animals, and that I will make good use of the supportive people I have to give me advice. You won't even have to lift a finger to feed or clean up after our puppy. You can just enjoy playing with him or her. I can't think of a more exciting and positive experience for our family to take part in this summer, and I hope you'll have faith in me and say yes!

Love always and thank you for considering,

Danielle



## RUBRIC

### Miss Couture’s Persuasive/Argumentative Writing Rubric

<b>Criteria:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Score:</b>
Introduction & Claim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opening sentence serves as an “attention getter.” A clear claim is stated (in the last sentence of the first paragraph). Three main pieces of relevant evidence are present. A clear context is set up.</li> </ul>	1    2    3    4    5
Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Claim/thesis statement is supported by a minimum of three relevant pieces of supporting evidence from credible sources. Evidence acknowledges opposing points of view.</li> </ul>	1    2    3    4    5
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Claim was restated in a new way. Three main pieces of evidence were summarized/restated. The reader was left with something to think about or called to take action.</li> </ul>	1    2    3    4    5
Focus & Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essay maintains clear focus and organization throughout and flows logically. Topics build on each other and do not jump around from idea to idea arbitrarily.</li> </ul>	1    2    3    4    5
Style/Language Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essay makes use of complex sentences, strong words, and transitional phrases. Essay is targeted toward the reader/audience.</li> </ul>	1    2    3    4    5
Writing Conventions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essay demonstrates correct use of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Errors are very few to none.</li> </ul>	1    2    3    4    5

Comments & Feedback:

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**Total Score: + \_\_\_\_\_/30 points**

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