

# Minnesota Writing Project

## --- Demonstration Lesson Template ---

**Title of lesson:** Staking Your Claim

**Suggested grade/age:** I teach 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, but I imagine students in grades 6 - 12 could benefit from the lesson

**Approximate time needed to complete lesson:** 2 (46 min) class periods. I can imagine an abbreviated version lasting one class period too.

**Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:**

*(Why is this lesson important in the development of your students' skills or knowledge? What do you want students to learn or be able to do? What "best practice" does this lesson incorporate?)*

By the end of the lesson I want students to have had the experience of finding evidence to support a claim, and experience talking through their reasoning (connecting that claim and evidence).

Because I teach in a middle school context I have incorporated a lot of movement in this lesson, partner talk, and have limited whole class discussions to the end of the class so students have the chance to talk through their thinking in smaller partnerships before presenting to the whole class.

I consider this a pre-writing exercise. Students have the experience of participating in an academic argument in a relatively "low-stakes" setting of the partnership. I originally saw this lesson at a district PD and have since modified it for my classes.

**Brief summary/outline of lesson:**

*(What steps do you take to implement this lesson in your classroom? Where is this lesson located in the school year or unit—beginning, middle, end? Does this lesson scaffold or build to a culminating assessment or demonstration of learning?)*

In my 7<sup>th</sup> grade classes this lesson comes at the beginning of the literary essay unit. The literary essay unit comes right after a reading unit where students are introduced to literary terms (figurative language, theme, characterization, etc.). The unit culminates in a somewhat traditional literary essay. I start with this lesson to get students thinking about finding evidence, but to also show them that they are capable of making literary/academic arguments.

I first ask them to list the characteristics of weak and strong characters/people for bell work. We make a list of those characteristics on the board. Next I lead them through a read aloud of the story *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein.

After we finish I ask them to decide using the characteristics on the board whether they think the tree in the story is a weak or strong character. After some thinking time, I ask students who think the tree is weak to go to one side of the room, and the people who think the tree is strong to go to the other side of the room. I then ask them to stand in a straight line facing the other "side". If the sides are not even, I ask people who feel like

they could argue either side to go to the less popular side (and if no one budges, I offer other incentives, but usually people switch sides when challenged).

In the line students shake the person's hand across from them (or somehow acknowledge the person). This will be their academic argument partner. I then ask the sides to gather away from the other side and to search for evidence supporting their claim as a group.

After five minutes or so I ask all students to line up again. I allow one side to share their strongest piece of evidence, while the other side simply listens for two minutes. Then they switch sides. Next I ask students to fall back into their groups and share what they heard, and come up with a rebuttal. After a few minutes I ask them to line back up and share their rebuttals. This can be repeated as many times as seems fruitful.

At the end of the class (or often times the next class period) I ask students to do a quick write outlining the argument they presented to their partner. This quickwrite can then be used as a pre-assessment to see where students are at with their argumentative writing skills.

### **Related Resources:**

*(What technology, articles, books, or supplies do you recommend?)*

As mentioned I used *The Giving Tree* with my 7<sup>th</sup> graders literary essay unit, but in 8<sup>th</sup> grade I use the same activity with a non-fiction text during a current events persuasive essay unit.

I always have a PowerPoint, Prezi, or some other visual means of displaying prompts and instructions.

### **Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:**

I think this activity works well with students who are not always quick to share in a big class debate or philosophical chairs activity. I have thought about having students write down/record the argument so they could see both how academic arguments can be structure and how they can happen sort of "organically" (but I haven't tried this yet).

This could also be a way to draft an essay or other forms of academic arguments.

**For additional information, contact:**

[sean.bailey@spps.org](mailto:sean.bailey@spps.org)