THE UNIVERSITY OF
KU **KANSAS**
Achievement
& Assessment Institute

EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

7.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

CONTENTS

UNIT OVERVIEW

In this unit, students trace and evaluate the argument in a text. They learn about the components of an argument and identify the thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence in an argumentative text. Students then evaluate the quality of the components and whether they make the argument strong.

Lesson 1: In this lesson, students learn about the main parts of an argument: thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence. Then they identify the components in an argumentative text.

Lesson 2: In this lesson, students examine what makes a claim clear or unclear and evaluate the strength of the claims in a text.

Lesson 3: In this lesson, students examine what makes a reason sound or unsound and evaluate the strength of the reasons in the text.

Lesson 4: In this lesson, students examine what makes evidence relevant and sufficient and evaluate the strength of the evidence in the text.

Lesson 5: In this lesson, students evaluate the overall quality of the text's argument. Using their verdicts about the claims, reasons, and evidence, they determine whether the argument is convincing or not.

Research Findings	Lesson Strategies, Approaches, or Activities
Instruction in a genre-specific reading comprehension strategy, Critical Analysis of Argumentative Text (CAAT), improves students' ability to identify, summarize, and analyze the structural elements of an argumentative text. (Haria, 2010)	The lessons in this unit are modeled after the CAAT strategy, which includes identifying the parts of an argument, summarizing the argument, and evaluating the effectiveness of the argument.
Instruction in the structure of an argument increases student knowledge of the principles of argumentation. (Reznitskaya, Anderson, & Kuo, 2007)	In Lesson 1, students examine the structure of an argument by learning to identify the thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence.

Instruction in critical reading significantly increases student understanding of argumentative text. Critical reading involves using evidence and reasoning to make conclusions, differentiating between fact and opinion, and identifying the author's point of view. (Darch & Kameenui, 1987)	This unit guides students through the process of critically reading an argumentative text. The lessons equip students to evaluate the strength of an argument by determining whether claims are clear, reasons are strong, and evidence is believable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Haria, P. D. (2010). *The effects of teaching a genre-specific reading comprehension strategy on struggling fifth grade students' ability to summarize and analyze argumentative texts.* (Doctoral dissertation), Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (3423407).

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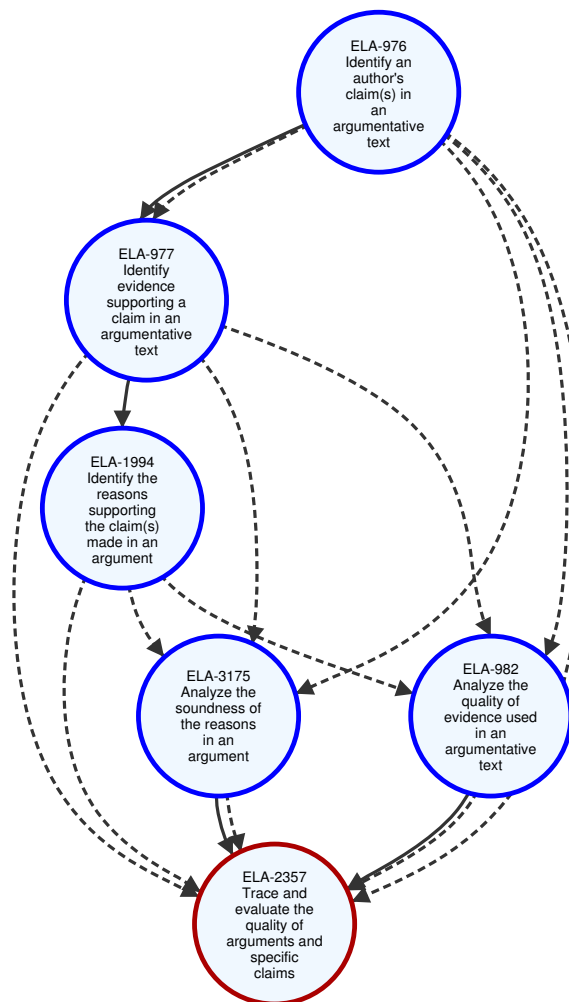
STANDARD

7.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

Learning map model for 7.RI.2.D.

Node ID	Node Name	Node Description
ELA-976	IDENTIFY AN AUTHOR'S CLAIM(S) IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT	Identify the specific claim(s) made by the author on a topic in an argumentative text.
ELA-977	IDENTIFY EVIDENCE SUPPORTING A CLAIM IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT	Identify the specific evidence used to support a claim in an argumentative text.
ELA-982	ANALYZE THE QUALITY OF EVIDENCE USED IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT	Evaluate whether the evidence in an argumentative text is of a high enough quality to fully support the claims made.
ELA-1994	IDENTIFY THE REASONS SUPPORTING THE CLAIM(S) MADE IN AN ARGUMENT	Identify the reasons used by the author to support the claim(s) made on the topic in an argument.
ELA-2357	TRACE AND EVALUATE THE QUALITY OF ARGUMENTS AND SPECIFIC CLAIMS	Trace the presentation of an argument and the specific claims in an argumentative text and evaluate them on the soundness of their reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
ELA-3175	ANALYZE THE SOUNDNESS OF THE REASONING IN AN ARGUMENT	Analyze whether the reasoning the author used to combine the reasons supporting the claims made about a topic in an argumentative text are valid.

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students identify the main parts of an argumentative text: the thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence.

STANDARD

7.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

PREPARATION

Before the lesson, select an argumentative text from a curriculum resource that has been purchased for individual student use, such as a class set of textbooks. The text should have a thesis, one or more claims, and multiple reasons and pieces of evidence. Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ chart paper or whiteboard
- ▶ argumentative text for individual student use
- ▶ SUPPLEMENT: PARTS OF AN ARGUMENT, displayed
- ▶ STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: "I can identify the parts of an argumentative text."

Tell the class that in the next couple of lessons they will learn to understand and evaluate an argumentative text. **Ask** students why it is important to analyze arguments. Answers may include understanding a political speech or evaluating advertisements.

Explain that to understand and evaluate an argument, students need to analyze each part of the argument and question what the author says. Tell students that today they will identify the different components, or parts, of an argument.

Introduce the argumentative text and share the text topic. Tell students that reading an argumentative text may change or enhance their opinions on the topic.

Direct students to turn to a partner and discuss their thoughts or opinions on the topic. **Ask** for volunteers to share and write their thoughts or opinions on the board. **Tell** students that readers often have opinions on the topic of a text, but it is important to consider the author's view on the topic and to keep an open mind about the author's argument.

Explain the purpose of the text. Is the author writing in favor of or against the topic?

Tell students that you will now read the text aloud. As they listen, they should think about the author's purpose and how the author defends his or her view on the topic. **Read** the text.

Explain that when reading an argumentative text, it is important to recognize the components of the argument: the thesis (or position), claims, reasons, and evidence. **Display** SUPPLEMENT: PARTS OF AN ARGUMENT and walk students through the components. Emphasize the importance of understanding these terms.

Instruct students to turn to a partner and define the four components in their own words as well as give an example of each one. **Ask** for volunteers to share and write responses in the extra space of the displayed supplement.

Explain that now they will identify the argument components in the text.

Pass out STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE and group students with partners. Explain that students will identify the author's thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence and write them in the corresponding sections. **Remind** students that some arguments have one claim and some have multiple claims. If the argument only has one claim, students should leave the other two boxes empty. Tell students that they do not have to do anything with the happy and sad faces or the argument analysis box; they will complete those parts in later lessons.

Circulate and check understanding while students work.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Determine if the student can IDENTIFY AN AUTHOR'S CLAIM(S) IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT (ELA-976):	Determine if the student can IDENTIFY THE REASONS SUPPORTING THE CLAIM(S) MADE IN AN ARGUMENT (ELA-1994):	Determine if the student can IDENTIFY EVIDENCE SUPPORTING A CLAIM IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT (ELA-977):
▶ What positions does the author present to support the argument?	▶ What statement or explanation does the author present to support the claim?	▶ What data does the author use to support the claim?

Invite volunteers to share their responses and ideas with the class and write final answers on the board. **Collect** handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the TEACHER NOTES for this lesson set.

| Part	Definition	Example
Thesis (position)	the debatable point that the author is trying to convince or persuade the reader to accept	Children should not be allowed to play violent video games.
Claim	a statement or position that the author presents as true to support the thesis An argument can have one or more claims.	Violent video games increase violence in children.
Reason	a statement or explanation that supports the claim	Children often confuse the sophisticated graphic images in games with reality, causing them to act more violently.
Evidence	data gathered to support the claim	Studies have shown that many children do not understand that violence in video games is not real.

Thesis

Claim

Claim

Claim

Reason	Reason	Reason

↓ ↓ ↓
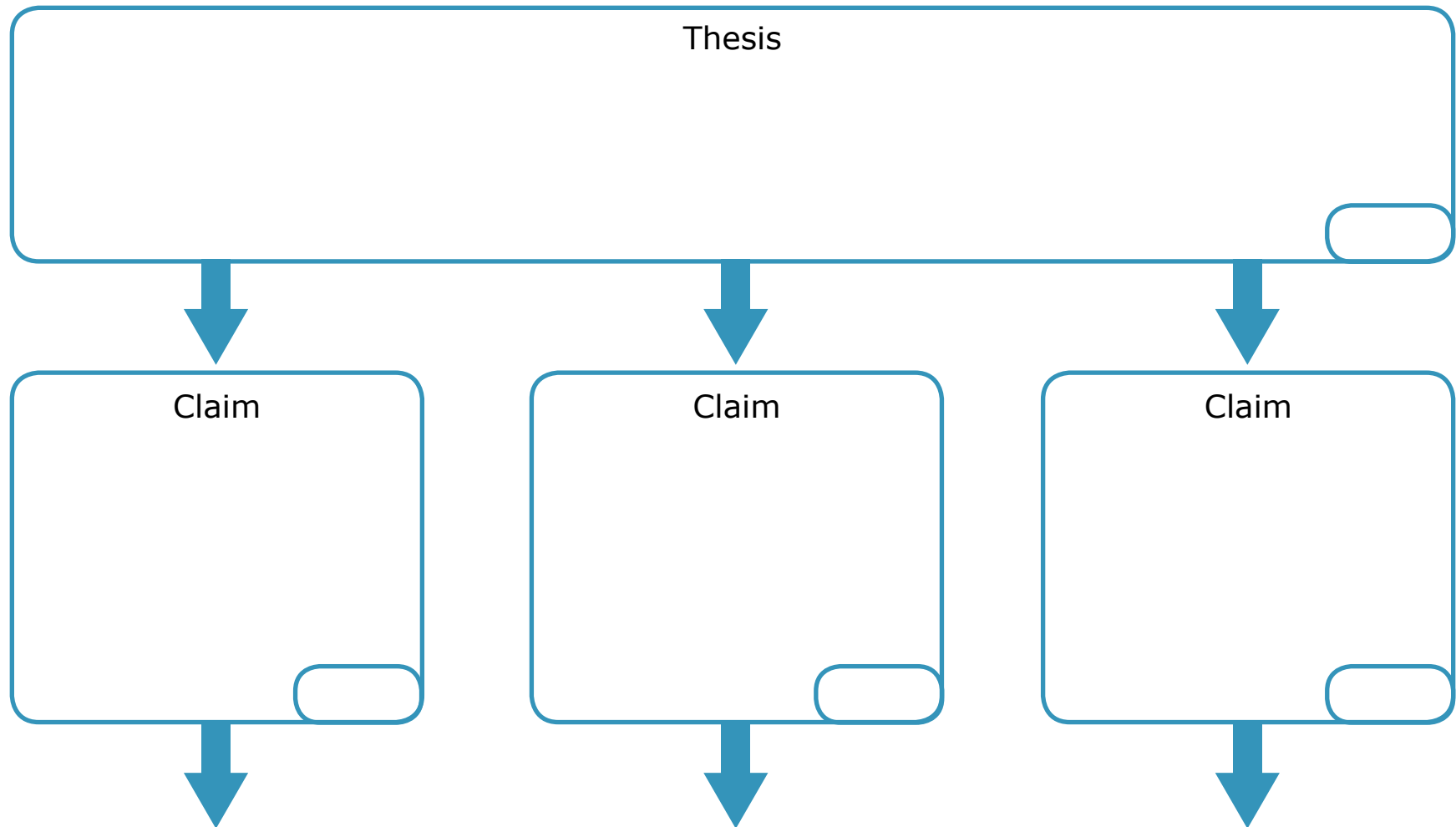
Evidence	Evidence	Evidence

Argument Analysis: Is the argument convincing? Why or why not?

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students analyze the argumentative text to determine whether the claims are clear.

STANDARD

7.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ chart paper or whiteboard
- ▶ SUPPLEMENT: CLEAR CLAIMS
- ▶ blank paper
- ▶ argumentative text from Lesson 1, for individual student use
- ▶ partially completed STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: "I can determine if the claims are clear."

Remind the class that they are learning to understand and evaluate an argumentative text. Tell them that to understand and evaluate an argument, they need to analyze each part of the argument and question what the author says. **Call on** students to share the different components of an argumentative text.

Tell students that they will examine each component in the text and come to a decision on whether it is strong enough to support the argument. Students will determine whether the claims are clear, the reasons are sound, and the evidence is relevant and sufficient. Today they will look at the claims.

Invite volunteers to tell you what a claim is. **Explain** that a claim is a statement or position the author presents as true to support the thesis. For example, the statements "A long summer vacation is boring" and "Summer vacation is expensive for parents" are claims. Tell students that some arguments have only one claim and some arguments have multiple claims.

Review the argumentative text used in the previous lesson.

Pass back STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE, and **ask** for volunteers to share the claims they identified. Write the claims on the board.

Tell students that the claims of an argument should be clear opinions on a debatable issue. A claim should not be based solely on the author's opinion or something obviously true. In a solid argument, the claims are clear. Claims are clear when the author openly states his or her thoughts on the topic and undoubtedly takes a side. A claim is unclear when the author vaguely addresses the topic and fails to take a side or gives a mixed opinion. **Display** SUPPLEMENT: CLEAR CLAIMS, and go through the examples.

Direct students to work with a partner to write their own examples of clear and unclear claims on a blank sheet of paper. You may want to give students specific topics, such as whether high school students should be allowed to work after school, whether schools should have uniforms, or whether schools should have vending machines.

Ask for volunteers to share examples without saying whether they are clear or unclear. Have the class determine whether each example is a clear claim or an unclear claim.

Group students in partners and direct them to evaluate each claim in the text. They should circle the happy face on the handout if they think the claim is clear or the sad face if they think the claim is unclear.

Walk around and ask the Checking for Understanding questions while students work.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Determine if the student can IDENTIFY AN AUTHOR'S CLAIM(S) IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT (ELA-976):

- ▶ Are the claims clear or unclear?

- ▶ How did you decide?

- ▶ If the claims are unclear, how would you make them clearer if you were the author?

Invite students to share their decisions, and help the class come to a consensus on whether the claims are clear or unclear. **Collect** handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the TEACHER NOTES for this lesson set.

CLEAR CLAIMS . . .

- ▶ state an opinion that can be supported with facts
- ▶ give a position on a topic with two or more sides

Example: Boys and girls should not be allowed to play sports together because boys are better at sports than girls are.

✔ states a clear opinion

✔ supporting data can be gathered
(for example, boys can lift more weight than girls can)

✔ the issue is debatable

UNCLEAR CLAIMS . . .

- ▶ state an opinion that cannot be supported with facts
- ▶ give an obvious truth
- ▶ fail to take a specific side
- ▶ give a mixed opinion

Example: There are pros and cons of children having their own pets.

✖ does not take a clear side

Example: Children should not have to learn a foreign language because I hate learning Spanish.

✖ based solely on the author's personal opinion

Example: People should not eat junk food because nutritious food is healthier.

✖ obviously true

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students analyze the argumentative text to determine whether the reasons are sound.

STANDARD

7.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ chart paper or whiteboard
- ▶ SUPPLEMENT: SOUND REASONS
- ▶ blank paper
- ▶ argumentative text from previous lessons, for individual student use
- ▶ partially completed STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: "I can determine whether reasons are sound."

Remind the class that they are learning to understand and evaluate an argumentative text. To understand and evaluate an argument, they need to analyze each part of the argument and question what the author says. **Tell** students that today they will look at reasons.

Ask students to tell you what reasons are. **Explain** that a reason is a statement or explanation that supports the claim. For example, in support of the argument that middle school students should not be allowed to bike to school, a reason might be that middle school students will be in less bicycle accidents.

Review the argumentative text used in the previous lessons.

Pass back STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE, and **ask** for volunteers to share the reasons they identified. Write the reasons on the board.

Tell students that a sound reason shows good judgment or sense. The reason should be closely connected to the author's claim and make that claim strong. It should be an important explanation and not based on personal opinions or experiences. **Display** SUPPLEMENT: SOUND REASONS and walk through the examples.

Direct students to work with a partner to write their own examples of sound and unsound reasons on a blank sheet of paper. You may want to give students specific topics, such as whether schools should serve only healthy food, whether marine mammals should be held in captivity, or whether students should be allowed to choose the subjects they study in school.

Ask for volunteers to share examples without telling whether they are sound or unsound. Have the class determine whether each example is a sound reason or an unsound reason.

Group students with partners and direct them to evaluate the reasons in the text. They should circle the happy face on the handout if they think the reason is sound or the sad face if they think the reason is unsound.

Walk around and collect evidence about student thinking.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Determine if the student can ANALYZE THE SOUNDNESS OF THE REASONING IN AN ARGUMENT (ELA-3175):

- ▶ Are the reasons closely connected to the claim?
- ▶ Is this reason an important explanation?
- ▶ Are the reasons personal or impersonal?
- ▶ Is this reason sound or unsound?

Invite students to share their decisions, and help the class come to a consensus on whether the reasons are sound or unsound. **Collect** handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the TEACHER NOTES for this lesson set.

SOUND REASONS . . .

- ▶ show good judgment or sense
- ▶ are closely connected to the author's claim
- ▶ make the claim strong

EXAMPLE

Thesis: Pluto should not be a planet.   **Claim:** Pluto does not meet the requirement to be a planet.

Reason: Pluto is too small to be a planet.

✔ gives a specific detail

✔ relates directly to the claim

Reason: Pluto is made of ice, but planets are made of rock and ice.

✔ gives a specific fact

✔ relates directly to the claim

UNSOUND REASONS . . .

- ▶ are based on personal opinions or experiences
- ▶ are not related to the claim
- ▶ are illogical

EXAMPLE

Thesis: Pluto should be a planet.   **Claim:** People like Pluto.

Reason: Lots of kids want Pluto to be a planet.

✖ based on personal opinions

✖ general statement

Reason: Pluto is one-third water.

✖ not related to the claim

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students analyze the argumentative text to determine whether the evidence is relevant and sufficient.

STANDARD

7.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ chart paper or whiteboard
- ▶ SUPPLEMENT: RELEVANT AND SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE
- ▶ blank paper
- ▶ argumentative text from previous lessons, for individual student use
- ▶ partially completed STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: "I can determine whether evidence is relevant and sufficient."

Remind the class that they are learning to understand and evaluate an argumentative text. To understand and evaluate an argument, they need to analyze each part of the argument and question what the author says. **Tell** students that today they will look at evidence.

Call on students to tell you what evidence is. **Explain** that evidence is data gathered to support the claim. For example, the number of bicycle accidents per year that middle school students are involved in would be

evidence to support the reason that bicycling to school is unsafe and the argument that middle school students should not be allowed to bike to school.

Review the argumentative text used in the previous lessons.

Pass back Student Handout: Argument Structure, and **ask** for volunteers to share the evidence they identified as the evidence. Write the evidence on the board.

Tell students that evidence is relevant when it is closely connected to the author's reason and claim. Relevant evidence directly supports the reason. Evidence is sufficient when it is based on facts not opinions, it is believable, and there is enough information to be convincing. **Display** Supplement: Relevant and Sufficient Evidence and go through the examples.

Direct students to work with a partner to write examples of evidence that is relevant and sufficient and evidence that is irrelevant and insufficient on a blank sheet of paper. You may want to give students specific topics, such as the ones listed in previous lessons.

Ask for volunteers to share their examples without telling whether the evidence is relevant and sufficient. Have the class determine whether the evidence is relevant and sufficient.

Group students with partners and direct them to evaluate the evidence. Students will circle the happy face if they think the evidence is relevant and sufficient or the sad face if they think the evidence is irrelevant or insufficient.

Circulate and check understanding while students work.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Determine if the student can ANALYZE THE QUALITY OF EVIDENCE USED IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT (ELA-982):

▶ Is the evidence closely connected to the claim and reason?

▶ Does the evidence support the reason?

▶ Is the evidence based on facts or opinions?

▶ Is the evidence believable and enough to make you feel convinced?

Invite volunteers to share their decisions, and help the group come to a consensus of whether the text's evidence is relevant and sufficient. **Collect** handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the Teacher Notes for this lesson set.

RELEVANT AND SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE . . .

- ▶ is closely connected to the claim and reason
- ▶ supports the claim and reason
- ▶ is based on facts
- ▶ is believable
- ▶ gives enough information to be convincing

EXAMPLE

Thesis: Schools should serve healthier food in the cafeteria.

Claim: There are too many overweight students.

Reason: Healthier food in the cafeteria would make students healthier.

Evidence: In 2012, 21% of teens were overweight.

✓ connects to claim and reason

✓ gives a fact that supports the claim

IRRELEVANT AND INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE . . .

- ▶ is not related to the claim and reason
- ▶ does not make the reason more believable
- ▶ does not give a specific fact
- ▶ does not give enough information to be convincing

EXAMPLE

Thesis: Marine mammals should not be held in captivity.

Claim: Keeping marine mammals captive is not safe.

Reason: Marine mammals can act unpredictably and hurt themselves in captivity.

Evidence: Marine animals hurt themselves a lot in captivity.

✘ does not give a specific fact

✖ repeats the reason

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students evaluate the overall quality of the argument in the text and determine whether the argument is convincing or not.

STANDARD

7.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ chart paper or whiteboard
- ▶ argumentative text from previous lessons, for individual student use
- ▶ partially completed STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

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IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: "I can evaluate the quality of an argument."

Remind the class that they are learning to understand and evaluate an argumentative text. Remind them that in previous lessons they identified and evaluated individual components of the argument. Explain that today they will determine whether the overall argument is convincing or not. Students will review what they decided about the quality of the claims, evidence, and reasons and determine whether they support the argument or not.

Group students with a partner and pass back STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE. **Instruct** partners to share whether they decided the claims were clear or unclear. Direct partners to discuss what this means for the overall strength of the argument. Do the claims make the argument more or less convincing?

Ask for volunteers to share and guide the class to a consensus on whether the claims strengthen or weaken the argument.

Direct partners to have the same discussion about the reasons, whether they are sound or unsound and what that means for the overall strength of the argument. Ask for volunteers to share and guide the class to a consensus.

Direct partners to discuss the evidence, and ask for volunteers to share. Guide the class to a consensus on whether the evidence strengthens or weakens the argument.

As students discuss claims, reasons, and evidence, **walk around** and ask the Checking for Understanding questions.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Determine if the student can TRACE AND EVALUATE THE QUALITY OF ARGUMENTS AND SPECIFIC CLAIMS (ELA-2357):

- ▶ Are the claims clear or unclear?
- ▶ Are the reasons sound or unsound?
- ▶ Is the evidence relevant? How so?
- ▶ Is the evidence sufficient? How so?
- ▶ What does this mean for the argument?

Summarize the class's verdicts about the claims, reasons, and evidence.

Instruct partners to discuss whether the argument as a whole is convincing and why or why not. Direct students to write their verdict in the analysis box on the handout. **Ask** for volunteers to share and guide the class to a consensus on the overall quality of the argument. **Collect** handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the TEACHER NOTES for this lesson set.

Directions: For each learning goal, circle the sentence that best matches what you can do.

Learning Goal	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Identify the parts of an argumentative text.	I can identify one part of an argument in a text: thesis, claims, reasons, or evidence.	I can identify two parts of an argument in a text: thesis, claims, reasons, or evidence.	I can identify all parts of an argument in a text: thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence.
Determine whether claims are clear.	I know the factors that make a claim clear.	I can determine whether the claims are clear.	I can explain why the claims are clear or unclear.
Determine whether reasons are sound.	I know the factors that make reasons sound.	I can determine whether reasons are sound.	I can explain why reasons are sound or unsound.
Determine whether evidence is relevant and sufficient.	I know the factors that make evidence relevant and sufficient.	I can determine whether evidence is relevant and sufficient.	I can explain why evidence is relevant and sufficient or irrelevant and insufficient.

Evaluate the quality of an argument.	I can determine whether a claim, reason, or piece of evidence supports the argument.	I can determine whether the claims, reasons, and evidence as a whole support the argument.	I can explain whether an argument is convincing by describing how claims, reasons, and evidence support it.