THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Achievement & Assessment Institute

EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

8.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

CONTENTS

TEACHER NOTES — An introduction to the lessons and a brief discussion of the research used to develop the instructional resources included in the lesson set.

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INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR LESSONS 1–3 — Detailed walkthroughs of each lesson.

STUDENT HANDOUT FOR LESSONS 1–3 — A reproducible handout students will use to complete activities during the lessons.

SUPPLEMENTS FOR LESSONS 1–3 — Additional teacher resources to use during the lesson set. This unit's supplements are visual aids that describe and give examples for each component of an argument.

STUDENT FEEDBACK GUIDE — A feedback tool for students to complete following the lesson set.

UNIT OVERVIEW

In this unit, students delineate and evaluate arguments. First, they identify the components of an argument: the thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence. Students then evaluate the quality of the components and identify irrelevant evidence in a pair of texts.

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

Lesson 2: In this lesson, students examine what makes a reason sound or unsound. They brainstorm sound and unsound reasons for a provided topic, and the class discusses what makes the reasons sound or unsound. Then partners evaluate the strength of the reasons in the texts.

Lesson 3: In this lesson, students examine what makes evidence relevant and sufficient. They brainstorm strong and weak evidence for a provided topic, and the class discusses what makes the evidence relevant and sufficient or not. Then partners evaluate the strength of the evidence in the texts, identifying any pieces of irrelevant evidence.

Research Findings	Lesson Strategies, Approaches, or Activities
In order to understand lengthy written arguments, students must mentally represent the different components of the argument as they are introduced throughout multiple paragraphs. Once students understand the argument, they can evaluate the argument's strength and validity. (Chambliss, 1995)	In this unit, students use a graphic organizer to visually represent the elements of the arguments in two texts.
Readers need instruction in identifying claims, reasons, and evidence in text. (Chambliss, 1995)	This unit provides explicit definitions of a thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence along with examples of each. Students expand their understanding by formulating their own arguments and by identifying these components in a pair of argumentative texts.

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 identifying 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 argumentative texts. 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

Chambliss, M. J. (1995). Text cues and strategies successful readers use to construct the gist of lengthy written arguments. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*(4), 778–807. doi:10.2307/748198

Darch, C., & Kameenui, E. J. (1987). Teaching LD students critical reading skills: A systematic replication. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 10*(2), 82–91. doi:10.2307/1510215

Reznitskaya, A., Anderson, R. C., & Kuo, L. (2007). Teaching and learning argumentation. *The Elementary School Journal, 107*(5), 449–472. doi:10.1086/518623
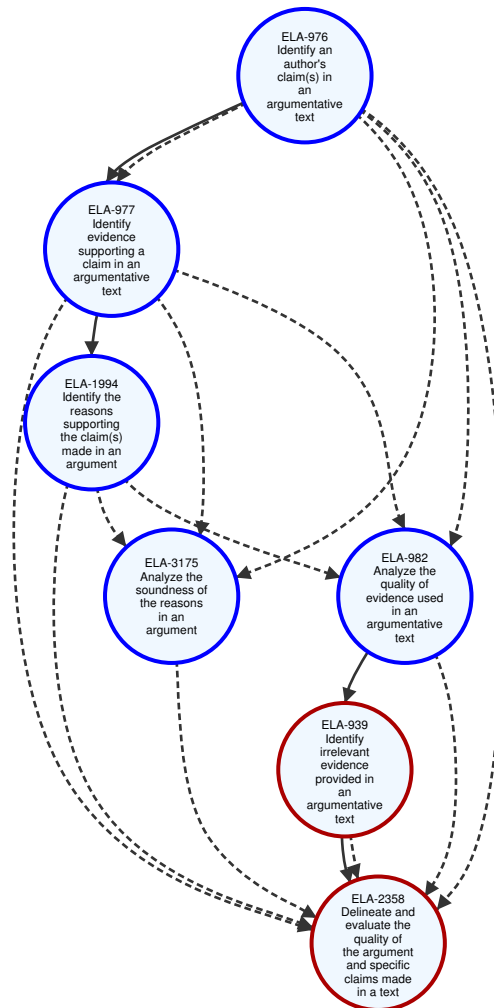
STANDARD

8.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

Learning map model for 8.RI.2.D.

Node ID	Node Name	Node Description
ELA-939	IDENTIFY IRRELEVANT EVIDENCE PROVIDED IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT	Identify when an argumentative text includes evidence unrelated to the claims and reasons.
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 the author uses to support the claim(s) made on the topic in an argument.
ELA-2358	DELINEATE AND EVALUATE THE QUALITY OF THE ARGUMENT AND SPECIFIC CLAIMS MADE IN A TEXT	Delineate the argument(s) and specific claims presented in an argumentative text and evaluate their quality based on the validity and soundness of their reasoning and evidence.
ELA-3175	ANALYZE THE SOUNDNESS OF THE REASONS IN AN ARGUMENT	Analyze whether the author's reasoning supports the claims made about a topic in an argumentative text.

LEARNING GOAL

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

STANDARD

8.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

PREPARATION

Before the lesson, select two argumentative texts from a curriculum resource that has been purchased for individual student use, such as a class set of textbooks. The texts should present conflicting sides of an issue. At least one of the texts will need to include irrelevant evidence to give students the opportunity to fully meet the standard. Alternatively, you can rewrite a given text so that it includes irrelevant evidence. Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ chart paper or whiteboard
- ▶ argumentative texts for individual student use
- ▶ SUPPLEMENT: ELEMENTS 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 argument in a text."

Tell the class that in the next several lessons, they will learn to identify and evaluate the elements of argumentative texts. Explain that to understand an argument and judge its quality, students need to analyze each part of the argument. Today, students will identify the elements of an argument in two texts on the same topic, one text in favor of the topic and one against the topic.

Present the topic of the texts. Ask volunteers to share their thoughts or opinions on the topic and write responses 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.

Introduce the two texts.

Tell students they will read the texts on their own. As they read each text, they should decide whether the author is in favor of the topic or against the topic. Direct them to think about the author's purpose and how the author presents his or her view on the topic. **Give** students time to read the texts.

Next, instruct students to discuss with a partner which text presents a view in favor of the topic and which text presents a view against the topic. Pairs should also determine each author's purpose.

Explain that when reading an argumentative text, it is important to recognize the components of the argument: the thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence. **Display** SUPPLEMENT: ELEMENTS OF AN ARGUMENT and walk students through the definitions and examples. 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 students will identify the argument components in each text.

Pass out STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE and group students with partners. Instruct students to write the title of the first text in the corresponding section of the handout. Explain that students will record the author's thesis, claims, reasons, and evidence. **Remind** students that some arguments have one claim and some have multiple claims. If the argument has only 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; they will complete those parts in later lessons. Have students complete the handout for the first text.

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? ▶ Why does the author believe the claim to be true?	▶ What data does the author use to support the claim? ▶ Where is a fact in the text? How does it connect to the claim?

Invite volunteers to share their responses and ideas with the class, and write final answers on the board or on a displayed handout.

Instruct students to write the title of the second text in the corresponding section of the handout. Give partners time to complete the handout for the second text. **Circulate** and ask the Checking for Understanding questions while students work.

Invite volunteers to share their responses and ideas with the class and write final answers on the board or on a displayed handout.

Lead a class discussion to compare the claims, reasons, and evidence of the two texts.
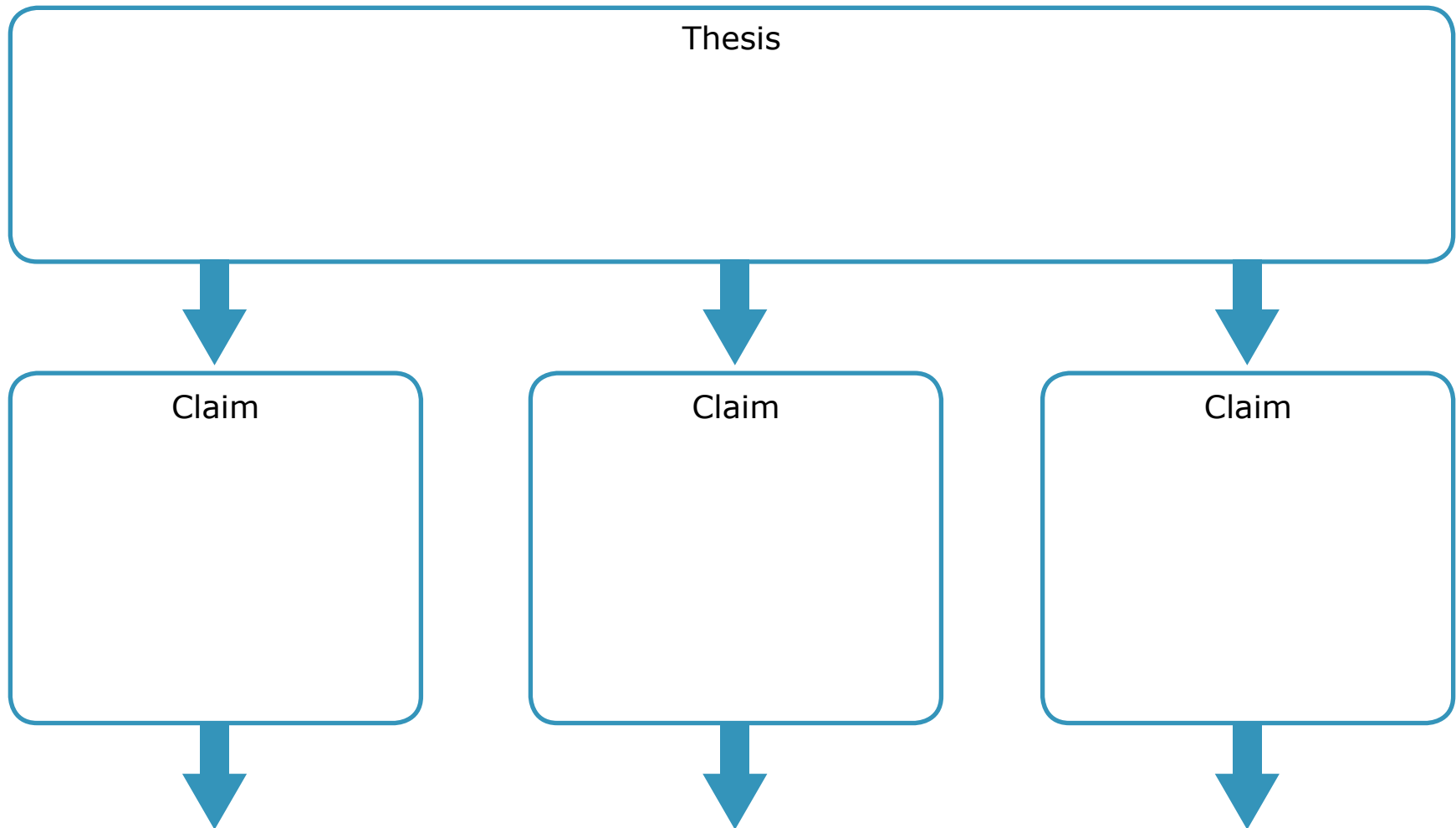
Collect handouts for use in the next lesson.

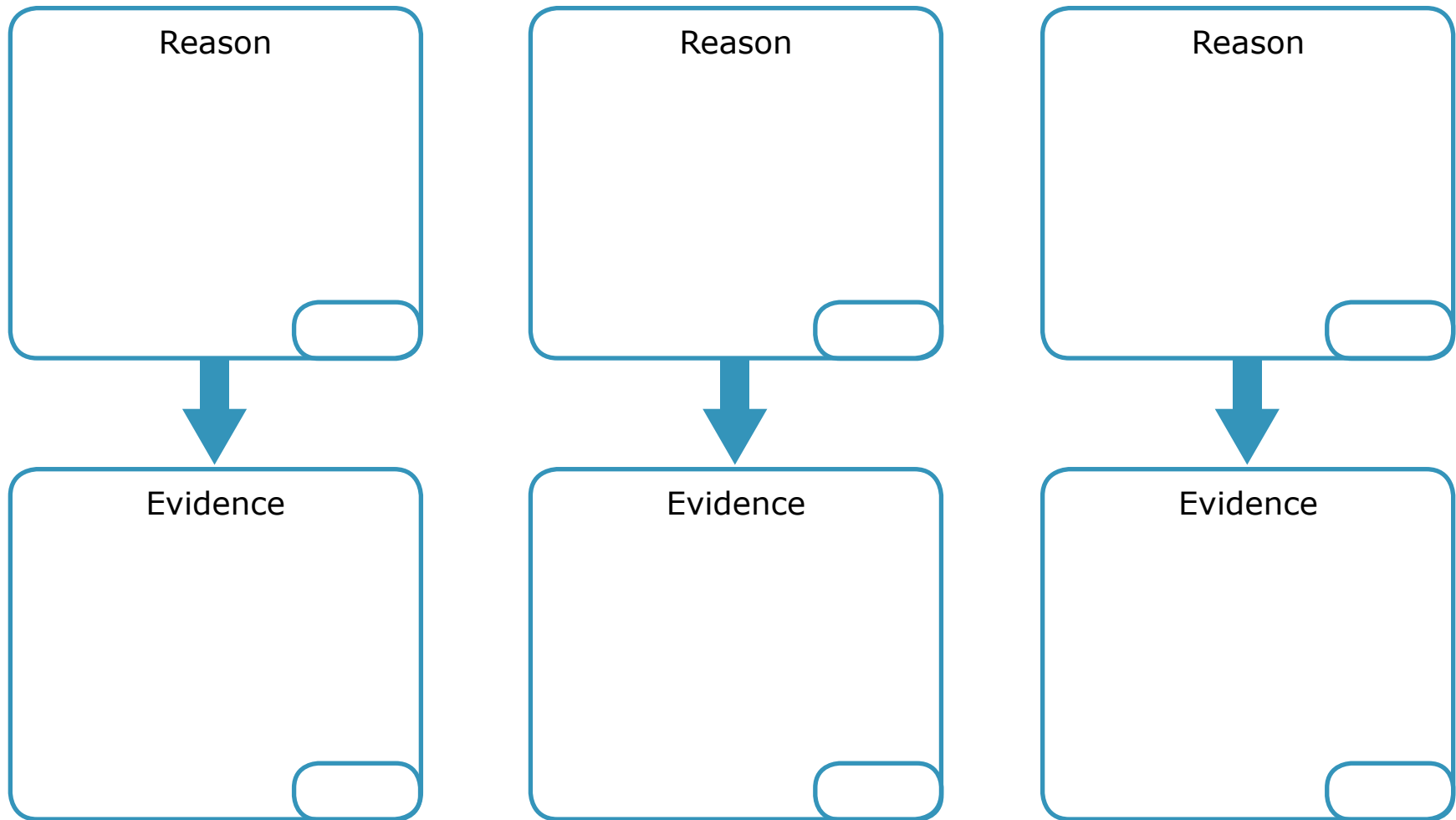For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the TEACHER NOTES for this lesson set.

Text #1 Title: _____

Thesis

Claim

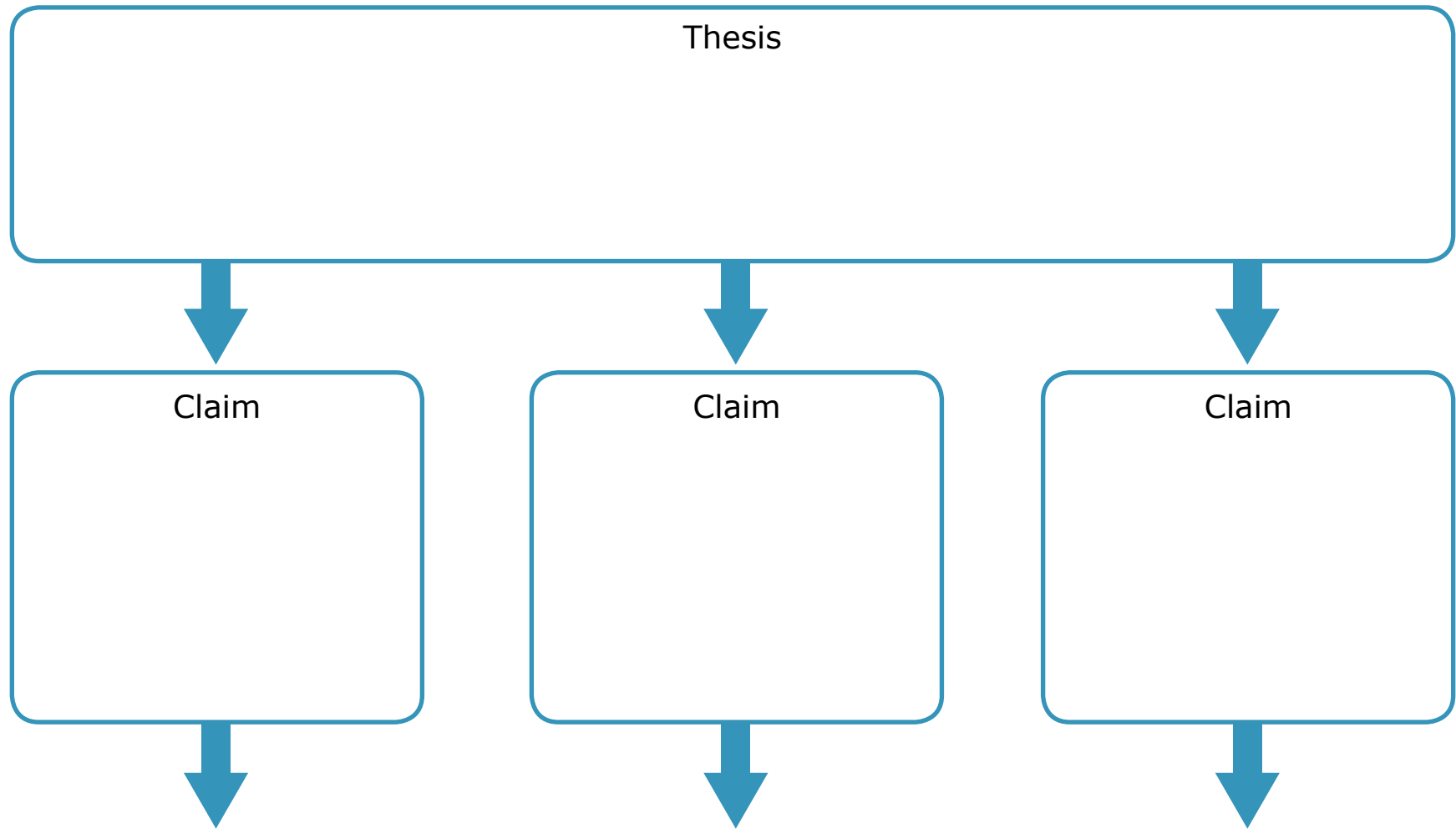Claim

Claim

Reason	Reason	Reason

Evidence	Evidence	Evidence

Text #2 Title:_____

Thesis

Claim

Claim

Claim

Reason	Reason	Reason

Evidence	Evidence	Evidence
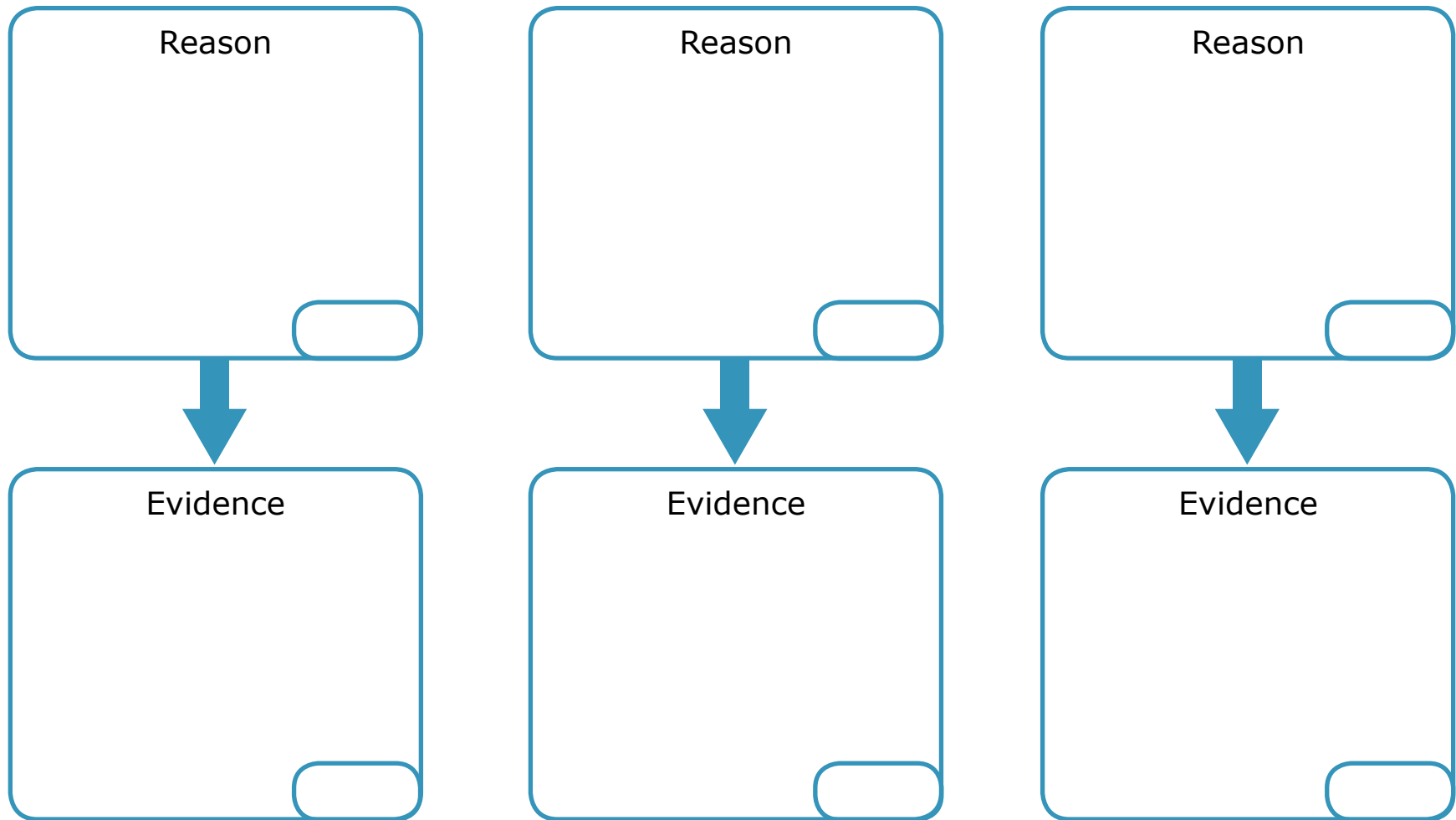
Part	Definition	Example
Thesis	the debatable point that the author is trying to convince or persuade the reader to accept	K–12 schools should not have sports teams.
Claim	a statement or position that the author presents as true to support the thesis An argument can have one or more claims.	The main purpose of schools is to educate.
Reason	a statement or explanation that supports the claim	A singular focus on academics would improve the weak academic performance of American youth.
Evidence	data gathered to support the claim	More than 20 countries have a higher high school graduation rate than that of the United States.

LEARNING GOAL

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

STANDARD

8.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ chart paper or whiteboard
- ▶ SUPPLEMENT: SOUND REASONS, displayed
- ▶ argumentative texts from previous lesson, 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 in a text are sound."

Remind the class that they are learning to understand and evaluate argumentative text. Review the four parts of an argument. Then explain that to understand an argument and judge its quality, students will need to analyze the reasons and evidence in the argument and question what the author says. Tell students that today they will analyze the reasons in both texts.

Invite a volunteer to define *reason*. **Explain** that a reason is a statement or explanation that supports the claim. For example, if the argument is that middle school students should not be allowed to have cell phones at school, a supporting reason might be that students can use their cell phones to cheat.

Review the texts used in the previous lesson.

Pass back STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE and **ask** for volunteers to share the reasons from both texts. Write the responses 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 claims, such as that standardized testing reduces opportunities for students to learn new material, that school uniforms reduce bullying, or that parent assistance on homework helps students learn.

Ask for volunteers to share their reasons without revealing 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 both texts. 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 REASONS IN AN ARGUMENT (ELA-3175):

- ▶ What is an example of a sound reason from either text? Why is the reason sound?
- ▶ What is an example of an unsound reason from either text? Why is the reason unsound?
- ▶ Which text provides the strongest reasons? Why?

Invite volunteers to share their decisions, and help the group come to a consensus of whether the reasoning in each text is sound.

Lead a discussion about the differences between the texts. Which text does a better job of providing sound reasons? Which text is more convincing?

Collect handouts for use in the next lesson.

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: Sports in middle school should not be coed.
Claim: Coed teams are unfair to all students.
Reason: On average, boys are physically stronger than girls.

✔ gives a specific fact that can be supported with statistical data (evidence)

✔ relates directly to the claim

Reason: Players on same-gender teams cooperate with one another more than players on coed teams do.

✔ gives a specific detail

✔ relates directly to the claim

UNSOUND REASONS . . .

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

EXAMPLE

Thesis: Sports in middle school should not be coed.
Claim: Boys will enjoy coed teams less than teams with only boys.
Reason: Boys do not like playing sports with girls.

✖ based on personal opinions

✖ general statement

Reason: Boys are poor losers.

✖ not related to the claim

LEARNING GOAL

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

STANDARD

8.RI.2.D Evaluate an author's argument, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▸ chart paper or whiteboard
- ▸ SUPPLEMENT: RELEVANT AND SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE, displayed
- ▸ argumentative texts 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 the evidence in a text is relevant and sufficient."

Remind the class that they are learning to understand and evaluate argumentative text. Explain that to do that, they need to analyze the reasons and evidence in the argument and question what the author says. Tell students that today they will analyze the evidence in both texts.

Call on a student to define *evidence*. **Explain** that evidence is data gathered to support the claim. For example, if the argument is that middle school students should be allowed to have cell phones at school, a supporting reason might be that cell phones give students immediate access to resources that can improve the quality of

student work. Evidence to support this reason might be study results that show students score better on essays with the help of a grammar app.

Review the texts used in the previous lesson.

Pass back STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE and **ask** for volunteers to share the evidence from both texts. Write the responses on the board

Explain 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 it provides 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 reasons, such as that bullies target students who dress differently (in support of the claim that school uniforms reduce bullying), that teens spend more time in public libraries that have video game consoles (in support of the claim that game consoles in libraries reduce teenage crime), or that teens with after-school jobs are better at public speaking (in support of the claim that after-school jobs give teens real-world skills).

Ask for volunteers to share their evidence without revealing whether the evidence is relevant and sufficient or not. Have the class evaluate the pieces of evidence. Pay particular attention to the pieces of irrelevant or insufficient evidence and how students can determine that they are irrelevant or insufficient.

Group students with partners and pass back STUDENT HANDOUT: ARGUMENT STRUCTURE. Direct pairs to evaluate the evidence from both texts. Students will circle the happy face if they think the piece of evidence is relevant and sufficient or the sad face if they think the piece of 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):	Determine if the student can IDENTIFY IRRELEVANT EVIDENCE PROVIDED IN AN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT (ELA-939):
▸ What is a piece of evidence from either text that is relevant? Why is it relevant?	▸ What is a piece of evidence from either text that is irrelevant? Why is it irrelevant?
▸ What is a piece of evidence from either text that is sufficient? Why is it sufficient?	▸ Which text has more irrelevant evidence?
▸ Which text provides the strongest evidence? Why?	

Invite volunteers to share their decisions, and help the group come to a consensus of whether the evidence in each text is relevant and sufficient. Pay particular attention to the evidence students identify as irrelevant, asking students to explain their logic.

Lead a discussion about the differences between the texts. Which text does a better job of providing relevant and sufficient evidence? Which text is more convincing?

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

Lead a discussion about the differences between the texts. Which text does a better job of providing relevant and sufficient evidence? Did their evaluation of the evidence change students' minds about which text is more convincing?

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

EXAMPLE

Thesis: There should be harsher punishments for bullying.

Claim: Bullying creates attendance problems by making students afraid to go to school.

Reason: Harsher punishments for bullying would make students feel safer at school.

Evidence: 160,000 students skip school each day because they are afraid of being bullied.

✓ connects to the 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: There should be harsher punishments for bullying.

Claim: Bullies need to be held responsible for their actions.

Reason: More severe punishments will decrease bullying.

Evidence: Bullies do not get punished enough for bullying.

✗ does not give a specific fact

✗ does not give enough information to be convincing

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 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.