

First Day of School – Constructing an Argument

I like to get to know my students on the first day of school. My generic questions show me something about them, but the more out of the box ones show me how creative they can be. It also helps me determine who struggles with thinking on the spot and who has difficulty drawing out their argument. Here are some sample questions below.

1. List all the things you can think of that are yellow.
2. What is one thing that has helped you be successful in school (talent, skill, habit, etc)?
3. What has a better chance of taking over the world: Zombies, Pirates or Robots? Convince me.
4. Would you rather give up your cell phone or your car/mode of transportation? Justify it.
5. What is one goal you have for this school year?
6. What else should I know about you?

After the survey is complete, I follow up with the survey the next day with a prove it! lesson that will show to students why we do critical analysis and argument. The following is their assignment.

Prove It!

Do you think Zombies, Robots or Pirates have the best chance to take over the world? Choose one and then construct your argument.

1. Take a side!
2. Back it up with evidence. What do you know about your villain that will make them more powerful than the others/than people?
3. What arguments might you expect from others? How will you refute their arguments?
4. What statement can you make to grab their attention at the beginning of our debate? What about to leave them with a powerful thought at the end?
5. Write down your evidence and other notes for the class debate.

Organize the class discussion. Students move to different sides of the room depending on their convictions. Those who change their minds during the discussion, based on classmates' arguments, can move to a different side of the room at the very end of the debate. Students should take part in the structured debate by making arguments based on evidence OR refuting other teams arguments. The debate is structured in that the teacher conducts the debate and ensures that students are taking turns and everyone is able to participate.

Debrief Argument:

- Which group would you say "won" the debate? Why?
- What arguments were best and why?
- Was their evidence that surprised you? Why was it surprising?
- What was most effective about this debate?
- What was least effective?
- Did someone convince you to think differently (or almost convince you)? How?

Why was this activity relevant to English class?

- Practice Oral Discussion
- Practice how to form a thoughtful argument
- Written critical analysis = argument
- Why is a strong thesis/conclusive statement important

- Draw on what you learned about oral argument as we move into our first unit. You will be asked to prove to me what theme you think an author conveys. This critical analysis is similar to our argument about whether or not Zombies can rule the world. It just is based in texts/novels etc.