

# Taking Arguments Up a Notch



**T**HROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES, which we hope will be filled with determination, your students will find that perseverance matters. High expectations matter. Coalitions also matter. To accomplish grand tasks, you usually have to bring people together around shared beliefs. You have to figure out your goals, assemble your gifts, and make your plans. And then you have to work hard to achieve them.

This session aims to rally students to engage in the work of Bend II, which involves working in coalition groups, each group tackling a different subtopic related to the larger issue they've been researching all along. Today is a “stirring up” day and a “step-up” day. It's a chance for your students to feel that pull of planning toward shared goals as you create a higher-stakes argument.

In Session 6, students decide on the topics that they want to study and then form coalition groups. If you think that will be hard to manage, you'll want to follow this session instead. In this session, the groups are formed *before* the lesson begins, therefore allowing students to dive directly back into research, this time with a new focus.

Look over the work your students wrote in the first bend, and you'll likely see that several hot subtopics have emerged. In the classrooms that piloted the work, teachers found that students were particularly riled up over the injury rate, tryouts in schools, paying to play, and the pressure kids face so we have included additional text sets around these subtopics, which can be found on the CD-ROM. Whether you choose those or others, the key to this work is to determine the subtopics that children are burning to research and then group your students prior to today's teaching.

With groups formed and systems for note-taking established, your students will be primed and ready to dive into the work that is outlined in the rest of Bend II so after today, return to the book and begin with Session 7: Bringing a Critical Perspective to Your Research.

## GETTING READY

- ✓ “Systems Argument Writers Might Use to Collect Research and Develop Thinking” chart (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ Post-its, index cards, and booklets for note-taking (see Link)
- ✓ A sample set of notes enlarged on chart paper as well as Post-its (see Share)
- ✓ A chart with the names of coalition groups in the rooms and the members of those groups.

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.7.1.a,b; W.7.4, W.7.5, W.7.7, W.7.8, RI.7.1, RI.7.9, SL.7.1, SL.7.2, L.7.6



## MINILESSON

# Taking Arguments Up a Notch

## CONNECTION

**Break open the topic of competitive sports, exposing the subtopics and establishing coalition groups.**

"Today begins the second bend of our unit. I'd love to celebrate by hanging a giant piñata here, overhead." I used my hands to create an imaginary piñata, swinging overhead. "Then one of you could smash it open and all the treats would spill around us.

"I'm thinking about that giant piñata because the great researcher, Annie Dillard, compares her work as a science writer to the experience of swatting open a giant piñata. She used that image when she was researching rocks. When studying rocks, researchers quite literally crack them open to see their insides. Dillard describes her study of rocks, saying":

*The rocks I'd seen in my life looked dull because in all ignorance, I'd never thought to knock them open. People have cracked open ordinary New England pegmatite—big and coarse granite—and laid bare clusters of red garnets, or topaz crystals. Chrysoberyl, spodumene, emeralds. They held in their hands crystals that had hung in a hole in the dark for a billion years unseen.*

*I was all for it. I would lay about me right and left with a hammer, and bash the landscape to bits, I would crack open the earth's crust like a piñata and spread to the light the vivid prizes.*

(An American Childhood 1987, 139)

"You and I need to do just what Annie Dillard did, cracking open the topic of competitive sports and lay bare all the many subtopics within it. I looked at your writing from the first bend, and I noticed that many of you were passionate about a few topics." I listed out the subtopics across my fingers. "I noticed that many of you were concerned about the injury rate in kids who play competitive sports, and a bunch of you were intrigued by the pay-to-play information. Others were interested in researching tryouts and the pressures that kids face. So, these are the topics you are going to research across this bend."

**Explain how coalition groups will work.**

"Writers, you'll notice that today you are sitting in groups. Working to make a difference, crafting research-based arguments that will change minds, is not easy, and sometimes it helps to work with other people. So, for this part of the

## ◆ COACHING



*It's important to celebrate at different points in the process—to take the time to validate efforts and relish in the satisfaction of having done important, challenging work, to say "job well done" before launching into the next stage of the journey. Here we're using a celebratory image to rally the class to new work.*

unit, you are going to work in coalition groups. Each of your groups will focus on one of the subtopics of competitive sports. Over the next few days you will work with your group, developing pieces of writing that you will present at a symposium. Each member of the group must produce a piece. Each member of the group must go through the writing process and prepare for the panel presentation. Each of you needs to write and show all that you have learned to do.

"One thing you know how to do is research. Now as you dive into your subtopics, you want to be sure you do this work well."

#### ✿ Name the teaching point.

"Today, I want to teach you that writers think about how to best capture the information they need, and then they dive into research, taking notes in the way that best suits them and best sets them up to think a lot and write a *lot*."

## TEACHING AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Set students up to recall the systems they have learned for collecting evidence toward essays and gathering research and invite them to adapt or invent systems for their current work.**

"So the question you need to ask yourself, writers, is what systems do you know, or could you invent, that will best let you gather evidence and hold onto your thinking, knowing that you are going to be composing and defending evidence-based arguments? Let's set up a chart to describe some of our systems. You've done a lot of research and essay writing over the years. It makes sense, then, for you to recall systems you've used for collecting research and developing thinking. Quickly, think for a moment, and put a thumb up in the air when you've thought of a time when you used a system that worked for you to keep track of evidence and to develop your thinking." When I noticed that most of the students had their thumbs up, they shared their ideas with their partners. While the partnerships talked, I listened in and charted their ideas.

### *Systems Argument Writers Might Use to Collect Research and Develop Thinking*

- Make folders for different reasons and fill the folders with evidence
- Make booklets—only writing on one side of the pages so that they can be cut apart
- Use our notebooks, with pages labeled in different ways, and Post-its
- Use note cards to record evidence (and maybe use these with folders)
- Collect researching using note-taking apps on laptops or iPads

*Depending on your students' past experiences and on their responses to your question, you'll offer a range of support here. You may feel that your class will need more concrete support in remembering or inventing note-taking systems, in which case you'll probably want to have some examples on hand to stimulate their thinking.*

**Channel students to consider if one of these systems best lets them gather evidence and hold onto thinking, or if another or an adaption of one of these might.**

"I looked at the chart with the students for a moment, pondering. "Hmm. . . remember, our question, writers, is this: which systems will let you best gather evidence and develop your thinking? Hold in your mind your final goal—presenting and defending your ideas and evidence to an informed audience. Does one of these systems seem right for you? Is there another one you think would be even better?" Students took a few minutes to discuss the systems in partnerships. After a few minutes, I reconvened the class and a couple of students shared out the systems they planned to use to gather notes.

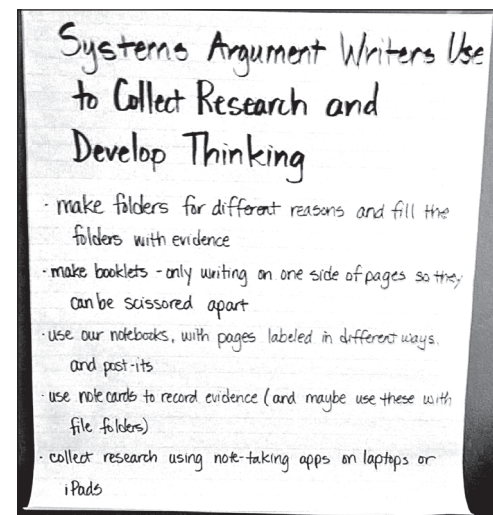
## LINK

**Set writers up to go off and dive deeply into research, using the systems they have decided on.**

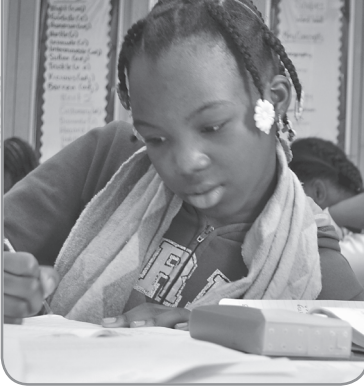
"Writers, before you get into your research—and I know you are dying to get started—it's worth it to take a moment to get your system organized. Now that you have decided which system you want to use, it will help to take the first couple of minutes of writing workshop to collect your materials. You might need to grab Post-its, index cards, or looseleaf to make booklets. Whatever you need to gather, it should really only take a couple of minutes so be sure to move quickly so that you can dive into your research and begin gathering information right away. There is a lot to do!"

*If you are in a classroom that has one-to-one devices, and each child has easy access to technology, by all means consider moving students to digital technology. Many teachers and students have used Evernote, which is an easily learned application you can use on a laptop, tablet, or smart phone. It allows students to take a picture of a text type, type their own thinking, or use a stylus to write. And if, as PARCC and Smarter Balance promise, students in grades seven and eight will eventually need to compose extended responses on computers, it's not a bad idea to give them fluency with these tools. Remember that their fluency will be greater than yours!*

*Still, lots of classrooms depend on paper and pencils. There are advantages to these tools. They don't break or wear out and they don't cost much. And, in fact, the ability to lay many cards out in front of you, to sort them and move them around, is really helpful even for adult writers.*







## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

### Tools Matter

YOU MAY APPROACH TODAY thinking that your conferring and small-group time should all focus on the technicalities of note-taking, and it is true that this is infinitely complex, but we want to stress that it is also worthwhile to devote some time to helping students think about their systems of organization so they approach note-taking with ambitious resolve. When writer select their tools, laying them out in preparation for the task ahead, they are assuming the identity of a researcher. They are dressing up for the new role they will play.

Do you remember those New Year's days when you resolved to start jogging? The new regimen never could start right away, right? First, you need to buy the new running suit. It is the same for us whenever we start a new book. One can't just decide to write a new book and then presto, you start. No way! The first thing that has to happen is the shopping trip where a new notebook is purchased, and a whole stack of the exactly right pens. Any writer will tell you that the tools matter. Some writers can only write with an extra-fine marker pen, or with eleven-point Times New Roman font. People have fetishes that function a bit like good luck charms. They bring on the magic, they create the aura. Today's session, then, is only superficially about the tools themselves, and it is actually about the writers in your care. You are helping them assume roles as researchers and rallying them to tackle this upcoming project with great seriousness.

As students prepare to dive back into the research, their writing will be all about synthesis. They'll be bringing together things that don't ordinarily go together. Writing is the preeminent tool for doing this work. It's about mind over matter. It's about layering insight onto information. So today, use your discussions about tools to help writers rethink the note-taking they already did and resolve to do work that is a notch more thoughtful now because they have a second chance to organize the work. You might, for example, encourage students to who have moved from gathering notes in T-charts to writing notes on index cards or Post-its to sort and categorize, looking for connections between information. They might lay out all their index cards in front of them and then create piles of information that relates. Then they might lay them back out again and look for a different way to sort and categorize.

Then too, as students rearrange their systems, you might encourage them to not just collect facts, but also do some writing about those facts, layering their notes with thinking and analysis. You might say, "Find a system that allows you to leave some room around each piece of information for your thinking," or you might demonstrate using a T-chart, recoding the information learned on one side and your thinking around that information on the other.

(continues)

#### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Maximizing Your Note-Taking System: Researching and Writing a Lot**

"Writers, now that you've all decided on the systems you'll be using to collect information and organize your notes, it's time to really settle into using that system well—maximizing it. Whether you are using note cards, notebooks, booklets, or a digital system, you want to get a lot done, not tinker with jotting down little bits of information. I know you've started, and all I really want to say to you now is, keep going! Now is the time to research and think and write *a lot*. It will be more helpful

to you as you begin drafting if you have piles of note cards filled with evidence and thinking or lots of notes and thinking that you'll cut up and rearrange. If you're having some trouble diving in, you can ask a partner—or simply watch and study, for a minute, someone at your table who seems to have dived in, someone who is up to her elbows in full note cards."

As you confer and lead small groups, make a special point to invite writers to author their own individual ways of note-taking. In a unit of study such as this one, where the work that students do is largely uniform, there is a real risk that this could slide into an “I say jump and you jump” kind of research project where there is little individual ownership.

Although you’ll give writers choices, you’ll also want to show them possibilities. If your students have done this work in previous years, you can bring some of that work to your current class. If student haven’t done that work yet, recruit a former student or a young friend to work with you, helping you produce examples that show what is possible.



## SHARE

# Writers Study Other Writers' Note-Taking Systems and Choose One that Works Best for Them

### **Make a comparison to an exhibition that stimulates new ideas.**

"Writers, lots of times people learn by studying other people's innovations. For example, there is a car show in New York City, and thousands of people, including engineers and manufacturers, come to look at the cars and get new ideas. I thought that maybe we could do this same thing now—we could have sort of a 'show,' an exhibition of note-taking systems.

"I don't think we will have time to day to study everyone's note-taking, but at least for now, I'm going to call on a few of you to go back to your workplaces and set up a display of your note-taking methods. Leave some Post-its beside your work as well, and then the rest of us will come around and study the cool technique you've used, and we'll make lists of things we might try doing as well."

I chose several children (most of whom I'd mentally noted, to make sure that a variety of techniques were being displayed) and asked them to set up their notes.

### **As some children set up a museum of note-taking, demonstrate to the others how you studied another writer's system, glean ideas for how you could classify your own notes.**

As those children dispersed, I said to the others, "Let me show you the way one of my friends had taken her notes and we can start our list of cool ideas just from studying her methods, okay?" I projected an enlarged set of notebook pages. "What I do is I look at what other writers have done, and I say to myself, 'What's something this writer did that might make sense for me as a writer too?'"

I looked carefully at some of the pages. As I did so, I voiced over my responses. "Let's see, this writer seems to collect whatever comes up in the text, but then she marks each of her notes with Post-its that are color-coded: green for notes that support one side of the issue and yellow for those that support another side. That is very cool. I can envision what the pages of my notebook would look like. Yes, that seems like a system that could work for me not just today, but over time." Then I looked up at the children and said, "Are you ready to do similar work? Off you go."

*Gather together a group of chefs, and they'll likely start chatting about new kinds of whisks and pans. Convene surgeons, and you'll likely hear about innovative laser methods and techniques. Those who share a common profession usually enjoy discussing tools and techniques of their trade. And, when one chef has a new whisk, the others are bound to view it with great interest and a touch of envy. So giving your writers a chance to see each other's systems and tools, and getting them to learn from and "borrow from" each other is another way of building the culture of the profession of writing in your classroom.*

**Send children off to study each other's systems of note-taking, convening them after five minutes to collect observations and insights that could inform their own note-taking.**

After the children browsed for a bit, I reconvened the class and harvested insights from them that they'd learned by studying each other's work.

### *Ideas for Making Systems More Powerful*

- *Use colored pens, colored fonts, or icons to mark which side of the argument a detail supports.*
- *Collect information onto Post-its, index cards, or digital notes so these can be sorted easily later.*
- *Use note-taking strategies like pro/con charts or graphs and sketches to show your ideas as you note-take.*
- *Record the author and title of the article so you don't forget.*
- *Leave lots of space so you can reread and write what you think beside bits of information.*
- *Make stars or arrows to show important things and things that connect.*
- *Don't just collect for one side. Try to be fair and open minded.*