

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Presenting Facts as Evidence Video Transcript

Elisabeth Shanley:

So we asked which was more successful, the Aztecs or the Incas? If you're up here arguing, your whole focus is on your details and aiming them at each other to make sure you're talking to each other. We're really going to work on counterarguments. So if Pat says that the stone structures were 10,000 feet tall, he's got a great one. And Declan says, "But our stone structures were 15,000 feet tall." His fact is a good fact, and he found one that answers Pat's argument. Wherever you can do that, you want to try to do that.

The purpose of today's lesson was to help them understand the difference between certain pieces of evidence and information. For this particular lesson they had sides. One of them took the side of the Aztec civilization, the other took the side of the Inca civilization. One of the things I want them to be able to do is genuinely learn the information while giving the information.

While you're not the ones in the hot seats doing the actual debating, the rest of you remember we score the debate. So to help you with that I prepared a sheet to make it a little easier. I have a three, two, one box. So if Johnny has an awesome fact about medicine and he starts off, you're like, "That's a pretty good fact and it supports his argument," I'd call that a two. If Pat comes back with a fact that makes his side look better at medicine, then I'd put a little checkmark in the three box.

When they're doing writing and they're writing big papers, the difference between a kid who gets an A on a paper is all going to be about which evidence that they choose. You need to come out more prepared, and with better information, and more interesting facts if you're going to stand out in your writing, or in your presentation skills. So this was the very beginnings of getting that concept.

The goal here, remember, is to try to tell the difference. Is it a superb, excellent fact that answers back the other side? Is it just an excellent fact, or if they gave a fact to support their side, but it's not that much detail, but it's something. You got to give them credit for that, and I would put that in the one box. What topic would you like to debate, pick one.

Student:
Economy?

Shanley:
Economy, excellent, that will be a good match-up. You can have anything in front of you that you want to use?

Student:
Most of our trading happened at markets in front of towns' temples.

Student:
That allowed us to have a very easy way of getting things we needed without having to travel long distances.

Student:
We had llamas, which would carry all of our baggage so that we could travel far distances and get things that we couldn't get in the surrounding area.

Student:
And the roads made it easier to get the things that we wouldn't originally have, making it easier for us to move forward and progress.

Student:
Well, a lot of travelers they brought their own like raw materials that certain places didn't have.

Student:
So those places -- It was only a limited supply.

Student:
Well, it's a limited supply it's more reliable that there will always be something without having to rely on long distance trade, and areas that we don't know, and unforeseen things happening.

Student:
If you use the roads, then you're less likely to get cheated if you're bartering or trading with someone.

Shanley:
They know by now that they can't use a detail without using it like a tool. So they know that we don't memorize facts, we never memorize facts. They need to understand them.

Mareck:

I looked through like a textbook online and through packets we got about economy. I took those facts and then once I actually got into the debate I, like, looked at the facts and changed those into useful things to say and, like, applied them as counterarguments.

Shanley:

I thought you guys did an excellent job. You started to figure out how to counter each other back and forth a little bit, and the thing that I loved the most about it is when you explain what you were talking about because you know that when you have information, you know why it's good, but does the rest of the people around you know why it's good? Can I have Andrew and partner pick a topic that you would like to do? Government, do we have government here? All right, come on up.

With the Common Core standards changing to argument writing being a big deal, they have to be invested, they have to own the information and that it means something to them because their opinion rests on it. And it's not just a list of details.

Student:

Government positions are not inherited, so if a ruler dies, his son does not immediately take the position. All positions are voted on.

Student:

We had a Sapa Inca, who owned everything, and he made all the rules.

Student:

Our government was a calpulli, and it was a true democracy.

Student:

Where they made their own rules and enforced them.

Student:

Our government cared for the sick and old.

Shanley:

You're off the hook, nice job, guys. Good.

And the biggest thing that they're learning is that there isn't one answer. And that's the most frustrating part. I'm not sitting there telling them this is the right answer and that's not. I'm saying, "Well, it could be the right answer," and somebody else that says something that's different I'm saying, "Well, that could

be the right answer, too." It's really in just what you prove to me. It's exactly in how you argue it to me. You need to convince me.

Student:

Incas, they had the government distribute a lot of like the crops.

Student:

And most of our trading was... well, there wasn't a standardized way of currency there was still trading that was efficient.

Student:

So we didn't have to pay money even though we did value the metals we still... there was a fair way to make sure that everyone still did their part.

Student:

They had irrigation structures that were built to serve everyone.

Student:

Well, the way that you did taxes might be more simple and basic, ours still, again, is a more reliable way of doing things. And more set up and defined.

Shanley:

Okay, time, excellent.

This kind of exercise, where they had to actually grade their peers and they had to listen and make a decision. So when they hear both sides arguing they have to think well, is that a number two fact or a number three fact? That is teaching them how to listen to the details and make a judgment call. Is this a good piece of evidence, and is that a better piece of evidence? Because that's where I'm trying to get them to go.

Mareck:

A good fact might just be like a fact that's kind of random. It's true but it's not pertaining to like what they're talking about. Very good could have some like relevance and a very good would be, like, a strong counterargument that would sway your side to be winning.

Shanley:

So, with your tallies, you've been doing all these checkmarks. I want you to see if you can determine what kind of score your side did manage to get. Did you judge the details the same way? Julia, what did you think of the trade economy?

Student:

I had 18 total with two threes and six twos.

Shanley:

I feel like there needs to be a foundation of the basics. Finding out that you can look up three details for one topic. So the more that I scaffold, and the more that I break down assignments, the more I engage them in it, the more effort and growth I'm getting out of them throughout the whole year.

So can I have a few sort of sign off remarks?

Student:

We only had to be responsible for a few topics instead of the entire chapter.

Shanley:

Does that help fairness, how do you think?

Student:

I think it helped prevent facts from being repeated.

Shanley:

Which would be our goal, which is hard. How do you think this kind of thing can affect your writing?

Student:

It can help you if you're like writing a persuasive piece because you can, like, argue for both sides.

Shanley:

Good, I like that.

I'm teaching them how to be their own historian, how to be their own researcher. It's not just about getting information, it's about how are you going to use it. The emphasis is on the understanding, the emphasis is on the analysis. I really feel a lot more confident that my students, even if I don't tell them all the pieces of a question, they can still run with it, they can still critically think, they can add to it. They don't have to wait for me to tell them every move.

Thank you. Thank you, you guys were awesome.