

LESSON 3.5

Writing an Argument – What the Kids Have to Say About Summer

This lesson provides a deliberate pause after analyzing an opinion piece directed to parents about what to do with their teenage kids during the summer to hear from kids on the subject. Whether students choose to agree with Sasse’s overall claim or counter it, they use their own personal experiences and observations to support their original arguments.

LESSON GOALS

Students will:

- select and organize relevant evidence
- plan and compose an argumentative essay

and demonstrate understanding through:

- evidence charts
- multiparagraph outlines
- argumentative essays

SUGGESTED TIMING

1–2 class period

MATERIALS

- Student readers
- **Handout 3.5.A**
What’s Your Stand? What Makes You Say So?
- **Handout 3.5.B**
Multiple-Paragraph Outline

PART 1: WHAT’S YOUR STAND? WHAT MAKES YOU SAY SO?

OPENING WRITING PROMPT AND DISCUSSION

Share the following prompt with students.



Review Sasse’s article and the descriptive outline you completed based on its messages and strategies. How many different voices or perspectives do you hear during the course of his argument? Whose voices or perspectives do you think are missing? Why do you think Sasse chose to leave those voices out?

Establish that Sasse’s argument primarily relies on his own personal experiences and observations, with the exception of his quoting his grandfather as saying, “every hour of sleep before midnight is worth two hours of sleep after midnight.”

Students will most likely point out that Sasse does not include the voices of those who may express alternative views—some parents, employers, or teenagers.

UNPACKING THE ARGUMENT WRITING PROMPT

Explain to students that they will write their own arguments about the value of summer work for teenagers, and—just like Sasse—they will rely on their own personal experiences and observations to support their claim.

Although many of your students may not have yet officially worked, they most likely have opinions about some of the ways he characterizes today’s teenagers’ “unnerving passivity” and their inclination to spend their time outside of school “consuming: products, media and entertainment, especially entertainment.” Let them know that this will be their opportunity to respond with their own opinions.

Present the writing prompt below and have students spend a few minutes going back to Sasse’s article to generate ideas about how they feel about specific points he made and how their own observations and experiences may inform their thinking.



You just read about how Ben Sasse feels teenagers should spend their summer vacations. As a teenager, what is your reaction to Sasse’s recommendations?

How do you feel about his suggestions and assumptions? Do you mostly agree, mostly disagree, or agree with some parts but disagree with others?

In a brief argument, defend, challenge, or qualify Sasse’s overall claim that summer employment is the best way to build self-reliance among teenagers.

Support your position with evidence from personal experience and observations, and feel free to include knowledge from other sources.

Handout 3.5.A guides students’ thinking as they list some of Sasse’s statements, decide to what extent they agree or disagree, and log evidence for their personal views (in the “What makes you say so?” column).

Emphasize that students may sometimes agree with one of Sasse’s larger points but may generalize his ideas to fit their personal circumstances. For example, while Sasse might think of physical labor as the ideal way to exercise one’s muscles, a student may instead consider athletics to be the ideal method.

Meeting Learners’ Needs

If students need more support, consider generating ideas for the left column together. Then students could signal their agreement or disagreement physically by moving to one side of the room for agree, the opposite side for disagree, and standing in the middle if they are on the fence. Volunteers could share their perspectives as you model completing the chart. By doing this for a few rows, students may be more prepared to complete the rest in peer groups or independently.

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Directions: List some of Sasse's main points in the left-hand column of the chart. Then, for each of Sasse's statements, decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement (or part of it) and mark that in the middle column. In the right-hand column, support your position with evidence from personal experience and observations or based on knowledge from other sources.

Sasse point or quote	What's your stance?		What makes you say so?
	Agree	Disagree (or agree but ...)	
"The time our students didn't spend in school was mostly spent consuming: products, media and entertainment, especially entertainment."	×		Most of my friends do spend most of their time outside of school watching YouTube videos and sharing selfies on Snapchat.
"And parents, on the whole, had fewer household labor needs and could afford to spare their kids the less pleasant experiences of their own childhoods"	×		If physical labor is no longer necessary, it seems more important to find ways for teenagers to learn skills that will be used later in their adult lives. For example, I know kids who go to coding camp and web-design classes over the summer.
"... adolescence should not be an escape from adulthood; it should be when we learn how to be adults."		×	When I complete a group project or play softball, it may not seem like labor, but these activities teach me how to work with others. Working with others is an important skill to learn for adulthood.
"We want our kids to exercise their muscles and their minds."		×	While I agree that teenagers should exercise their muscles and their minds, it doesn't have to come from hard physical work and reading literature (as Sasse suggests). I exercise my muscles by playing softball and exercise my mind by coding.
"The health of our republic ... is also built on the Teddy Roosevelt-like vigor of its citizens and local self-reliance."	×		I agree that self-reliance is an important trait for Americans to have. I may not have a "job," but I am learning self-reliance by excelling in academics and in sports.

Handout 3.5.A

Once students have settled on how they might potentially respond to a list of Sasse's points or quotes, have them articulate their overall claim in a complex sentence.

Completing one of the following frames will help students craft their claim in an academic style.

Sentence frames for agreement:

- Sasse argues _____, and I agree because _____.
- I agree with Sasse that _____ because my experience _____ confirms it.

Source

These and other sentence and paragraph frames can be found in Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*.

Sentence frames for disagreement:

- I disagree with Sasse's view that _____ because, as my personal experiences have demonstrated, _____.
- Sasse's claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that _____.

Paragraph frames for agreeing and disagreeing:

- My feelings on the issue of _____ are mixed. I do support Sasse's position that _____; however, based on my personal experience, _____.
- I am of two minds about Sasse's claim that _____. On the one hand, I agree that _____. On the other hand, I am not sure if _____.

Sample paragraph based on a frame:

My feelings on the issue of teenagers working over summer vacation are mixed. I do support Sasse's position that working hard helps teenagers become self-reliant; however, based on my personal experience, a teenager can also develop self-reliance by juggling the responsibilities of being a hardworking student and team athlete.

PART 2: OUTLINING YOUR ARGUMENT AND ASSERTING YOUR CLAIM

Ask students to use **Handout 3.5.B** (the MPO) to organize their ideas before composing their complete arguments.

In composing their introduction, have students incorporate their customized version of the *They Say / I Say* frame they chose to use, and then ask them to broadly address other subclaims they will assert in the course of their arguments.

Sample student introduction:

My feelings on the issue of teenagers working over summer vacation are mixed. I do support Sasse's position that working hard helps teenagers become self-reliant; however, based on my personal experience, a teenager can also develop self-reliance by juggling the responsibilities of being a hardworking student and team athlete. Also, with the rising importance of technology and the demand for skills outside of physical labor, a teenager's development of technological skills seems to hold more importance than it did in Sasse's generation.

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PART 3: SUPPORTING YOUR CLAIM WITH PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS**COMPOSING THE SECOND AND THIRD PARAGRAPHS**

Have students return to **Handout 3.5.A** and select the most relevant quotes from Sasse and their related responses.

Suggest to students that in structuring their body paragraphs, it might be useful to first introduce Sasse’s quotes or ideas and then follow each with their reactions to those ideas.

Sample student body paragraphs:

Sasse describes how he and his wife design their children’s summer activities to “exercise their minds and their muscles,” and he uses sending his daughter to work on a cattle ranch as an example. While it’s true that working on a ranch probably does exercise the mind and the muscles, in my experience, taking on the responsibilities of being a hardworking student and athlete can require just as much self-reliance and discipline as such a job could. Juggling assignments from all of my classes forces me to learn how to manage my time, schedule in activities like softball practice and other extracurriculars, and even trains me to put away distractions like my cell phone. In fact, completing different academic assignments over summer break and during the school year exercises my mind more than any one task that I would be asked to repeat during a manual summer job such as detasseling would.

The decline in summer employment opportunities can be largely blamed on the decrease in the need for the types of labor that Sasse believes will allow teenagers to become self-reliant. Sasse writes, “... parents, on the whole, had fewer household labor needs and could afford to spare their kids the less pleasant experiences of their own childhoods.” If this physical labor is no longer necessary, it seems that more important than finding ways to allow teenagers to do manual labor is finding ways for teenagers to learn skills that will be used later in their adult lives. While too much media consumption can be unhealthy, with the use of technology only increasing, it practically seems irresponsible for a teenager to not practice skills such as coding or web design that could potentially prepare them for a career in the technology industry.

COMPOSING A CONCLUSION

Before they write their conclusions, recommend to students that they think of the conclusion of their arguments as an opportunity to reassert their overall claim and recast Sasse’s argument through the lens of their own experiences or observations.

Meeting Learners’ Needs**Sentence-writing practice**

For free practice on writing sentences using *however* and *therefore*, visit Quill.org: quill.org/activity_sessions/anonymous?activity_id=168 and [connect. quill.org/#/play/lesson/-Lit1Fh52fzccQfBYkH5](https://quill.org/#/play/lesson/-Lit1Fh52fzccQfBYkH5).

Sample student conclusion:

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Sasse asserts that “... adolescence should not be an escape from adulthood; it should be when we learn how to be adults,” and he’s right. While completing a group project or playing on a sports team may not seem like labor, these activities teach teenagers how to work with others, a skill that is vital in the workplace and is used every day in adult life. And those teenagers who spend their summers designing YouTube videos to teach others the art of origami or how to master a video game challenge could be gaining valuable technological experience while pursuing their passions. Maybe Sasse just needs to get with the times and broaden his thinking to consider the many ways teenagers can develop a sense of self-reliance without toiling in the fields at the break of dawn.