

Lesson Skill: Identifying false premise

Strand Reading — nonfiction

SOL 11.5

12.5

Materials

- Computer access for each student
- Copy of fallacy definitions
- Copy of *Practice False Reasoning* document
- Curriculum Framework 11.5

Lesson

1. Brainstorm with students topics for persuasion that involve their own lives; have them think small and local. Ideas might include dress code, using computers in the classroom, homework, a parental issue such as curfew, getting a pet, video game time, etc. Be sure that the list includes topics for which their own general knowledge and experience is evident. Avoid topics that would require research or that would become an emotion-based argument.
2. Have each student pick a topic about which they have a strong opinion. With each student seated at a computer, have the student freewrite his/her opinion with supporting reasons. Allow five to ten minutes for the freewrite. At the end of the time, tell each student to finish the sentence he/she is currently writing. Do a “write around” where each student moves one seat to the next computer. Students read what is on the computer in front of them and add arguments to what the first student has written.
3. Repeat this “write around” for two to three more moves, allowing each new student to add or counter. This will not produce good writing, but it will get lots of opinions and reasons in writing for students to work with. Have each student print or save the piece he/she originated.
4. The next day, have students take out the papers they originated and get two colored highlighters. As they read over the paper, have them highlight one side of the argument in one color and the other side in a different color.
5. Display the fallacy definitions. Discuss with the class and have students take notes. Students should recognize persuasive techniques such as:
 - ad hominem — means “to the man” does not argue the issue, instead it argues the person;
 - red herring — is a deliberate attempt to divert attention;
 - straw man — creates the illusion of having refuted a proposition by substituting a similar yet weaker proposition; and
 - begging the question — assumes the conclusion is true without proving it; circular argument.

6. Display *Practice False Reasoning* document. Have students work with a partner to match up the example with the type. Discuss answers with the whole class.
7. Return to the write around the students did earlier. Have them read through the opinions and underline possible places where false reasoning might have been used. Collect the papers.
8. Compile a list of sentences from the student papers that are examples of the four types of false reasoning. Post and use for discussion the next day.

Strategies for Differentiation:

- Vocabulary — Word Wall
- Chart Paper — Brainstorming as a group
- Free-Writing format/procedure
- Model process as a group — exemplify process of adding arguments
- Modify using the “group” or collaborative learning strategy to produce a group product and also complete group reviews to create additional arguments/counter arguments

Practice False Reasoning

Identify the false reasoning used for each of the following. Choose from red herring, ad hominem, begging the question, or straw man. Each will be used once.

1. The government doesn't take care of the poor because it doesn't have a tax specifically to support the poor.
2. I know your car isn't working right, but if you had gone to the store one day earlier, you would not be having problems.
3. Tobacco has been shown to be as addictive as heroin and thus should be treated as a dangerous drug.
4. Green Peace's strategies aren't effective because they are all hippies.