Argumentative Writing

Learning Targets
• Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
• Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
• Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
• Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
• Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
• Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
• Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
• Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Writing an Argumentative Essay
Writers and speakers use argumentative techniques to influence the attitudes and actions of an intended audience regarding a wide variety of issues. Effective argumentation involves conveying claims and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

You will work with your teacher and with your classmates to construct two arguments that respond to a specific perspective. You will then use these as models for your own writing.

ACTIVITY 1
Discovering the Elements of an Argumentative Response Essay

Before Reading
1. Honing skills in civil debate and diplomatic argumentation is important in many careers and fields. When trying to convince others of your point of view, it is especially important to understand the logic of the opposition. Think of the last time you engaged in a debate or disagreement with a teacher or classmate about a topic worthy of debate. Were you able to understand the other point of view well enough to respond with a rebuttal based on logic and reason? How did you address the opposing point of view effectively?

LEARNING STRATEGIES
RAFT, Discussion Groups, Close Reading, Brainstorming, Think-Pair-Share, Drafting, Peer Editing, Sharing and Responding

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
Rebuttal: n. Evidence that attacks the criticisms against a thesis or claim, a refutation

Materials: Pens and highlighters for marking the text
Pacing: 1 class period
2. The following letter of veto (a form of rebuttal) is an example of formal argumentation that responds to a specific piece of legislation passed by the State Senate of Illinois. The author, Adlai Ewing Stevenson, served as the governor of Illinois from 1949 to 1953 and later as Ambassador to the United Nations.

Governor Stevenson maintains a professional persona while expressing his opinion that Bill No. 93 is ridiculous. As you read, highlight specific phrases and clauses that are intended to be gently humorous as well as convincing.

To the Honorable, the Members of the Senate of the Sixty-sixth General Assembly:

I herewith return, without my approval, Senate Bill No. 93 entitled “An Act to Provide Protection to Insectivorous Birds by Restricting Cats.” This is the so-called “Cat Bill.” I veto and withhold my approval from this bill for the following reasons:

It would impose fines on owners or keepers who permitted their cats to run at large off their premises. It would permit any person to capture, or call upon the police to pick up and imprison, cats at large. It would permit the use of traps. The bill would have statewide application—on farms, in villages, and in metropolitan centers.

This legislation has been introduced in the past several sessions of the Legislature, and it has, over the years, been the source of much comment—not all of which has been in serious vein. It may be that the general assembly has now seen fit to refer it to one who can view it with a fresh outlook. Whatever the reasons for passage at this session, I cannot believe there is a widespread public demand for this law or that it could, as a practical matter, be enforced.

Furthermore, I cannot agree that it should be the declared public policy of Illinois that a cat visiting a neighbor’s yard or crossing the highway is a public nuisance. It is in the nature of cats to do a certain amount of unescorted roaming. Many live with their owners in apartments or other restricted premises, and I doubt if we want to make their every brief foray an opportunity for a small game hunt by zealous citizens—with traps or otherwise. I am afraid this bill could only create discord, recrimination and enmity. Also consider the owner’s dilemma: To escort a cat abroad on a leash is against the nature of the cat, and to permit it to venture forth for exercise unattended into a night of new dangers is against the nature of the owner. Moreover, cats perform useful service, particularly in rural areas, in combating rodents—work they necessarily perform alone and without regard for property lines.

We are all interested in protecting certain varieties of birds. That cats destroy some birds, I well know, but I believe this legislation would further but little the worthy cause to which its proponents give such unselfish effort. The problem of cat versus bird is as old as time. If we attempt to resolve it by legislation who knows but what we may be called upon to take sides as well in the age-old problems of dog versus cat, bird versus bird, or even bird versus worm. In my opinion, the State of Illinois and its local governing bodies already have enough to do without trying to control feline delinquency.

For these reasons, and not because I love birds the less or cats the more, I veto and withhold my approval from Senate Bill No. 93.

Respectfully,

Adlai E. Stevenson, Governor
After Reading

3. When responding to and analyzing text, it is important to understand the relationship among the author’s role, the audience, the format, and the topic. Using the RAFT strategy can help analyze the text for these elements. If only one element is changed or adjusted, the text can take on an entirely different complexity. Begin by identifying the following elements from the sample text:

a. Author’s Role
Sample response: The writer is the Governor of Illinois whose job it is to veto a legislative bill that he considers unenforceable, unfair, and downright silly. His task is to show why he cannot support the bill without offending its proponents.

b. Audience
Sample response: The audience is the Illinois Senate, including both proponents and opponents of this legislation which saw fit to pass the bill, probably knowing that the Governor would veto the bill. A veto is a public document so the audience also includes the wider public.

c. Format
Sample response: The format is a formal letter of veto.

d. Topic
Sample response: The topic is a veto of legislation enacted to restrict the movements of cats in favor of protecting the lives of birds.

Check Your Understanding
Examine the specific phrases and clauses you highlighted or underlined. How would you categorize the tone of this letter? Why does Stevenson choose to approach this topic with this tone? What is the intended effect of this approach? Sample response: The tone of this veto is wryly humorous. Stevenson uses wit and humor to amuse the opponents and convince the proponents of this legislation that it would be impossible to enforce and unfair to cats and cat owners. Governor Stevenson uses hyperbole for comic effect and to underscore his reasoning, saying, “I doubt if we want to make their every brief foray an opportunity for a small game hunt by zealous citizens—with traps or otherwise.” He crowns his argument with this reducto ad absurdum: “The problem of cat versus bird is as old as time. If we attempt to resolve it by legislation who knows but what we may be called upon to take sides as well in the age-old problems of dog versus cat, bird versus bird, or even bird versus worm.” He also offers cogent reasoning to assure he is being reasonable and not insensitive to the value of bird life: “I cannot believe there is a widespread public demand for this law or that it could, as a practical matter, be enforced.” “That cats destroy some birds, I well know, but I believe this legislation would further but little the worthy cause to which its proponents give such unselfish effort.”

4 After Reading: RAFT is a strategy that helps initiate reader response, facilitate analysis of a text, and promote understanding of the relationship between the author, the audience, the format, and the topic. Begin by creating a class definition of each component of RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic). Pair students (or place them in small groups) to discuss and respond to the graphic organizer. Ask students to share their responses with the class.

5 Check Your Understanding:
After students answer the question independently or in small groups, lead them in a discussion of the phrases and clauses they highlighted and their understanding of the intended effect of each element. Clarify the terms and concepts if necessary.

ASSESS
Use the Check Your Understanding to evaluate students’ grasp of diction and tone. Based on your observations of students’ understanding of the argumentative elements of a structured response, assess which students may need additional support and resources.

ADAPT
A number of examples of writing to respond are included in well-known literature and rhetoric courses. If you would like to expose students to a longer and more complex example of this type of writing, you may wish to refer to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham jail” as an extension example for potential use in class.
Writing Workshop 2 (continued)

ACTIVITY 2
Writing a Class Argumentative Response

PLAN

Materials: Overhead or whiteboard to display group-generated work; research materials, if necessary; Materials generated in Activity 1 to serve as models

Pacing: 1–2 class periods

TEACHER TO TEACHER

This activity is intended to be a guided writing activity involving the entire class. However, you may want to use small groups for specific parts of the activity. If so, writing groups should be organized so that specific roles are assigned to each member of the groups of no more than four (e.g., 2 recorders, a manager, and a presenter).

TEACH

1. Review the prompt. Be sure to remind students of the elements they should incorporate in the class-generated argumentative response essay. Refer to the scoring guide to inform your areas of emphasis.

2. Engage students in a shared reading of the article. Do a close reading of the text, paying attention to the case being promoted by the Lloyd family and their lawsuit. Remember that some parts of the lawsuit make explicit claims, but other claims are implied rather than stated explicitly.

NJ Woman Hit by Ball Sues Little League Player

by David Chang

June 22, 2012

Little Leaguer Sued by Teammate’s Mom

1. There’s no crying in baseball, but as one local teen is learning, there are lawsuits.

2. Back in May of 2010, Matthew Migliaccio, a catcher in the Manchester Little League, was helping a pitcher warm up during a bullpen session. Matt’s father, Bob Migliaccio, says one of his son’s warm-up throws got away from him and struck Elizabeth Lloyd, the mother of a teammate, in the face.

3. “Mrs. Lloyd was sitting on the top of the bench and the ball came over the fence and hit her,” said Bob. Bob says his son, who was 11 at the time, ran over to check on Lloyd who he says claimed to be okay.

4. “A few weeks later she came to a game and the team gave her flowers,” said Bob. “Matt went up to her and formally apologized and she said again, ‘I’m fine Matt, I know you didn’t do anything wrong.’”

5. Lloyd, 45, of Manchester, was not okay however. The Asbury Park Press reports she suffered multiple fractures. Yet while Lloyd suffered the injury, it’s Matthew and his family who felt the insult. Six months after his son apologized to Lloyd, Bob says he received a letter from the woman’s attorney demanding home owner’s insurance information. On April 24 of this year, Lloyd’s attorney filed a lawsuit against Matt, who is now 13. The Press reports that Lloyd is seeking $500,000 in damages to cover medical costs stemming from the incident. The attorney, Riaz A. Mian, tells the Press the damages his client is seeking is the maximum that the family’s home insurance covers.

6. The suit claims Matthew intentionally struck her, causing permanent injuries, according to the Press. Mian tells Asbury Park the suit was filed after several failed attempts to reach a settlement with insurance companies and that “life is now different” for his
client. According to Mian, Lloyd had to undergo reconstructive surgery and currently suffers from headaches.

7 The International Little League tells NBC10 that all local chapters carry accident insurance that covers players, coaches and concessions but not spectators.

8 Bob also tells Asbury Park the entire ordeal has made the family step back from the league. He's taken a break from coaching while his wife Sue has stepped down as manager of the league's snack stand. Matthew continues to play however.

9 “He accidentally threw a ball,” said Bob. “He didn’t do anything wrong and I don’t want him to carry that around thinking he did something wrong. It’s just not right.”

10 No court date has been set for the lawsuit.

Prewriting

1. Using the left column of the following graphic organizer, list the explicit or implied points that Lloyd uses to support her position that the Migliaccio family is liable in this case. Then, in the right column, brainstorm possible responses and evidence that could be used to argue against her position. Prepare to share your ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lloyd’s claims (explicit or implicit)</th>
<th>Potential rebuttals and evidence that could be employed to respond to this claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At little league games, spectators should not be held responsible for paying attention to their environment or watching out for stray/fly balls. It is not reasonable to expect spectators to be vigilant or to protect themselves.</td>
<td>Sample response: All spectators take risks when they attend a sporting event. It is the same as walking in a park when a sporting event takes place. An element of danger is present in all activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample response: Those who hit baseballs should be liable for any injuries or damage incurred as a result of their hits or misses or mishits.</td>
<td>Sample response: Accidents happen; no athlete intends to hit a spectator. Responsibility implies intent to harm. In this case there was no intent to harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample response: The Migliaccio family has insurance and the purpose of insurance is to cover any unexpected or unplanned damages that occur, therefore Lloyd can collect damages.</td>
<td>Sample response: Just because a person has insurance does not mean he can be sued for damages for an accident in a public place in a court of law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Response: Damage or injury incurred can develop over time, rather than at the moment of the incident.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After all class members have shared their ideas, you will have a solid representation of a range of responses and evidence for rebuttal of counterclaims. As a class, synthesize this information, and select the most relevant and persuasive responses and evidence for inclusion in the rebuttal to the case against the Migliaccio family.

To augment your evidence, spend time researching online sources as well as conducting informal interviews. Search for both primary and secondary sources. Your goal here is to search out information that represents the entire range of relevant perspectives on this lawsuit—not just your own.

Once you have found additional sources, consider their validity and reliability. If you deem your new information valid and reliable, add the information to your brainstorm list so you can accurately represent these viewpoints in your class-constructed text.

To consider your sources’ validity and reliability, think about the following questions:

- Validity: Does the information appear to be legitimate? Is it timely and relevant to the rebuttal? In what ways could this evidence be used to support the ideas generated for response?
- Reliability: Are the author’s name and qualifications clearly identified? Is the information from a respected source of publication? If it is an online resource, is the site listed as .gov, .edu, or .org rather than .com?

Once you have compiled a list of relevant and valid evidence, choose two to three of the most compelling and precise pieces of evidence and place them on the board.

After everyone has submitted their best evidence, you will have a solid representation of a range of views and information on the topic. As a class, use the synthesized information to construct an outline that will frame the response.

Drafting
Your class should now have a clear and thoughtful line of reasoning in response to Lloyd’s lawsuit, a list of specific and relevant evidence, and a proposed outline. The next step is to plan an approach that will suit the public audience (not just Lloyd) and the purpose.

Remember that part of your task is to present a persona that maintains formal style while exposing the absurdity of this case. This is crafted not only into what you write, but how you write it. The tone you strike will have a great deal of impact on the effectiveness and ethos of your response. Before you begin drafting, come to an agreement as a group about how to promote this persona in your response. This selection will influence your choices regarding diction, syntax, and rhetorical appeals/devices.

As a class, work together to draft the introduction, or opening paragraph of the response. Remember that while this will take the form of a letter of response, the forum is public and the appeals should be directed at a broader audience than just Lloyd as an individual.
9. Your teacher will assign your group a portion of the outline to draft. Work together as a group to draft your portion of the response and prepare to share your draft with the class for revision before including it in the class-constructed response.

10. After your class has assembled these portions to create a complete body, your teacher will lead your class as you work together to draft a conclusion, or closing.

Check Your Understanding
After you have completed this process, read over the drafted response that your class has created. Use these questions as a checklist.

• Does the introduction clearly establish your group’s position and the topic of contention?
• Are the strongest points of argument in the lawsuit adequately addressed?
• Does the writing maintain decorum while promoting the specified persona desired?
• Does the writing expose the absurdity of holding small children liable for stray pitches?
• Is the tone effective for the purpose and audience?
• Do transitions help the reader clearly make connections among the ideas of the response?
• Is the response organized in the most effective way to convince the audience?

Revising for Language and Writer’s Craft

Using Hyperbole
Sometimes, in order to expose the absurdity of a situation, it is necessary to employ figurative language or hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration). In these cases, the figurative expression or exaggeration is not meant to be taken literally. Rather, the intention is to expose the irrational reasoning of the opposing viewpoint by gently (or sometimes not so gently) mocking ideas the other side proposes as logical or reasonable.

11. Reread the examples of figurative language and hyperbole employed in the sample text. Then, in the space provided, explain what impression Stevenson hopes to make by employing a hyperbolic diction and imagery in each instance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language/hyperbole from the passage</th>
<th>Explanation of the intended effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It would permit any person to capture, or call upon the police to pick up and imprison, cats at large.</td>
<td>Sample response: Using the language of human capture and incarceration makes the idea of restraining cats ridiculous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I doubt if we want to make their every brief foray an opportunity for a small game hunt by zealous citizens—with traps or otherwise.</td>
<td>Sample response: “small game hunt” uses the language of hunting and thus contextualizes the restraint of cats as absurd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To escort a cat abroad on a leash is against the nature of the cat, . . .</td>
<td>Sample response: Inflated diction “escort” coupled with “on a leash” creates a ridiculous image.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Writing Workshop 2 (continued)

12. Look back at the response you drafted as a class. Have you already employed examples of language that intends to exaggerate the claims or ideas behind the lawsuit? In what places could ideas be revised, or words or phrases be added or replaced to exploit this subtle but powerful technique? Consider specific diction as well as hyperbole of ideas. Prepare to share your thoughts with the class to be considered for inclusion in the class constructed response.

**Editing**

After presenting your revisions to the class and hearing the revisions of others, it’s time to polish the final draft of the argumentative essay by editing for mistakes. Consider all of the elements listed in the Language category of the Scoring Guide.

**ACTIVITY 3**

**Writing an Argumentative Response Essay with Peers**

**WRITING PROMPT:** With a partner (or partners), locate a published, publicly filed lawsuit or proposed bill that inspires you to respond with rebuttal. Then, work together to respond to the stated or implied ideas expressed in the piece in a well-crafted letter or essay. Refer to the Scoring Guide for this writing task—it will help you understand where to focus your attention and efforts. Your peer-constructed response should include the elements listed in Activity 2 under the writing prompt.