

6.3 Analyzing and Comparing

This activity introduces basic evidence evaluation skills. Students will compare the purpose and content of several different styles of articles and think about the way each could be used as evidence in a debate round. This activity will introduce students to thinking about sources as they begin to write their own briefs.

Time Allotment

30 minutes

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- be introduced to analyze the purpose, audience, and arguments in a source.
- develop critical reading skills.

Materials and Preparation

Each student will need 1 copy of each of 3 different newspaper or magazine articles. The 3 articles should deal with a similar event or issue. However, they should fit into three distinct categories:

- A short article that simply reports a fact or event.
- A longer article that also only reports a fact or event.
- An editorial that presents a clear argument.

For example, you may include a newspaper report that a particular bill has been vetoed by the president, an article that describes the content of the bill, and an op-ed column in favor of the bill.

Method

Pass out the articles to the class. Give the students time (10-15 minutes, depending on article length) to read over the articles silently. Students should underline/bracket the main facts or arguments presented in the article. You may also want to pass out the articles the night before and have students read them to prepare for the activity as homework.

Break the class into groups of 3-5 students. Have students discuss the differences between the style and content of the articles. Groups should discuss questions such as:

- What is the purpose of each article? What does each attempt to prove?
- Who is the intended audience of article?
- How do the articles differ in structure and organization?
- Are there implicit arguments present in the articles which seem only to inform?
- How would the different types of articles be useful in a debate round?

Have representatives of each group share conclusions with the class in short reports.

Follow-up Activity:

This activity can be followed up (or preceded) with a short, introductory discussion about evaluating evidence. Talk about authorial intent and bias; facts, evidence and warrants; and audience.