

Thank you

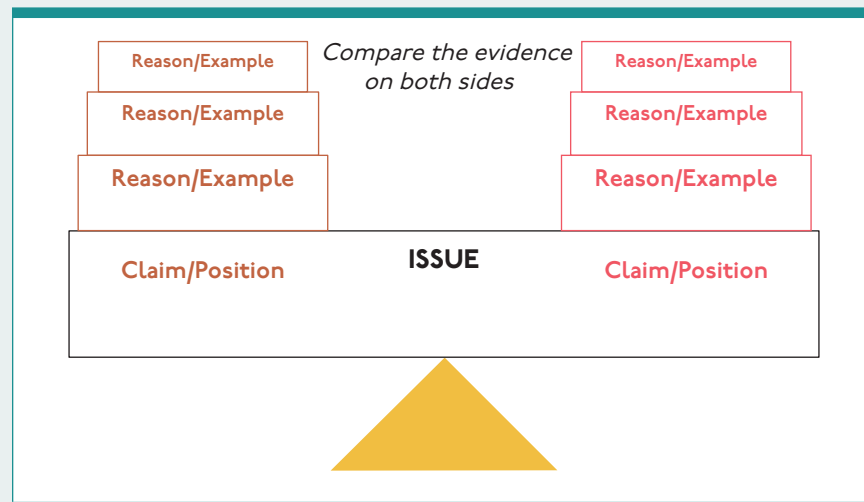
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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The K-3 Guide to Academic Conversations*.

LEARN MORE about this title!

ACTIVITIES FOR BUILDING THE SKILL OF EVALUATING

- **Pro-Con.** In each pair there is a director and an actor. The teacher provides the prompt and a series of pictures or words that show the positive and negative aspects of an idea. For example, “Should we have a trampoline at school?” The director poses the question, claps hands, and says, “Pro!” The actor then says all the positive ideas, evidence, and reasons that he or she can, using the pictures as support. The director cuts the actor off at an appropriate time (to not let the partner use up all of his or her ideas) and says, “Con!,” and the actor must then use an academic transition (“However,” “On the other hand,” “Then again, etc.) to introduce the cons. They go back and forth a couple more times until the actor runs out of ideas.
- **Argument Balance Scale.** The balance scale is a visual (or manipulative) scaffold for getting students to build up both sides of a controversy or question and decide between two sides or options. Students decide which two sides are best to compare (school uniforms or not; dogs or cats are better pets; homework or not, etc.) and put them on each side. Then they work together to come up with reasons and examples that support (weigh down) each side. They should try to keep from telling their opinions right off and wait until they have filled in reasons and/or examples on each side. Then they compare sides to see which is heavier. You should model how to do this with a partner to maximize oral language used (e.g., you don’t just want the more verbal or fluent kid filling in everything without any talk). You can model evaluation language such as “Which side weighs more? Why? Are any reasons bigger than other reasons? I think that this example is very strong because . . .”

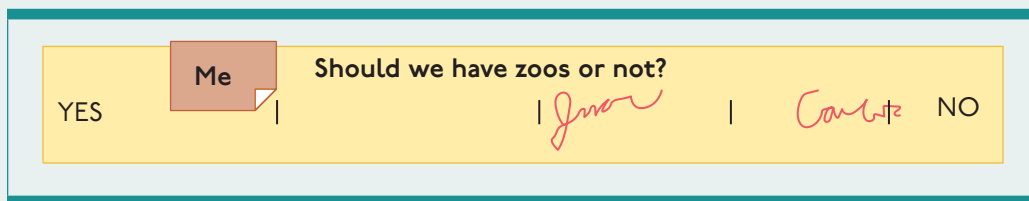


Argument Balance Scale Visual Organizer

- **“Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Grids & Continuums** (adapted from Zwiers, O’Hara, & Pritchard, 2014). This set of activities is based on students having successive pair-shares in which they improve their ideas and language with each turn. It takes a little longer than a normal pair-share, but is often worth it with respect to content and language development. You can have students get into conversation lines or circles, which make the transitions less chaotic. In some cases, you can have them write their answers to your prompt before and after the activity to see the difference the pair-shares make. You can have students work on a wide range of interpersonal communication skills in addition to supporting, such as clarifying, nonverbal communication, validating the ideas of others.

Have students meet with their first partners and tell them which line or circle talks first. Then use a sound (one ding) for turns to change in a partnership and another sound (two dings) for switching to another person. Notice positives and things to change during each pair-share, and in between the pair-shares you can emphasize and remind them to borrow ideas and language from partners to make their ideas stronger and clearer for the next partner. If you don't model this and remind them often, they will tend to just say the same thing or even less each time. You can also have students, when listening, to ask a support question to the partner (What's another example of that?), if desired. Remind students that one of their jobs is to help their fellow students talk more and talk more academically during the year.

Opinion Continuum. If it is an opinion-based prompt, students can use a continuum and move their name along it (on a sticky note) depending on where they stand on the issue after each turn.



Sample Opinion Continuum

- **Highlight Academic Language.** Teach the comparative and superlative of *important*: “This evidence is important because . . .” “This example is more important than that example because . . .” “This reason is the most important because . . .”
- **Respectfully Disagree.** Ask students to pair up and each take a side of an issue. Tell them it doesn't matter if they don't truly believe their side; it is for the activity. The purpose is to learn to take different perspectives. For example pose the prompt, “Are cats better than dogs?” Then ask them to talk about the prompt while following these norms:
 - I respectfully listen to and try to understand others' ideas, even if I disagree.
 - I don't criticize or make fun of other students.
 - I value others, even if I challenge their ideas.
 - I know I am valuable, even if others disagree with my ideas.
 - I am open to changing my mind.
- **Assessing the Skill of Evaluating, Comparing, and Choosing Ideas in Conversations**

You can formatively assess students' abilities to evaluate, compare, and choose relevant ideas by observing students and using the Conversation Observation and Analysis Tool (COAT, also available for download and in Chapter 5 of the book). You can also use a basic checklist for assessing the skill:

- Do both students seem to be on the same page as they negotiate the idea?
- Do they use questioning moves to ask each other to compare ideas?
- Do they decide on an idea that is supported by evidence and can they explain their thinking?