

## PART 1

# UNDERSTANDING EVIDENCE-BASED CLAIMS

## “Connecting the Dots”

### OBJECTIVE:

Students learn the importance and elements of making evidence-based claims through a close reading of part of the text.



## ACTIVITIES

### 1- INTRODUCTION TO UNIT

The teacher presents the purpose of the unit and explains the proficiency of making EBCs.

### 2- INDEPENDENT READING

Students independently read part of the text with a text-dependent question to guide them.

### 3- READ ALOUD AND CLASS DISCUSSION

Students follow along as they listen to the text being read aloud, and the teacher leads a discussion guided by a series of text-dependent questions.

### 4- MODEL FORMING EBCs

The teacher models a critical reading and thinking process for forming EBCs about texts.

**ESTIMATED TIME:** 2-3 days

### MATERIALS:

Forming EBC Handout  
Forming EBC Tool  
EBC Criteria Checklist I  
Making EBC Tool



## ALIGNMENT TO CCSS

### TARGETED STANDARD(S): RI.6.1

RI.6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

### SUPPORTING STANDARD(S): RI.6.2 RI.6.3 SL.6.1

RI.6.2: Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

RI.6.3: Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

SL.6.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.



## ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTION TO UNIT

The teacher presents the purpose of the unit and explains the proficiency of making evidence-based claims, making reference to the first five criteria from the EBC Checklist I.

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Introduce the central purpose of the unit and the idea of a “claim” someone might make. The following is a possible approach:

Introduce the first characteristic of an evidence-based claim: “States a conclusion you have come to... and that you want others to think about.” Pick a subject that is familiar to students, such as “school lunches” and ask them to brainstorm some claim statements they might make about the subject. Introduce the fourth characteristic: “All parts of the claim are supported by specific evidence you can point to” and distinguish claims that can be supported by evidence from those that are unsupported opinions, using the students’ brainstorm list as a reference.

Move from experience-based claims to claims in a field like science. Start with more familiar, fact-based claims (For example, the claim “It is cold outside” is supported by evidence like “The outside thermometer reads 13 degrees F” but is not supported with statements like “It feels that way to me”). Then discuss a claim such as “Smoking has been shown to be hazardous to your health” and talk about how this claim was once considered to be an opinion, until a weight of scientific evidence over time led us to accept this claim as fact. Introduce the third characteristic/criterion: “Demonstrates knowledge of and sound thinking about a topic” and with it the idea that a claim becomes stronger as we expand our knowledge about a subject and find more and better evidence to support the claim.

Move from scientific claims to claims that are based in text that has been read closely. Use an example of a text read recently in class or one students are likely to be familiar with. Highlight that textual claims can start as statements about

what a text tells us directly (literal comprehension) such as “Tom Sawyer gets the other boys to paint the fence” and then move to simple conclusions we draw from thinking about the text, like: “Tom Sawyer is a clever boy” because (evidence) “He tricks the other boys into doing his work and painting the fence.” Then explain how text-based claims can also be more complex and require more evidence (e.g., “Mark Twain presents Tom Sawyer as a ‘good bad boy’ who tricks others and gets into trouble but also stands up for his friend Jim.”), sometimes – as in this example – requiring evidence from more than one text or sections of text.

Explain that the class will be practicing the skill of making evidence-based claims that are based in the words, sentences, and ideas of a text by closely reading and analyzing the text (or texts) selected for this unit.

In the activities that follow, students will learn to make a text-based claim by moving from literal understanding of its details, to simple supported conclusions or inferences, to claims that arise from and are supported by close examination of textual evidence. This inductive process mirrors what effective readers do and is intended to help students develop a method for moving from comprehension to claim. In addition, the guiding questions, model claims, and movement through the text over the course of the unit are sequenced to transition students from an initial, literal understanding of textual details to:

- Claims about fairly concrete ideas presented in short sections of the text;
- Claims about more abstract ideas implied across sections of the text;
- More global claims about the entire text and its meaning.



## ACTIVITY 2: INDEPENDENT READING

Students independently read part of the text with a text-dependent question to guide them.

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES



Students independently read the first paragraph of the speech's text and answer the question, "What important detail do we learn about the speaker as he begins his commencement address? What sentence(s) in the paragraph tell you this information?" After all students have finished reading the paragraph, lead a brief discussion in which students volunteer something they learned about the speaker. List their answers on the board, checking those that are repeated. Go back to the list and ask this question: "What words or sentences in the paragraph tell you this information?" for each of the answers, having students read the "evidence" that led them to their answer. Do not worry here about labelling their answers "right" or "wrong", but ask them to see if what they think they know is confirmed as they listen to the speech.

Students should be allowed to approach the text freshly and to make their own inferences based on textual content. Plenty of instruction and support will follow to ensure comprehension for all students. The question helps orient students to the text and begins the focus on searching for textual evidence.



## ACTIVITY 3: READ ALOUD AND CLASS DISCUSSION

Students follow along as they listen to the text being read aloud, and the teacher leads a discussion guided by a series of text-dependent questions.

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES



The students follow along as they listen to Steve Jobs deliver the speech (see link in the text) or as the teacher reads the first eight paragraphs. Then the teacher leads a discussion guided by four text-dependent questions:

- 1- In line 16 we learn that Steve Jobs' mother "refused to sign the adoption papers." Why did she do this, and why did she "relent" a few months later?
- 2- What were the reasons why Steve Jobs "decided to drop out" of college? Why was doing so "one of the best decisions I ever made"?
- 3- What are the "dots" that Steve Jobs connected between his post-college experiences and his designing of the first Mac computer?
- 4- What do you think he means when he says "you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards"?

The close reading of these paragraphs serves three primary purposes: to ensure comprehension of an important part of the text, to orient students to the practice of close reading, and to guide students in searching for textual evidence.

Use the discussion about the questions to help students learn the essential skills of selecting interesting and significant textual details and connecting them inferentially. This process links directly to the forming of evidence-based claims they will begin in Activity Four.

## ACTIVITY 3: READ ALOUD AND CLASS DISCUSSION (CONT'D)

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

1- In line 16 we learn that Steve Jobs' mother "refused to sign the adoption papers." Why did she do this, and why did she "relent" a few months later?

Because this section of text is a story with a chronological narrative structure, students can be guided by text-dependent questions to move from literal understanding of "what happens" in the story to its meaning in Jobs' life (and his speech). In paragraph 4, the reader learns that Jobs was adopted, and some important details about both his biological mother and his adoptive parents. The question, by directly quoting from the text, should cause students to find two key sentences at the end of the paragraph and (potentially) to read backward from there. When they do so, they should learn why going to college was initially so important in his life. Answering this question from textual inferences can demonstrate to students how close reading can substitute for what could have been supplied by background information about the author. Discuss with students how beginning with details about Jobs' family background sets the stage for the entire text.

2- What were the reasons why Steve Jobs "decided to drop out" of college? Why was doing so "one of the best decisions I ever made"?

In paragraph 5, we learn why Jobs has earlier stated "this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation." Students should be able to point to direct textual evidence that presents the reasons why Jobs decided to leave college after only "six months." Discuss with students what we learn about Jobs from the six reasons he presents: he was naïve; he chose an expensive college; his parents were spending their lifetime savings to pay for his tuition; he "couldn't see the value" in what he was learning; he didn't know what he wanted in life; he was unsure how college would help him "figure it out." Answering this question, and attending to the paragraph's text, again provides an opportunity for students to move from literal comprehension of details to recognition of the inference Jobs (and the reader) makes as to why dropping out was a good decision. Point out that his "one of the best decisions I ever made" statement is itself a claim. Ask students if they think it is "evidence based" or just Jobs' opinion?

3- What are the "dots" that Steve Jobs connected between his post-college experiences and his designing of the first Mac computer? What do you think he means when he says "you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards"?

As the story moves into paragraph 6, readers learn a number of details about what Jobs experienced immediately after dropping out of (and then back into) Reed College (an elite and progressive liberal arts college in Portland, OR). Students may get lost in these details, and struggle with trying to understand why Jobs wanted to learn calligraphy – which presents an opportunity to work with the vocabulary listed at the bottom of page 2. Paragraph 7 reveals who Steve Jobs is if students do not already know this. It is also where the label of the first story ("connecting the dots") is explained. To understand this metaphor, students first will need to think literally about what it means to "connect the dots" between two points in space (or time). After helping them do so, the discussion can move to a focus on what the "dots" in Jobs' life were, and how connecting them proved to be important. This movement to a more abstract understanding of the first story culminates with thinking about what Jobs means when he says "you can only connect [the dots] looking backward," and finally to why he chooses to tell this story to the graduates. The progression suggested by the three text dependent questions, from concrete detail to abstract inference, will be difficult for some students (and relatively easy for others); observing them as they read, answer, and discuss should provide insights as to where and how some students may need to be supported (or extended) as the lesson moves on.



## ACTIVITY 4: MODEL FORMING EBCs

### INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Based on the class discussion of the text, the teacher models a critical reading and thinking process for forming EBCs: from comprehension of textual details that stand out, to an inference that arises from examining the details, to a basic EBC that is supported by specific references back to the text.

Once the class has reached an understanding of the text, use the Forming EBC Handout to introduce a three-step process for making a claim that arises from the text.

Exemplify the process by making a claim with the Forming EBC Tool. The tool is organized so that students first take note of “interesting” details that they also see as “related” to each other. The second section asks them to think about and explain a connection they have made among those details.

Such “text-to-text” connections should be distinguished from “text-to-self” connections readers make between what they have read and their own experiences. These “text-to-text” connections can then lead them to a “claim” they can make and record in the third section of the tool – a conclusion they have drawn about the text that can be referenced

back to textual details and text-to-text connections. Have students follow along as you talk through the process with your claim.

To provide structured practice for the first two steps, you might give students a textual detail on a blank tool. In pairs, have students use the tool to find other details/quotations that could be related to the one you have provided, and then make/explain connections among those details. Use the EBC Checklist 1 to discuss the claim, asking students to explain how it meets (or doesn't yet meet) the criteria.

[Note: Here and throughout the entire unit, you are encouraged to develop claims based on your own analysis and class discussion. The provided models are possibilities meant more to illustrate the process than to shape textual analysis. Instruction will be most effective if the claims used in modeling flow naturally from the textual ideas and details you and the students find significant and interesting. Also, while the tools have three or four places for supporting evidence, students should know that not all claims require three pieces of evidence. Places on the tools can be left blank.]



## INDEPENDENT READING ACTIVITY

Read paragraphs 9-14 and use the Making EBC Tool to find evidence to support the teacher-provided claim. This activity overlaps with the first activity of Part 2 and can be given as homework or done at the beginning of the next class.



## ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Forming EBC Tool should be evaluated to get an initial assessment of students’ grasp of the relationship between claims and textual evidence. Even though the work was done together with the class, filling in the tool helps them get a sense of the critical reading and thinking process and the relationships among the ideas. Also make sure that students are developing the habit of using quotation marks and recording the reference.