

PART 1

UNDERSTANDING EVIDENCE-BASED CLAIMS

“We owned it together until his boots filled with water”

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 that are related to the original guiding question.

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



ALIGNMENT TO CCSS

TARGETED STANDARD(S): RL.11-12.1

RL.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

SUPPORTING STANDARD(S): RL.11-12.3 RL.11-12.5 RL.6 SL.11-12.1

RL.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

RL.11-12.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

RL.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.



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.

Discuss other fields and areas in which making claims supported by evidence is central to what practitioners do (e.g., lawyers, historians, movie critics, etc.). Then transition and focus discussion into the realm of claims made about literary

works and the close reading skills of literary analysis - the domain of scholars and critics, but also that of active and skillful readers who intuitively sense and appreciate the multi-dimensional aspects of writing craft when they read a poem, short story, novel, play, or essay. Let students know that in this unit they will be focusing and applying their skills of reading closely for textual details and making evidence-based claims in the realm of literary analysis. Use an example text read recently by most students to suggest what it means to read a literary work for meaning while also attending to its craft.

When reading and analyzing a literary work (as with any text), a reader attends to details that are related to comprehending the text, finding meaning, and understanding the author’s perspective. But a skillful reader of a literary work also pays attention to what authors *do* – the language, elements, devices, and techniques they use, and the choices they make that influence a reader’s experience with and understanding of the literary work - the craft of writing. Explain that literary scholars classify, name and discuss the elements, devices, and techniques characteristic of a literary genre to help us analyze and think about texts. Students should already be familiar with some of these techniques (i.e. plot, characterization, imagery, rhyme). Throughout this unit, they will discuss specific techniques, develop their ability to identify and analyze the use of those techniques, and make evidence-based claims about the effects of those techniques on textual meaning.

It is important for students to come to understand that in a great literary work, the many aspects of its craft are interdependent, creating what Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have described as the “organic unity” of



ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTION TO UNIT (CONT'D)

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

a work, where all aspects “are significant and have some bearing on the total significance” of the work. [See Brooks’ and Warren’s anthology *The Scope of Fiction*, Prentice Hall, 1960.]

However, students will also need to practice and develop the skills of examining specific aspects of a work, and the relationship of those aspects to other aspects – and to the overall meaning of the work. Thus, this unit will focus on specific elements, devices, or techniques that seem particularly relevant and students will initially make claims related to those targeted aspects of craft. The text notes and text-dependent questions are designed to emphasize these targeted techniques, but teachers and students are also encouraged to extend beyond or outside of the unit’s models, into the study of other literary techniques, themes, and meanings that transcend what is suggested here. No matter what approach is emphasized during reading, discussion, and analysis, the close reading process should be guided by these broad questions:

1. What specific aspect(s) of the author’s craft am I attending to? (Through what lense(s) will I focus my reading?)
2. What choices do I notice the author making, and what techniques do I see the author using? What textual details do I find as evidence of those choices and techniques?
3. How do the author’s choices and techniques influence my reading of the work and the meaning that emerges for me? How can I ground my claims about meaning in specific textual evidence?

In this unit, reading, discussion, and literary analysis will focus on the broad genre of the literary narrative using Louise Erdrich’s “The Red Convertible” and Tim O’Brien’s “On the Rainy River.” Students will read these texts closely,

search for evidence of narrative techniques used by each writer, and develop claims about specific passages in the works, eventually forming and writing more global claims about how the techniques and choices they have identified contribute to the overall meaning and unity of each work and/or how the two works compare. Broad guiding questions, specific textual notes, and text-dependent questions will guide teachers and students as they examine how Erdrich and O’Brien have evidenced the following targeted elements and devices of the narrative:

Narrative structure (use of time, flashback, foreshadowing)

How is the narrative structured? How does it unfold in time – chronologically or not? What details stand out in the sequence of the plot? What effects do those details - and the order and ways in which they are presented - have on our reading and understanding of the narrative?

Focus of narration (narrative point of view, narrator’s voice)

Who tells the story? What do details and language reveal about the point of view of its narrator? How might we characterize the narrator’s “voice”? How does the focus of the narration influence our reading and understanding of the narrative?

Character development (exposition, description, internal conflict, evolution)

Whose story is it? How do we come to know its characters (exposition)? What internal conflicts do they seem to face? What details suggest how/ why they change (or don’t)? How does characterization influence our reading and understanding of the narrative?



ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTION TO UNIT (CONT'D)

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Resolution of the narrative (irony, understatement)

Where does the narrative end, with what details, events, or thoughts? How are the threads of the narrative resolved? What seems unexpected, troubling, or ironic about the resolution of the narrative? What meaning emerges – how does the narrative end up suggesting a “pervasive and unifying view of life”? [Brooks and Warren]



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 four sections (paragraphs 1-25)* of “The Red Convertible,” through: “Thanks for the extra key,’ I’d said. ‘I’ll put it up in your drawer just in case you need it.’ He laughed. ”

[*NOTE: Because texts used in this unit are not open source, and therefore not freely available to the public, they are not reproduced with paragraph and line numbers in this unit’s materials. References to sections of text are often keyed to quotations, and are usually also indicated by sequential section (places where extra white space breaks occur between paragraphs) and paragraph numbers. It is recommended that teachers and students similarly number the copies of the texts they are reading, so that the numbers referenced here make sense in guiding reading and analysis.]



As students read, they should be thinking about several broad guiding questions – related to the author’s choices, the narrative’s structure, and the point of view from which the story is told: What choices do I notice the author making? How is the narrative structured? How does it unfold in time – chronologically or not? Who tells the story? What do details and language reveal about the point of view of its narrator? After all students have finished reading the first four sections, lead a brief discussion in which students volunteer something they learned about the narrative’s structure or narrator. 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 narrative 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 labeling their answers “right” or “wrong”, but ask them to see if what they think they know is confirmed as they listen to the story read aloud.

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 close reading of the first section of text 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 using questions to search for textual evidence.

Use the discussions about both the guiding and text-specific questions to help students learn the essential skills of selecting interesting and

significant textual details and connecting them inferentially. Also encourage students to develop and use their own text-specific questions related to the guiding and modeled questions. This process links directly to the close reading skills they may have practiced in the Reading Closely for Textual Details unit or a previous EBC unit, and to the forming of evidence-based claims they will do in Activity 4.

Students follow along as they listen to the teacher (or a volunteer student) read the first four sections of “The Red Convertible” aloud. The first four sections of the narrative introduce the reader to the narrator, Lyman, and main characters (Henry Junior and, perhaps, the red Olds convertible); they also establish the basis for its complication (Henry’s stint in Vietnam) as well as revealing the episodic structure of the narrative and foreshadowing its ending. Following the reading, the teacher leads a discussion guided by text-dependent questions that focus on specific passages and narrative techniques.

In the very first paragraph, Erdrich introduces the main characters of the story and the general sequence of its narrative plot. What details has the author chosen to tell us? What does the sentence, “We owned it together until his boots filled with water on a windy night” make us wonder about as we begin the narrative?

Louise Erdrich is an award-winning author of fiction, poetry, children’s literature, and non-fiction, mostly featuring Native American characters and settings, and has been classified as a “postmodernist” writer. She is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians and was among the first Native American women to attend and graduate from Dartmouth College (in 1976). In “The Red Convertible,” set in 1974, Erdrich tells her story through the persona of one of her repeating characters, Lyman Lamartine. In this first paragraph, which ultimately ends up also being the final moment of and comment on the story, Lyman briefly introduces himself and the two other main characters of the story, his brother, Henry Junior, and the Red Convertible they buy and own together. The paragraph, in its cryptic sparseness, provides interesting opportunities for close reading and for student

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

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

questioning that can drive their reading of the rest of the story. In particular, this question sequence asks students to focus on the phrase “until his boots filled with water,” which at this point in the reading makes little sense but which ultimately foreshadows the final moments of the narrative sequence. They might also think about why “Lyman walks everywhere he goes.”

Who tells us the story, and why is that important? What details do we learn about Lyman in the first two sections of the text (paragraphs 1-8), and what do those details tell us about the narrator’s view of the story, role in it, perspective and voice?

An emphasis of this unit, and the reading of “The Red Convertible,” is on what critics Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have referred to as the “focus of the narration” – also often referred to as “point of view.” This story unfolds through the eyes of a first person narrator, who is telling both his own story and one he has observed – without an “omniscient” ability to go into the thoughts of other characters like Henry. In the first two sections of the text, Lyman presents various details of his life as a Chippewa who “was different that way” in that he “could always make money,” and how he came to own the Red Convertible with his brother Henry. In doing close reading, students might focus on paragraph 8 (“I do remember this one place...”) and compare how/what the reader learns about Lyman and his view of the world through his description of a place with how/what we have learned earlier through his direct telling of his own background story.

As we move through Sections 1-4 of the story, what happens with time? What details in the short episodes Lyman recounts suggest a general sequence of events, and what details seem to be omitted?

Erdrich’s use of time, and the episodic nature of the story, is one of the key aspects of its craft. Students might diagram what “happens” in time in sections 1-4, listing key details, then examine if the order of the plot matches the order of the events (it doesn’t, mostly because the narrative starts at its end, then goes way backward in time following the first paragraph to fill in background events, then jumps forward to an isolated episode (addressed in question 4), and finally up to the turning point when Henry enters the military (addressed in question 5). Listing details of what the reader comes to know through Lyman’s episodic narration also sets up a listing/discussion of all the things the reader doesn’t know – what Erdrich has chosen to omit, and the impact of the narrative’s sparseness on the experience of reading and understanding it.

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

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Section 3 (paragraphs 9-20) presents a short vignette, seemingly unconnected to the rest of the story. Why might Erdrich have chosen to include the incident with the girl and her long hair? What do we learn in this section about Henry Junior as a character, and how is this revealed to us?

The episode, or vignette, of Lyman's and Henry's unexpected trip to Chicken, Alaska after they meet the enigmatic character Susy seems randomly inserted into the narrative, is oddly comic, but also important in revealing more about the two main characters to the reader. Students might focus close reading on paragraph 16 ("We got up there and never wanted to leave..."), which reveals more about Lyman through his description of the Alaskan summer, and paragraphs 19-20 ("Then my brother Henry did something funny...") in which the scene Lyman describes offers a counterpoint description of Henry before he goes to Vietnam to the Henry described later after he returns from the war.

Near the end of the section, Lyman tells us that, "We got home just in time, it turned out, for the army to remember Henry had signed up to join it." Why might Erdrich have chosen to present this important narrative detail in such an understated way? How do key details in the paragraphs that follow (22-25) begin to turn the story in a different direction?

The detail that is so sparsely and cryptically revealed through this sentence turns out to be a key turning point, which affects everything that happens in the rest of the narrative. Discussing how the author reveals this important event in the narrative sequence, why, and the impact on the reader's experience provides students with an opportunity to do close reading of what follows and how Erdrich again uses Lyman, the narrator, to filter what the reader learns.

What few details do we learn about Henry's time in Vietnam? How does hearing the narrator's sparse recounting affect our understanding and anticipation of the rest of the narrative? Why might Erdrich choose to have Lyman say in paragraph 24: "But Henry was never lucky in the same way as me"?

On first reading, for many students, this story will be about the tragic effects of the Vietnam war on a character and his family. And yet Erdrich chooses to tell us (through Lyman) very little about what Henry experienced in the war. Listing the few details Lyman imparts sets up an opportunity to contrast this sparse narration with the more vivid descriptions of Henry *after* he returns from Vietnam (through which Erdrich lets us see the "effects" without really knowing anything about the "causes") in the next section of text to be read.



ACTIVITY 4: MODEL FORMING EBCs

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

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 Lit 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

Students independently read the sections 5-8 (paragraphs 26-46) of “The Red Convertible,” through: “We started off, east, toward Pembina and the Red River because Henry said he wanted to see the high water,” 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.