

PART 1

UNDERSTANDING EVIDENCE-BASED CLAIMS

“Does that sound like love to you?”

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 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.11-12.2 RL.11-12.3 RL.11-12.4 SL.11-12.1

RL.11-12.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

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.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

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.



ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTION TO UNIT (CONT'D)

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

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 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 short story genre, using Raymond Carver’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love.” Students will read this text closely, search for evidence of techniques used by Carver, and develop claims about specific passages, eventually forming and writing more global claims about how the techniques and choices they have identified contribute to the story’s overall meaning and unity. Broad guiding questions, specific textual notes, and text-dependent questions will guide teachers and students as they examine how Carver has evidenced the following targeted elements and devices of the short story:

Language Use (word choice/diction, conversational, vernacular, repetition, poetic prose)

How could Carver’s style be described in this short story? What is the range of word choice? What language features stand out? What is the significance and/or effect of words being repeated in the story?

Narration (narrative point of view, authorial construction of narrator, characters, setting)

Who moves the story forward? How many storytellers are there? Who provides perspective on the story? How are characters described? What background information is given? What information about setting is provided?

Tone (author/character attitude towards theme and reader, perception of tone by reader, effect of tone on theme)

How can the tone be described? What choices by the author or character contributed to the creation of tone? What is the emerging relationship between tone and theme? How does tone inform theme, at this point?



ACTIVITY 2: INDEPENDENT READING

Students independently read pages 170-174 ("She's easy to be with.") of the text with a text-dependent question to guide them.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES



Briefly introduce students to "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" by Raymond Carver. The introduction should be kept to naming the author, the title, and the year it was published. While any unabridged version of the story can be used, the pagination referenced in these notes correspond to *Where I'm Calling From, New and Selected Stories*. Vintage Contemporary, 1989.

Students independently read the first part of the story guided by the question:
Who are the characters of this story?



ACTIVITY 3: READ ALOUD AND CLASS DISCUSSION

Students follow along as they listen to pages 170-174 of 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.

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

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

1. Who are the characters of this story? What significance do you think there may be in Carver choosing these particular characters? How might his choice of characters relate to the developing meaning or theme of the text?


Two pairs of couples are introduced—Mel and Terri, Nick and Laura, and, by way of the stories that Mel and Terri tell, two secondary characters—Ed, a former lover of Terri's, and at the end of the story, Marjorie, Mel's ex-wife. Suggest to students that they write down the names and relationships of the five (eventually, by the end, six) characters as they read to help with tracking and remembering with whom they are paired. The act of making these notes should also indirectly call attention to the fact that every character is paired with at least one other character. Why would Carver choose to construct his story with only characters who are relationally grouped together? Help students infer a relationship between this choice of craft and, from the title and other pieces of evidence (e.g., the topic of the couple's discussion), the furthering of the seeming subject of the text—i.e., the nature of love. Highlight the significance of all characters being paired or grouped with other characters as it relates to the seeming subject of the story. Point out that even the secondary characters are relationally connected, forming, as it were, a trio with the other characters—e.g., Mel, Terri, Ed, and Mel, Terri, Marjorie. Discuss how Carver's decision not to invent a character for the story who was not relationally connected and paired with another character focuses the story on its subject. Discuss how, in this way, even seeming basic choices of character selection are complimentary to and help provide coherence to the emerging theme of the text.

Additionally, discuss with students why Carver (through the observational lens of Nick) chose to keep character description to a minimum, how this might help focus attention on what is said between them as they discuss the subject of love. Perhaps compare again to other short stories to demonstrate how description of character in this story is minimal, how it's largely been stripped away. We learn just enough about the characters to appreciate how they contribute (or not) to the conversation. There are no distractions. Their dialogue is on center stage. No description is really even given of Terri. Nick mentions only his age—thirty-eight. Laura receives a bit more description—she is a thirty-three year old legal secretary who, Nick tells us, is compatible with him—"We like each other and enjoy each other's company. She's easy to be with" (173-174). Mel is a heart surgeon who spent five years in seminary—how might this relate to the theme of the text?

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

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

2. What is striking about the setting? How might Carver's selection of setting contribute to the development of meaning or theme in the story?



The entire story takes place in the kitchen of Mel's apartment—it is the story's only setting (though a nearby restaurant is mentioned repeatedly, it is never visited). The scene never changes, except for the passage of time being marked by the sun and the consumption of gin. Ask students to recall other short stories they may have read and consider the different settings they had—were events in those stories contained to only one setting? Discuss why Carver may have chosen a minimalistic, static “set” and how that might contribute to the development of the story's meaning. Why might Carver have chosen to situate his story entirely in a kitchen, to confine the scene to four people sitting in a kitchen talking and drinking? What effect does the domesticity evoked have on the story's construction and development of meaning? Ask students to describe what is remarkable about Carver's choice of setting, and suggest that what is remarkable is the lack of setting and changing scenery (save the sun and gin bottle). There is only one milieu, the accoutrements are minimal, the set is bare, and its description is spare. Building off the discussion between Carver's choice of characters, encourage students to think along the same lines and consider the significance of this selection of setting in the story, how Carver's choice of characters and setting help inform the development of the story's main activity and subject—an informal discussion about the nature of love.

3. From this beginning section of the story, what can be said about the tone of the text? What descriptors come to mind to describe the tone? What decisions has Carver made in the construction of the text to create tone?

A quick overview with examples about what tone is may be desirable to help students consider these guiding questions as they read/listen to the first part of the story. Perhaps, by way of refamiliarizing and reassuring students that tone is not a mysterious concept, circulate a legal contract and/or a text message, asking students what the tone of those texts are, and how do they know—e.g., what is the evidence for the claim that the legal contract is “serious” or “formal” and the text message is “light-hearted” or “funny”? Specifically identify word choice (or diction) and sentence structure as textual elements that the author makes choices about when fashioning the text and how those decisions convey tone.

Discuss with students how text is imbued with tone via an author's and/or narrator's

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

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES



decisions regarding word choice, sentence structure, description of setting, or other literary elements, and how this evinces an author's/narrator's perspective or stance to the text or the reader—thus creating tone. Talk about how perspective or stance can be identified through decisions made regarding the use of literary elements. In the case of this story, the title's construction itself does much to influence tone. The word choice and syntax is colloquial, perhaps poetic through the repetition of words, a bit playful, possibly elusive or indirect—lightheartedly announcing, as it seems to, that the story will be about a peripheral discussion on the subject of love instead of being on the subject of love itself. All of these elements combine to create a literary/artistic, casual, inviting, good-natured, accessible, inclusive tone—a tone of welcoming readers in with a wink and a smile. Nick's pun on Mel being a cardiologist "sometimes giv[ing] him the right [to discourse on love]" furthers the playful dimension of the tone through wordplay (170). And yet, very soon, the tone is pushed and enlarged to contain other dimensions through the harsh, jarring contribution Nick makes by way of his concise summary of Terri's story: "Terri said the man she lived with before she lived with Mel loved her so much he tried to kill her" (170). The tone continues to broaden in this way when Terri begins talking, relating a horrible scene of domestic abuse, and is further complicated by her quote that oppositionally integrates "I love you" with the vulgar and abusive "you bitch" (170). Terri's implication that this was a scene of love—"What do you do with love like that?"—is the culminating contribution to the complication of tone in this early part of the story. The point here is that the choices Carver makes regarding the imagery and language his characters use to tell and report stories, creates rich and complex tone towards the text's subject matter; and the development of this complexity is well underway by paragraph four. Have students cite other instances of tone being evinced through word choice or description. Discuss how a tone that requires various oppositional descriptors may be a hallmark of a literary text—that the tone being many things at once is part of what enables a text to effect an aesthetic experience.



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 pages 174-183 (“Do you see what I’m saying?”) of the text and use the Making EBC Tool to look for evidence to support a claim made by the teacher. 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.