

A Protocol for Argument Work in Read Aloud

1. *Text Selection*

Choose a text that will be accessible and engaging and that merits rereading either because it is delightfully entertaining, or provocative, or both. Look for complexity rather than difficulty (so, the characters and/or setting are complex, or the themes and issues it illuminates are complicated). Look for texts that include images when possible, to engage more readers and introduce a different kind of complexity.

2. *Set Up the Initial Argument*

The teacher sets up the argument and the positions. Kids need to be in partnerships – and these partnerships will actually function as opponents. You'll give Partner A and Partner B each different positions to defend. (There is something about saying 'defend your position' that seems to strike a chord with kids).

3. *Read Aloud and Collecting Evidence*

You read aloud, giving kids time to collect evidence – older kids will jot as you read, younger ones may simply use their fingers to keep track of how much evidence they've got so far. You don't have to read the whole story – in fact, it's often helpful to stop after just a little bit, and say, "you should have something by now!"

4. *Defending Positions/Making Their Arguments : Flash-debating*

Set Partner A up to defend his or her position first. "Partner A, are you ready to defend your position..." - then restate that position to help them remember it exactly. You might prompt, "think to yourself...what evidence will you give first...what second..." Let Partners A know they will only have one (or two once they're good at this) minutes to argue – that way, they have to think which evidence they want to include – they have to not only sort it but rank it. You might say, "put a star next to any evidence you definitely want to get to."

5. *Giving predictable feedback to hone their logic and raise the level of their discourse*

You can give feedback either in between Partner A and Partner B, or after they both go, or both. Give just one tip each time, so they can put it into play immediately – the tips are most useful when they will get repeated, immediate opportunities for practice. Then when they do the next round of argument, you can give more feedback, in the form of a tip.

Predictable feedback includes:

- expecting to have to actively and imaginatively seek evidence (the story isn't going to say...and so this proves that...)
- ranking evidence so you get to your most important either first or last
- stating your position with a big, bold claim
- using transitions to make your points more powerful (most importantly...surprisingly...and another thing...)
- framing evidence by retelling the part of the story it's from, and then explaining it
- sorting out the logic of claim/reasons/evidence
- noting and responding to opponent's points and perspective
- arguing to come to new thinking, not arguing to prove a point

6. *Layer toward complexity*

Begin with accessible arguments, such as is a character weak or strong, was a decision made by the character good or bad, is this place a good or bad place or time to live, etc. It can be helpful to move from character or setting to lesson or theme to author's craft. The positions often begin as binary opposites, and are pretty simplified (she's a good sister/bad sister). Then you can move towards ones that are more nuanced and not necessarily oppositional (the most important theme is that in tough times and places, all you need is love, versus the most important theme is that in tough times and places, all you need is hope).

7. *Integrate skills across reading, talking, and writing*

Consider opportunities for kids to extend and integrate skills, such as by: flash-drafting their arguments; coming up with their own debatable ideas for their partnerships and book clubs; filming their flash-debates so they can self-assess; repeating the work with non-fiction texts and topics. Also, practice off of read aloud texts, partner and book club texts, digital texts.