



Argument Writing Response Activity Project Overview

The debatable issue for this project is:

Cece embraces her deafness as a unique and positive part of herself, so much so that by the end of the book she would not exchange it for normal hearing even if she could.

The Argument Writing Response Activity (AWRA) has students make interpretive arguments about the autobiographical *El Deafo* (2012), by Cece Bell, in writing and, significantly, has them making counter-arguments against other students' writing, and defending their own arguments against counter-arguments. AWRA takes large portions of a spoken debate and asks students to put the point/counter-point in written form, enabling students to enact the underlying bond between classroom argumentative discussion and debate, and academic writing.

Method and Procedure

1. Early in the unit, the teacher should introduce the debatable issue above. She should ask students to explain what the essential question is behind the issue, in their own words. She should then lead a discussion about what is “at stake” in this question and debatable issue. How would the book’s meaning and thematic message differ depending on which interpretation is more supportable, is truer to what the author (or the text) really means?



2. The teacher should organize reading, close reading, classroom-wide discussion, group discussion, and other literacy activities in the unit around the debatable issue, where possible. The *El Deafo* guided questions (on a separate document) are designed to help do that.
3. When reading and discussion activities have reached about the half-way point of the novel, the class should be divided into two halves. One half should be assigned the affirmative position on the debatable issue and one should be assigned the negative position. Students should be encouraged to begin thinking about arguments that can support their position on the issue, based on their reading and the discussion that's already taken place and that's to come.
4. After reading and guided discussion of the remainder of the graphic novel has taken place, the teacher should distribute the Argument Writing Response Form, one per student. Students should put their name and class period number on the form, and leave the rest of it blank.
5. Students should then be paired: each student should be matched with a pair-partner from the other side of the debatable issue.
6. Optionally, the teacher can distribute the set of prepared argumentative claims for this debatable issue. Some teachers will have incorporated these claims in their instruction and discussion of the chapter clusters already, so they won't need to distribute the form separately at this point in the project. The teacher also has the option of using one of the prepared argumentative claims from each position to model at this point the construction of a full argument, with evidence and reasoning, as well as a counter-argument to each of these arguments, and refutation of the counter-arguments. If students are still relatively unsure what of the expectations attending each of these argumentation components, modeling at this point is strongly recommended.
7. Students should be given 40 minutes to build their two arguments on the AWRA Form. The teacher can circulate to monitor student progress, answer questions, and offer suggestions.
8. Students should then give their AWRA Form with their two arguments to their pair-partners. Their pair-partner should write their name on the student's form on the first



page (next to “pair-partner”), and they should then read the two arguments and create 1 – 2 counter-arguments to each argument on the form. Counter-arguments can consist either of a critique of flaws in the evidence and reasoning of the argument – identification of a misalignment between the evidence and the claim, insufficiency of evidence, or reasoning that wrongly interprets the text – or of a new argument that contradicts the argument being countered. Typically the latter type of counter-argument is called an “independent counter-argument,” and it should include backing of its own (evidence and/or reasoning). Creating counter-arguments should take 20 – 30 minutes.

9. When the period for counter-argument creation is over, pair-partners should return the AWRA Form to the original student, who should then refute the counter-arguments written into the form by their pair-partner. Refutation should not merely be a statement of the argument. That isn’t really refutation, it’s repetition. Rather, refutation should address the substance of the counter-argument, and through analytic thinking and reference to evidence explain why the original argument is stronger and still stands. The refutation period should also take 20 – 30 minutes.
10. The teacher should collect the Argument Writing Response Forms from each student. It is recommended that they are assessed using an ACE assessment rubric and form with three components: argumentative claims, evidence/reasoning, and refutation.