

# Study Guide for *Oh, Yeah?! Putting Argument to Work Both in School and Out*

**Purpose:** This reading guide can be used as a vehicle for discussion or an exchange of ideas with colleagues as part of a study or reading group as well as a resource for generating ideas, plans, and lessons you can undertake with your students.

The focus of this book is teaching reading and composing of argumentative texts. The foci of your course include teaching through inquiry and engaging students in reading, writing, and talking about argumentative texts through our teaching, as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) call for. This reading guide will address both purposes.

## Before Reading To Think About

You may wish to use the following questions to begin your discussion before you read *Oh, Yeah?!*

### REACT

*(Respond to the questions based on your current practice.)*

What is your current classroom practice in regard to argument?

What priority does reading and composing arguments take in your planning?

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

The CCSS writing anchor standard for argument reads: "Write arguments to support claims in analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence." What is your response to that standard? What are the most important word(s) in that standard? Why?

**REFLECT**

What is the role of argument in your life? The world?

## Chapter 1 Getting Started

In the first chapter you get an introduction to argument as well as a case for the Common Core State Standards. The chapter begins with an explanation of the prevalence of argument in our lives and moves to the significance of argument in education, particularly in academic writing. The chapter concludes by addressing the value of the Common Core State Standards, acknowledging objections to the Standards, but ultimately concluding with the potential for the CCSS and the important role within them.

**REACT**

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Just as we want our society to be a place where intellect and difference are celebrated, where we think proactively instead of just reactively about problems and how to solve them, where we respond with articulate empathy to others’ interests and concerns, so too do we want our classrooms to provide forums for vibrant intellectual exchanges. It is little wonder that schools place such an emphasis on argumentation” (3).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

In this chapter, the authors argue “that all of the CCSS standards, except for the ones on appropriateness, are related to the structure of the argument” (9). Go to the reading or writing standards for your grade level and content area and identify two standards that are related to what you understand as “the structure of argument.” Paste the standards in the third column and write a brief explanation of why you chose them.

**TAKE ACTION**

“Begin collecting arguments of various sorts; both academic arguments and those that are made outside of school. . . . [look] both for arguments that you find compelling, ones that can serve as mentor texts, and those that don’t work so well, ones you might call upon your students to critique or revise” (10). List and explain at least three arguments you find, using the above criteria as you are searching.

## Chapter 2 Thinking About the Structure of an Effective Argument

In this chapter the authors begin with a look into the NAEP scores for adolescents, focusing on writing, and introduce the idea that there is a clear gap between student abilities in oral and written argument. The rest of the chapter involves an explanation of the Toulmin model of argument, including explanation and real-world examples of the key features: claim, data, warrant, backing, rebuttals, and qualifiers.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“NAEP doesn’t disaggregate scores based on genre, but it’s worth noting that 40 percent of the writing prompts called for persuasive writing, so it seems safe to say that NAEP establishes that most adolescents are not proficient at argumentation” (11).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

Find a reading or writing standard at your grade level that you feel you feel lends itself to one or more of the key features of the Toulmin model. Copy that standard onto the third column, bolding the words or phrases that are most significant to you. Then, write a brief (1 to 4 sentences) description of your thinking about *how* the standard relates to the Toulmin model.



**REFLECT**

At the end of Chapter 2, the authors suggest that the first step in understanding the Toulmin model is to “begin using his model to think about the arguments you see and hear around you, the kind of arguments we suggested last chapter that you begin collecting” (18). Choose one of the arguments you found and analyze it using Toulmin’s framework. Name where you see the key elements at work, but also any elements that are missing.

### Chapter 3 Five Kinds of Knowledge, Five Kinds of Composing: The Foundations of Our Practice

In Chapter 3 you will find an overview, definition, and specific examples of the Five Kinds of Knowledge that the authors will reference throughout the rest of the book. The chapter begins with a look at what students need to know to craft arguments and moves to a definition of each of Hillocks' Five Kinds of Knowledge, illustrated through examples from arguments. The second half of the chapter follows the same pattern for the Five Kinds of Composing. The chapter concludes by addressing how teaching with the Five Kinds of Knowledge and Five Kinds of Composing impacts instructional practice. If you have questions about the five kinds of knowledge or five kinds of composing, you might be interested in seeing Michael W. Smith explain them at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFiDt9yMt58](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFiDt9yMt58).

#### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

*“Knowing what you’re supposed to do doesn’t mean that you’re able to do it. You may need instruction, and once you get that instruction, you have to practice and then practice some more. And even if you think you’ve mastered something, small changes in the task or situation can mean you have to learn more so you can adjust to the new demands”*  
(20).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

Return to the CCSS argument reading or writing standards at your grade level and identify a standard that you could use as an example of Procedural Knowledge. Paste it in the third column and explain (1) why you believe it is procedural and not declarative, and (2) whether it is procedural knowledge of substance and/or form and how you know.

**REFLECT**

Consider a text you currently teach and, using the definitions and examples from this chapter, explain the following for the text:

- Immediate and Wider Context
- Procedural Knowledge of Substance
- Procedural Knowledge of Form
- Declarative Knowledge of Substance
- Declarative Knowledge of Form

## Chapter 4 Making Argument Matter in the Here and Now

Chapter 4 begins with a return to the importance of focusing on the immediate and then moves to address the absence of genuine argument in the many English/language arts classroom. The authors then propose framing units around essential questions as the solution to this problem and move through four processes for developing essential questions, followed by a model of developing a specific essential question and an explanation of how to introduce the question and how to sequence instruction for that particular question. The chapter ends with a case for the effectiveness of organizing instruction around inquiry units framed by essential questions.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“This inclination to focus on the immediate, one that was displayed by the boys in Michael and Jeff’s study and one that we have all seen in many of the young women we have taught as well, creates a profound irony for us as teachers. It is our obligation to prepare our students for the future. But we are convinced that we can only do so if we can engage them in the present. In the case of teaching students to read and write arguments, that should be easy. But we’re afraid it’s not” (38).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

In Chapter 4, the authors point out that the CCSS emphasize argumentation. Return to the standards at your grade level and find examples that illustrate this emphasis and explain your choices.

**TAKE ACTION**

Using one or more of the arguments you identified after reading Chapter 1 and analyzed after reading Chapter 2, explain an essential question suggested by that argument. Using one of the four methods explained in Chapter 4, brainstorm a list of possible essential questions you could use to plan a unit—you will use these essential questions in future chapters so don't skip this step!

## Chapter 5 Introducing the Elements of Argument

Chapter 5 provides a closer look at Toulmin’s model of argument and begins with ideas for building procedural and declarative knowledge through classroom discussion. The chapter is full of practical classroom ideas for practicing with the Toulmin model as a whole, as well as ideas for teaching each individual element of argument.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“And we want to stress that it’s crucial to keep in mind that using Toulmin’s model is a means to the end of helping students become more proficient composers and consumers of arguments. That is, while we introduced the terms and used them, we never tested students on them. What mattered to us was that students understood how to employ them rather than how to define them” (51).



**REFLECT**

Return to the essential questions you brainstormed after reading Chapter 4. Choose one question and reflect on what kinds of ads you could use that would work for practicing with the Toulmin model, but that would also be in service of exploring your essential question.

**TRY SOMETHING**

This chapter is packed with practical ways to integrate authentic discussion and argumentation in the classroom. Choose *one* strategy described in this chapter that you could adapt for a unit you are teaching right now. Explain what it is and how you can use it. If possible, try the strategy and write a reflection on how it went.

## Chapter 6 Putting It Together in Simulations and Debates

Chapter 6 is all about bridging the gap between classroom conversation and more extended compositions. The chapter begins with an explanation and specific example of a simulation and repeats the same for a formal debate. The authors then acknowledge the challenges teachers face in duplicating those specific examples in other classroom settings and the latter half of the chapter explains a step-by-step process for developing a simulation or debate in a more typical English classroom.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Unfortunately, Kristen’s study also establishes that this kind of transfer is difficult to achieve, which makes sense given the extent to which arguments are context dependent, a point that we explored in Chapter 3. Although her students appeared to transfer what they learned about evidence into the literary analyses she asked them to write after the debate, they were not as successful in transferring what they seemed to have learned about claims and, especially, about rebuttals. It seems that they regarded their literary analyses more as performances for the teacher than as arguments that sought to establish a claim or set of claims from among possibly competing claims” (71).

**TRY SOMETHING**

Using the step-by-step process described in the latter half of Chapter 6, develop a simulation or debate for the essential question you have been developing as you work through these chapters. Write your responses and thoughts for each step in the process in the column to the right.

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

Consider the simulation or debate you have planned. Go to the speaking and listening standards for your grade level and identify the 2 or 3 standards that you can focus on meeting for the simulation or debate you have created. Paste them in the third column and explain what evidence you would look for to know if students have met each standard.

## Chapter 7 Teaching Argument Through the Study of Literature and Reading

This rich chapter begins with an introduction to four possibilities for integrating authentic argument into the teaching of literature in the English/language arts classroom. The rest of the chapter involves a detailed explanation of each of the four possibilities. Each explanation includes an overview of what it is, connections to the Toulmin model, specific lesson and activity examples, and connections to the Common Core State Standards.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“A second way to encourage alternative interpretations, we think, is to deliberately try to change the nature of classroom discussion. Remember the research we reported in Chapter 4 about how rare open discussion is? One reason might be that teachers think of themselves as question askers rather than as problem posers. Our preservice teachers, anyway, often see planning a lesson on a text as developing a series of questions specific to that text” (80).

**RELATE TO THE CCSS**

In this chapter, the authors make reference to many of the Common Core anchor standards that are met through specific activities. Choose one activity and one standard that is cited as being met through the activity and write a warrant explaining how the standard is or is not met through the activity. Please include a claim about whether or not it is met, the specific standard and activity, and a warrant explaining your thinking. (This process will be very important as you start to work with administrators, curriculum directors, and other teachers to “implement” the CCSS in your schools and districts.)

**REFLECT**

Consider the many strategies the authors include in this chapter. Choose one that you can add to an existing unit or to an inquiry unit you are planning for the future. List the strategy and explain how you would adapt it to fit your unit.



## Chapter 8 Focusing on Form

Chapter 8 focuses on assisting students in understanding Procedural Knowledge of Form for arguments. The first half of the chapter addresses knowledge of form at the sentence level and includes examples of how to assist students in meeting the form of argument through sentence combining and sentence templates. The second half of the chapter concerns organizing arguments as a whole.

### **REACT**

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Of course, knowledge of form requires much more than knowledge of sentences. Whether your students are writing single paragraphs or entire research papers, they’ll have to think hard about how they organize the larger pieces of their arguments. The reason they have to think so hard is that there’s no one right approach” (121–22).

**CONNECTIONS TO THE CCSS**

In this chapter, the authors point out that “the CCSS challenge us to prepare our students for college and for work in the world and it’s important to understand that five-paragraph essays don’t exist in either place” (122). Return to the standards at your grade level and find one that most clearly echoes this idea. Paste it in the third column and explain your choice.

**REFLECT**

Chapter 6 includes many lesson ideas for helping students develop Procedural Knowledge of Form for argument. Choose one lesson idea and explain how you could adapt it for a unit you teach or for a potential inquiry unit you might plan in the future.

## Chapter 9 A Few Words About Assessment

In this chapter the authors begin by addressing an anticipated rebuttal to the call for more writing that has been presented so far: the fact that more writing requires more grading and teachers don't have time for that. The first half of the chapter addresses this concern and provides ways to increase writing and decrease grading. The second half of the chapter turns to large scale state assessments and includes a brief introduction to the new Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessments.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“Of course, we need to be mindful not only of the evaluation we do in our classrooms but also of the large-scale evaluations our students will experience. Large-scale assessments are a fact of life for all public school teachers. And as George Hillocks (2002) has so powerfully demonstrated, many of those assessments reward banal and formulaic writing. But, to coin a phrase, the times, they are a changing” (127, 130).

**REFLECT**

Consider the summaries and sample performance task described at the end of this chapter. What is your response to those items? How will classroom instruction need to change to prepare students for those kind of assessment tasks? What ideas in this book would be most helpful in preparing students for tasks of that nature?

## Chapter 10 Embracing the Challenge

The authors conclude the book by offering a case for taking the opportunity the CCSS offer in order to make real and lasting change in the lives of both teachers and students.

### REACT

*(Respond to the quotation with comments, connections, and questions.)*

“We don’t see any way that the CCSS can be met in classrooms that aren’t rich with talk, with a variety of reading, and without the opportunity to develop all five kinds of knowledge through all five kinds of composing. We don’t see any way the CCSS can be met in schools that aren’t rich in opportunities for collaboration and professional development. In short, it seems to us that the CCSS point to what we see as best practice.” (132).

**NEXT STEPS**

The book concludes with a call to “seize the day.” What are your first steps in doing this? What will you do right away to “to make the changes you need to make to prepare your students for college, for the world of work, and for their lives as citizens in a democracy” (135)?