

Identifying Evidence in a Text



This activity can have students work alone or in small groups. They are first asked to read a short text and then determine the author's main claim (with some guidance from the teacher, depending on the class' needs). When everyone knows the central claim, students are then tasked with identifying the warrants the author uses. They should also be able to explain how each warrant helps support the original claim.

This activity helps students see how authors construct arguments in texts. Note that the "argument" a given text is making does not necessarily need to be controversial. So, students could identify evidence in a textbook that follows from the claim that "curing the Colonial period, the southern economy was based on agriculture." Though the author's point is well-known by virtually everyone, students will still benefit from identifying the various reasons that this statement is true.

The activity is similar to Breaking Down a Text (below) but more basic. While Breaking Down a Text serves as a way to understand longer, more complex arguments, Identifying Evidence can

be performed with a single paragraph or even less. It can also be applied to texts that do not, at first glance, seem to be “arguments” at all. For instance, once students studying the Civil Rights movement have read the story of Emmett Till, they might revisit it to understand its importance to the study of civil rights overall. Given the claim that “all students of the civil rights era should study the Emmett Till story,” they would scour the text for warrants to support that claim. They might even repeat the process with the opposing claim (“Emmett Till does not belong in all civil rights curricula”) to see which position is better supported by the text. This would be an excellent way to test students’ theses before writing an essay, but it is also simply a way to have them read and reread a text until they know its every detail and can understand it from a variety of perspectives.

Step	Teacher Move	Student Move
1	Provide students with a text. Optionally, also provide them with the text’s main argument.	Read text individually, in groups, or as a class.
2	Optionally, lead a class discussion that helps students...	Come to a consensus on the text’s main argument (or one of them).
3	Have students work individually or in groups to...	Find three pieces of evidence in the text that support its main argument.
4	Have students, either in writing or aloud and either in their groups or to the whole class...	Explain how the evidence you found supports the text’s main argument.
5	Once students understand the activity’s basic premise, try having them compete individually or in groups to...	Come up with better evidence or more evidence than your peers. Be prepared to explain the links between each piece of evidence and the overall argument.