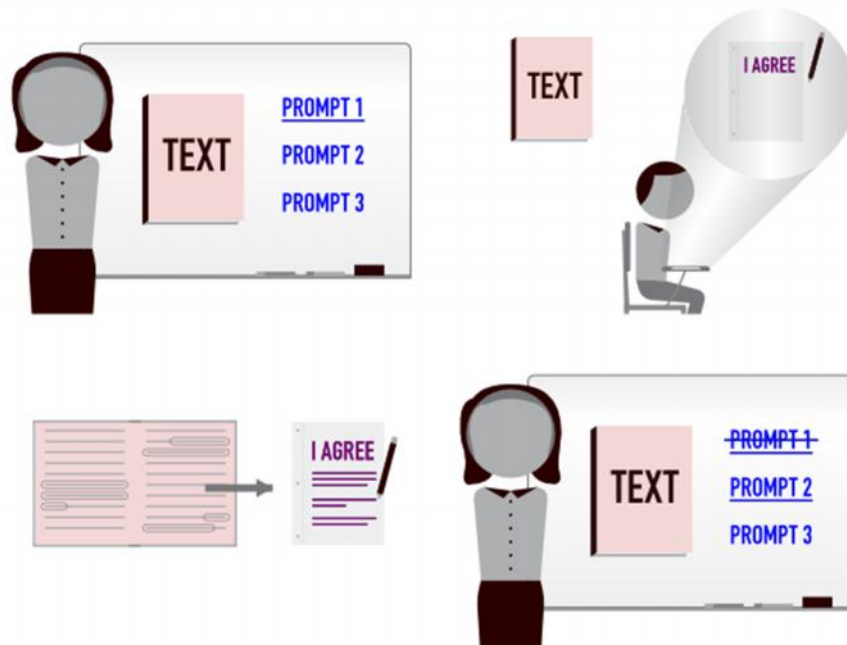


Mini Paragraph Writing



This activity illustrates the links between written and oral argumentation by having students write paragraphs rather than make speeches or hold debates in response to resolutions. Students are given three prompts about a text. Each statement will be the basis for an individual mini paragraph. The student starts with a sentence that re-states the provided prompt and indicates whether she agrees with it. Then, the student must supply a piece of evidence from the text to back up her perspective. Finally, the student must explain why that piece of evidence supports her original interpretation in one or two sentences. This repeats for each additional prompt.

For example, a world history teacher might give her class the prompt “Cortez was the most important conquistador.” Once students’ first paragraphs are complete she might have them change viewpoints to argue that “Pizarro was the most important conquistador”--or she might prompt them with “Cortez was the most violent conquistador” and eventually have them write mini-essays laying out several arguments for why Cortez is the most influential overall.

At the most basic level these paragraphs can be heavily scaffolded. A template might require students to begin with a pre-set topic sentence: for example, either “Cortez was the most violent conquistador” or “Cortez was not the most violent conquistador.” The sequence of sentences that follow could also be prescribed: one providing a warrant for the claim, one citing a piece of evidence, one explaining how that evidence supports the claim, and one concluding the paragraph. More advanced students, of course, will need none of this; they might simply be asked to “write a paragraph” and be expected to know what that task entails.



As with any written EBA activity, this one can be used in conjunction with oral ones: paragraphs could be delivered as speeches, incorporated into mini-debates, or used to debrief a debate already completed.

Step	Teacher Move	Student Move
1	Provide the class with a controversial statement about a text they have read or concept they have studied.	Decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement provided.
2	Provide as much scaffolding as you deem necessary for students to...	Write a paragraph in which you articulate your stance on the statement, cite a piece of evidence from the text, and explain how that evidence supports your position.
3	Repeat steps 1–2 as desired (generally two more times) with different statements.	Repeat steps 1–2 as required.