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Thesis Writing Lesson

## Claims and Enthymemes: The Rudiments of Argument

### **Abstract:**

In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle called the enthymeme the syllogism of persuasion. More recently, philosopher Stephen Toulmin used a similar structure to form “practical arguments” in his Model of Argument in *The Uses of Argument* (1958). Essentially, such an argument consists of three components: claim, evidence, warrant. The **claim** is an arguable conclusion, for example “Edward Hopper is a famous painter.” The **evidence** provides a reason to support this claim, for example “because his work is at the Art Institute in Chicago.” The **warrant** is an assumption inherent in an argument, usually unstated, in this case, that famous artists have work at the Art Institute in Chicago.

This lesson familiarizes students with the basics of forming an enthymeme and allows them to practice creating them.

This lesson can take 40-70 minutes, depending on the size of your class.

### **Common Core State Standards:**

W.9-10.1

### **Procedure:**

1. Using the attached PowerPoint as a reference, discuss with students statements that are and are not claims.
2. Discuss the types of sentences that students often mistake for claims (neutral statement, statement of topic, statement of fact, etc.). Note that in these slides (2-8), the red sentence indicates a sentence that is *not* a claim. If time allows, give students a chance to form their own claims on the topics listed before revealing the claim (in black).
3. Discuss avoiding morally relative or sweeping terms (slide 9), and the use of modifiers (some, many, most, etc.) to help form claims. “Good” and “bad” are especially to be avoided.
4. Have each student write a claim on any topic – topics may include national or international news, local/school news, hobby, extra-curricular, or even personal or family topics. You may want to use a school or local newspaper to help give ideas. One word of advice: caution the boys against making claims about sports (although they all will be tempted), because they all tend to be “personal conviction” or “opinion based only on feeling” statements that are difficult to change in to claims. This represents a chance for students to be creative and even a little silly, provided their claims are legitimate.
5. Have each student read his/her claim, and let the class judge if the claim is legitimate or one of the mistakes covered in (2). If it is not, workshop with the class to revise it.

6. Have each student add evidence to his/her claim. This is done most simply by adding a “because” clause after his/her claim. Go around the class again, hearing all the claims and reasons coupled together.
7. If time permits, advanced classes may wish to examine the warrants inherent in these arguments, although high school level students often have difficulty with this.
8. Reinforce that this structure (claim + evidence) is the solid foundation of a thesis in a wide range of topics.

**Materials:**

PowerPoint presentation and projector.

Students need paper and writing utensil for their portion of the exercise.