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Civil Discourse in the Classroom: Preparing Students for Academic and Civic Participation

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CIVIL DISCOURSE IN THE CLASSROOM:

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

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This thesis will explore the importance of civil discourse education. I assert that there is a tremendous need for productive means of disagreement in today's society, and I propose that the classroom is an ideal setting in which to foster the skills needed for civil discourse. This document features arguments for the need for civil discourse, a detailed definition of it, multiple pedagogical approaches to civil discourse education, and an explanation of the ways in which civil discourse aligns with national- and state-level educational standards. Among this research are also examples of the work of Pierce High School's English 9 students, who have engaged in instructional methods such as the ones presented.

The Need for Civil Discourse

In September of 2016, three college football players from Lincoln, Nebraska, knelt during the playing of the national anthem prior to the start of their game against a conference opponent. Their actions were situated amid other similar protests happening across the country, protests that were designed to respond to racial injustice and inequality. From those who disagreed with these players' stance or approach to protest, responses ranged from labeling these young men and their actions "disgraceful and disrespectful" to calling for their deaths, saying they should be shot, or even hung before the national anthem prior to their next game (Christopherson). In many cases, rather than discussing the ideas and issues at the heart of the young men's protest, personally attacking and even urging violence were normal responses in voicing disagreement.

These players' story serves as only one example of the state of argument in modern American society. One need only turn on a news network having a panel discussion, check social media or news feeds, or tune into a political debate to see that discourse in the face of disagreement has eroded. It has become commonplace for those involved in argument to resort to unproductive and even vicious strategies that pervert the very term *argument* itself and defy democracy's intended function, as it seems the prevailing instinct is to attack, criticize, and ultimately defeat those with whom disagreement occurs (Kroll 452). Or, in another extreme, because "a conversation that turns into a disagreement is assumed to be a disaster" (Roberts-Miller, *Deliberate Conflict* 86), people avoid discussing important, albeit controversial, issues altogether for fear of harming

their personal and professional relationships or for fear of what may perceived as

"losing" the argument if they concede any points being made from another

perspective. Logical fallacies, including personal attacks on the other parties

involved, pervade heated exchanges from kitchen tables to the presidential

debate stage. Government representatives reach stalemate in political progress.

Violence in the face of fundamental disagreement is normalized, and its

condemnation from political leaders perfunctory.

   The work of restoring and preserving civil discourse is critical and urgent if

we are to preserve our democratic society. Saying that democracy itself hangs in

the balance is not melodramatic, for the consequences of allowing the current

degraded form of discourse to persist could lead to a citizenry too discouraged

and disillusioned to fulfill its civic role. Because of the state to which argument in

today's society has deteriorated, many people prefer to avoid it altogether, and

not only to avoid the risk of "losing" or doing damage to relationships. In Sharon

Crowley's 2006 book *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism,*

she asserts that, in today's America, "to dissent is to risk being thought

unpatriotic" (1). All these risks often impede argument from occurring at all, and

as Crowley further asserts,

   Inability or unwillingness to disagree openly can pose a problem for

   the maintenance of democracy…When citizens fear that dissenting

   opinions cannot be heard, they may lose their desire to participate

   in democratic processes, or…they may replace their allegiance to

democracy with other sorts of collective identifications that blur or

obscure their responsibilities as citizens. (1)

The latter consequence to which Crowley refers is perhaps the most insidious,

and one for which we can see evidence in many of the models of disagreement

in our increasingly polarized society. Patricia Roberts-Miller suggests in her 2017

book *Demagoguery and Democracy* that we have reached a point at which,

"instead of engaging in arguments and evidence that [are] presented, too many

people [dismiss] claims on the basis of who is making them" (3). Such an

approach to argument, Roberts-Miller asserts in the same text, leads to the

degradation of democracy, and in its place, allows for the rise of demagoguery,

which reduces complicated issues to "a binary of us (good) versus them (bad)"

and leads us to "think entirely in terms of who is like us and who isn't" as we

argue over policy, rather than to consider the issues themselves (8). One need

not look far or long to see that American politics is circling this drain, and rapidly

so. Discussion of social issues and policy involves heated rhetoric that often

demonizes other perspectives or entire groups of people thought to hold those

perspectives (Winerman), or it even halts completely as many write off or avoid

engaging with anyone whose viewpoint may contradict their own.

Political division of this degree is not new. In *Demagoguery and*

Democracy, Roberts-Miller cites the historical examples of the slavery debate,

the internment of Japanese-Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor, and

even the Holocaust as events marred by an "us versus them" binary (5, 53, 65).

In each of these cases, fear of "the other," scapegoating, and refusal to listen to

those with conflicting viewpoints—all of which are common features of demagoguery—allowed for the victimization and oppression of entire groups of people, and at worst, led to all-out warfare. In examining these few historical instances, the dangers of this way of thinking and arguing are clear.

It is critical to note that disagreement and argument are not impediments to well-functioning democracy but rather essential hallmarks of it. Roberts-Miller further asserts in *Demagoguery and Democracy* that "democracy depends on rhetoric—on people arguing with one another and trying to persuade one another" (13). However, as ad hominem, calls for violence, or even outright refusal to engage in authentic discussion with those viewed as opponents are currently commonplace argumentative practices, the state of discourse in the face of disagreement clearly needs our attention if we are to make progress and enact social change. I write with great hope that, as a society, we can do better. Our democracy, one day soon, will be in the hands of the students in our secondary classrooms, and therefore the classroom provides an ideal setting for planting the seeds of civic engagement and the discourse skills required for it.

Civil Discourse Defined

When one hears the term *civility,* it may appear to be synonymous with manners, politeness, and courtesy. However, when applied to argument, these synonyms are not only far too simplistic to encompass the complex practice of civil discourse but are also threatening to democracy. Roberts-Miller writes in *Deliberate Conflict* that when disagreement arises within a community, it is an

indicator that something is wrong and that an injustice needs addressing. She

posits that prizing civility in the sense that it equates to the avoidance of conflict

"means that people who become confrontational or argumentative have violated

a basic principle of social discourse and should be condemned" and furthermore,

that "the issue becomes the behavior of those who violated the code of civility

rather than their concerns regarding injustice" and that, as a result, these

injustices "never enter the realm of public discourse" (*Deliberate Conflict* 153-4).

If civility is defined as mere politeness, then evasion of disagreement is

practically inherent, and those who voice it are vilified, and this means that issues

requiring attention and action may never even be addressed.

However, when civility is applied to discourse (which necessitates

discussion), the traditional definition is still far too simplistic to encompass the

complex practice of civil discourse, which is much more than simply listening

politely, avoiding disrespect, and arguing one's own position in measured tones

(Koegler). Jim Leach, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities,

offers a robust definition of civility in his 2011 article "The Health of Our Nation,"

stating:

> Civility is not simply or principally about manners. It doesn't mean
>
> that spirited advocacy is to be avoided. Indeed, argumentation is a
>
> social good. Without argumentation, there is a tendency to
>
> dogmatism, even tyranny. What civility does require is a willingness
>
> to consider respectfully the views of others, with an understanding
>
> that we are all connected and rely on each other.

Leach acknowledges that disagreement is an important component of a well-

functioning democracy and that one can still practice civil discourse *and* argue

passionately to advance a viewpoint. In fact, if passion or indignation is forbidden

in civil discourse, we risk diminishing the weight of injustice and the voices of

those who are rightfully outraged by it (*Deliberate Conflict* 30). Civility, however,

does require consideration of multiple perspectives. Not only is this practice

respectful of the person making an opposing argument, but it is reverent of the

very issue at the heart of the argument, as it allows for thorough and multifaceted

examination of said issue. Only after considering multiple angles, including the

viewpoints of other stakeholders, can one make the best decisions about policy

or action.

Philosophy professor Hans-Herbert Koegler offers a compelling

interpretation of the role of the word *civil* in civil discourse, suggesting that "the

term civil refers not to polite or mannered conduct, but to our membership in civil

society, to our being citizens in a democracy," and further, that to treat one

another civilly does, of course, involve respect but respect primarily for other

interlocutors as "fellow citizens, as members of a shared democracy, as partners

in a project of the realization of the common good." This is not to suggest that a

society or community must be free of conflicting viewpoints, for "one does not

need consensus to have a community," and "change and struggle within a

community [need not be viewed] as threats to its coherence but as normal

activity" (Harris, "The Idea of Community" 20). Rather, civil discourse, in this

sense, involves placing the false dichotomy of "us" versus "them" aside and

instead focusing attention and inquiry on the issue at hand and the points of

disagreement so as to make the most informed judgments possible on policy or

action required to achieve social justice. Koegler goes on to address the desired

outcomes of civil discourse, emphasizing that the goal is not to "establish the

truth of one's position, to assert one's superiority in dialogue, to 'debate the other'

when it comes to the exchange of views about a common concern." However, he

also argues that the objective of civil discourse need not be common ground or

consensus. Although these may be found as a result of civil discourse, they are

often not, nor should they necessarily be, the purpose of argument. Koegler

suggests that first and foremost, the aim of civil discourse is to comprehend

another perspective, and in doing so, reach a more complex understanding of the

serious public matters being discussed. Achieving this level of discourse, Koegler

says, is "essential for the life and thrive of our democracy."

In light of these perspectives, as it will be used here, civil discourse shall

refer to argumentative practices that:

- Seriously consider the viewpoints of others regarding matters of

  public concern

- Respect all parties involved as fellow members of our civil society

  who also have a stake in said matters

- Aim to reach an informed understanding of issues at stake in order

  to determine the best course of action

But what does civil discourse look like in practice? In Barry Kroll's 2008

College Composition and Communication article "Arguing with Adversaries:

Aikido, Rhetoric, and the Art of Peace," he suggests key strategies for civil discourse. The first is to "begin by reviewing, accurately and respectfully, the argument that appears to be in conflict with your views or values, rather than asserting a contrary thesis or engaging in aggressive rebuttal" (454). Of course, Kroll does not suggest that one avoid counterarguments, for "responding to opposing arguments or advocating contrary views" is also among the key discourse moves he suggests (454). However, in order to engage in effective argument with someone holding an opposing viewpoint, the first step should be to ensure that one accurately and comprehensively understands the other's perspective, what Joseph Harris calls "coming to terms" with opposing viewpoints before immediately refuting another party's claim, for "simply proving someone else wrong rarely advances your own thinking" (*Rewriting* 27). Harris recommends coming to terms in a way that is "both *generous* and *assertive*" (*Rewriting* 25). It is critical to correctly represent another's viewpoint (i.e. be generous), but this practice alone does not achieve deepened understanding of the issue at hand. After coming to terms, one must "neither simply endorse nor reject [the other] perspective but point out its uses *and* its limits" (Harris, *Rewriting* 26, emphasis added). In doing so, the argument advances, and if all parties are willing to engage, knowledge of the matter is enriched.

Kroll also suggests a related move for effective argumentation that involves moving from a position of opposition to one in which parties are "looking in the same direction" (454). To be clear, this does not necessarily have to involve conceding points or changing one's identity in any way, but rather

considering "shared concerns about a problematic situation" and "shifting the

focus from disagreements about solutions." In this way, people with differing

viewpoints on a subject can, if for a moment, see themselves as collaborators.

Even if disagreement about certain aspects of an issue remains, the approach of

facing in the same direction may help adversaries consider ways in which they

might work cooperatively or "merge the power" behind both schools of thought

(458). Kroll's practice aligns with a suggestion from Andrea Leskes in her article

"A Plea for Civil Discourse: Needed, the Academy's Leadership." Leskes asserts

that "discourse that is civil means those involved…seek the sources of

disagreements *and* points of common purpose" (emphasis added). Even if the

only common ground that is found is that stasis[1] is reached, or that opponents

reach consensus regarding the point(s) at which they disagree, progress has

been made, for an argument that is more focused on *what* is at issue, and

therefore more constructive, can ensue, and argument is the only way to reach a

resolution that avoids physical or verbal violence (Crowley 29). Certainly, with

any controversial public matter, points of contention may remain among those in

even the most effective argument, for the goal of argument is not necessarily

common ground. However, if through the civil discourse strategy of facing in the

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[1] Sharon Crowley asserts that unless interlocutors reach stasis, debate cannot become argument, for the arguments being mounted are incompatible with one another unless centered around the same point of disagreement. According to Crowley, argument necessarily involves the exchange of claims regarding a specific position, and this is virtually impossible without stasis. Further, Crowley posits that "if participants in a dispute do not formulate the position about which they disagree, the necessary respect for the other may not be in play, and neither the conduct nor the outcome of the argument may be just" (29).

same direction, parties can identify where mutuality or shared concern may exist

or even precisely where disagreement occurs, they can capitalize on it as they

decide on policy, action, or course of argument.

In the approaches to civil discourse described above, listening[2] is

obviously a critical component. To accurately come to terms with an opposing

viewpoint, to identify potential points of shared concern, to agree upon what

exactly is at issue all require that interlocutors listen carefully to one another.

Authentic listening also demonstrates the aforementioned criterion of respect for

an opponent as a fellow community member with a concern. But perhaps most

significantly, through listening to others with different viewpoints[3], "people can

enrich their experience[, and] while we may not be able to enter those

perspectives fully, we can do so to a large extent, and our resulting decisions will

be better," and further, "we are likely at least to understand our own [position]

better" (Roberts-Miller, *Deliberate Conflict* 183, 193). The practice of listening

extends even to the perspectives of those who may not actually be present in the

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[2] In considering the role listening plays in civil discourse, it is useful to consider Krista Radcliffe's idea of "rhetorical listening," which requires interlocutors to "invoke both their capacity and their willingness…to promote an *understanding* of self and other…to locate identification in discursive spaces of both *commonality* and *differences*, and…to accentuate commonalities and differences not only in *claims* but in *cultural logics* within which those claims function" (204, emphasis original).

[3] This is not to say that all viewpoints and opinions ought to be considered as valid in an argument. Patrick Stokes, senior lecturer in philosophy at Deakin University, argues that not all beliefs are defensible, and therefore it is neither necessary nor productive to take into account viewpoints that should be abandoned. Stokes provides the example of anti-vaccination advocates whose opinions are contrary to the science surrounding the issue, but I would add that opinions based in bigotry of any kind also do not require consideration in a serious argument on civic issues.

discussion. Roberts-Miller quotes political theorist Hannah Arendt in *Deliberate Conflict* as asserting that one should "form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to [one's] mind the standpoint of those who are absent" (124). Arendt's latter suggestion seems particularly important if civil discourse is to address issues of systemic injustice and oppression. Such issues are quite often areas of disagreement that arise to indicate a problem within a society, but all too often, absent are the voices of those who are most affected. Therefore, multiple sources of information, including the perspectives of those who may be systemically silenced or undervalued, must be sought as participants in civil discourse aim to listen and address these problems.

However, discourse requires not just listening but also discussion. When parties stop at listening to others' concerns, even if with seriousness and critical consideration, views are only expressed and not deliberated, and deliberation is necessary if the status quo is to change. People must "participate in a public sphere of conflict…there must be continued interaction of people who are disagreeing with one another; an area of expression[4] is not enough" (Roberts-Miller, *Deliberate Conflict* 87). This requires that, in addition to listening and

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[4] Expression, as defined by Roberts-Miller, refers to an "expressivist public sphere," in which "people express their points of view rather than deliberate with one another." Roberts-Miller likens such a public sphere to "bumper cars bouncing against each other. They are not changed by interacting with one another; contact with one another is arbitrary (if not random) [and] hostile" (*Deliberate Conflict* 48-49). Essentially, an "area of expression" allows merely for the spouting of arguments, not the responses necessitated by discourse.

working to understand more fully an issue through the views of others, one must

also construct effective arguments of one's own. Such arguments must consider

the possible limitations of one's standpoint, involve the critical inspection of

others' standpoints, utilize factual information (including the facts of one's own

experiences and observations as well as those of others), and build upon

reasons that even those with differing opinions and experiences will consider

understandable and valid (Roberts-Miller, *Deliberate Conflict* 124, 197).

The tools needed for one to effectively participate in civil discourse are

manifold. Leskes lists several key skills required for civil discourse, including:

- Critical inquiry

- Analysis and reasoning

- Information retrieval and evaluation

- Effective written communication

- Effective oral communication that includes listening as well
  as speaking

- An understanding of one's own perspectives and their
  limitations

- The ability to interact constructively with a diverse group of
  individuals holding conflicting views. (Leskes)

Each of these skills is not only essential for civil discourse but also a component

of an effective education in general. In the sections to come, I will explain

classroom practices and conditions that can promote civil discourse, the

alignment of civil discourse education with college- and career-ready standards,

and the importance of fostering these habits of civil discourse in students in order to equip them for civic engagement.

A Pedagogical Approach to Civil Discourse

Kate Shuster writes in her *Facing History* article "Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations," that when it comes to ensuring that students are equipped with the necessary models and skills to participate in civil discourse themselves,

> We educators have an essential role to play. The classroom should be a place where students learn to exchange ideas, listen respectfully to different points of view, try out ideas and positions, and give—and get—constructive feedback without fear or intimidation. Through engaging in difficult conversations, students gain critical thinking skills, empathy and tolerance, and a sense of civic responsibility.

Establishing such an educational environment is congruous with providing students with powerful learning. Yet it is challenging, even intimidating, to some educators to consider not merely allowing but capitalizing upon conflict and controversy within the classroom. However, as Roberts-Miller argues, "the tendency to see all conflict as necessarily unproductive is self-fulfilling" when in fact, "a world where people really disagree, where our central assumptions are questioned, can be exciting" (*Deliberate Conflict* 56, 57). Embracing controversy is key if teachers are to educate for civil discourse, but more is still required. As

with all quality instruction, deliberate design, rationale, and reflective grounding of teaching practices in civil discourse scholarship are essential.

In this section, I will explore ways in which civil discourse pedagogy is present in my classroom at Pierce Public Schools, located in the northeast Nebraska agricultural community of Pierce, which has a population of 1,739. The course at the heart of this discussion is English 9, a required, non-differentiated course taken by all ninth graders. At Pierce Public Schools, students are divided into two buildings: Pierce Elementary for grades K-6, and Pierce Jr./Sr. High for grades 7-12. The Jr./Sr. High is run on a block schedule with four ninety-minute periods each day, which also means that students' courses are semester-long. Pierce Jr./Sr. High is also a one-to-one school with all students having a MacBook Pro that they are able to use both inside and outside school. Additionally, the Jr./Sr. High uses the Canvas Learning Management System, and much of the work discussed here was done via Canvas. The secondary building serves 311 students, with 57 of those students being in the ninth-grade class. English 9 is then divided into three sections. The strategies and student work featured here stem from the two sections that took place in the fall of 2017, which includes a total of 35 students with a mixture of ability levels.

Pierce's English 9 curriculum includes grammar and vocabulary; literature including poetry, Greek mythology, Shakespeare, the novel, and nonfiction; and writing including poetry, argumentative essays, and research essays. With grammar and vocabulary instruction integrated into literature and writing, the curricular arc begins with the study of place-based poetry (both reading it and

producing it), at the end of which students compose a summative analysis essay,

which is followed by their first informal written argument on rural decline

(Appendix A). Using the idea of place as one determinant of cultural values, the

course transitions into Greek mythology, when we read *The Odyssey* and

discuss the essential questions of what makes one heroic as well as what actions

may cause someone to lose such a title. This unit includes their second informal

argument (Appendix B), which serves as a prewriting activity to their summative

essay (Appendix C) in which they must argue a claim about Odysseus' status as

a hero. The class then moves into a unit on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*,

which explores essential questions regarding the consequences of one's actions

and responsibility/accountability. This unit also includes an informal argument

(Appendix D) and ends in a summative essay in which students must develop

and argue a claim about who is to be held responsible for the demise of Romeo

and Juliet (Appendix E). The focus of essential questions takes a broader scope

in the next unit, which revolves around Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir, *Night*.

Students explore questions of what happens to a society when issues of injustice

are present and what our responsibility is to one another in such cases. Students'

final informal argument (Appendix F) is written during this unit, which transitions

into a research unit during which students learn research skills and information

evaluation, develop a topic centered around a community issue (they are able to

interpret community in ways ranging from local to global), curate a set of reliable,

nonfiction sources on the issue in order to gain an understanding of it, develop a

claim regarding the issue, and support the claim in a researched argument. This summative essay (Appendix G) closes the semester.

As can be seen in the description of the curricular arc, much of the English 9 students' writing, both formal and informal, is argumentative in nature. In my approach to argument instruction, I rely heavily on the National Writing Project's College, Career, and Community Writers Program, or C3WP, which "answers the contemporary call for respectful argumentative discourse" and provides "instructional resources [that] help teachers and students read critically, explore multiple points of view, and finally take a stand on important issues" ("College, Career, and Community Writers Program"). C3WP's instructional resources focus on specific argument writing skills, utilize texts[5] representing varying viewpoints on a particular issue, encourage reading and writing in ways that help students to build knowledge of the conversation that exists around a given topic, aid students in developing claims (after having considered multiple perspectives on the issue at hand) that are based in textual evidence and acknowledge the nuances and complexities of the issues, and help students to utilize source material and organizational strategies that advance their arguments. The units developed by

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[5] C3WP provides text sets on various issues, including reality television, space debris, sports drinks, school lunches, technology use, driverless cars, school start times, the cost of higher education, zoos, social media, online privacy, homework, wild horses, concussions, police use of force, and protests. Each text set contains at least four, but often more, nonfiction texts (including written texts, videos, and graphics) that represent varying perspectives on the issue. The viewpoints represented are beyond simply pro and con and instead show students multifaceted positions. In the informal arguments assigned to Pierce English 9 students, the protest text set was utilized, but in each of the others, I developed a text set true to C3WP's principles.

C3WP are designed to build upon one another, scaffolding the thinking moves students need to make in order to make effective arguments (Appendix H). In Pierce's English 9 course, the mini-units were used during the informal arguments described in the curricular arc in order to introduce and hone different argument skills. These mini-units included, in order: Writing into the Day, Writing and Revising Claims, Connecting Evidence to Claims (used twice in a row), and Organizing Evidence.

One of the first steps I took in English 9 to implement the C3WP program was to introduce students to written arguments through a text set on rural decline using the Writing into the Day mini-unit. As students navigated the texts in this mini-unit, they annotated—at first, with guidance—each article by highlighting the main claim the author was making and underlining what they considered to be the author's strongest piece(s) of evidence. In this way, students were able to note the ways in which authors present their arguments and use evidence to support them. Furthermore, the exposure to the ideas in the texts aided their development of a position on the issue at hand. After reading each text, students wrote informally about their thinking regarding the issue of rural decline. They were encouraged to use sentence stems such as:

- After reading the article, I considered…that I hadn't considered

- Now I'm thinking…

- Just as I was thinking before…

- This article helped me see…

After repeating the annotation and informal writing exercise for each article in the rural decline text set, students had been exposed to a number of claims, evidences, and ways of constructing arguments. From there, the class began working to develop claims of their own about rural decline.

A key skill emphasized by C3WP is that of crafting claims that are debatable, defensible, and nuanced. After reading texts that represent multiple perspectives on the issue being studied, students arrive at claims that must take an argumentative stance (debatable) and be able to be supported by the texts they have read (defensible). The aspect of C3WP claims that aligns particularly well with civil discourse is the way in which students are encouraged to acknowledge complexities that make an issue controversial in the first place (nuance). This way of crafting argumentative claims develops the civil discourse skills of noting the limits of one's viewpoint and considering those of others. This skill is certainly complex, and in their initial arguments, students struggled. Consider the following claims developed by Pierce English 9 students in response to their first informal argument prompt on rural decline (Appendix A):

> As rural communities struggle to find a solution, their populations continue to decrease. I would like to move away from Pierce also, but I think this is a huge problem that needs to be addressed.

> Rural areas In Nebraska can teach people many life lessons and all people should be able to experience those, but some people don't think that these rural areas have anything to offer them.

> I think there many of benefits to living in a small town even though some individuals find opportunities in cities.

> Even though rural communities provide very promising
> opportunities, some people feel the need to leave to participate in
> more areas of the world.

> Even though it is easy to see why people living in rural, NE would
> leave, I believe that there are several benefits in rural areas.

These claims show an attempt at nuance by acknowledging the fact that there exists another perspective besides their own. However, simply noting this existence doesn't reveal the complexity behind this issue. Furthermore, in their attempts to nuance their claims, they often sacrificed the "debatable" factor of the claim and simply presented statements that informed their readers that two or more perspectives on the issue of rural decline exist.

In an attempt to aid students in their claim writing ability after reading their first arguments, I broke down the process in their next arguments by first encouraging them to simply write a sentence articulating their position in light of having read the text set. This ensured that they were, indeed, making a debatable claim. I then asked them to write down what they viewed as the opposition's strongest reason or evidence. Together, we then brainstormed a list of nuanced sentence starters, which included stems such as *even though*, *as long as*, *although*, *even if*, and *while* to foster their acknowledgement of the issue's complexities using a dependent clause before asserting their own stance. This practice ensured that students were doing more than noting the existence of another perspective, or citing reasoning of another perspective that is easy to dismiss. As students continued to practice claim writing in their future arguments, they improved measurably. The same students from above, along with four

additional ones, were able to develop the following claims in response to a

question about the effectiveness of protests (Appendix F), which was their final

informal argument of the semester:

> Protests work as a way to raise awareness and bring people to a common cause; if they aren't well planned, then they won't aid in bringing about change.

> Although protest may not completely solve a problem, the protests make problems known enough for people to take action.

> As long as protests don't get violent, they can be very efficient.

> There have been many protest throughout the years in the United States, but are protest the most effective way to get things done? There are other ways to solve the problems at hand such as going straight to the government, you can also vote, or just take action.

> Even though protest are not always immediately successful, they make a difference in the long run.

> Although protest can be very moving, they are usually not the final factor in changing something that is unwanted. While protests widen the view on the argument they are fighting, they are not effective by themselves.

> I think protesting is a right we have at our disposal and something we should use, but nonetheless, mostly ineffective.

> Other than bringing people together, protests do not accomplish much in the big scheme of things.

> Even though protesting doesn't change people's minds immediately, protests are successful because it increases the visibility of the cause, demonstrates power, and energizes participants.

Each of these claims takes the important step of noting the merits of another

perspective, which at the same time, notes at least one limit of their own. In

encouraging students to form these kinds of nuanced claims, teachers foster civil discourse abilities.

Beyond the development of claims, C3WP encourages students to construct arguments that rely on textual evidence in support of those claims. The principles of C3WP draw heavily from Joseph Harris's *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*, which focuses on teaching students four key moves for using texts to join an existing argument. These include illustrating, authorizing, countering, and extending. Harris defines illustrating as looking to texts for examples of a point one is trying to make in an argument (*Rewriting* 39). This move capitalizes on the link between reading and writing and encourages students to find support for their claims. Pierce High School's English 9 students, whose C3WP instruction included the use of Harris's four rhetorical moves, demonstrated illustrating frequently in their argument writing. A look into an argument constructed in response to a prompt about the moral and ethical shortfalls of people perceived as heroes (Appendix B) reveals a student using illustrating to support her claim:

> First off, to carry out a lifelong practice of heroism, it would be important not to make huge mistakes that would ruin an image of heroism already created. An example of this would be the story of Lance Armstrong using performance enhancing drugs. As found in the article "Good Versus Effective Leadership" Ronald E. Riggio, a professor of leadership and organizational psychology, says, "The fact that Armstrong raised millions for charity doesn't excuse him

> for his misbehavior in his sport and for ultimately being a poor role
>
> model for aspiring athletes." This quote clearly explains how even
>
> though people looked up to Armstrong while he was an elite cyclist
>
> he ruined that image of himself as a hero when he didn't continue
>
> to act as a hero throughout his lifetime, but only in that one part of
>
> his career.

This student took the position that heroes must be held to high moral standards throughout their lives, and by citing a text that discussed the case of Lance Armstrong, she effectively illustrated an example in support of her claim. Furthermore, she demonstrated yet another of Harris's rhetorical moves: authorizing, which is defined as invoking the status or expertise of the author of a text (*Rewriting* 39). When this student invoked Ronald E. Riggio's position as a professor of leadership, she strengthened her argument by demonstrating that this assertion stemmed from someone with authority on the topic.

C3WP also encourages students to counter claims that are made in the texts they read, a rhetorical move which does not nullify or invalidate another perspective but rather points to its limits or suggests other ways of thinking (Harris, *Rewriting* 56). Countering requires that writers accurately and generously represent the viewpoints of others as this Pierce English 9 student demonstrates in her argument responding to the question of whether protests are an effective means of making change (Appendix F):

> Some protests in the past have been unpopular with the general
>
> public. Robert Y. Shapiro, a professor of political science at

Columbia University, states in his article "Americans don't like

protests. But protests may work anyway" that "the American public

has traditionally responded unfavorably to protesters seen as

disruptive." I disagree with this statement because while Americans

may see protesters as disruptive, the only way to raise awareness

of a cause is to interrupt people's daily routines so that they find out

about this cause. So while some people don't like this kind of

interruption to their day, other people will see this cause as

something to support and join the protests.

This student's overall claim was that, despite their unpopularity with the general

public, protests can be effective. In this instance of countering, she accurately

represents the text she counters by quoting it directly as well as granting the

concession that protests can, indeed, be disruptive. The student then points out a

weakness she sees in this argument by stating that this disruption is what may

contribute to the effectiveness of protests, thereby advancing her argument

through pushing back against another perspective.

A final rhetorical move suggested by C3WP is extending, which involves

students putting their own "spin" on the ideas presented in a text (Harris,

Rewriting 39). This is a sophisticated argument move, but one that allows

students to move the argument outward by "changing or inflecting the meanings

of the texts it brings forward" (Harris, *Rewriting* 46). Consider this student's use

of extending in his argument about the ineffectiveness of protests:

Protests may change people's minds but they don't always get what they want because of the actions after the marches. In the article "Why Street Protests Don't Work" Moises Naim, a distinguished fellow in the International Economics Program at the Carnegie Endowment for the International Peace, says "the problem is what happens after the march. Sometimes it ends in a violent confrontation with the police, and more often than not it simply fizzles out." Adding onto this idea, when protests end up in violence they not only lost their goal, but they actually hurt their cause because people start to associate it with violence and riots, which creates a negative effect to many people.

In this student's final sentence, he slightly altered the inflection of the text he cited, and in doing so brought forth an additional facet of the argument, thereby advancing his point. In using an approach like C3WP to teach students the important skill of writing an argument by first considering multiple angles on an issue, then arriving at one's own claim that makes room for the issue's complexity, and finally advancing that claim through use of reliable source material, teachers aid their students in the development of the kinds of skills needed to participate in civil discourse both inside and outside the classroom.

While C3WP does encourage students to draw on textual evidence to advance their arguments, it also fosters their ability to add their own significant contributions to the broader discussion about the issue, for when students write argumentatively about issues, "they are participating in a broad conversation"

(McCann 19). The C3WP program refers to this skill as commentary, when students articulate the ways in which text evidence relates to their claim. In Pierce English 9 students' initial arguments, they often struggled with commentary as is evidenced by this excerpt from a student's argument on the moral and ethical shortfalls of people perceived as heroes (Appendix B):

> Many believe that a hero is how efficient they are, but their character doesn't matter. In the article "Good versus Effective Leadership," by Ronald E. Riggio, a professor of leadership and organizational psychology, it says that Lance Armstrong, a professional cyclist, raised millions of dollars for charity, but that doesn't excuse him for his misbehavior in his sports history. It is saying that Armstrong is effective in what he does, but he doesn't show character in what he does, making him unheroic.

This student's overall claim was that a hero is not just someone who is a good leader, but who also displays good character. While it is possible to see a connection between this student's claim and his use of Lance Armstrong as an example, he lacks a clear explanation of just what this example illustrates regarding his claim about heroism's relationship to character. This informal argument was only the students' second, but it was clear to me through many essays similar to this one that they needed additional instruction on commentary. As a result, prior to their next argument, I implemented the Commentary Planner tool (Appendix I), which was adapted from a C3WP resource. In asking students to consider how the text evidence they plan to use applies to their claim and what

can be logically concluded as a result of considering said evidence, I was able to foster the thinking moves necessary for them to eventually be able to include commentary without the planning tool. Toward the end of the semester, their work looked more like the example below, which is the work of the same student in the above excerpt. This argument was their final of the semester in which they were able to develop a claim regarding a topic of their choice and curate their own text set (Appendix G):

> The school lunch program is favorable because it makes meals more affordable for children in need of help. According to the article "Why Healthy School Meals Matter," Tom Vilsack, an American politician and lawyer says, "A recent USDA report showed that in 2008, an estimated 16.7 million children lived in households that experienced hunger multiple times throughout the year." This report shows that several million children were hungry in 2008, which was before the lunch program took effect. This also shows that the school lunch program may have been too expensive for some people to afford. Research now shows that the number of starving children has dropped tremendously while the program is active (Vilsack). This being said, the school lunch program has lowered the average number of children who are starving, by providing them with healthier, and lower cost lunches.

Here, the same student who struggled to articulate connections between text evidence and his claim early in the semester demonstrates a strong ability to do

so in this excerpt. His overall claim in this argument was that school lunches, while they may not be as tasty as they once were, provide students with nutritious meals for low cost. He not only selects compelling and relevant text evidence to illustrate his claim, but he goes on to tell his reader what the evidence shows regarding his claim and what can be concluded as a result of considering the evidence.

The civil discourse skill of crafting effective written arguments is certainly invaluable to students as they participate in a democratic society. C3WP, in addition to its focus on argument writing, emphasizes the importance of establishing and sustaining a culture of argument. This idea is further supported by Thomas M. McCann in his book *Transforming Talk into Text: Argument Writing, Inquiry, and Discussion, Grades 6-12*. McCann writes that a culture of argument helps students to "experience what it means to live in a democratic society where the decisions and actions of one person affect others, and where the individual reflects on the effects those actions have on others" (McCann 20). In addition to frequent argumentative writing, one key way that I attempt to maintain a culture of argument in English 9 is to engage students in frequent argumentative discussions.

Verbal discussion is a critical component of civil discourse education. Using discussion as a classroom strategy for approaching controversial issues or questions is valuable in helping students recognize that there is often more than one viable position regarding such issues, develop and articulate their own viewpoints, consider the perspectives of others, and respond effectively to those

perspectives. Drawing support from a Vygotskian perspective, McCann asserts in

Transforming Talk into Text that social learning and interaction with others have

tremendous benefits for students, and that when interactions are purposeful and

authentic, several important processes are at play, including the following:

> The contributors identify and evaluate options; they elaborate and
>
> defend assertions in the face of challenges; they support the
>
> positions and suggestions they approve and question the offerings
>
> they don't embrace; they evaluate the quality of evidence and the
>
> speaker's interpretations of it; and they consider the exceptions to
>
> generalizations. (17)

Teachers have myriad options for discussion strategies, but some are more

conducive to civil discourse than others. Kate Shuster suggests such strategies

in her aforementioned article "Teachers, Schools, and Civil Discourse," beginning

with silent conversations, an option that allows a discussion to take place in

writing. This strategy allows students to slow down their thinking process as they

articulate their own views and focus on those of others. Further, a visual record

of students' thoughts, responses, and questions remains after such a discussion.

Shuster recommends the use of a large sheet of paper as one possibility for

setting up a silent discussion, but another viable approach to the silent

discussion could be an online exchange.

Pierce's English 9 students frequently engaged in online discussions that

were argumentative in nature. Each of the informal arguments mentioned in the

curricular arc took place online via Canvas, which provided space for students to

develop their arguments as well as consider and respond to the perspectives of

others, a minimum of two to be specific. One main benefit I noticed as the

instructor is that more introverted students, who normally would not verbally

participate in class discussion, were able to engage and have their perspectives

considered, a benefit that Shuster also notes. Furthermore, as the article

"Reasons to Use Online Discussions" published by Marquette University states,

students who participate in online discussions are more likely to use critical

thinking and rhetorical skills, as they have more time and space to be reflective,

consider what others have written, respond carefully to discussion prompts and

one another, and organize and synthesize their ideas. In examining samples

from one online discussion among Pierce's English 9 students prompted by a

question regarding the degree to which children should be accountable for their

actions (Appendix D), these benefits emerge:

> Student 1: Although adolescents' brains are still developing, a child
>
> should be held accountable for the actions they commit. According
>
> to "Are Parents to be Blamed When Their Teens Intentionally Hurt
>
> Others" written by Ugo Uche, although children's brains are
>
> developing in areas that involve judgement and intelligence children
>
> are able to realize the effects of their decisions. Uche goes on to
>
> explain one well known policy called the golden rule (treating others
>
> the way you want to be treated). This shows that while you can
>
> blame physical development for children's impulsiveness they are

still very knowing of what is right and wrong. This plays a massive

role in why I believe kids can be responsible for their own actions.

Student 2: Your ideas help me see that teens should be

responsible for their actions and looking this way I also see that

even though teens brains are still developing they still have a sense

of right and wrong.

Student 3: I was on the other side of this argument and you really

open my perspective of how teens should be responsible. It kinda

changed my perspective when you wrote about the golden rule and

what Ugo said.

Student 4: I agree with what you said about knowing right from

wrong. Yes, the cortex being less developed might mean that kids

make quicker decisions but it doesn't mean they don't know what's

right in the end. I also took the side that teenagers should be

accountable, but I used different reasons, so it helped me to read

yours.

Student 1's response to the question shows critical thought regarding the

issue. His claim acknowledges that there is another viable perspective, and he

supports his position using a source. His commentary on the source material also

demonstrates that he does concede to the validity of one counterargument—that

teens' brains are underdeveloped and therefore they may be more likely to act

impulsively. Student 1's argument was also logically organized and presented in

a way that even his peers who initially disagreed with him found valid. The

student responses also demonstrate careful consideration of the issue and of Student 1's perspectives. Both Student 2 and Student 3 were able to see the issue in a new way after reading Student 1's post; Student 3 even articulates a willingness to change positions in light of Student 1's points. And while Student 4 took a similar position to that of Student 1, she expresses that her reasoning was different and that Student 1 helped her to consider an aspect of the issue she had not previously taken into account. The civil discourse skills of analysis and reasoning, information evaluation, effective written communication, understanding of one's position and its limits, and the ability to interact constructively with those holding conflicting views are all evident in this exchange.

Later in the same online discussion, Student 1 responded to a peer who took the position that teens should be held accountable to a certain extent, but that some exception or understanding should be granted when the child has experienced trauma. Student 1 replied:

> I see what you are saying in the fact that kids should be given a little
> bit of understanding for what they go through. I agree that if a child is
> hurt emotionally in childhood they may see actions that are wrong to
> be okay. Taking this in, we should as you say be understanding of
> what their situation is, but we still need to realize they are
> responsible for themselves and their own actions.

Even after making an argument that showed his overall commitment to the position that teenagers should be held accountable for their actions,

Student 1 granted that a classmate who had taken a conflicting position had

made a strong point that was worth considering. All of this was able to

happen as students were given the time and space to construct their

arguments and responses that silent discussion provides.

One challenge that can emerge with a silent discussion, online or

otherwise, especially with novices in civil discourse, is that of encouraging the

kinds of thoughtful responses demonstrated by this group of students. A strategy

that was useful in Pierce's English 9 course was providing students with

sentence starters (Appendix K). These stems, adapted from Dr. Robert Brooke's

Nebraska Educational Technology Association presentation titled "Managing the

Online Classroom," helped scaffold the thinking moves necessary to make

effective rhetorical responses, such as elaborating upon or articulating reasons

for agreement with another's position, justifying disagreement, and supporting

one's thinking with evidence and examples. The sentence stems also modeled

phrasing that encouraged students to engage respectfully with an argument with

which they might take issue. In the following excerpt from an online discussion

among Pierce's English 9 class regarding the effectiveness of protests as a

means of social change (Appendix F), Student 2 demonstrates the use of the

Rephrase and Redirect sentence stem ("I think you're saying X, and that leads

me to this insight…").

> Student 1: Protests do work as long as they don't turn into violent
>
> riots. In the article "Americans Don't Like Protests" by Robert
>
> Shapiro, he says that "the distinction between violent and

nonviolent protests makes an enormous difference to the American

public." With this we see that the effectiveness of protests is majorly

impacted when they turn into riots because people might not take

them as seriously if that happens.

Student 2: I think you're saying that if a protest turns violent then

there is more of a chance for the protest to not be successful and

then even when someone has good points they will be forgot about.

I took the stance that protests are effective, but this leads me to the

insight that if you want to have a better chance of having a

successful protest it cannot turn violent. If you look at the article

"Top 10 American Protest Movements" though we see that there's

not much evidence that most protests get violent in the first place,

so they are still effective overall.

Student 2 did go on to mount a counterargument; however, before doing so, he

took the important step of coming to terms with the position with which he

disagreed. Without the sentence stems, the thinking moves required for this

sophisticated but necessary step in the argument process may not have

happened.

Of course, it is unrealistic to believe that students will always be allowed to

partake in silent discussions that allow them to carefully construct arguments and

responses and even possibly use sentence starters as they participate in civil

discourse throughout their lives, so verbal discussions should also be utilized.

One effective discussion strategy is the Four Corners debate, which was

frequently utilized in Pierce's English 9 course (Shuster). In this activity, each

corner of the room is labeled with a different sign, including "strongly agree,"

"agree," strongly disagree," and "disagree." I then read a controversial statement,

and students had time to respond to it in writing. Once students had considered

their positions, they moved to the corner of the room that best reflected their

viewpoint and shared reasons in support of their opinions. Students were first

asked to speak about their reasoning to one other person in their corner before

the discussion opened up to the large group. Ahead of the whole-class

discussion, reminders about avoiding interruption, side conversation, and talking

over one another, as well as supporting arguments using evidence were

emphasized. Students were also told that they were welcome to move to a

different corner if something a classmate said changed their mind. One benefit of

the Four Corners discussion is that students get a visual representation of where

each other stands. This removes the need for students to state *whether* they

agree or disagree with a controversial statement and turns the attention to *why*

they hold the positions they do, encouraging them to articulate reasons and

evidence for their beliefs as well as respond directly to one another's reasoning.

Frequent discussion has a significant role in establishing and sustaining a

culture of civil discourse within a classroom, but such discussions also have

tremendous benefits for students' writing, a discourse skill that is obviously

utilized in classroom contexts but is also incredibly valuable in the democratic

sphere as people use writing to voice dissent through op-eds or letters to

representatives or write policy, to name only a few. As McCann states, "a

substantial body of research reveals that students' frequent participation in

authentic discussions has a strong impact on the quality of the writing that these

students produce" (2). McCann's analysis of two studies conducted by Troyka

and McCleary reveals that students who analyzed a problem or issue, worked

with authoritative information on the topic, and deliberated with one another

about both the merits and shortcomings of the various perspectives on the issue

developed discourse strategies for logical reasoning and effective argumentation,

both of which translated to their writing (5). By capitalizing on the link between

discussion and argument writing, the latter is then transformed into a social

process, and civil discourse depends upon these types of purposeful interactions

with others who have a stake in the issues at hand, interactions that include

investigating an issue from multiple viewpoints and then using those viewpoints

to inform and build one's own arguments and responses to dissenting voices.

Interaction with peers through discussion as preparation for and throughout the

writing process helps create the social conditions necessary for students to

practice civil discourse.

An important prerequisite to students' engaging in civil discourse is that of

establishing a classroom culture in which civil discourse can thrive. Before any

constructive discourse, whether spoken or written, is to be practiced in a

classroom, students must first feel secure in that environment, particularly

because civil discourse inherently involves controversy and disagreement. In

establishing such an environment, Kate Shuster recommends that educators

begin with the self. Namely, teachers must be models of civil discourse. This

entails being conscious of one's own positions and beliefs as well as any emotional responses or bias that may exist regarding issues that arise in discussion. Reflection about how such factors might influence what teachers say and do must be common practice. It is a fallacy to believe that educators are completely neutral, and students are well aware of this. If teachers aren't reflective and self-aware, this can shift into a coercive power dynamic in which students feel pressured to speak or write advocating for views with which they believe their instructor would agree in hopes of succeeding in a class (Roberts-Miller, *Deliberate Conflict* 207). However, teachers need not strive for a kind of false neutrality, for "whether one is neutral…is not nearly as important as whether one is fair. That is, one can treat students with equal respect, one can articulate (and, if necessary, defend) a set of grading criteria that are applied to all students equally, and one can make the same discursive demands of all students" (Roberts-Miller, *Deliberate Conflict* 207). In Pierce's English 9 course, clear parameters are set for both informal and formal written arguments, and by adhering to these rubrics (Appendix K) and remaining mindful of my own viewpoints and biases, it is possible for me as the instructor to evaluate students' arguments fairly, even if I may disagree with the positions they take. When self-awareness and fairness are key components of an instructor's approach to teaching civil discourse, the foundation for a more secure environment in which students can practice disagreement can be laid.

Reflective practices must also extend to students in an environment that promotes civil discourse, according to Shuster, who recommends that teachers

develop what she refers to as a reflective classroom community and establish a

classroom contract. Shuster notes that:

> A reflective classroom community is in many ways a microcosm of
>
> democracy—a place where explicit rules and implicit norms protect
>
> everyone's right to speak; where different perspectives can be
>
> heard and valued; where members take responsibility for
>
> themselves, each other, and the group as a whole; and where each
>
> member has a stake and a voice in collective decisions.

Such a classroom must be marked by trust, openness, listening, participating via

multiple avenues, and appreciation for the views of others. A reflective classroom

space can, and should, be co-constructed by teachers and students, and Shuster

describes one approach to this process as "contracting," wherein clear rules or

expectations are set for class participation, as are consequences for those who

violate these shared norms. Some such expectations may include setting

regulations against behaviors like putdowns or interruptions and encouraging

practices like sharing talking time, writing down thoughts students may not feel

comfortable sharing aloud to discuss later with the teacher, responding to

disagreement using certain phrasings or strategies, or asking questions to clarify

understanding of what others are saying (Shuster). An environment such as the

one Shuster describes provides space for students to develop and articulate their

own positions, respond constructively to others, and pause to reflect on their own

understanding, as well as the limitations of, their viewpoints. In considering the

idea of the reflective classroom, I recognize that this is an aspect of sustaining a

culture of civil discourse that I do not make explicit enough. While there are certainly expectations for the ways in which English 9 students interact with one another, these are set forth in the course syllabus at the beginning of the semester, which does not leave them fresh in the minds of students, nor does it situate these expectations within the context of an argument. While I certainly strive to maintain an atmosphere that promotes respect and listening, it is not overt nor co-constructed with students, and therefore the reflective classroom is an adjustment I would like to make as I continue educating for civil discourse.

Establishing a reflective classroom also creates safe space for controversial topics themselves. One of the chief criticisms of academia is the idea of the "politicized" classroom (Roberts-Miller, *Deliberate Conflict* 10). However, the habits of civil discourse cannot be applied in the absence of conflict. What's more, it is impossible and even irresponsible for educators to shield students from the political, social, and cultural realities that inevitably challenge our society (Morrell 4). In establishing space for sensitive topics, Shuster recommends the practices inherent in a reflective classroom, but also argues that it is beneficial "to first acknowledge the possible discomfort of participants and reassure them that their feelings are valid and their contributions to the discussion are valuable." An activity that guides students through this process may be a useful way to approach controversial topics, and Shuster's suggestion for such an activity in which students reflect and journal about their emotions and possible apprehensions prior to discussing such topics is included in Appendix L. Without a classroom culture in which students feel able to take the

necessary risks of engaging in argument, civil discourse cannot authentically

happen. Important to note, however, is that such an environment need not be

pacifying. Disequilibrium and discomfort may be key factors in pushing students

to examine their positions; locate, evaluate, and use information to support them;

respond to others' ideas; or inquire further. And, as Roberts-Miller reminds us,

disagreement can even be exciting and engaging (*Deliberate Conflict* 57). But,

civil discourse cannot occur without dialogue and response, and if students feel

the risks of advocating their own positions are too great, this critical component

of civil discourse will not be reached. When a culture of civil discourse is the

norm in a classroom, then activities that involve argument can be implemented

much more effectively.

Benefits of an Education in Civil Discourse

Today's students are society's best hope if civil discourse is to be

restored, as our communities will, one day soon, be in their hands. Furthermore,

as historical events from Civil Rights Era lunch counter sit-ins to 2018 gun control

protests have shown, students need not wait until after their high school

graduation to actively participate in our democratic society. As John Dewey

writes in *Democracy and Education,* "Such a society must have a type of

education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and

control, and the habits of mind of which secure social changes without

introducing disorder[6]." In other words, educators in a democratic society have the

responsibility to equip their students with the tools to both think and act in ways

that demonstrate authentic civic engagement and advance social change. The

latter begins with citizens' abilities to productively exchange ideas, even when

those ideas are related to controversial issues and involve differing perspectives.

Jenna Fournel writes in her *English Journal* article "Teachers, Schools, and Civil

Discourse" that civil discourse is "a *skill*, not just a product of character, and one

that improves immeasurably when we teach it rather than just expect that it will

happen between good people" (emphasis added). The classroom is an ideal

space in which students can be guided and, to a certain extent, protected as they

learn and hone the various skills needed to participate in discourse (Roberts-

Miller, *Deliberate Conflict* 3). By educating in ways that promote civil discourse,

including engaging students with civic issues, fostering an environment where

productive exchange of ideas can happen, equipping students with the skills

necessary to construct evidence-based arguments, and facilitating their practice

of confronting alternate viewpoints, teachers can help ensure students'

preparedness not only for academic tasks that require these skills (college-

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[6] As has been established, civil discourse does not equate to a lack of conflict but rather relies upon it, as does democracy itself. Dewey embraced conflict, writing in *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology,* that "conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates to invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving," and furthermore, that conflict is an essential condition for "reflection and ingenuity." Therefore, "disorder" in this case does not refer to the presence of conflict, which is inevitable and necessary in a vibrant democratic society. Instead, disorder refers to the violence (physical or otherwise) or lack of progress (which keeps the status quo in place, no matter how unjust) that occurs when civil discourse is not practiced in the face of disagreement.

readiness) but for productive membership in our democracy (career- and

citizenship-readiness).

Students' college- and career-readiness have gained nationwide

emphasis since 2009 with the development of the Common Core State

Standards Initiative, which highly emphasizes these two facets of preparing

students for their futures. Since their inception, the CCSS (Appendix M) have

been adopted by 42 states and the District of Columbia. While Nebraska has not

adopted the CCSS, the most recent versions of the state's English Language

Arts standards (Appendix N), released in 2014, mirror the emphasis of college-

and career-readiness. In order to analyze the ways in which civil discourse

education aligns with these two sets of standards, it is useful to again consider

the skills laid out by Andrea Leskes in her plea for civil discourse in the academy.

Critical Inquiry, Analysis and Reasoning, and Information Retrieval and
Evaluation

If participants in civil discourse aim to reach an informed understanding of

issues in order to determine the best course of action, then inquiry into said

issues and the differing viewpoints that accompany them is a necessary step. For

students, this step will inevitably involve locating and evaluating information, and

both the CCSS and Nebraska ELA standards emphasize the evaluation of texts

(which, in both sets of standards, are not limited to written documents). The

CCSS Anchor Standards for reading promote close reading in order to make

logical inferences and support them using the text; determining central ideas and

their support; analyzing structure, point of view, and purpose; and delineating claims and evidence and analyzing their reasoning and relevance ("English Language Arts Standards"). Similarly, the Nebraska ELA standards require that students evaluate meaning and reliability; consider author's purpose, style, influences, and perspectives; interpret and evaluate information; build background knowledge to deepen understanding; "formulate and justify inferences" using evidence from the text; and use evidence to "support analysis, reflection, and research" through multiple media ("English Language Arts Education").

Nebraska's ELA standards have a unique subset under the category of "multiple literacies," which further support the civil discourse skills of information retrieval and evaluation. Specifically, this subset of standards asks students to locate, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and cite information from both print and digital resources in order to inform and defend their understandings. Civil discourse education similarly requires these literacy skills, which are complex even for adults, but they are necessary if students are to understand the information they are consuming regarding a given issue and then determine whether the information ought to be trusted as they use it to arrive at their own positions or courses of action. Analysis, reasoning, and evaluation will also be required as students come to terms with opposing viewpoints and mount responses to them, which leads to Leskes's next set of civil discourse skills.

Effective Written and Oral Communication

Civil discourse necessarily depends on more than mere consideration of arguments but also the production of one's own, whether written or spoken. The CCSS Anchor Standards for writing emphasize the skills necessary for students to effectively participate in written discourse, including writing arguments with claims supported by "valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence," producing writing that is clear and appropriate for its purpose and audience, constructing pieces that demonstrate research and understanding of the topic being investigated, and drawing upon evidence ("English Language Arts Standards"). Nebraska's ELA standards also promote students' use of authoritative sources in constructing texts that investigate, generate or evaluate ideas, raise questions, and/or solve problems, all while supporting these ideas with evidence and presenting them in a way that is appropriate for audience and purpose ("English Language Arts Education"). Civil discourse demands these skills as students form connections between the information they consume regarding the issue under investigation and the claims they produce. Additionally, both sets of standards, as well as civil discourse, emphasize audience awareness, for presenting reasoning that others, particularly those with diverse backgrounds and differing viewpoints, will find valid is a crucial discourse move.

Speaking and listening, of course, have their place in civil discourse as well, and both are stressed in the CCSS and the Nebraska ELA standards. Listening, as noted earlier, is crucial for effective discourse, and Nebraska's ELA standards specifically call upon students' active listening skills, including analysis

of the information presented and its motives and credibility. The CCSS

emphasize these skills as "comprehension and collaboration," requiring students

to converse and collaborate with "diverse partners, building on others' ideas and

expressing their own clearly and persuasively," as well as integrating and

evaluating any information with which they are presented during said

conversations ("English Language Arts Standards"). Just as in the reading

standards, evaluating another's point of view and use of reasoning and evidence

is stressed, and similar to the writing standards, students' arguments must rely

on support that is presented clearly and with regard to purpose and audience.

The CCSS also parallel civil discourse practices in encouraging a continual

exchange over merely presenting one's views, stating that students should learn

to "propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe

reasoning and evidence;" moreover, the CCSS speaking and listening standards

explicitly state that students must "work with peers to promote civil, democratic

discussions and decision-making" ("English Language Arts Standards"). The

connection from national and state speaking and listening standards to civil

discourse is obvious.

An Understanding of One's Own Perspectives and Their Limitations

      A clear understanding of one's own views begins with a thorough

examination of the issue at hand, requiring skills which are encompassed in the

reading standards of both the CCSS and Nebraska. But, what is also

emphasized by both sets of standards is the practice of reflection. All three

subsets shared by these two sets of standards (reading, writing, and speaking

and listening) include reflection as a key component of what students must do in

order to meet them. In guiding student reflection following reading, writing, or

speaking about a particular issue, teachers can facilitate the process by which

students critically consider their own viewpoints, how they arrived at these

viewpoints, and questions or weaknesses that may remain, as asking relevant

questions (whether of others, texts, or the self) is also an important component of

both sets of standards ("English Language Arts Education," "English Language

Arts Standards").

The Ability to Interact Constructively with a Diverse Group of Individuals
Holding Conflicting Views

     The CCSS, as mentioned, emphasize engagement with diverse partners,

as do Nebraska's standards. But even further, the CCSS ask that students

"ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue" through reading

a variety of texts as well as listening to others in conversation ("English

Language Arts Standards"). Nebraska's ELA standards promote the same skills

but also further break down their speaking and listening section into a third

category of reciprocal communication, which involves "clearly and persuasively

[expressing] one's own views while respecting diverse perspectives" ("English

Language Arts Education"). This idea is echoed in the multiple literacies subset,

which puts particular emphasis on ethical digital communication, an arena in

which civil discourse is often neglected. While both sets of standards do highlight

the importance of consuming multiple perspectives, neither stops there, nor does

civil discourse. Constructive interaction need not mean that students cannot

mount their own arguments. Rather, in order for the discourse to be constructive

at all, the argument must advance as students "evaluate [an interlocutor's] point

of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance,

premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used"

("English Language Arts Standards"). As previously asserted, civil discourse

necessitates the serious consideration of others' viewpoints and respect for all

parties as fellow members of a civil society who also have a stake in said

matters, and the standards set forth by both CCSS and Nebraska support these

as classroom practices.

Before moving on from the connection between civil discourse and

college- and career-readiness, it is useful to consider another area of alignment:

the ACT test. This test is highly consequential for students, as it can open up

access to college and funding for higher education. The writing component of this

test requires students to construct an argument (Appendix O). They are

presented with three perspectives regarding an issue, and then they are tasked

with writing an essay that states their perspective on said issue and analyzes its

relationship to the ones provided, supports their perspective using reasoning and

examples, and presents their argument in a way that is clear and logical ("Writing

Sample Essays"). In order to succeed on this exam, students must use the texts

provided to inform their position, requiring them to analyze the uses and limits of

each perspective. They must also logically reason and support a nuanced claim. Their arguments are evaluated on the degree to which they critically engage with the given perspectives, generate relevant ideas, offer rationale, and provide examples to support their reasoning. With all of these requirements aligning with civil discourse practices, civil discourse education seems a practical way of preparing students for such an important exam without falling into the trap of teaching to the test.

In considering the aforementioned pedagogical approaches to civil discourse, C3WP clearly emerges as a strong method for preparing students for the kind of thinking and writing they must do on the ACT, as C3WP similarly asks students to consider various perspectives regarding an issue that extend beyond pro and con; develop a debatable, defensible, and nuanced claim; and cite the perspectives provided as well as other types of evidence in supporting that claim. The ACT writing rubric is included in Appendix O, with the areas of alignment with C3WP highlighted. In addition, C3WP aids in meeting the CCSS and Nebraska ELA standards associated with the civil discourse skills of critical inquiry, analysis and reasoning, information retrieval and evaluation, effective written communication, an understanding of one's own perspectives, and the ability to interact constructively with differing views. The text sets provided or created by teachers for most of the mini-units offer students the opportunity to learn about and critically consider an issue from various perspectives, write recursively about said issues in light of the texts they read, and use them to arrive at a claim of their own. Additionally, mini-units like Finding a Topic and

Researching the Conversation and Extending Argument with Interest-Driven

Research build students' skills in locating and evaluating sources of their own.

The C3WP program also provides an excellent resource for guiding student

reflection in the Using Sources Tool (Appendix P), which encourages students to

consider their claims as well as the ways in which they use and comment on

textual evidence. This can guide them toward not only producing stronger written

work but also a more robust understanding of their stance and its possible limits.

C3WP's focus on using rhetorical moves like illustrating, authorizing, extending,

and countering aid students in developing effective written arguments and

interacting with opposing viewpoints, particularly with the move of countering. A

detailed breakdown of the CCSS and Nebraska ELA standards that align with

C3WP is included in Appendix H.

Beyond College- and Career-Readiness

Among the chief goals of educators must be preparing students to

successfully participate in classrooms both present and future, and in their

chosen careers. Perhaps more significant, however, is preparing them for

democratic citizenship, an important component of which is their ability to use

discourse to investigate, understand, and determine the best course of action

regarding a consequential societal issue. Dana Maloney, in her *English Journal*

article "The Essential Work of English Language Arts—and ELA Teachers—in

Our Democracy" echoes the aforementioned Deweyan attitude that "what we do

in our classrooms protects and perpetuates democracy." Maloney further asserts

that the discourse that keeps such a democracy in place demands strong literacy skills of its people. This set of literacy skills is perhaps in closest alignment with the concept of critical literacy. Critical literacy, as it is used here and defined by Ernest Morrell in *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth: Pedagogies of Access, Dissent, and Liberation*, refers to the literacy skills by which people "make themselves aware of the various social, ideological, cultural, and political contexts in which the languages and literacies of power operate" (5). Morrell further asserts that "Any citizen who aspires to live an independent life will need to confront and counter the ideologies latent in language and texts in our postindustrial, postmodern society in which information is the ultimate capital of exchange" (5).

The idea that civil discourse demands critical literacy is evidenced by Leskes's list of civil discourse skills of critical inquiry, analysis, reasoning, information retrieval and evaluation, effective oral and written communication, understanding of one's own viewpoints and their limits, and the ability to interact with diverse people with conflicting views. Consider, for instance, the skills of information retrieval and evaluation, which are closely related to those of analysis and reasoning. In a classroom environment, teachers may have a certain degree of control over the kind of information students access and use as they practice civil discourse and can therefore work to assure that students are exposed to reliable information. However, outside the classroom, students must independently determine whether the text they are consuming is trustworthy and authoritative as they use it to inform their positions or advance an argument.

There exists an enormous volume of heavily biased, logically flawed, intentionally misleading, or flat-out incorrect information—particularly in the age of social media in which our students are coming of age—and with critical literacy skills, students will be better able to locate and discern the good from the bad. This ability plays a key role in civil discourse, "whether we are talking about reading a newspaper, watching television commercials, consuming texts in preparation for an election, organizing a demonstration, writing a letter in protest of a faulty product, or interrogating our child's standardized test scores" (Morrell 6).

The remaining skills associated with civil discourse suggested by Leskes (effective written and oral communication, understanding of one's position and its limits, and constructive interaction with those holding conflicting views) are also in alignment with critical literacy and are indispensable as students engage with fellow members of their communities in determining the best course of action when disagreement indicates a problem within the community. As Morrell asserts, critical literacy demands that citizens not only understand the social constructions surrounding and impacting them, "but they must also intervene in them; they must speak back and act back against these constructions with counter-language and counter-texts" (5). Intervention cannot occur without effective writing and speaking, particularly with those possessing opposing views, nor without a complete understanding of the reasons and evidence behind one's own claim and the possible weaknesses of it. Not only does critical literacy demand such speaking back, but so does civil discourse, which is not truly being practiced without effective exchange of ideas. Unfortunately, few models of these

last three civil discourse skills proposed by Leskes seem to exist for today's students, especially in the digital environments to which they are native, for as Roberts-Miller asserts, the Internet is used much more often as an "expressivist public sphere" rather than one of civil discourse (*Deliberate Conflict* 191). Such a public sphere allows the status quo to persist at best, and it leads to hostility, even to the point of violence among opponents, at worst. However, if students develop the discourse abilities needed to effectively engage those with whom they disagree, they may be better able to confront society's challenges, injustices, and conflicts.

The critical literacy skills demanded by civil discourse have tremendous benefits for students outside the classroom. For one, they are correlated with increased social and economic opportunity. According to Ernest Morrell's *Critical Literacy in Urban Youth*, students who master critical literacy are more likely to attend college or obtain higher-paying jobs; if these students become parents, they are better able to advocate for their children throughout the children's educational experience and, in turn, increase the children's likelihood of also experiencing positive social and economic outcomes (2). These are all certainly desirable outcomes for students and ones that a civil discourse education can aid them in achieving, but Morrell argues even further that critical literacy can also help individuals come to a critical understanding of the world around them and their own role within that society (167). If students are to one day play active roles in democratic society, this understanding is key, especially if it is to lead to wider societal change. Citizens with critical literacy skills are more likely to

engage in civic actions such as voting, advocacy and activism, or holding public office (Morrell 2). What's more, the critical literacy skills needed for participation in civil discourse are essential to the "transformation of oppressive social structures and relations of production" (Morrell 5). If students are to use civil discourse to confront and subvert societal injustices, then these critical literacy skills are paramount, and teachers who wish to prepare students for democratic citizenship must make them part of the experiences in their classrooms.

Conclusions

There is a clear need for civil discourse practices in today's society, and the classroom is the ideal place to foster these skills. The research presented here not only shows alignment with national- and state-level educational standards and myriad academic advantages of teaching students the necessary skills for civil discourse, but also reveals the many ways a civil discourse education will promote students' authentic participation in democratic processes as citizens. There are multiple approaches and strategies teachers can utilize as they establish a culture of civil discourse, promote authentic discussion, and guide students through presenting effective arguments. Analyzing the work of students who have participated in a civil discourse education reveals their building of the skills necessary to engage in written or spoken arguments. Intentional instruction in civil discourse can benefit students as teachers promote their college- and career-readiness, but more importantly, it can benefit society in ways that help secure a more just future.

Appendix A: Argumentative Prompt for English 9

Compose an argumentative response about the issue we have been researching and discussing in class regarding rural decline.

Remember the assessment tool for informal arguments looks like this:

Total out of 30:	Developing	Competent	Effective
Claim is debatable			
Claim is defensible			
Claim is nuanced			
Writer uses source material			
Writer clearly identifies source material			
Writer comments on source material			
Writer uses a variety of Harris moves			
Writing has a clear beginning that introduces the claim			
Body of writing uses strong paragraphing			
Conclusion leaves writing feeling finished and reminds readers of takeaways			

Once you have constructed your argument, peruse the discussion board and find two classmates to whom you would like to respond. Compose a thoughtful reply to both classmates in which you focus on the reasons and evidence they presented. Please feel free to use the "Sentence Stems for Responding" (found in the Announcements on Canvas) to guide you as you write.

Appendix B: Argumentative Prompt for English 9

Compose an argumentative response about the issue we have been researching discussing in class: Are heroes still considered "heroic" when they violate society's moral and ethical standards?

Remember the assessment tool for informal arguments looks like this:

Total out of 30:	Developing	Competent	Effective
Claim is debatable			
Claim is defensible			
Claim is nuanced			
Writer uses source material			
Writer clearly identifies source material			
Writer comments on source material			
Writer uses a variety of Harris moves			
Writing has a clear beginning that introduces the claim			
Body of writing uses strong paragraphing			
Conclusion leaves writing feeling finished and reminds readers of takeaways			

Once you have constructed your argument, peruse the discussion board and find two classmates to whom you would like to respond. Compose a thoughtful reply to both classmates in which you focus on the reasons and evidence they presented. Please feel free to use the "Sentence Stems for Responding" (found in the Announcements on Canvas) to guide you as you write.

Appendix C: *The Odyssey* Final Essay Prompt for English 9

The Odyssey **Final Essay**

In literature, Odysseus is one of the truest examples of an epic hero. However, many would suggest that Odysseus has some unsavory qualities and flaws in his character. In a well-supported argument that makes use of textual evidence, develop and support a debatable, defensible, and nuanced claim about Odysseus' status as a hero.

Your essay must be in MLA format. See the English 9 Argument Rubric (Canvas) for requirements on content, organization, and conventions.

Your essay must use source material that includes *The Odyssey*, as well as at least three of the nonfiction texts we read for your heroism argument.

Sources you may find useful (available on Canvas):
- Harris Moves slideshow
- Moves Writers Make graphic
- MLA Specifications
- English 9 Argument Rubric

Appendix D: Argumentative Prompt for English 9

Compose an argumentative response about the issue we have been researching and discussing in class: To what degree should we hold teenagers responsible for their actions?

Remember the assessment tool for informal arguments looks like this:

Total out of 30:	Developing	Competent	Effective
Claim is debatable			
Claim is defensible			
Claim is nuanced			
Writer uses source material			
Writer clearly identifies source material			
Writer comments on source material			
Writer uses a variety of Harris moves			
Writing has a clear beginning that introduces the claim			
Body of writing uses strong paragraphing			
Conclusion leaves writing feeling finished and reminds readers of takeaways			

Once you have constructed your argument, peruse the discussion board and find two classmates to whom you would like to respond. Compose a thoughtful reply to both classmates in which you focus on the reasons and evidence they presented. Please feel free to use the "Sentence Stems for Responding" (found in the Announcements on Canvas) to guide you as you write.

Appendix E: *Romeo and Juliet* Final Essay Prompt for English 9

Romeo and Juliet **Final Essay**

Romeo and Juliet are deemed "star-crossed lovers" at the beginning of the play, meaning that fate is working against them. Also, they are merely teenagers with many adults influencing their lives. Still, they make many consequential decisions for themselves. In a well-supported argument that makes use of textual evidence, develop and support a debatable, defensible, and nuanced claim addressing the question of whether Romeo and Juliet are accountable for their own deaths.

Your essay must be in MLA format. See the English 9 Argument Rubric (Canvas) for requirements on content, organization, and conventions.

Your essay must use source material that includes *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as at least three of the nonfiction texts we read for your teenage accountability argument.

Sources you may find useful (available on Canvas):
- Harris Moves slideshow
- Moves Writers Make graphic
- MLA Specifications
- English 9 Argument Rubric

Appendix G: Argumentative Prompt for English 9

Compose an argumentative response about the issue we have been researching discussing in class: Are protests an effective means of making social change?

Remember the assessment tool for informal arguments looks like this:

Total out of 30:	Developing	Competent	Effective
Claim is debatable			
Claim is defensible			
Claim is nuanced			
Writer uses source material			
Writer clearly identifies source material			
Writer comments on source material			
Writer uses a variety of Harris moves			
Writing has a clear beginning that introduces the claim			
Body of writing uses strong paragraphing			
Conclusion leaves writing feeling finished and reminds readers of takeaways			

Once you have constructed your argument, peruse the discussion board and find two classmates to whom you would like to respond. Compose a thoughtful reply to both classmates in which you focus on the reasons and evidence they presented. Please feel free to use the "Sentence Stems for Responding" (found in the Announcements on Canvas) to guide you as you write.

Appendix G: Research Essay Prompt for English 9

Research Essay Requirements

Topic: For your research essay, you will be choosing an issue that interests and/or affects you, your community, etc. You will research the topic; curate a text set of reliable sources; develop a debatable, defensible, and nuanced claim about that issue; and support it with text evidence.

As you support your claim in the body of your essay, you should be sure to thoroughly answer the following questions as they apply to your topic:
- Describe or define the issue in detail. What is it?
- Where does it occur?
- When did it begin or come to light in the public eye?
- Who/what is affected by it?
- What are the root causes?
- What are the potential effects?
- What are the various perspectives on this issue?
- What has been done to solve the problem?
- What organizations, if any, exist that address the issue, and what do they do?
- What could or should still be done to address this issue?

*The issue could be one that affects a community as small as our school to one that affects people worldwide, your choice. Keep in mind, however, that it is often more enjoyable to research and write about something that affects and/or is interesting to you.

Your essay must utilize a minimum of four reliable sources, and they should represent a variety of perspectives on the issue.

Sources you may find useful (available on Canvas):
- Harris Moves slideshow
- Moves Writers Make graphic
- MLA Specifications
- English 9 Argument Rubric

Appendix H: C3WP Resources and CCSS/Nebraska ELA Standards Alignment

ENTERING THE CONVERSATION

Title	Description	Skill Emphasis	Standards Addressed
Creating a Culture of Argument/Writing/Civic Discourse	Create a culture of argument through routines and habits of consistent reading and writing.	• Identify and respond to arguments in the world. • Develop routine argument strategies and skills.	LA 1.6, LA (9-12) 1.6.a LA 2.1, LA 2.1.a LA 3.3, LA 3.3.c CCSS 6-12 Speaking and Listening 1.a-d, 2, 3, 4,6
Writing into the Day to Jumpstart Argument	Consider multiple perspectives on an issue and enter the conversation.	• Describe a conversation among nonfiction sources. • Join the conversation. • Craft a claim with supporting evidence.	LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c LA 2.2, LA 2.2.c CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10

USING SOURCE MATERIAL PURPOSEFULLY

Title	Description	Skill Emphasis	Standards Addressed
Writing and Revising Claims	Layer annotated reading, reflective writing, and critical thinking to gather information from texts, consider multiple angles on a topic, develop a recursive claim, and finish a draft.	• Explore an issue to make a claim. • Identify and respond to evidence. • Revise claim based on new information in sources • Integrate sources.	LA 1.6, LA 1.6.J, LA 1.6.K LA 2.2, LA (4-8) 2.2.a, LA (9-12) 2.2.a LA 2.2.b LA 4.2, LA 4.2.b CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10
Connecting Evidence to Claims	Write commentary that explains how and why	• Write and revise a claim throughout becoming	LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c LA 2.2,

Title	Description	Skill Emphasis	Standards Addressed
	information becomes evidence that supports a claim	informed and planning process • Identify evidence and explain the importance of its connection to the claim • Comment on evidence in ways that connect the evidence to the claim	LA (4-8) 2.2.a, LA (9-12) 2.2.a CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10
Focusing on Evidence	Write commentary that explains how and why information becomes evidence that supports a claim	• Explore evidence from multiple sources representing a range of perspectives in a conversation around a single issue • Make a claim that is debatable and defensible. • Identify evidence and explain its relevance to a claim.	LA 1.6, LA (4-8) 1.6.n, LA (9-12) 1.6.n LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c LA 4.1, LA 4.1.a, LA 4.1.c CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10

ADVANCING ARGUMENTS WITH EVIDENCE

Title	Description	Skill Emphasis	Standards Addressed
Organizing Evidence	Select, organize, and connect evidence to support a nuanced claim.	• Select and organize evidence from sources representing multiple perspectives/stakeholders • Plan multiple approaches to organizing evidence • Draft to support nuanced claim	LA 1.6, LA 1.6 (4-8) 1.6.n, LA (9-12) 1.6.n LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.a, LA (9-12) 2.1.a, LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10
Ranking Evidence	Evaluate quality and relevance of evidence to support a claim.	• Analyze use of evidence in sources representing multiple	LA 1.6, LA 1.6.k LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.a, LA (9-12) 2.1.a,

Title	Description	Skill Emphasis	Standards Addressed
		• perspectives on an issue around a single topic. • Select and rank evidence based on relevance to a claim. • Order evidence to plan for logical reasoning in a draft.	LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c LA 2.2, LA (4-8) 2.2.a, LA (9-12) 2.2.a CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10
Making the Case in an OpEd	Structure a purposeful argument for an authentic audience.	• Analyze elements of a purposeful Op-Ed. • Connect related & countering evidence sets. • Draft a purposeful Op-Ed with a nuanced claim	LA 2.2, LA (4-8) 2.2.a, LA (9-12) 2.2.a LA 2.2.b LA 2.2.c CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10
Coming to Terms with Opposing Viewpoints	Engage with and objectively analyze multiple perspectives to create respectful counter arguments.	• Compare purposeful arguments across texts representing a range of perspectives in a conversation around a single issue. • Counter opposing viewpoints. • Draft from nuanced claims.	LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10
APPLYING ARGUMENT SKILLS			
Title	Description	Skill Emphasis	Standards Addressed
Writing On-Demand Arguments	Develop on-demand reading and writing skills to independently write an argument of policy	• Read and respond to several sources representing a range of perspectives in a conversation around a single issue.	LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c LA 2.2, LA 2.2.b LA 4.1, LA 4.1.a CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text

		Skill Emphasis	Standards Addressed
		• Quickly construct a nuanced claim & support with evidence from nonfiction sources.	CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10

RESEARCHING SELF-SELECTED TOPICS

Title	Description	Skill Emphasis	Standards Addressed
Focusing on Purpose and Audience in Public Arguments	Plan and draft a letter to a public audience with a focus on purpose and audience.	• Select a topic from multiple choices. • Gather information from multiple sources representing a range of perspectives in a conversation around a single issue. • Develop a claim. • Plan and draft with a focus on purpose and audience.	LA 2.2, LA (4-8) 2.2.a, LA (9-12) 2.2.a LA 2.2.c CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10
Finding a Topic and Researching the Conversation	Find a topic, gather sources, and write a letter using evidence from sources.	• Choose an issue worth writing about. • Gather information from multiple sources. • Develop a claim.	LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.a, LA (9-12) 2.1.a, LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10
Making Civic Arguments	Research local issues using a framework to make civic arguments to local decision-makers.	• Annotate complex texts • Annotate primary source documents • Gather evidence through personal experience, primary research, and secondary research	LA 2.1, LA (4-8) 2.1.c, LA (9-12) 2.1.c LA 2.2, LA 2.2.c CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10

	• Understand multiple perspectives surrounding a complex civic issue • Construct a logical line of reasoning • Revise for publication	
Extending Argument with Interest-driven Research	Identify, plan, and develop a culminating self-selected researched argument project.	
	• Take a position on an issue while claiming personal bias. • Research and write to portray the opposing side in a way agreeable to the opposing side. • Develop an informed claim to interpret and present evidence for civic advocacy.	LA 1.6, LA 1.6 (4-8) 1.6.n, LA (9-12) 1.6.n LA 2.2, LA 2.2.c CCSS 6-12 Reading Standards for Informational Text CCSS 6-12 Writing 1.a-e, 10

Appendix I: Commentary Planner Tool

My Claim:

Text Evidence Quote, Fact, Statistic, etc.	Commentary How could you connect the evidence to your purpose? How can you help readers see the importance of this fact to the argument? How and why does this evidence support your claim?	Possible Outcome or Result: What might happen if we use this evidence to make a decision about how we'll think, act, or believe?
The text says…	How it applies to my claim…	If we consider this…
The text says…	How it applies to my claim...	If we consider this...
The text says…	How it applies to my claim...	If we consider this...
The text says…	How it applies to my claim...	If we consider this...

Appendix J: Sentence Stems for Responding

Adapted from Dr. Robert Brooke's Nebraska Educational Technology Association presentation "Managing the Online Classroom" from April 2017

1. Point and relate (I like what you said HERE because I've

   experienced/thought...)

2. Rephrase and redirect (I think you're saying X and that leads me to this

   insight...)

3. Apply and embellish (Your idea helps me see THIS about our topic, and

   looking this way I also see...)

Appendix K: English 9 Argument Essay Rubric

	A/B	C	D	F
Content	• Writer's claim is nuanced, debatable, and defensible • Writing effectively distinguishes between student's own ideas and source material • Writing effectively comments on source material in ways that connect to claim • Writing effectively characterizes credibility of the source material • Writing effectively uses source material for illustrating, authorizing, extending, and countering	• Writer's claim is debatable and defensible • Writing competently distinguishes between student's own ideas and source material • Writing competently comments on source material in ways that connect to claim • Writing competently characterizes credibility of the source material • Writing competently uses source material for illustrating, authorizing, extending, and countering	• Writer presents a statement, but it is not debatable • Distinction between student's own ideas and source material is developing • Commentary on ways source material connects to claim is developing • Characterization of source material credibility is developing • Writer's use of source material for illustrating, authorizing, extending, and countering is developing	• Writer does not present a claim • Distinction between student's own ideas and source material is not present • Commentary on ways source material connects to claim is not present • Characterization of source credibility is not present • Writer's use of source material for illustrating, authorizing, extending, and countering is not present
Organization	• Writer effectively develops intro, body, and conclusion • Writer effectively uses transitions to show how ideas connect	• Writer competently develops intro, body, and conclusion • Writer competently uses transitions to show how ideas connect	• Intro, body, and conclusion are developing • Use of transitions is developing	• Intro, body, and conclusion are not present • Transitions are not present
Conventions	• Writer effectively uses spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and usage	• Writer competently uses spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and usage	• Writer's use of spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and usage is developing	• Writer's use of spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and usage is weak

Appendix L: Activity for Establishing a Safe Space for Sensitive Topics (Shuster)

The following activity is designed to help create a safe space. You can replace the word "race" with whatever sensitive topic you're focused on.

1. Start with a journal prompt: Tell students that the following writing exercise is a private journal entry that they will not be asked to share with anyone, so they should feel free to write their most honest reflection. Have students take several minutes to complete this sentence: "I mostly feel _____ when discussing race, because _____."

2. Now that students have gathered their thoughts, tell them that you are going to do a group brainstorm. They should not make "I" statements or share how they feel or what they wrote. Tell students: Let's put words on the board that represent the feelings that we think may be in the room when we discuss race. At this point, we will just list and not comment on them.

3. Now look at the list. Ask students: What do the words have in common? (Usually the words are mostly, but maybe not all, negative.) What else do you notice? (The words are not just surface observations; they are deeply personal feelings.) Do you have any other important reflections? (The words represent a wide and varied range of responses.) Which of these feelings are most valid? (They are all valid. You may want to acknowledge that this is a rhetorical question, but it is important to validate everyone's feelings.) Where do these feelings come from? (Personal experiences, the media, stereotypes, etc.)

4. It's important for teachers and students to acknowledge that these feelings are in the room and that they need not be afraid of them. Each person should be allowed to enter this conversation wherever he or she is without being judged or shut down. Everyone needs to feel free to participate without fear of being called racist or given any other label.

Appendix M: Common Core State Standards

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

Key Ideas and Details
1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure
4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing

Text Types and Purposes
1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Production and Distribution of Writing

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge
7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Range of Writing
10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration
1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Appendix N: 2014 Nebraska ELA Standards Aligned to Civil Discourse

	LA 1 Reading: Students will learn and apply reading skills and strategies to comprehend text.
LA .1.6	**Comprehension:** Students will construct meaning by using prior knowledge and text information while reading grade-level literary and informational text.
LA (9-12) 1.6.a	Evaluate the meaning, reliability, and validity of text considering author's purpose, perspective, and contextual influences.
LA (9-12) 1.6.i	Construct and/or answer literal, inferential, critical, and interpretive questions, analyzing and synthesizing evidence from the text and additional source to support answers.
LA 1.6.j	Identify and apply knowledge of organizational patterns to comprehend informational text (e.g., sequence, description, cause and effect, compare/contrast, fact/opinion).
LA 1.6.k	Select text and explain the purpose (e.g., answer a question, solve problems, enjoy, form an opinion, understand a specific viewpoint, predict outcomes, discover models for own writing, accomplish a task).
LA 1.6.l	Build background knowledge and activate prior knowledge to identify text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections before, during, and after reading.
LA (4-8) 1.6.n	Make and confirm/modify predictions and inferences before, during, and after reading literary, informational, digital text, and/or media.
LA (9-12) 1.6.n	Formulate and justify inferences with text evidence while previewing, reading, and analyzing literary and informational text in various formats.
LA (9-12) 1.6.o	Demonstrate an understanding of complex text by using textual evidence to support analysis, reflection, and research via multiple mediums (e.g., writing, artistic representation, video, other media).
	LA 2 Writing: Students will learn and apply writing skills and strategies to communicate.
LA 2.1	**Writing Process:** Students will apply the writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish writing using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other conventions of standard English appropriate for grade-level.

LA (4-8) 2.1.a   Use prewriting activities and inquiry tools to generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, and answer questions.

LA (9-12) 2.1.a   Use multiple writing strategies to recursively to investigate and generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, and answer questions.

LA (4-8) 2.1.c   Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative print and/or digital sources to support claims or theses.

LA (9-12) 2.1.c   Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative print and/or digital sources, including primary and secondary sources, to support claims or theses.

LA 2.1.e   Revise to improve and clarify writing through self-monitoring strategies and feedback from others.

LA 2.1.i   Display academic honesty and integrity by avoiding plagiarism and/or overreliance on any one source and by following a standard format for citation.

LA 2.2   **Writing Modes:** Students will write in multiple modes for a variety of purposes and audiences across disciplines.

LA (4-8) 2.2.a   Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.

LA (9-12) 2.2.a   Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, argumentative, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.

LA 2.2.b   Provide evidence from literary or informational text to support analysis, reflection, and research.

LA 2.2.c   Conduct and publish research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple resources to support theses.

     LA 3 Speaking and Listening: Students will develop and apply speaking and listening skills and strategies to communicate for a variety of purposes.

LA 3.3   **Reciprocal Communication:** Students will develop, apply, and adapt reciprocal communication skills.

LA 3.3.c   Apply conversation strategies to recognize and consider new informatio presented by others in relationship to one's own ideas.

LA 4 Multiple Literacies: Students will apply information fluency and practice digital citizenship.

LA 4.1   **Information Fluency:** Students will evaluate, create, and communicate information in a variety of media and formats (textual, visual, and digital

LA 4.1.a   Locate, organize, analyze, and evaluate information from print and digit resources to generate and answer questions and create new understandings.

.LA 4.1.b   Demonstrate ethical use of information and copyright guidelines by appropriately quoting or paraphrasing from a text and citing the source using available resources (e.g., online citation tools).

LA 4.1.c   Use or decipher multiple formats of print and digital text (e.g., cursive, manuscript, font, graphics, symbols).

LA 4.4.2   **Digital Citizenship:** Students will practice the norms of appropriate and responsible technology use.

LA 4.2.b   Use appropriate digital tools (e.g., social media, online collaborative too apps) to communicate with others for conveying information, gathering opinions, and solving problems.

Appendix O: Sample ACT Writing Prompt

Intelligent Machines

Many of the goods and services we depend on daily are now supplied by intelligent, automated machines rather than human beings. Robots build cars and other goods on assembly lines, where once there were human workers. Many of our phone conversations are now conducted not with people but with sophisticated technologies. We can now buy goods at a variety of stores without the help of a human cashier. Automation is generally seen as a sign of progress, but what is lost when we replace humans with machines? Given the accelerating variety and prevalence of intelligent machines, it is worth examining the implications and meaning of their presence in our lives.

Read and carefully consider these perspectives. Each suggests a particular way of thinking about the increasing presence of intelligent machines.

Perspective One	Perspective Two	Perspective Three
What we lose with the replacement of people by machines is some part of our own humanity. Even our mundane daily encounters no longer require from us basic courtesy, respect, and tolerance for other people.	Machines are good at low-skill, repetitive jobs, and at high-speed, extremely precise jobs. In both cases they work better than humans. This efficiency leads to a more prosperous and progressive world for everyone.	Intelligent machines challenge our long-standing ideas about what humans are or can be. This is good because it pushes both humans and machines toward new, unimagined possibilities.

You are asked to read and consider the issue and perspectives, state your own perspective on the issue, and analyze the relationship between your perspective and at least one other perspective on the issue. Your score will not be affected by the perspective you take on the issue.

Appendix O: ACT Writing Scoring Rubric
(Only scorepoints deemed proficient included, criteria highlighted to show alignment with C3WP principles)

	Ideas and Analysis	*Development and Support*	*Organization*	*Language Use*
Score 6: **Responses at this scorepoint demonstrate effective skill in writing an argumentative essay.**	The writer generates an argument that critically engages with multiple perspectives on the given issue. The argument's thesis reflects nuance and precision in thought and purpose. The argument establishes and employs an insightful context for analysis of the issue and its perspectives. The analysis examines implications, complexities and tensions, and/or underlying values and assumptions.	Development of ideas and support for claims deepen insight and broaden context. An integrated line of skillful reasoning and illustration effectively conveys the significance of the argument. Qualifications and complications enrich and bolster ideas and analysis.	The response exhibits a skillful organizational strategy. The response is unified by a controlling idea or purpose, and a logical progression of ideas increases the effectiveness of the writer's argument. Transitions between and within paragraphs strengthen the relationships among ideas.	The use of language enhances the argument. Word choice is skillful and precise. Sentence structures are consistently varied and clear. Stylistic and register choices, including voice and tone, are strategic and effective. While a few minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics may be present, they do not impede understanding.
Score 5: **Responses at this scorepoint demonstrate well-developed skill in** **writing an argumentative essay.**	The writer generates an argument that productively engages with multiple perspectives on the given issue. The argument's thesis reflects precision in thought and purpose. The argument	Development of ideas and support for claims deepen understanding. A mostly integrated line of purposeful reasoning and illustration capably conveys the significance of the argument. Qualifications and	The response exhibits a productive organizational strategy. The response is mostly unified by a controlling idea or purpose, and a logical sequencing of ideas contributes to the effectiveness of	The use of language works in service of the argument. Word choice is precise. Sentence structures are clear and varied often. Stylistic and register choices, including voice and tone, are purposeful and productive. While

	establishes and employs a thoughtful context for analysis of the issue and its perspectives. The analysis addresses implications, complexities and tensions, and/or underlying values and assumptions.	complications enrich ideas and analysis.	the argument. Transitions between and within paragraphs consistently clarify the relationships among ideas.	minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics may be present, they do not impede understanding.
Score 4: **Responses at this scorepoint demonstrate adequate skill in writing an argumentative essay.**	The writer generates an argument that engages with multiple perspectives on the given issue. The argument's thesis reflects clarity in thought and purpose. The argument establishes and employs a relevant context for analysis of the issue and its perspectives. The analysis recognizes implications, complexities and tensions, and/or underlying values and assumptions.	Development of ideas and support for claims clarify meaning and purpose. Lines of clear reasoning and illustration adequately convey the significance of the argument. Qualifications and complications extend ideas and analysis.	The response exhibits a clear organizational strategy. The overall shape of the response reflects an emergent controlling idea or purpose. Ideas are logically grouped and sequenced. Transitions between and within paragraphs clarify the relationships among ideas.	The use of language conveys the argument with clarity. Word choice is adequate and sometimes precise. Sentence structures are clear and demonstrate some variety. Stylistic and register choices, including voice and tone, are appropriate for the rhetorical purpose. While errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, they rarely impede understanding.

Appendix Q: C3WP Using Sources Tool for Students

Student Using Sources Tool

(Check one) _____Peer Response _____Self Review

Writer's Name: _____ **Draft number:** _____

Responder's Name: _____ **Date/Class period**: _____

Remember: The questions below focus on a set of skills that helps us to write effective arguments.

1. As you read, use annotations and/or highlighters to identify these three argument components: claim, source material, and commentary.

2. After reading the paper, do you have a sense of the writer's position on this topic?
___ The claim thoroughly explains the position and expertly focuses the argument.
___ The claim somewhat explains the position and somewhat focuses the argument.
___ The writing includes a claim, but the argument lacks focus.
___ The writing doesn't include a claim.

3. Does the writing include information from other sources?
___ Three or more sources
___ Two sources
___ One source
___ No sources

4. Does the writing include source material that represents multiple perspectives?
___ The writing presents multiple perspectives that go beyond pro and con.
___ The writing presents pro and con perspectives.
___ The writing presents a one-sided perspective.
___ The writing does not use source material.

5. Can you tell the difference between writing that belongs to the writer and writing that belongs to the source material?
___ The writing consistently uses signal phrases and/or quotation marks to clearly indicate the use of source material.
___ The writing sometimes uses signal phrases and/or quotation marks to indicate the use of source material.
___ The writing's use of signal phrases and/or quotations marks is unclear.
___ The writing does not use source material.

6. Does the writing establish the credibility of each source used?

___ The writing thoroughly describes each source's credibility.

___ The writing somewhat describes the credibility of each source.

___ The writing somewhat describes the credibility of some of the sources.

___ The writing does not attempt to establish the credibility of the sources.

___ The writing does not use source material.

7. Does the writing's commentary connect the source material to the claim?

___ The commentary consistently includes analysis that clearly shows how the source material connects to and supports the claim.

___ The commentary sometimes includes analysis that shows how the source material connects to and supports the claim.

___ The commentary summarizes the source material and/or offers little analysis to connect to the claim.

___ The writing contains no commentary on source material.

8. Does the organization of the writing contribute to the overall development of argument?

___ The writing is thoughtfully organized and the ideas flow smoothly. I can easily follow the logic and line of reasoning.

___ The writing is somewhat organized and I can somewhat follow the logic and reasoning.

___ The writing is disjointed and the logic and reasoning are often unclear.

9. Does the writing use source material for any of the following purposes? Circle all that apply.

Illustrating – *Using specific examples from the text to support the claim*

Authorizing – *Referring to an "expert" to support the claim*

Extending – *Putting your own "spin" on terms & ideas you take from other texts*

Countering – *"Pushing back" against the text in some way (e.g., disagree with it, challenge something it says, or interpret it differently)*

None of the above

10. *NEXT STEPS for REVISION:* Based on your reading and your responses above, identify the one or two revisions that will improve this argument the most. Consider the claim, use of source material, and commentary.

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