

Argument – analysing an article

Biofuels – looking at the structure of a longer argument

Developing Argument Skills

This activity is one of a set written to improve SPU students' argument skills. There is more information on this project and on how teachers can contribute on the following web page: <http://www.scpub.org/resources/argument,1292,NA.html>.

Once students are familiar with the terms used to describe the components they can apply these to the analysis of a longer argument. Analysis of a longer written argument would be excellent practice before they write their own project, which should be an extended argument. A recent article in the Guardian criticising proposals to use biofuels, available free on the archive, is suitable but many others would be equally so depending on the SPU topic to be covered.

You may decide it is too long but it can easily be edited. The same approach can be used with any appropriate article depending on the SPU topic to be covered.

Method

Students would probably benefit most if they were first reminded of the components of an argument. The model diagram in the activity [Air Pollution – regulation of car emissions](#) which can be found on web page <http://www.scpub.org/resources/argument,1292,NA.html> would be suitable. They could then work independently until they have done as much as they can and then share their ideas with a partner.

The adoption of biofuels would be a humanitarian and environmental disaster for the planet

George Monbiot

The Guardian

December 03 2004

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/renewable/story/0,2763,1357463,00.html>

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In many argument pieces in the newspapers each paragraph is an argument in its own right. Each paragraph then supports the main claim or includes a counterargument and rebuttal.

1. Read the article. Look at each paragraph separately and decide whether the argument in that paragraph could be described as;
 - summarising the main evidence and claim
 - an intermediate argument, claim and grounds, that supports the main claim
 - a counter argument
 - a rebuttal of the counter argument.
2. Choose two intermediate arguments. Evaluate the evidence used to support the claim.
3. An author often qualifies the claim so that it is more easily accepted. For example you are more likely to accept the claim, ‘We think that some recent extreme weather conditions are caused by the increase in greenhouse gases’, than the claim ‘Recent hurricanes are caused by the increase in greenhouse gases’. See if you can find examples of such qualifications in the article.
4. Are you convinced by the overall argument? Pick out the two main grounds that convince you. Or if the overall argument does not convince you pick out two reasons why.
5. Discuss your analysis of the article with another student or share your ideas in a class discussion.