**Student Resources**

***A Case-Based Approach to Argumentative Writing***

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* **Includes Writing Assignment**

**Chapter Three: Critical Reading and Thinking**

**Key Concepts:**

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| **Reading with the Grain, Reading Against the Grain-** reading to understand and reading to question. |

**Learning Objectives:**

* Understand aspects of critical thinking, including questions of procedure, preference, and reason.
* Understand aspects of critical reading, including strategies for understanding texts and making connections across texts and ideas.
* Reading academic texts.

**Quiz: Critical Reading and Critical Thinking**

To practice critical reading and thinking, you will use a technique called Reverse Brainstorming.

Reverse Brainstorming: A Different Approach to Brainstorming: Reverse brainstorming helps you to solve problems by combining brainstorming and reversal techniques. By combing these, you can extend your use of brainstorming to draw out even more creative ideas that will ultimately help you solve problems.

To use this technique, you start with one or two “reverse” questions: Instead of asking, “How do I (we) solve or prevent this problem?” ask, **“How could I possibly cause the problem?”** And instead of asking “How do I achieve these results?” ask, **“How could I possibly achieve the opposite effect?”**

**How to Use the Tool**

1. Clearly identify the problem or challenge and write it down.
2. Reverse the problem or challenge by asking, “How could I possibly achieve the opposite effect?”
3. Brainstorm the reverse problem to generate reverse solution ideas. Allow the brainstorm ideas to flow freely. Do not reject anything at this stage.
4. Once you have brainstormed all the ideas to solve the reverse problem, now reverse these into solution ideas for the original problem or challenge.
5. Evaluate these solution ideas. Can you see a potential solution? Can you see attributes of a potential solution?

Use the Reverse Brainstorming Activity after you have read, annotated, questioned assumptions, and summarized the following essay. You will not submit your critical reading strategies; however, you will submit your Reverse Brainstorming attempts. Come to class prepared to discuss your critical reading of the essay. I may ask several of you to lead discussion during our next class meeting.

Read Pippa Biddle’s blogpost entitled, “The Problem with Little White Girls (and boys): Why I Stopped Being a Voluntourist”

White people aren’t told that the color of their skin is a problem very often. We sail through police checkpoints, don’t garner sideways glances in affluent neighborhoods, and are generally understood to be predispositioned for success based on a physical characteristic (the color of our skin) we have little control over beyond sunscreen and tanning oil.

After six years of working in and traveling through a number of different countries where white people are in the numerical minority, I’ve come to realize that there is one place being white is not only a hindrance but negative –  most of the developing world.

In high school, I traveled to Tanzania as part of a school trip. There were 14 white girls, 1 black girl who, to her frustration, was called white by almost everyone we met in Tanzania, and a few teachers/chaperones. $3000 bought us a week at an orphanage, a half-built library, and a few pickup soccer games, followed by a week-long safari.

Our mission while at the orphanage was to build a library. Turns out that we, a group of highly educated private boarding school students were so bad at the most basic construction work that each night the men had to take down the structurally unsound bricks we had laid and rebuild the structure so that, when we woke up in the morning, we would be unaware of our failure. It is likely that this was a daily ritual. Us mixing cement and laying bricks for 6+ hours, them undoing our work after the sunset, re-laying the bricks, and then acting as if nothing had happened so that the cycle could continue.

Basically, we failed at the sole purpose of our being there. It would have been more cost-effective, stimulative of the local economy, and efficient for the orphanage to take our money and hire locals to do the work, but there we were trying to build straight walls without a level.

That same summer, I started working in the Dominican Republic at [a summer camp I helped organize for HIV+ children](http://camphopeandjoy.wordpress.com/). Within days, it was obvious that my rudimentary Spanish set me so far apart from the local Dominican staff that I might as well have been an alien. Try caring for children who have a serious medical condition, and are not inclined to listen, in a language that you barely speak. It isn’t easy. Now, 6 years later, I am much better at Spanish and am still highly involved with the camp programming, fundraising, and leadership. However, I have stopped attending having finally accepted that my presence is not the godsend I was coached by non-profits, documentaries, and service programs to believe it would be.

You see, the work we were doing in both the DR and Tanzania was good. The orphanage needed a library so that they could be accredited to a higher level as a school, and the camp in the DR needed funding and supplies so that it could provide HIV+ children with programs integral to their mental and physical health. It wasn’t the work that was bad. It was me being there.

It turns out that I, a little white girl, am good at a lot of things. I am good at raising money, training volunteers, collecting items, coordinating programs, and telling stories. I am flexible, creative, and able to think on my feet. On paper I am, by most people’s standards, highly qualified to do international aid. But I shouldn’t be.

I am not a teacher, a doctor, a carpenter, a scientist, an engineer, or any other professional that could provide concrete support and long-term solutions to communities in developing countries. I am a 5′ 4″ white girl who can carry bags of moderately heavy stuff, horse around with kids, attempt to teach a class, tell the story of how I found myself (with accompanying PowerPoint) to a few thousand people and not much else.

Some might say that that’s enough. That as long as I go to X country with an open mind and a good heart I’ll leave at least one child so uplifted and emboldened by my short stay that they will, for years, think of me every morning.

I don’t want a little girl in Ghana, or Sri Lanka, or Indonesia to think of me when she wakes up each morning. I don’t want her to thank me for her education or medical care or new clothes. Even if I am providing the funds to get the ball rolling, I want her to think about her teacher, community leader, or mother. I want her to have a hero who she can relate to – who looks like her, is part of her culture, speaks her language, and who she might bump into on the way to school one morning.

After my first trip to the Dominican Republic, I pledged to myself that we would, one day, have a camp run and executed by Dominicans. Now, about seven years later, the camp director, program leaders and all but a handful of counselors are Dominican. Each year we bring in a few Peace Corps Volunteers and highly skilled volunteers from the USA who add value to our program, but they are not the ones in charge. I think we’re finally doing aid right, and I’m not there.

Before you sign up for a volunteer trip anywhere in the world this summer, consider whether you possess the skill set necessary for that trip to be successful. If yes, awesome. If not, it might be a good idea to reconsider your trip. Sadly, taking part in international aid where you aren’t particularly helpful is not benign. It’s detrimental. It slows down positive growth and perpetuates the “white savior” complex that, for hundreds of years, has haunted both the countries we are trying to ‘save’ and our (more recently) own psyches. Be smart about traveling and strive to be informed and culturally aware. It’s only through an understanding of the problem’s communities are facing, and the continued development of skills within that community, that long-term solutions will be created.

**Sample Writing Assignment**

**Argument Analysis - Using the Toulmin Method**

The Toulmin Model of argument is a model of argument that focuses on six parts to unpack a writer’s argument. The six-part structure includes: Claim, data, Warrant, Backing, Rebuttal, and Qualifiers. “The Toulmin model has some advantages that make it an excellent model for reading, writing, and viewing argument” (Wood 130). Using the Toulmin model will help you dig deeper into arguments and assessing their viability, given the audience and purpose.

**Purpose:**

* To write an analysis of the argument.
* To use the Toulmin model to focus on the details and evidence of an argument. This dimension of analyzing arguments is similar to how you analyze and think through the rhetorical, contextual, and informational moves of an argument.
* To show an in depth understanding of a contemporary issue.
* To use the writing process to craft more effective communication for your audience.
* To use summary, paraphrase, and direct quote to analyze an author’s claim and overall argument.

**Audience:** A receptive audience interested in the contemporary issue

**Task:** Your task is to write an analysis of an academic argument that takes a stance on a contemporary issue. You will use the Toulmin six-part structure to write a well-organized analysis of an author’s argument. You should you have thesis and support your analysis of the author’s argument with evidence you glean from the author’s text. Do not organize your essay into the six-part structure categories. Instead, decide what you want to say about the argument. Your goal is not to say what you like or dislike; *it is to note what you think makes the argument work, for example strong evidence or data, or how it fails, for example, too much emphasis on emotional appeals.*

A Toulmin analysis answers questions like the following:

* What is the main argument?
* What is the basis for any given claim(s) and is it reasonable? Why or why not?
* What are warrants used (or, what is the link or bridge between evidence and an argument made), and are they reasonable?
* What evidence or examples are used? Are they from credible sources?
* What reasoning is used with the evidence? In other words, how is the evidence used?
* What are counterarguments? Or what is a reasonable position (or multiple reasonable positions) that are not in agreement with the argument? What are the merits of each counterargument? Why, ultimately, is the alternative argument more reasonable?

**Requirements**:

**Schedule of Activities and Due dates**