



HxA High School Classroom Activity Series

Mini-Unit Four: Seek to Understand Opposing Points of View

This mini-unit introduces students to the concepts of “steel man” and “dialectical thinking” to help them understand and appreciate both sides of an argument.

By completing this mini-unit, students will:

- Understand issues more completely and accurately.
- Understand their own views and the views of others.
- Be able to identify fallacious arguments.
- Be able to have more productive dialogue.

This mini-unit asks students to work independently and with their peers to determine the argument of the opposing side, which will help them better understand their own views and, if warranted, change their mind. In addition, this mini-unit helps students with a diverse range of worldviews get along with each other better.

Standards

This mini-unit addresses the Common Core State Standards outlined in the table below.

	Grades 9 – 10	Grades 11 – 12
English Language Arts — Speaking & Listening		
<i>Comprehension and Collaboration</i>	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3 Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3 Evaluate a speaker’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.

<p><i>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</i></p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.</p>
<p>English Language Arts — Writing</p>		
<p><i>Text Types and Purposes</i></p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</p>

Time

Plan to spend approximately 5 to 6 days (50 minutes per day) completing this mini-unit. The number of days depends on how long you spend on each activity and whether you assign activities as in-class work or homework.

Although some of the activities can be completed at home, if they are assigned as homework, allot time to discuss them in class. Engaging in these activities may be the first time that students have been asked to articulate a viewpoint they do not hold. Providing a time for students to debrief in class will help them strengthen their ability to engage in this process.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<p>Warm-Up Activity: "Elephant and Rider" (see below)</p> <p>Activity: "Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies."</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: Did you think about logical fallacies after class? Did you notice them used in shows, on social media, etc.?</p> <p>Continue discussion of logical fallacies and completion of activity</p> <p>Activity: "Seeking Disconfirmation"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: On your "Seeking Disconfirmation" worksheet, what did you write as a next step for understanding an opposing view?</p> <p>Activity: "Challenging Our Political Biases"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: In your "Challenging Our Political Biases" assignment, how did it feel writing a supporting argument for a view you disagree with?</p> <p>Activity: "Dialectical Thinking"</p>	<p>Warm-Up Activity: Ask students: Reflect on the "Dialectical Thinking" activity, what was difficult about that activity, and what was easy about it?</p> <p>Discussion questions: "Dialectical Thinking"</p>

Warm-Up Activity

Each day of this mini-unit starts with a warm-up activity. The following section, titled "The Rider and the Elephant," outlines the activity for the first day of the mini-unit. The activity for each subsequent day is outlined in the "time" table above. The first day can be a whole class discussion, but for each subsequent day, have students work in pairs to discuss the topic or answer the question(s).

The Elephant and the Rider

To start this mini-unit, have students watch the short YouTube video, ["Elephant and Rider."](#) After showing the video, reiterate to students that the elephant, which represents our emotions, often overpowers the rider, representing logic and reason. Then ask this question: When trying to persuade someone, what should you appeal to, the rider or the elephant? Then tell students: In this unit, the goal is to better understand our own views and the views of others, which might be in opposition to our own. To do this successfully, we must try to control our elephants, our emotions.

Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies

Before implementing these activities, teach students about logical fallacies using the guide [“Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies.”](#) Students will need to understand the “straw man” fallacy for activities in this mini-unit. Still, as students engage in dialogue and develop arguments, they need to be aware of other fallacies. This awareness will help them pinpoint logical fallacies in the arguments of others and avoid them when developing their own arguments.

The guide provides definitions and examples of common logical fallacies that can be taught to students, and the guide ends with an activity for students. The activity has students develop cards of logical fallacies, including an image and definition for each fallacy, to hang around the classroom. Having the logical fallacies displayed will help remind students how to make sound, evidence-based arguments when engaging in relevant activities.

Seeking Disconfirmation

Start this activity by reminding students of the logical fallacy of “straw man,” then introduce them to the inverse argument, “steel man.” The definitions and examples are found in [“Introduction: “Seeking Disconfirmation” & “Challenging Our Political Biases.”](#) Introduce and teach these terms through any means that best suits students’ needs—e.g., present the definitions and examples through direct instruction then have students provide their own examples.

After students grasp the terms, have them complete the activity [“Seeking Disconfirmation.”](#) The worksheet can be completed independently or with a partner. Having students complete the activity on their own may be more beneficial because breaking down specific ideologies and perspectives can often feel like a personal journey.

This activity will prepare students to steel man an argument, which they will be asked to do in “Challenging Our Political Biases.”

Challenging Our Political Biases

After students have completed the activity “Seeking Disconfirmation,” have them complete the activity [“Challenging Our Political Biases.”](#) Like with “Seeking Disconfirmation,” this activity can be completed in pairs or as independent work, but having students complete it as independent work may be more beneficial. Students will have an opportunity to work with others on a similar task in the following activity, “Dialectical Thinking.”

Dialectical Thinking

Before teaching about dialectical thinking, read the [“Instructor Suggestions: Dialectical Thinking Classroom Activity.”](#)

Teach about the importance of dialectical thinking by presenting the information provided on page 1 of [“Dialectical Thinking.”](#) Use a presentation style that works best for students, but spend time providing examples to students and eliciting examples from them.

Have students work in pairs or small groups to complete the activity on page 2 of “Dialectical Thinking.” Either on the same day or the following day, engage the whole class in a discussion of the reflection questions found on page 3 of “Dialectical Thinking.”

Looking Ahead

Mini-Unit Five, the final mini-unit in this series, has students actively engage with one another to define the terms they use, develop an argument, present an argument, and *steel man* the arguments of others.