

Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Issues/Eli Haber Interview

During this week's audio lesson, we used the various critical thinking tools we have been studying to analyze two issues on the 2012 Massachusetts ballot. In both cases, the Massachusetts Voter Information Guide provided by the state included arguments for and against each ballot proposal which were used as the basis of analysis.

An argument for the medical use of marijuana was analyzed by:

- Turning the opening statements of the "For" argument into a valid syllogism and then discussing how the premises of that syllogism could be tested for soundness
- Looking at the rhetorical devices used to minimize feelings of risks around the proposal
- Discussing the "bandwagon effect" used to appeal to the audience's concern for others, as well as respect for authority

The argument against the proposal was analyzed by:

- Looking at language used to tap into fear over risks associated with the proposal
- Identifying logos-based statements of facts meant to undermine belief that marijuana will only be used for intended medical purposes
- Discussing the importance of deliberative statements proposing reasonable alternatives to the proposed question

In both cases, we looked at how use of misleading statistics or other incorrect information can damage the credibility of both the argument and the arguer. We also looked at how political organizations name themselves to establish credibility or influence decision-making.

The analysis exercise was repeated by this week's guest, an 8th grader who has been studying the Critical Voter lessons, to demonstrate that these skills can be put to use regarding any political issue (or other decision in life) by people of any age group.

Terminology

No new vocabulary was introduced during this lesson.

Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Issues/Eli Haber Interview

Goals

The goal of this lesson is for students to be able to use the critical thinking tools they have been studying to analyze arguments regarding specific issues, including the ability to:

- Turn statements written in normal language into syllogisms that can be tested for validity and soundness
- Identify appeals to logic (logos), emotion (pathos) and shared values (ethos) within an argument, including the ability to determine whether a presenter has struck the right balance between these three Modes of Persuasion for a given argument
- Determine whether an arguer is using words with positive or negative connotation to try to maximize the appeal of or minimize risks associated with their position
- Identify use of rhetorical devices (either linguistic or strategic) to persuade the audience
- Understand how deliberative arguments proposing reasonable alternatives can be particularly effective in persuading an audience one way or another

Students should also be able to use the Information Literacy skills developed during this course to perform research needed to confirm statements of fact made in an argument. And based on their findings, they should understand that the accuracy of information presented by an arguer contributes (positively or negatively) to the credibility of the person making the argument.

Primary Resources

The following resources are available at the www.criticalvoter.com web site to support this lesson:

- **Critical Voter Podcast 014 – Issues and Interview with Eli Haber:** A 30-minute audio lesson that analyzes political issues using the tools of critical thinking, including an analysis performed by this week's guest: 8th grader Eli Haber
- **Quiz** – A short quiz designed to determine if someone has listened to and understood the podcast.
- **Blog Entries** – The Critical Voter blog contains multiple blog entries dealing with the issues covered in the podcast (look for entries the week of November 4, 2012).

Additional Resources

[Massachusetts Voter Information Guide – Ballot Questions](#)

Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Issues/Eli Haber Interview

Suggested Activities

Activity	Notes on this activity
<p>Have students listen to the podcast and answer the quiz questions to ensure they have listened to and understood the concepts covered in the lesson.</p>	<p>The podcast can be played in class or assigned as homework.</p> <p>The quiz is made up of four questions which were designed to be easily answerable by anyone who has listened to the podcast lesson in its entirety.</p>
<p>Ask students to repeat the analysis of ballot question heard during the audio lesson on a local or state-level question that appeared on the ballot in their community.</p>	<p>Note: Not all local state ballots will contain ballot questions and not all localities or states provide voter information containing pro- and con-arguments. If such information is not provided by election officials, arguments in support of or opposing individual questions can be found in the campaign material created by groups associated with either position.</p> <p>At this point in the curriculum, students should utilize as many critical thinking tools as appropriate to analyze each argument. As noted during the podcast, such arguments contain many components that can be reviewed for logical structure, use of rhetorical devices, organization and many of the other critical thinking tools studied during this course.</p>
<p>Ask students to research statements of fact within the arguments from the previous exercises. Ask them to evaluate the credibility of each arguer based on what they discovered.</p>	<p>Research should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review against the actual language of the proposed voter initiative (to ensure arguers are characterizing the proposal accurately) • Checking factual statements (such as statistics) against available information to ensure they pass Information Literacy tests for accuracy, relevance, timeliness, bias, etc.