Lesson Title: Developing an Argument of Fact by Asking the Right Questions

Burning Question: How can I get students to engage with a text (close read), ask questions (inquiry), collaborate, use critical thinking to analyze data, and develop/write an argument in response to an essential question?

Objective/Introduction: In *Teaching Argument Writing*, George Hillocks uses pictures to present the "mystery." This variation requires students to close read and analyze actual text, generate questions, and write a simple argument of fact to answer the question. [*Students may also be asked to examine the strategies they use to find answers.]

Context: As long as an engaging narrative of some kind is available, this could be used in any subject area. The narrative must not, however, tell "the whole story." Students must answer a question that can be supported using evidence from the text and the teacher's responses to the questions students generate during the activity.

Materials: Copies of a carefully chosen narrative with a question or problem at the end

Time Span: Variable, depending on text length and difficulty and how complicated the "solutions" are; teachers may also want students to think about it overnight.

Procedures:

1) Hand out (part of) a story that presents a mystery or a problem requiring students to answer a question: Whodunnit? What logical conclusion can you draw? How did the experiment turn out? What happens next? [The text itself may not provide enough information to actually solve the problem, but there will be an opportunity for students to ask questions later.]

2) Read and annotate the text. This can be done in whatever way is most effective – individually, in small groups, aloud, quietly – but students must have a copy of the text on which they can make notes, draw diagrams, etc.

In PAIRS/SMALL GROUPS, have students address the following:
3) Discuss initial impressions of the story. What do you know for sure? What do you need to know to solve the problem? Share some theories. Wrestle with the question together. *Resist the urge to leap to unsupported conclusions.*

(*Optional) Procedural Strategies: Besides asking someone who already knows the answer, what do you do to begin solving the problem for yourself? How can you get it clear in your own head? How do you approach the problem? What are some critical thinking strategies you use? [Reread, question-search-check, draw a diagram to visualize, test theories against the text (work backwards), consider motives of people involved, examine evidence, decide what is worth

chasing and what is a red herring – how do you decide? Summarize/Simplify the "whole story." Make a list of questions.]

4) Generate Questions: What do you need to know to be able to solve the problem? Write down the specific questions you need answers to. [Some questions will be answered to help you solve the problem.]
5) Ask Questions (NO GUESSING!): The teacher provides answers to the specific story-based questions students ask (not the "Do I have the right answer?" variety). Teacher may also provide direction but should not reveal the ultimate solution (if one exists) to the greater problem. [Teacher must resist the urge to do too much guiding or to tolerate guessing. Let the questions succeed or fail on their own.]

If students are familiar with the "Claim – Warrant – Evidence" chart (Hillocks), this would be an ideal opportunity to have them fill it to illustrate their own reasoning.

6) Write: State a "claim" that answers the essential question posed at the end of the narrative. Identify the evidence that leads to that answer. Explain HOW that evidence supports your claim (warrants).

7) Share. Students read/present their written arguments of fact. [Teacher may choose to share the "right" answer if one exists…or not.]

This is an opportunity to address logical fallacies if any occur in the arguments students present.

Extensions: In science, I can see telling the story/describing the process a scientist like Gregor Mendel went through to arrive at his/her great discovery. In the form of a story, give students most of the facts the scientist was presented with, allow them to ask clarifying questions, then have them write out their own conclusions based on the evidence. [Then share with them the actual outcome of the story to see how they did.] Bill Bryson's book ***A Short History of Nearly Everything* is full of such narratives, presented more as stories than as scientific examinations. Similarly, social studies courses could present the "evidence" that caused a president to declare war (DBQs) and have students make the decision based on their understanding of the evidence.

Rationale: This involves content-area reading, inquiry, critical thinking, discussion, and writing.

Resources:

Bryson, Bill. ***A Short History of Nearly Everything*. New York: Broadway Books, 2003. Print.

Hillocks, George. *Teaching Argument Writing*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2011. Print.

Sobol, Donald. ANY of 28 *Encyclopedia Brown* books

Sukach, Jim. *A Little Giant Book: Whodunit Mysteries*. New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 1998. Print.