

Using Talk and Conversations to Cultivate Academic Language in ELA



Jeff Zwiers
Tamalpais

March 13, 2017

jeffzwiers.org/march13

jzwiers@stanford.edu

A Major Overhaul

LESS

Individual
accumulating of
right answers,
“paying” for points,
& playing school



MORE

**Collaborating,
understanding,
building, using, &
communicating
whole ideas**



Improving Quantity & Quality of Oral Language

	 SPEAKING & LISTENING	 CONVERSING
Increase Quantity	# of students # of minutes	# of students conversing # of turns Length of turns
Increase Quality	Strength Clarity	Co-Construction Collaborative Arguing Conversation Skills



Jeff Zwiers

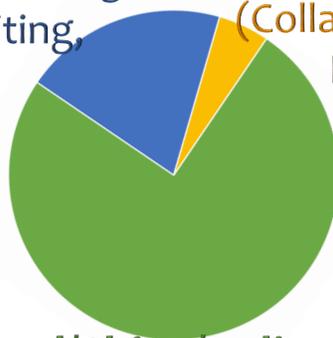
Understanding Language

Types of Classroom Communication

One-way (Productive Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, Multimedia)

Conversational (Collaborative Building, Exploring, Arguing)

Minimal/Shiny/Indirect/Fake (Display, IRE)



Jeff Zwiers

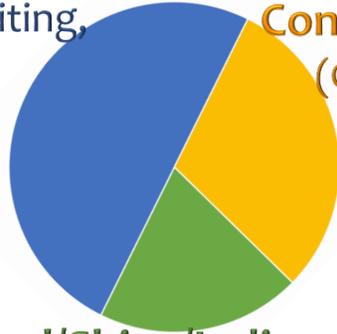
jeffzwiers.org/March10

Understanding Language

More Authentic Communication

One-way (Productive Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, Multimedia)

Conversational (Collaborative Building, Exploring, Arguing)



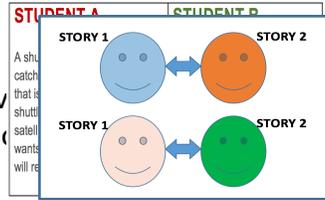
Minimal/Shiny/Indirect/Fake (Display, IRE)

Communicativeness "Test" (Essential Features for Language Development)

___ **Is there a useful & engaging purpose?** In the activity, do students *use* (and *need to use*) language to do something meaningful and engaging beyond just to answer questions or get points? (e.g., language, content, thinking...)

Discuss how authors decide how Columbus Co-design an experiment that measures the speed of sound.

___ **Is there an information gap?** In the activity, do students get or give information that they want, need, or expect? Are there consequences for lack of clarity?

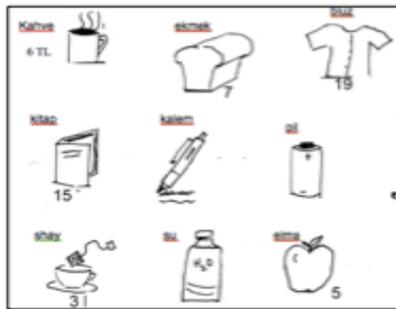


___ **Is there attention to language in service of communication?** In the activity, is there extra assessment focused on improving how language is used?

- Sentence Frames
- Language modeling & scaffolding
- Practice
- Formative feedback

Fortifying Speaking & Listening with
INFORMATION GAP
Activities

Info Gap Activities for Listening and Speaking



Info Gap Activities: A and B Forms

B: Bluz ne kadar?

A: Yehdee lira

B: Kitap ne kadar?

A: Ohn-besh lira

...

A: Fircha ne kadar?

B: Sekeez lira.

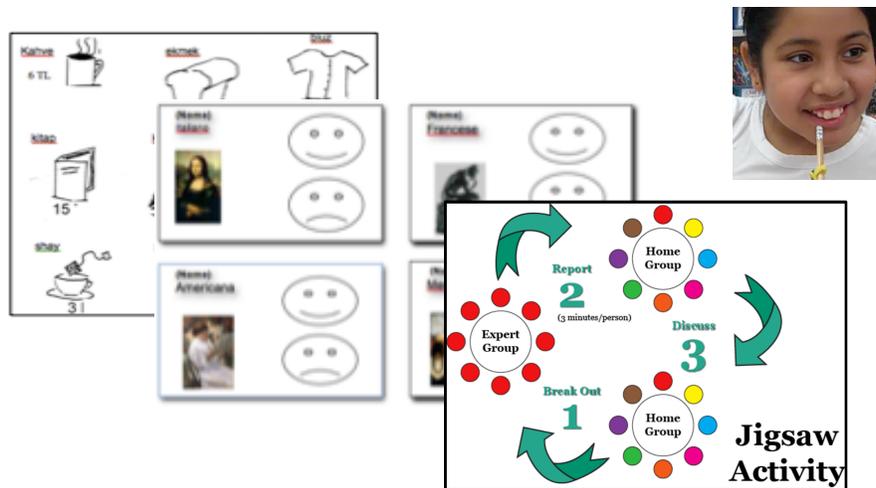
A: Balik ne kadar?

B: Yeermee yooch lira

1 beer	2 eekee	3 yooch	4 dirt	5 besh	6 alth	7 yehdee	A
8 sekeez	9 dohkooz	10 ohn	11 ohn-beer	20 yeer-mee	21 yeermee beer	30 oh-tooZ	

Kahve 6 lira 	ekmek 7 	bluz 19 	fircha 
kitap 15 	kalem 	pil 	muz 2 
shay 31 	su 	elma 5 	balik 

Info Gap Activities for Listening and Speaking



What are situations in language arts, life, or literature in which two people have to share information?

Communicativeness "Test" (Essential Features for Language Development)

___ **Is there a useful & engaging purpose?** In the activity, do students use (and need to use) language to do something meaningful and engaging beyond just to answer questions or get points? (e.g., language, content, thinking, etc.)



___ **Is there an information gap?** In the activity, do students get or give information that they want, need, or don't have? Are there consequences for lack of clarity?



___ **Is there attention to language in service of communication?** In the activity, is there extra teaching and assessment focused on improving how language is used?



APPLICATION TIME

Think about how you might use
Information Gap activities in your
upcoming lessons.

Growing speaking and listening
with semi-structured discourse:

TRANSITION IMPROV

Activities



Transition Improv Activity: Pro-Con

Topics: Social Media's influence on communication skills

Transitions: **However,**
On the other hand,
Then again, ~~but~~

Frames: One advantage is ... For example, ...
Another positive of ... is... because...
A negative aspect of ___ is ...
In spite of the positives of _____,

A & B, Lean?

Jeff Zwiers Understanding Language

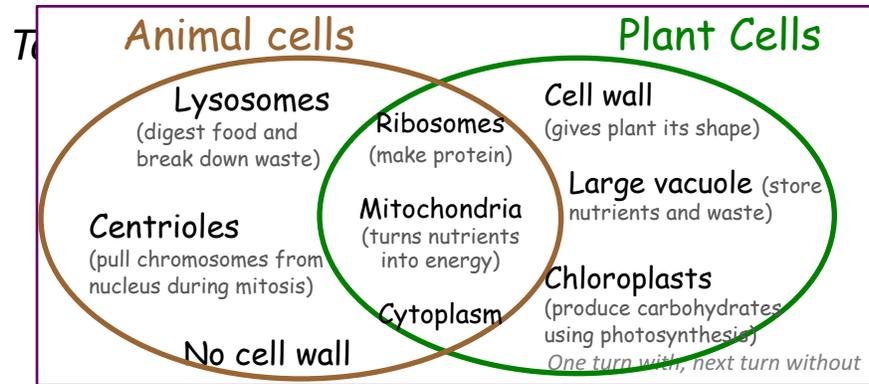
Transition Improv: **For-Against**

Topics: Fracking, adding lime to soil to lower pH, genetic engineering, nuclear energy, stem cell research, human-caused climate change, wolf reintroduction, de-extinction, zoos, preserving wetlands, corn as fuel, extraterrestrial life, desalination, ...

Transitions: **However,**
On the other hand,
Then again, ~~but~~

<i>Frames:</i>	One reason for ... is ... For example, ...	<i>A & B, Lean?</i>
<i>because...</i>	Evidence that supports ... is...	
<i>example</i>	A reason against ... is ... For	

OUTPUT: Transition Improv (Similar-Different)



However,
On the other hand,
Then again,

Unlike animal cells, plant cells have ____, which ...
 Plant & animal cells both have ____, which serve to...
 ... are similar to ____ in that they both ____
 Animal cells differ from plant cells in that ____

Transition Improv: Two Views

Views: Patriots
Loyalists



Transitions: **However,**
On the other hand,
Then again,

~~but~~

Frames: The ___ thought that ...
Many ___ believed that...
A different perspective held by ___ was that...
In the eyes of ___...

Communicativeness "Test" (Essential Features for Language Development)

___ **Is there a useful & engaging purpose?** In the activity, do students use (and need to use) language to do something meaningful and engaging beyond just to answer questions or get points? (e.g., language, content, thinking, etc.)



___ **Is there an information gap?** In the activity, do students get or give information that they want, need, or don't have? Are there consequences for lack of clarity?



___ **Is there attention to language in service of communication?** In the activity, is there extra teaching and assessment focused on improving how language is used?





APPLICATION TIME

Think about how you might use **Transition Improvs** in your upcoming lessons.

Developing Listening, Speaking, & Clarifying with

**“STRONGER Y CLEARER
EACH TIME”**

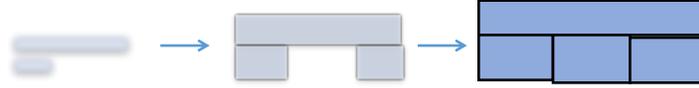
Activities:

Stronger-Clearer Grid

Opinion Continuum



Designing “Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Activities



1. Prompt for an **original response**
2. Successive partners: **borrow and use the language, ideas, and evidence** each time-->
 - **Stronger** (often longer) with better supporting evidence and examples, and
 - **Clearer** with more precise terms and linked, organized, complete sentences.
3. Scaffolds **are reduced during** the activity.

“Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Grid

I think bad things happen when cultures meet, like wars.

Switch partners!
Don't forget to use examples.

I think it's both good and bad. Like you learn from each other, but also you can fight.

(PRE)
Bad things happen when they meet.
Wars start.



What happens when cultures meet and why?

"Stronger & Clearer Each Time" Grid

I think bad things happen when cultures meet, like wars.

Cultures meet and bad things happen like war. But good things, too, like you can learn other language.

1.	Mario	both, learn
2.	Juan	religion, Aztecs,
3.	Spain	
Me		

Switch partners!
Don't forget to use examples.

I think it's both good and bad. Like you learn from each other, but also you can fight.

When cultures meet each other, it helps us to learn how others live, like their religion. But wars can happen, like the Aztecs and Spain.




What happens when cultures meet and why?

"Stronger & Clearer Each Time" Grid

I think bad things happen when cultures meet, like wars.

Cultures meet and bad things happen like war. But good things, too, like you can learn other language.

When cultures meet, is bad and good. Bad cuz they fight wars, like they're different. Spain thought they were better than the Aztecs. And good cuz you can learn languages, like Spanish, and new religion.

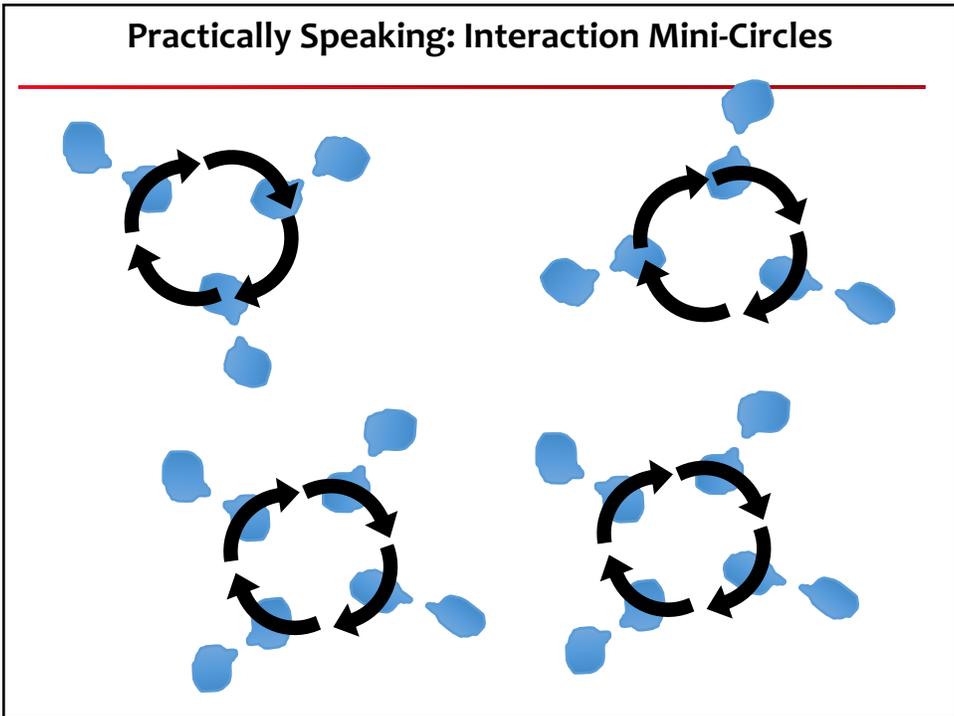
Switch partners!
Don't forget to use examples.

(PRE)
Bad things happen when they meet.
Wars start.

(POST)
When cultures meet, is both bad and good. Bad cuz they fight, like the Aztecs and Spain. Spain thought they were better so they took over. Good cuz of new food and languages and religion.



What happens when cultures meet and why?



“Stronger & Clearer Each Time” Grid

Name	How can literature improve the lives of its readers—and writers?
Me	(just two or three key words, if any)
1.	
2.	
3.	
Me	

One powerful way in which literature can improve lives is...

In one story, for example...

Characters in literature often...which...

~~I disagree with you....~~

(Teacher can have listeners ask clarifying and supporting questions)

Key Practices

1. Push students to push themselves and each other to be as clear as possible every time they say something.



2. Encourage students to be “mini-teachers” who support and draw language out of peers.



3. Set up situations in which students want/need to be clear and want/need to listen to others (clarity matters)



Jeff Zwiers

Understanding Language

What to Look For in Conversations: Conversation Observation & Analysis Tool (COAT)

Prompt

Quantity

Quality

- Effective listening
- Clear speaking (+ use of language asked for in prompt)
- Academic thinking (+ use of thinking asked for in prompt)
- Academic content (+ talk about content asked for in prompt)
- Nonverbal communication

Jeff

E

Building Ideas in Conversations

Prompt	
Quantity	Quality
Supports & Structures	

Laura: I think air has weight. Remember the balloon?

Eli: I disagree.

Laura: Why?

Eli: Cuz I can't feel it. Can you?



Lisa: I think the dog was his best friend in the story.

Edgar: I would like to add to your idea. My dog ran away last year and we found him in the park.

Lisa: Which park?

Edgar: The one by the train station.

Lisa: I took a train to San Jose last week.



Jeff Zwiars

Understanding Language/SCALE

Building Ideas in Conversations

Prompt	
Quantity	Quality
Supports & Structures	

Alex: What caused the fall?

Carlos: The book said disease and war.

Alex: It also said crops and politics.

Carlos: All of them, I guess.



Mansur: I think there are different ways to solve it.

Lynn: So? Just do what the teacher did.

Mansur: But why did she turn the fraction over?

Lynn: Who cares? Just turn it over.

Mansur: OK.

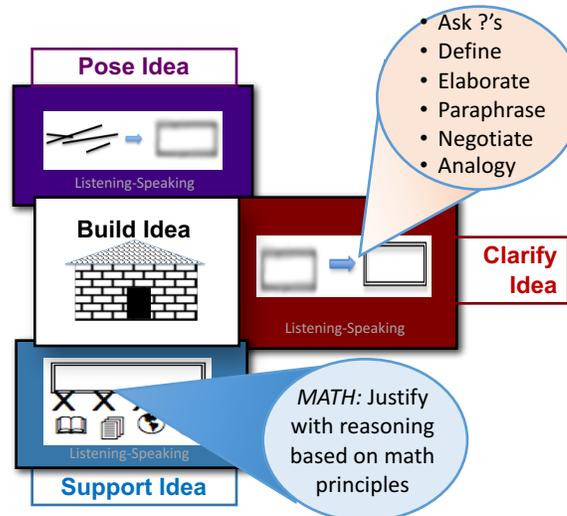
$$\frac{3a}{3c-6} \div \frac{9ab}{c^2-4} =$$

Jeff Zwiars

Understanding Language/SCALE

Constructive Conversation Skills for “Build Up 1 Idea” Mode

Goal: Students collaboratively (but w/o teacher) build an idea (e.g., claim, answer, solution, interpretation), **using the following skills:**



Jeff Zwiers

Understanding Language/SCALE

Conversations at Beginning Levels of Proficiency

Learning objective: Use reasons to argue the importance of a historical figure.

Prompt: Talk about what makes Abraham Lincoln a hero.

A: How Lincoln a hero?

B: He stop slavery, the slaves.

A: How?

B: The war.

A: Yeah, Civil. He fighted it stop slavery.

B: Muchos die in the war.

A: Very bad.

B: But cuál es more bad? Slavery or die?

A: Slavery.

B: Why?

A: Cuz you not free, like, como en la cárcel, y te golpean. And Lincoln stop it. He's a hero.



Constructive Conversations in 9th ELA

Prompt	
Quantity	Quality
Supports & Structures	

Context

- Sheltered 9th grade English class
- Intermediate and early advanced speakers.
- Have read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men*
- Focal conversation skill: supporting your ideas with examples from a text.
- Some prompts are on the board



This Clip

- Prompt: "What do you think an important theme in this book is?"
- How do they clarify and support ideas? ("*What does courage mean?*" "*Can you elaborate on that?*" "*Can you give an example from another book?*" "*How does this apply to our life?*")

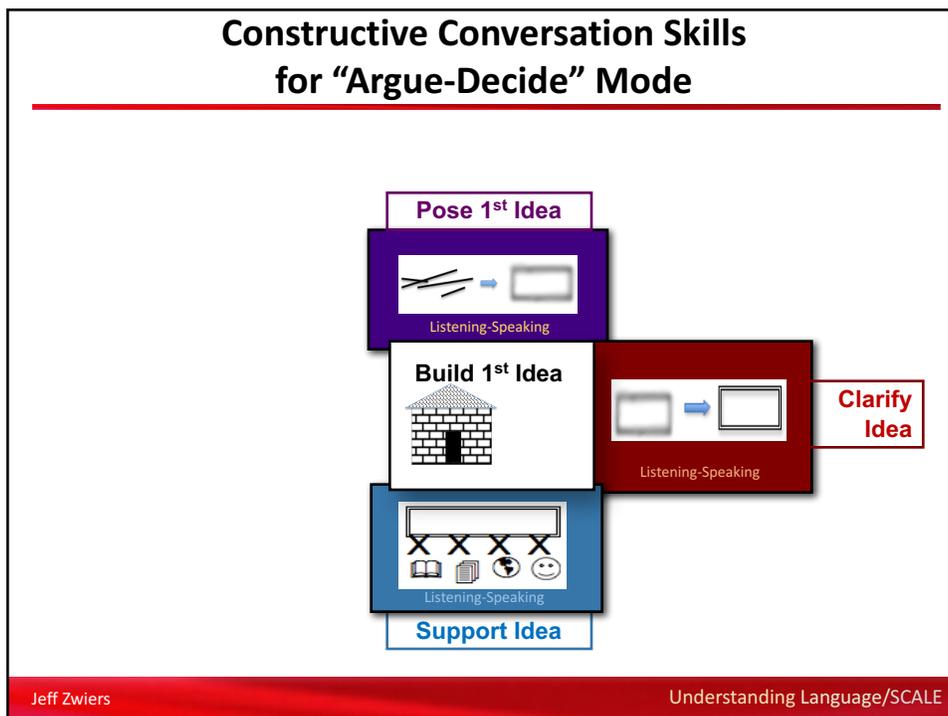
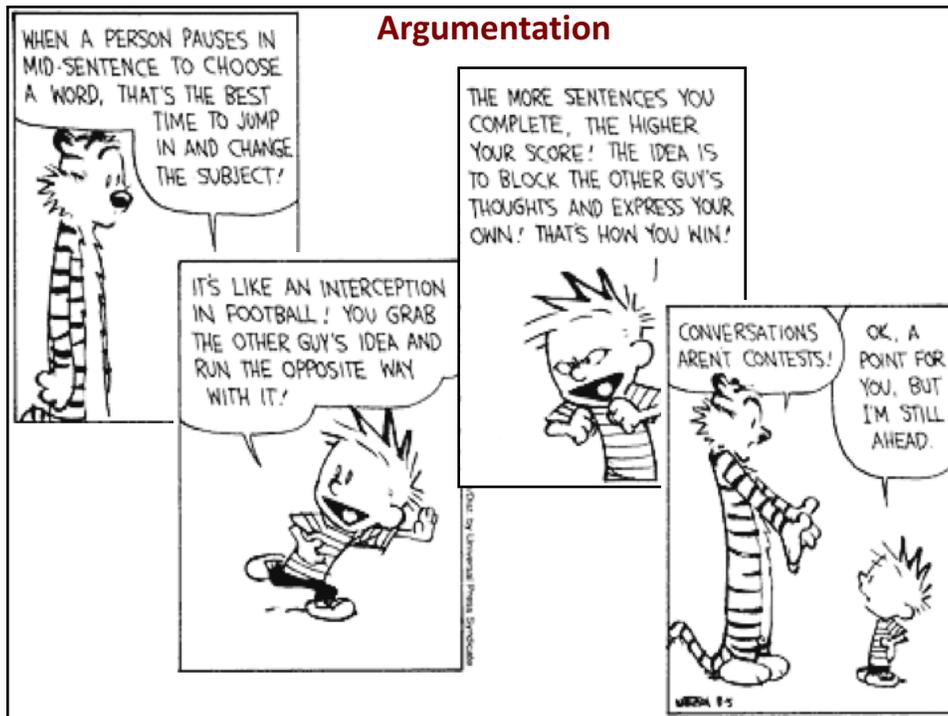
Jeff Zwiers

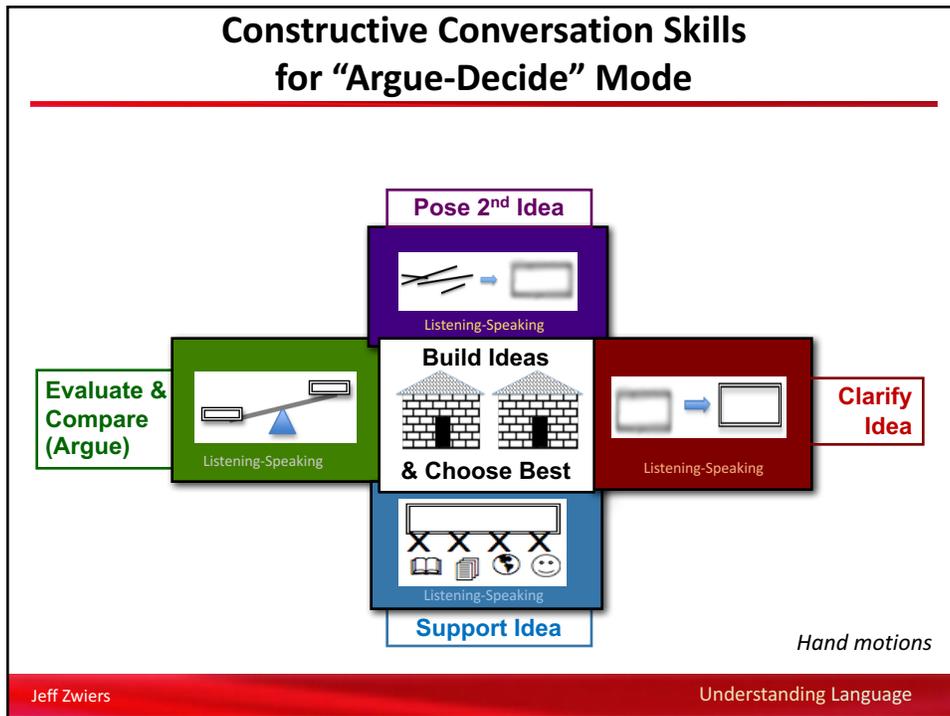
Understanding Language/SCALE

Your Turn: Build up an idea about this text

"[...] If you don't want a house built, hide the nails and wood. If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war. If the government is inefficient, topheavy, and tax-mad, better it be all those than that people worry over it. Peace, Montag. Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn Iowa grew last year. Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely 'brilliant' with information. Then they'll think they're thinking, they'll get a *sense* of motion without moving. And they'll be happy, because facts of that sort don't change. Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy. (Bradbury, 1956)

Is the theme of this passage still relevant? If so, why has it persisted for over half a century?





What to Look For in Conversations: Conversation Observation & Analysis Tool (COAT)

Prompt
Quantity
Quality
<input type="checkbox"/> Effective listening
<input type="checkbox"/> Clear speaking (+ use of language asked for in prompt)
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic thinking (+ use of thinking asked for in prompt)
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic content (+ talk about content asked for in prompt)
<input type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal communication

Jeff E

Constructive Conversation– Language Arts

- A: I think a big theme is to see other perspectives.
- B: Like how?
- A: Like to get to know others feel, in their shoes, like when Jem gets to know Mrs. Dubose.
- B: Yeah, she's mean but was brave to get off morphine before she died; I think that's why Jem was mad when he heard.
- A: What else?
- B: The weird guy, Boo. At the end, Scout sees he's nice.
- A: And they were scared of him but they never met him.
- B: What about when Atticus stops the mob at the jail?
- A: Yeah, I don't think he wanted kids to be there; they snuck out. But what did he say afterward? Maybe it's evidence for the theme. Here, he showed affection to Jem.
- B: So do we have enough evidence to say it's a theme?

Constructive Conversation Activity- WTSN

- B: I think the theme is about racism. (What To Say Next)
- A: What do you mean? (clarify)
- B: Racism is really bad.
- A: How is it bad? (clarify)
- B: It makes you think others are less because of race.
- A: So how is it a theme in this book? (focus-clarify-support)
- B: The teacher said it yesterday.
- A: But we need to get evidence from the book. Maybe when they don't let Jem and Scout go to church. (suppt)
- B: Or when they say Tom is guilty, even though it was obvious he wasn't. (support)
- A: I think the theme is having courage to stand up to racism, like Atticus does, when he takes the case and...

Conversation Sample (6TH ELA)

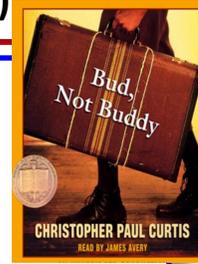
Before the conversation

Conversation skills: Teacher used a Stronger-Clearer Grid to focus on clarifying and getting partners to clarify important ideas.

Content Focus(s): Teacher read a portion of the story *Bud, Not Buddy* aloud and modeled, thinking aloud, how to make summaries, predictions, inferences, and questions.

Language: Teacher put a graphic organizer up front that showed how to support ideas with evidence. Then she modeled language used for supporting, such as “What evidence supports that?” and “Why?”

Prompt: Build up an idea for an important theme in the story.



Conversation Sample (6th ELA) (Using the COAT)

- 1A. Do you have a theme?
- 2B. Maybe racism.
- 3A. What do you mean by racism?
- 4B. It's like when you are mean to people cuz of race. Like you don't pay them enough or like...I don't know, like when they hit you.
- 5A. Or like the KKK and slaves.
- 6B. And this book, what's racism in it, like evidence?
- 7A. Like Mr. Callway. He always has a white person in the band.
- 8B. Why?
- 9A. Something about having land. Like black people couldn't have land, I think. He needed a white person to sign things.
- 10B. So (looking up at board), why did the author write this?
- 11A. Maybe to tell how hard life was then, like with racism?

Prompt	
<input type="checkbox"/> Relevant & Engaging Purpose	<input type="checkbox"/> Need to talk (info gaps)
<input type="checkbox"/> Clear Expectations (language to use, thinking, content)	
Quantity	
<input type="checkbox"/> # of turns	
<input type="checkbox"/> Length of turns	
<input type="checkbox"/> Equity of voice	
Quality	
<input type="checkbox"/> Use conversation skills to co-construct & argue ideas	
<input type="checkbox"/> Turns build on previous turns <input type="checkbox"/> Students pose or choose a relevant initial idea(s) that is focused on learning objective(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Students clarify idea(s) (by paraphrasing, defining, elaborating, asking questions, negotiating, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Students support ideas (using evidence, examples, explanations)	
<input type="checkbox"/> If there are two or more competing ideas (argue/decide): students build up both ideas and	
<input type="checkbox"/> (a) evaluate the strengths/weights of the evidence of each idea <input type="checkbox"/> (b) compare the strengths/weights and choose the "strongest/heaviest" idea <input type="checkbox"/> (c) explain and/or negotiate final decisions & conclusions	
<input type="checkbox"/> Effective listening	
<input type="checkbox"/> Clear speaking (+ use of language asked for in prompt)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic thinking (+ use of thinking asked for in prompt)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic content (+ talk about content asked for in prompt)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal communication	

Conversation Sample (6th ELA) [Use the Support Cards]

- 12B. Yeah, but maybe also to, like, tell how people are good. Bud met nice people. And he only did one mean thing, like putting that kid's hand in warm water//
- 13A. //to make him pee in the bed. That was funny, but he deserved it. Lo merció. So what now?
- 14B. The teacher said to build up ideas. Like my idea of people can be good. Like examples.
- 15A. Oh. Like the guy who picked him up and drove him. The guy with the blood.
- 16B. Yeah. I thought Buddy could live with them. They were nice.
- 17A. And the band was nice, too. Especially Miss Thomas. She was like his mother.
- 18B. How?
- 19A. She tucked him into bed and...I don't remember

Prompt	
<input type="checkbox"/> Relevant & Engaging Purpose	<input type="checkbox"/> Need to talk (info gaps)
<input type="checkbox"/> Clear Expectations (language to use, thinking, content)	
Quantity	
<input type="checkbox"/> # of turns	
<input type="checkbox"/> Length of turns	
<input type="checkbox"/> Equity of voice	
Quality	
<input type="checkbox"/> Use conversation skills to co-construct & argue ideas	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Turns build on previous turns - Students pose or choose a relevant initial idea(s) that is focused on learning objective(s) - Students clarify idea(s) (by paraphrasing, defining, elaborating, asking questions, negotiating, etc.) - Students support ideas (using evidence, examples, explanations) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If there are two or more competing ideas (argue/decide): students build up both ideas and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) evaluate the strength/weight of the evidence of each idea (b) compare the strengths/weights and choose the "strongest/heaviest" idea (c) explain and/or negotiate final decisions & conclusions 	
<input type="checkbox"/> Effective listening	
<input type="checkbox"/> Clear speaking (+ use of language asked for in prompt)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic thinking (+ use of thinking asked for in prompt)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic content (+ talk about content asked for in prompt)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal communication	

Jeff Zwiers

Understanding Language/SCALE

5th Gr. Language Arts/ELD (Use the CAT→)



Context

- 5th grade Language Arts/ELD class in San Francisco
- Advanced and early intermediate partners.

This Clip

- After reading an allegory for the Holocaust, students discuss what could have happened if the animals had stood together.
- They practice stating opinions, paraphrasing, and clarifying

Structuring Collaborative Argument Conversations: Argument Scale

Claim

vs.

**Opposite or
Different Claim**

Which claim's reasons, evidence, and explanations weigh the most?

Claim/Position

Good

Are humans good or evil?

Claim/Position

Evil

Jeff Zwiers
Understanding Language/SCALE

Argument Scale

Prevent dropouts & jail costs

Gets them to read

Kids need to eat

Stay after school

Pizza tastes good

Reason/Evidnc/Exp

Kids need to eat

Reason/Evidnc/Exp

Prevents dropouts, crime, jail costs

Reason/Evidnc/Exp

Gets kids to read

Claim/Position

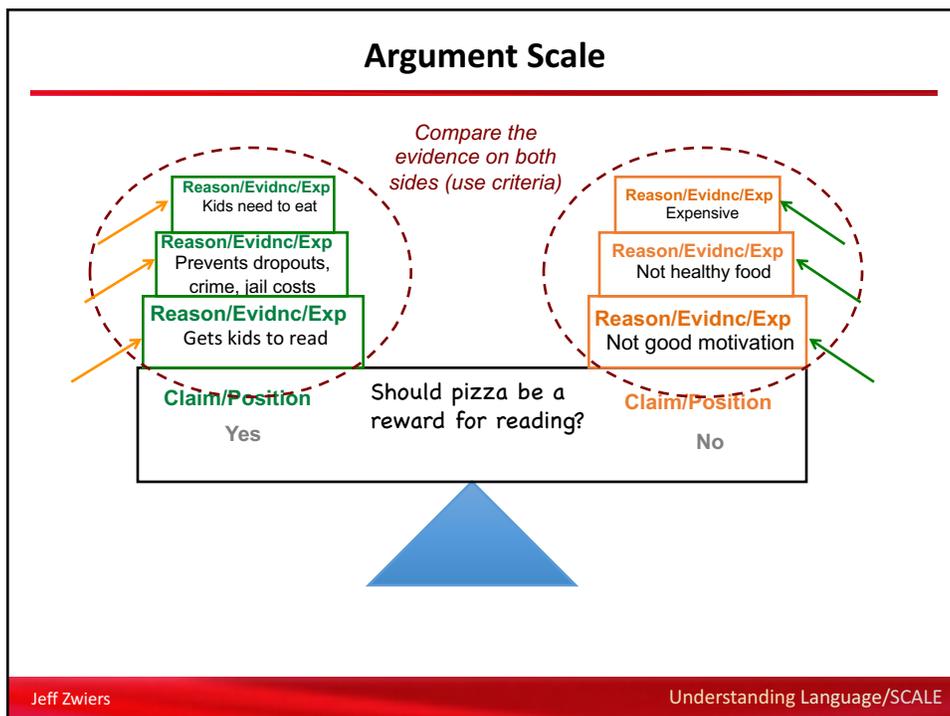
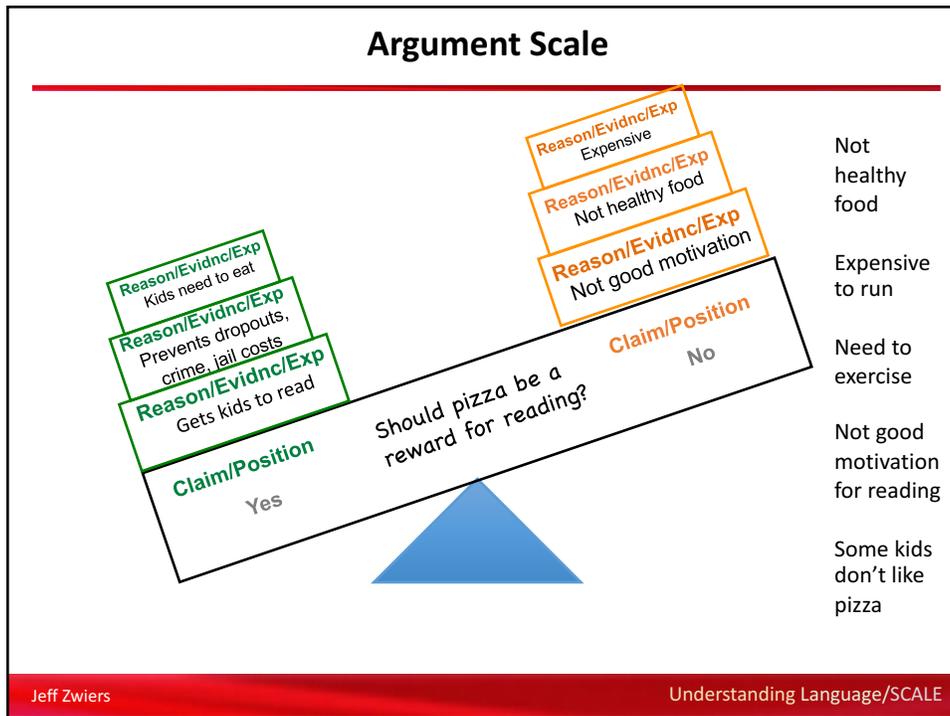
Yes

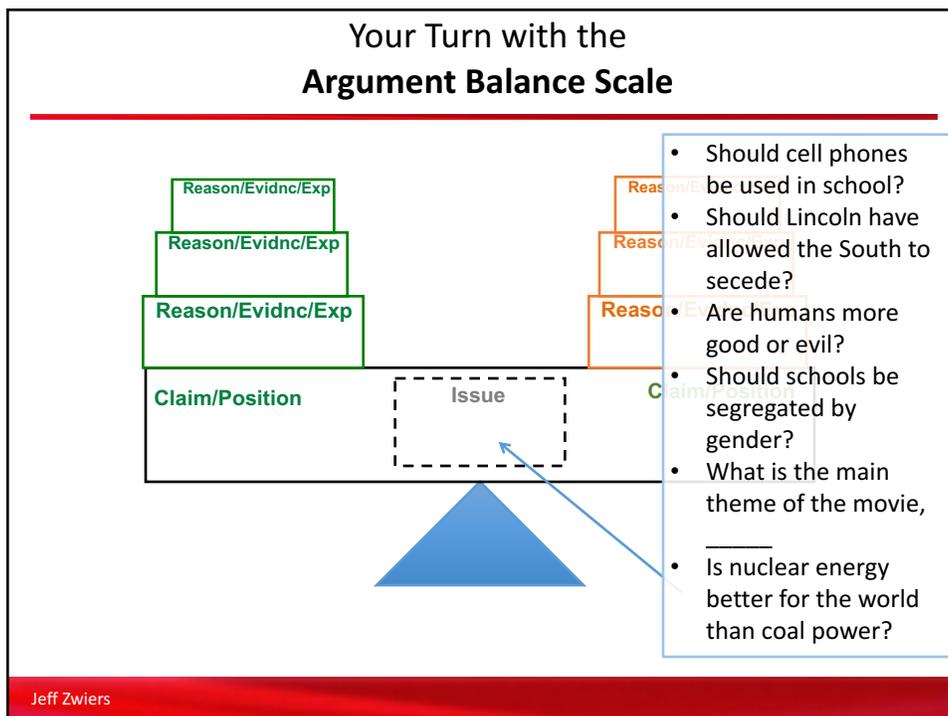
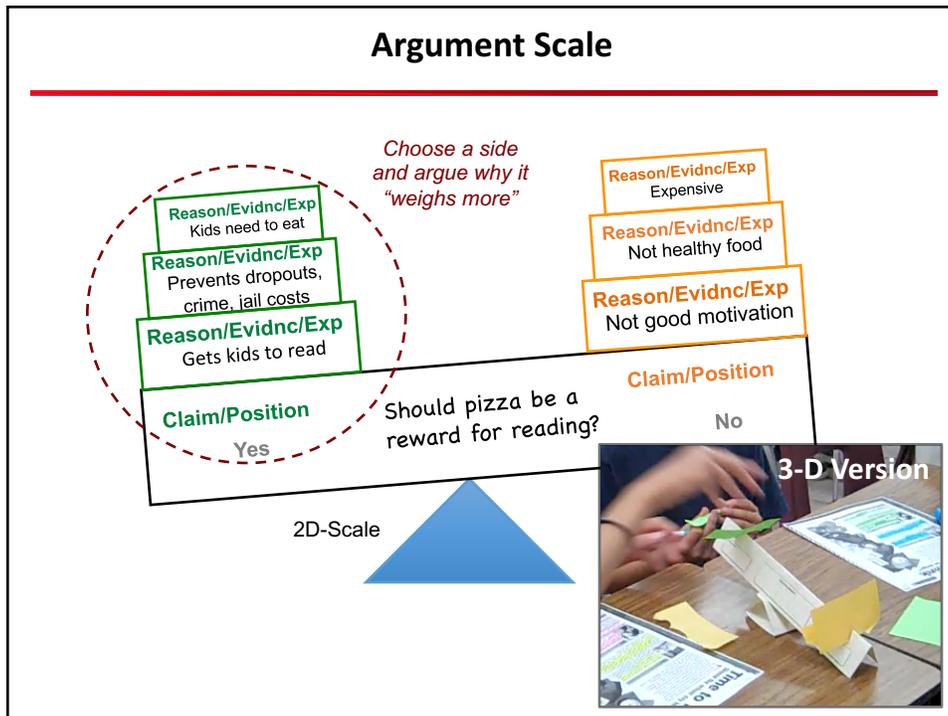
Should pizza be a reward for reading?

Claim/Position

No

Jeff Zwiers
Understanding Language/SCALE





Improving Conversation Prompts

- There is an engaging purpose** for conversing that (a) **connects to lesson objectives**, and (b) **requires thinking & doing something with ideas** (e.g., create, clarify, argue (=>consensus), decide, rank, solve, evaluate, combine, compare, choose, fortify, build, & transform) (+ Agency)
 - There is a need to talk** (info gaps; bring unique ideas)
 - There are clear directions** for how to converse (language use, thinking, content concepts...)
- ELA Literature: Collaboratively**
ELA Expository: Engage in a
Math: Work with your partner to
Science: In your conversation,
History: With your partner, decide if Lincoln was more interested in abolishing slavery or more interested in preserving the Union. Use evidence to support the claims on each side and evaluate the value of the evidence, along with any bias that might exist in the sources. Use historian language such as "This is strong evidence because..."

Souping Up Socratic Seminars

Notes:

-

Sample Lesson(s) Plan: ELA

- I. **Objectives:** Infer and support themes in short stories.
Argue the most important theme for students your age.
- II. **Stronger-Clearer Each Time:** Read same story, share theme, support
- III. **Modified Jigsaw:** Think-Pair-Square: Read different stories, share theme and evidence with partner, then w/ other pair.
- IV. **Transition Improv:** Two Differing Themes (e.g., 'Two Brothers')
- V. **Academic Conversation Model:** Emphasize skills of supporting and evaluating evidence and importance, and arguing for one theme over another.
- VI. **Argument Balance Scale Conversations:** 2 Themes (+ Writing)



Jeff Zwiers

Understanding Language



APPLICATION TIME

Think about how you might use **Constructive Conversation activities** in your upcoming lessons.

Write a model conversation

Think of an upcoming lesson, create a good prompt, and write a model conversation between two students that shows their learning.

Prompt:

A:

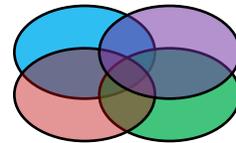
B:

A:

B:

CONTACT INFORMATION

Email: jzwiers@stanford.edu
Web sites: jeffzwiers.org/March13
ell.stanford.edu



References

- Mercer, N. (2000). *The Guided Construction of Knowledge: Talk amongst teachers and learners*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Zwiers, J. & Soto, I. (2016) *Academic Language Mastery: Conversational Discourse in Context*. Corwin Press.
- Zwiers, O'Hara, & Pritchard (2014) *Common Core Standards in diverse classrooms: Essential practices for developing academic language & disciplinary literacy*. Stenhouse.