

# DEVELOPING WRITERS *of* ARGUMENT

TOOLS & RULES  
That Sharpen  
STUDENT REASONING

20  
Ready-to-Use  
Lessons

Michael W. Smith & Jon-Philip Imbrenda  
Foreword by Jim Burke



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## Who Is the Better Superhero?

### UNIT CONTEXT:

Arguments in our everyday lives

### LESSON BACKGROUND:

One of the things we want students to recognize is that the elements of argument with which they are working are intimately related. One of the purposes of this lesson is to help students understand how an a priori understanding of potential warrants will help them generate data and clarify their claims.

## LESSON PLAN

**Purpose/Learning Intentions:** Understand how potential warrants will help you as both a reader and a writer.

**Length:** Approximately 45 minutes

### Materials Needed

- A class set of Handout 3.1, “What Makes a Good Superhero?”
- A class set of Handout 3.2, “Batman vs. Superman”
- A class set of Handout 3.3, “Planning Your Argument”
- Whiteboard, chart paper, or other means of recording students’ responses

### Lesson Steps

#### *Step 1: Relate this lesson to yesterday’s.*

- Remind students that yesterday we continued our work with everyday arguments and that they have had practice working with all three elements: data, warrants, and claims.
- Ask students to respond in choral fashion to the question associated with each element:

**Teacher:** What question does a claim answer?

**Student:** *Where do you stand?*

**Teacher:** What question do data answer?

**Student:** *What makes you say so?*

**Teacher:** What question does a warrant answer?

**Student:** *So what?*

- Explain that today we're going to turn our attention from music and food to comic books and TV and consider the question "What makes a good superhero?"

**Step 2: Generate criteria for what makes a good superhero.**

- Distribute Handout 3.1. Ask students to rank the items on the handout. As they do so, circulate to see what new characteristics students are adding.
- Begin a whole-class discussion by soliciting new characteristics. List those on the board.
- Give students a few minutes to factor the new characteristics into their ranking.
- Begin a whole-class discussion by asking a student, "What did you rank as number 1?" Use Toulmin questions to probe for his or her reasoning:
  - What makes you say so?
  - So what?
- Ask, "How many of you agree?" Turn to a student who disagreed and follow the same procedure for the characteristic he or she selected as #1. Once again, use Toulmin questions to probe for his or her reasoning.
- Continue the process until the discussion loses energy or students have had a chance to share their top three characteristics.

**Step 3: Draw on discussion to inform their reading.**

- Explain that today they'll be considering who makes the better superhero, Batman or Superman. Note that the discussion they just had should provide the basis for their argument and that in fact, what they were just debating is what warrants they should use in making their case.
- Distribute Handout 3.2. Explain that they should read the handout being mindful of the argument that they will be making. Explain that one way to think about what they are doing is "mining" the text to select what's most valuable so they can then use what they mined to talk and write. Encourage them to use highlighters to identify what they mined.
- Give students an opportunity to read the handout.

**Step 4: Divide students into pairs to rehearse their argument. To the extent possible, pair students who made different choices.**

- Ask students to write down which superhero they will be advocating for.

- Have all of the students who chose Batman to stand up. Explain that you want each Batman advocate to find a Superman advocate and to debate the issue in pairs. If the numbers are not divided equally, allow some debates to be in groups of three.
- As pairs are debating, circulate to listen to their arguments. If some debates are losing energy before the majority of the class, use the Toulmin questions to help students with their discussions.

**Step 5: Have students write out their arguments.**

- Distribute Handout 3.3. Note that this handout is a bit different from their previous planning sheet in that it shows how having a sense of the warrant helps determine what are the best data.
- Have students work on their planning sheet and once they have done so to write a paragraph arguing for their selection.

**Step 6: Have students share their work in pairs.**

- Have students return to their original pairings.
- Have them switch papers and repeat the process they used in the previous two lessons:
  - Circle the claim; that is, circle the answer to the “Where do you stand?” question, on their partner’s work.
- Ask them to put in brackets each piece of data; that is, bracket the answer to the “What makes you say so?” question.
- Ask them to underline each warrant; that is, underline the answer to the “So what?” question.
- Have partners discuss what elements of their arguments work best and which ones might need improvement.

**Extension:** Have students imagine that they are going to buy a new car to drive when they are in college. Have them list what they think are the five most important criteria they would use in making that purchase. Using those warrants, have them mine a website to determine what choice they would make.

## What Makes a Good Superhero?

Rank these characteristics from the one that is most important to being a good superhero (1) to the one that is least important to being a good hero (8). If you want to add a characteristic that's not included, please do and include it in your rankings.

- \_\_\_\_\_ A good name
- \_\_\_\_\_ A good costume
- \_\_\_\_\_ A good power
- \_\_\_\_\_ An interesting history
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being easy to relate to
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being a good role model
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being funny
- \_\_\_\_\_ Having good villains to oppose
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify)



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# Batman vs. Superman

	BATMAN	SUPERMAN
<b>Species</b>	Human	Kryptonian
<b>Abilities</b>	Peak human capacity in intelligence, physical conditioning, and willpower. Master of martial arts. Expert in military tactics, forensic science, and espionage. Designer of high-tech gadgets, vehicles, and armor.	Peak superhuman levels of strength, speed, stamina, and endurance. Invulnerable to physical harm. Can fly at supersonic speeds. Thermal vision. Super breath. Enhanced senses.
<b>Alter Ego</b>	Bruce Wayne, billionaire CEO of Wayne Industries	Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for <i>The Daily Planet</i>
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Relies on gadgets and armor	Vulnerable to green kryptonite
<b>Symbolism</b>	Strikes fear and terror in the hearts of criminals	Serves truth, justice, and the American way
<b>Heroic Origin</b>	After witnessing the murder of his parents at the hands of a desperate criminal, young Bruce Wayne devoted himself to a vigilante lifestyle. He tapped into his family's tremendous resources to develop crime-fighting technology, while undergoing intensive physical and mental training.	After the destruction of his home planet, Krypton, Superman, an infant at the time, was sent to Earth by his parents. Adopted by humble farmers and raised as a typical American boy, young Clark began to discover his extraordinary powers during his adolescence. Eventually, his adopted father revealed his true origin to him.



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# Planning Your Argument

A good superhero has to have these qualities:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Therefore:

Make your *claim*!  
Which hero has those qualities?

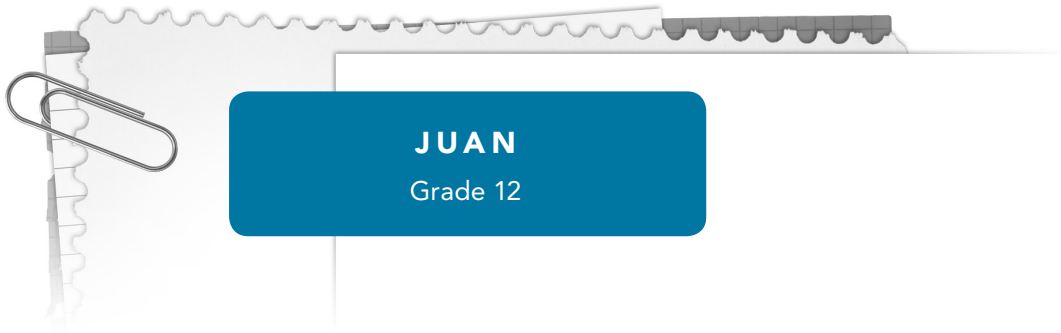
Show your *data*! Explain how you know that your hero has those qualities and the other hero doesn't.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



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**JUAN**

Grade 12

*Juan makes an interesting move here by embedding his warrant in his claim.*

*He might want to reorganize these data points a bit. He seems to be undecided as to whether he wants to compare by character or by attribute.*

*Juan does a great job of referring back to warrant, but his moves would be more effective if he more clearly articulated his reasoning.*

I think Batman is a better superhero because his civilian life and background are more interesting and realistic. What makes me say that is superman is an alien and Batman was born on Earth and even though he is rich he's still human. So there Batman is vulnerable. He can die, making his dedication more meaningful. Superman, on the other hand, is invincible so he can walk through bombs making his motives less realistic.

### Moving Forward

- We've helped Juan to develop a complete argument with all of the necessary elements.
- Juan seems to understand all of the elements of argument, but we need to work with him to elaborate his ideas for his audience.
- Juan will probably benefit from the use of paragraph templates to help him organize his arguments into common rhetorical structures.



Learn more about the book this lesson is from: <http://bit.ly/2CsmAOq>