What Is Art?
Enhancing Persuasive Writing Through Philosophical Debate

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summer art camps
with dan and rachelle kuehl
Many students are ill-prepared to write at the level required for successful college completion.

- 40% of college-bound students did not pass ACT writing test (Goldstein, 2017)

- 73% of 8th/12th grade students did not pass writing test (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012)

Pass Rate of 8th graders/12th graders on National Writing Assessment

- Proficient
- Not Proficient
**Argument** “is at the heart of critical thinking and academic discourse, the kind of writing students need to know for success in college . . . and career.”

(Hillocks, 2010, p. 25)

Students must be able to
- state a claim
- present relevant evidence
- consider alternative viewpoints
- arrive at a sound conclusion that convinces others to adopt their viewpoint

(Song & Ferretti, 2013, pp. 67–68)
To learn how to use short intervals of writing about aesthetic considerations to increase participation in class discussions and improve students’ reasoning and writing skills.
“Everyone who uses the word ‘art’ in ordinary conversation has a concept of art” (Lankford, 1992, p. 4)

**BUT . . .**

because the question of **aesthetics** has no absolute answer, **AND . . .**

because people often differ on their opinions about art, participants must use **reason and logic** to convince others.
This technique
• Brings broader participation from students who feel more comfortable sharing their ideas after articulating them in writing first (Lemov, 2015).
• Forces students to listen and respond to the opposing viewpoint
• Motivates students by setting a real purpose for writing

“incorporating counterarguments and refuting them are crucial for maximizing the extent of persuasiveness in argumentative writing”
(Liu & Stapleton, 2014).
What Is Art?
A clock with fancy numbers
A river polished stone with stripes of color in the middle.
A license plate with a bird on it.
A skyscraper
practice sketches from a famous artist
A cloud in the shape of a cat
A famous work of art turned into a puzzle.
A full-size car made out of Legos
A garden of flowers
A carved pumpkin
A cookie jar made out of clay.
A bottle of soda
A fork with a plastic handle
A scribble drawing of a 3 year-old
A wooden shovel with a red handle
A white coffee mug
A sock with blue stripes
A copy of Mona Lisa by an unknown artist
What Is Art?
Try it!

1. Ask students to write a definition of art.
2. Show multiple images, voting with RED or GREEN cards for each. Offer students the chance to explain why the object is or is not art.
3. Make note of contentious items, selecting two for the debate.
4. Divide class in half. One half debates the first item, the other half debates the second item.
5. On their red or green card, students write an argument to convince the judges (other half of the class) of their opinion.
6. In turn, each student reads his or her statement (they may not add extra words). Judges raise their red or green cards to vote—the winner is the one with the most votes. The second group debates.
7. Students revise their original definition of art.
References


