

CREATURES™ Argumentative Writing Diagnostic Assessment

Range Performance Level Descriptor (RPLD) Integrated Edition

The Writing Academy®, LLC

Purpose

A low-stakes argumentative-writing readiness assessment that identifies not only what students can produce, but the level of thinking they currently demonstrate within each CREATURES™ component. Results are used to select the next instructional move—not to assign a permanent label or traditional grade.

● Foundational	■ Emergent	▼ Visible	▲ Independent	◆ Reflective
(Beginning)	(Developing)	(Engaging)	(Independent)	(Highly Independent)

CREATURES™ Framework — Consider both sides and defend a claim.

- C — Claim: state a clear, defensible position on the issue.
- R — Reasons: explain why the claim should be accepted.
- E — Evidence: use accurate, relevant information from the source text.
- A — Argument: organize claim, reasons, evidence, and responses into a logical case.
- T — Thinking: explain how the evidence supports the reasons and claim.
- U — Understanding Others (Counterargument): represent an opposing viewpoint fairly.
- R — Rebuttal: answer the counterargument with reasoning and evidence.
- E — Ending: bring the argument to a clear, purposeful close.
- S — Significance: explain why the issue or decision matters beyond personal preference.

Core RPLD Principle

A student should not be assigned one thinking level for all of argumentative writing. Determine the highest supported level separately for Claim, Reasons, Evidence, Argument, Thinking, Understanding Others, Rebuttal, Ending, and Significance. Preserve the components the student already controls and target only the thinking that needs to grow.

Teacher Administration Guide

What to say, what to provide, and what not to coach

Materials to Prepare

- One student diagnostic packet per student.
- The short anchor passage, “The Recess Decision,” included in this packet.
- Pencil or approved writing tool; lined paper if additional writing space is needed.
- Teacher RPLD scoring profile and answer key.
- Any routinely provided documented accommodations. Accommodations should provide access without supplying a claim, reasons, evidence choices, counterargument, rebuttal, wording, or organization.

Suggested Administration Sequence

Phase	Suggested time	Purpose
1. Opening	2–3 min	Explain that this is not a grade and that students should show what they can do now.
2. Anchor Passage + Recognition	20–25 min	Read/follow the balanced passage, then complete passage-based and general recognition items.
3. Build the Argument	20–25 min	Construct each CREATURES™ component with visible scaffolds.
4. Independent Writing	35–45 min	Plan and write a complete argument without step-by-step coaching.
5. Broad Check + Close	5–7 min	Collect supplemental revising/editing evidence and close the assessment.

Opening Script

Teacher says:

“Today you are going to show me how you think as an argumentative writer. This is not a grade, and I do not expect everyone to do the same things yet. Some parts may feel easier than others. That is useful information because it helps me know what to teach next. You will read about a school decision, consider both sides, and defend the position you believe is strongest. Use your own thinking, and do your best without asking me which side or answer to choose.”

What the Teacher May and May Not Do

MAY DO

- Read directions and the anchor passage aloud if that is part of normal classroom access or an approved accommodation.
- Clarify procedural directions such as where to write, whether students may reread, or how much time remains.
- Provide documented accessibility supports that do not supply argumentative content or decisions.
- Repeat the prompt exactly as written and encourage students to use the passage and show their best independent thinking.
- Provide additional lined paper without adding prompts, frames, or labels.

DO NOT DO DURING THE DIAGNOSTIC

- Do not suggest which side the student should take or help the student write the claim.
- Do not supply a reason, evidence quotation, explanation, counterargument, rebuttal, ending, or significance statement.
- Do not tell the student that one paragraph, sentence, or answer is “better” while the assessment is underway.
- Do not point to the exact sentence in the passage that should be used as evidence.
- Do not require students to use a teacher-created formula beyond the supports already printed in Part 2.
- Do not edit or revise the student’s independent composition during administration.

Anchor Passage for Part 1

The Recess Decision

Teacher says before reading:

"First, we will read a short passage about a decision a school must make. Follow along as I read it aloud. The passage presents information from more than one point of view. Afterward, you will read it quietly and answer questions about the choices an argumentative writer could make. Listen for the decision, the evidence on both sides, and the concerns that would need to be answered."

At Cedar Grove Elementary, students receive twenty minutes of recess each day. The student council has asked the principal to extend recess to thirty minutes. The school day cannot be made longer, so the extra ten minutes would have to come from the morning skill lab, a time when students read, practice mathematics, or meet with a teacher in a small group.

Before making a decision, Principal Ortiz arranged a two-week trial for students in grades three through five. During the trial, teachers recorded how quickly students settled into afternoon lessons, how the longer recess affected skill-lab instruction, and what happened on the playground.

Supporters of the change noticed several benefits. With ten more minutes, students had time to organize games instead of spending most of recess choosing teams. They also had more time to solve small disagreements before the bell rang. Eighteen of the twenty-four teachers reported that their classes began afternoon work within three minutes after the longer recess. Before the trial, only eleven teachers reported that result. Several students said the additional movement helped them feel calmer and more prepared to concentrate.

Other teachers raised concerns. Ten fewer minutes of skill lab each day meant one hundred fewer minutes of targeted practice during the two-week trial. Six teachers said they were unable to finish planned reading or mathematics conferences with every student. Playground supervisors also recorded five arguments during the final ten minutes of the longer recess, compared with two arguments during the first twenty minutes. These teachers worried that adding time could create more conflicts while reducing support for students who need extra instruction.

Some families suggested a compromise. The school could extend recess to twenty-five minutes, or it could provide a thirty-minute recess only three days each week. Student council members replied that a consistent daily schedule would be easier for students and teachers to remember. They also argued that students might learn more efficiently after enough time to move and reset.

Principal Ortiz has not made a decision. She has asked students, teachers, and families to study the trial results, consider both sides, and defend the plan they believe would best support learning at Cedar Grove Elementary.

Teacher says after reading:

"Now read the passage quietly one more time. Then answer the passage questions on your own. You may look back at the text as often as you need. Remember that understanding both sides does not mean you must agree with both sides."

Part 1A: Reading the Writer's Argumentative Choices

Use "The Recess Decision"

P1. C — Claim

Which claim responds most directly and defensibly to the issue?

- A. Recess is a part of the school day.
- B. Cedar Grove should extend daily recess to thirty minutes because the trial showed that many students returned ready to learn and had more time to manage play problems.
- C. Skill lab includes reading and mathematics.
- D. Some students like longer recess.

P2. R — Reasons

A writer claims that Cedar Grove should extend recess. Which is the strongest reason supporting that claim?

- A. Thirty is a larger number than twenty.
- B. Students enjoy making school decisions.
- C. The longer recess may help students return to class calmer and begin work more efficiently.
- D. The school has playground supervisors.

P3. E — Evidence

Which detail from the passage BEST supports the reason that longer recess may help students begin class more efficiently?

- A. The student council asked for a change.
- B. Eighteen of twenty-four teachers reported that classes began afternoon work within three minutes after longer recess, compared with eleven teachers before the trial.
- C. Six teachers could not finish every skill-lab conference.
- D. Some families suggested a compromise.

P4. A — Argument

Which plan would create the most logical argument?

- A. Begin with an ending, add an unrelated fact, and state a claim last.
- B. Describe only the opposing side and never state a position.
- C. List every detail from the passage without explaining how the details connect.
- D. State a claim; develop reasons with evidence and thinking; represent the other side; rebut the concern; and close with significance.

P5. T — Thinking

Which sentence BEST explains how the class-start evidence supports longer recess?

- A. Eighteen is greater than eleven.
- B. Recess lasted thirty minutes during the trial.
- C. Because more classes began work quickly after longer recess, the extra movement may have helped students return prepared, which supports the claim that the time can improve learning conditions.
- D. Teachers recorded information during the trial.

P6. U — Understanding Others (Counterargument)

Which sentence most accurately represents a concern from the opposing side?

- A. Opponents do not want students to have fun.
- B. Some teachers worry that extra recess would reduce targeted skill-lab time and could increase playground conflicts.
- C. Opponents believe recess should be removed completely.
- D. Teachers dislike the student council.

P7. R — Rebuttal

Which response BEST answers the opposing concern while remaining fair?

- A. Anyone who opposes longer recess is wrong.
- B. Skill lab does not matter.
- C. The conflicts should be ignored because recess is fun.
- D. Although lost skill-lab time is a real concern, the school could protect required small-group sessions and examine whether faster afternoon starts recover some learning time before rejecting the longer-recess plan.

P8. E — Ending

Which ending most effectively brings an argument for longer recess to a close?

- A. That is all I have to say.
- B. The school has many teachers.
- C. Cedar Grove should choose the plan that best balances focused learning with students' need to move, and the trial results support giving students a longer daily recess.
- D. Recess takes place outside.

P9. S — Significance

Which statement BEST explains why the decision matters beyond whether students simply prefer more play time?

- A. Students may have time to play kickball.
- B. The decision matters because schools must balance instructional minutes with the conditions that help students focus, cooperate, and learn.
- C. Thirty minutes is ten minutes more than twenty.
- D. Families have opinions about school.

Part 1B: Recognizing Strong Argumentative Writing

Choose the response that would create the strongest argumentative writing.

1. C — Claim

Which sentence is a defensible claim?

- A. School libraries contain books.
- B. I like music and reading.
- C. Our school should allow students to choose one library book for independent reading each week because choice can increase interest and reading stamina.
- D. Books are found in many places.

2. C — Making a Claim Precise

Which revision makes the claim “Homework is bad” more precise and defensible?

- A. Homework is very bad for everyone.
- B. Elementary students should receive short, purposeful homework rather than long nightly assignments because practice should reinforce learning without replacing needed rest.
- C. Homework exists in many schools.
- D. I do not like homework.

3. R — Reasons

A student claims that the school should create recycling stations. Which is the strongest reason?

- A. Recycling bins are often blue.
- B. Stations can make it easier to sort materials and reduce the amount of school waste.
- C. The cafeteria is a large room.
- D. Students carry backpacks.

4. R — Distinct Reasons

Which pair provides two distinct reasons for allowing classroom plants?

- A. Plants are green, and some plants are tall.
- B. Plants need water, and plants need soil.
- C. Students can name plants, and students can draw plants.
- D. Plants can support science observation, and caring for them can build responsibility.

5. E — Relevant Evidence

A writer argues that a later start could help students arrive ready to learn. Which evidence BEST supports the reason that attendance may improve?

- A. School buses are yellow.
- B. Some students say they enjoy sleeping.
- C. After a one-week trial, the number of tardy students dropped from eighteen to nine.
- D. School begins on Monday.

6. E — Strongest Evidence

Which evidence is strongest for the claim that a school walking club can increase participation?

- A. Membership rose from twelve students in September to thirty-seven in November after the club added beginner groups.
- B. The club uses orange cones.
- C. Students wear shoes while walking.
- D. The teacher enjoys walking.

7. A — Argument

Which organization creates the clearest argumentative structure?

- A. Evidence, unrelated story, claim, new topic.
- B. Conclusion, counterargument, title, claim.
- C. Two different claims with no reasons.
- D. Claim; reason/evidence/thinking; second reason/evidence/thinking; counterargument; rebuttal; ending and significance.

8. A — Connecting Ideas

Which transition most effectively connects a second reason to an argument about a safer arrival plan?

- A. Also.
- B. Beyond improving safety, the plan could also help students arrive on time.
- C. I have another reason now.
- D. This is my next paragraph.

9. T — Explaining Evidence

Evidence: “During the pilot, cafeteria waste fell by twenty-two percent.” Which sentence BEST explains the evidence?

- A. The cafeteria has trash containers.
- B. Twenty-two is a number.
- C. This decrease shows that sorting stations changed how students disposed of materials, supporting the claim that the stations can reduce waste.
- D. Students ate lunch during the pilot.

10. T — Deepening the Thinking

Which sentence adds the strongest reasoning after evidence that more students returned library books on time when reminders were sent?

- A. Timely returns matter because other students can then access the books they need, so reminders help the whole reading community rather than only one borrower.
- B. Reminders are messages.
- C. The books were returned.
- D. Libraries have shelves.

11. U — Understanding Others

Which sentence fairly states a counterargument to keeping a class pet?

- A. People who oppose class pets hate animals.
- B. Some families and staff may worry that allergies, cleaning needs, and weekend care would create responsibilities the class cannot manage.
- C. Nobody has a good reason to disagree.
- D. Class pets are cute.

12. U — Showing Both Sides

Which sentence shows understanding of both viewpoints without giving up the writer's claim?

- A. The other side is ridiculous.
- B. Some people disagree with me.
- C. Everyone knows my side is right.
- D. Supporters of a no-homework night value family time, while opponents worry students may lose needed practice.

13. R — Rebuttal

Counterargument: "A school garden costs too much." Which rebuttal BEST responds to that concern?

- A. Gardens are great.
- B. That concern is silly.
- C. Although start-up costs matter, the school can begin with donated containers and a small pilot, then expand only if the benefits justify the cost.
- D. People should donate things.

14. R — Answering the Concern

Which response addresses the counterargument instead of merely repeating the claim?

- A. Although longer lunch lines may delay students, assigning two serving stations could reduce the delay while preserving the new menu choices.
- B. The new menu is best because it is best.
- C. People who disagree are wrong.
- D. Lunch is served at noon.

15. E — Ending

Which ending closes an argument effectively?

- A. That is my essay.
- B. For these reasons, the school should adopt the walking-bus plan and review its results after one month to make sure it improves both safety and attendance.
- C. I also like bicycles.
- D. There are many sidewalks.

16. E — Ending Without a New Topic

Which ending avoids introducing an unrelated new argument?

- A. In conclusion, our school needs a reading-buddy program. We should also buy new playground equipment.
- B. Reading is good.
- C. The program has buddies.
- D. By pairing older and younger readers, the school can strengthen reading confidence while building a more connected student community.

17. S — Significance

Which statement moves beyond personal preference?

- A. I want the plan to happen.
- B. The new schedule is my favorite.
- C. This decision matters because the way a school uses time communicates what it believes students need in order to learn well.
- D. Schedules have clocks.

18. S — A Warranted Larger Idea

Which statement communicates a defensible significance for student service projects?

- A. Every student who completes a project will become a hero.
- B. When students use academic skills to solve real community needs, schoolwork can become a way to practice responsibility and citizenship.
- C. Service projects fix every community problem.
- D. Communities are large places.

Part 2: Build the Argument

This section makes student thinking visible through guided construction.

Teacher says:

"Now the answer will not be in a list. I want to see how you build each part of an argument. You may use the passage, and you may choose either side of the recess decision. The labels and questions will help organize the task, but the ideas and wording must come from you."

Student Prompt

Using information from "The Recess Decision," build an argument about whether Cedar Grove Elementary should add ten minutes to daily recess. Consider both sides and defend the claim you believe is strongest.

19. C — Claim

State a clear, defensible position that directly answers the school's decision.

My claim is that Cedar Grove Elementary should / should not _____

20. R — Reasons

Give two distinct reasons that explain why your claim should be accepted.

Reason 1

Reason 2

21. E — Evidence

Choose specific information from the passage that supports each reason.

Evidence for Reason 1

Evidence for Reason 2

22. A — Argument

Plan a logical order for the whole argument. Write the job of each section or the idea you will place there.

1. Claim / position:

2. Strongest reason + evidence:

3. Second reason + evidence:

4. Opposing concern:

5. Rebuttal:

6. Ending / significance:

23. T — Thinking

Explain how each piece of evidence supports its reason and strengthens the claim.

Evidence 1 matters because

Evidence 2 matters because

24. U — Understanding Others (Counterargument)

State the strongest reasonable concern someone on the other side might have. Represent that concern fairly.
Some people may believe _____
because _____

25. R — Rebuttal

Respond directly to the counterargument. A strong rebuttal may acknowledge a valid concern, then answer it with evidence, reasoning, a condition, or a practical solution.
Although _____
however, _____

26. E — Ending

Write an ending that reinforces the claim, brings the reasoning together, and does not introduce an unrelated new topic.

27. S — Significance

Why does this decision matter beyond whether individual students simply want more or less recess?

Part 3: Independent Argumentative Writing

The strongest evidence for Independent and Reflective thinking

Teacher says:

"This is the part where I want to see what you can do as an argumentative writer on your own. You may plan before you write, and you may look back at the passage. Choose the position you believe you can defend most strongly. I cannot help you choose a side, select evidence, or decide what to say. Use the writing tools you already know, and make your reasoning clear to a reader who may not agree with you."

Writing Task

Using information from "The Recess Decision," write an argumentative response in which you make and defend a claim about whether Cedar Grove Elementary should add ten minutes to daily recess. Consider both sides, use relevant evidence, explain your thinking, respond to an opposing concern, and end by showing why the decision matters.

Remember CREATURES™

- C — Claim: answer the decision with a clear position.
- R — Reasons: explain why the claim should be accepted.
- E — Evidence: use relevant information from the passage.
- A — Argument: organize ideas into a logical, connected case.
- T — Thinking: explain how the evidence proves the reasons and claim.
- U — Understanding Others: represent a reasonable opposing concern fairly.
- R — Rebuttal: answer that concern with reasoning and evidence.
- E — Ending: close the argument purposefully.
- S — Significance: explain why the issue matters beyond personal preference.

Optional Planning Space

Claim

Reason 1 / Evidence / Thinking

Reason 2 / Evidence / Thinking

Counterargument / Rebuttal

Ending / Significance

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. The paper itself is a clean, off-white color.

Part 4: Broad Writing Check

Secondary information only

This portion is intentionally brief. The primary purpose of the diagnostic is to assess argumentative development through CREATURES™, not isolated editing or revising skills. Use these items as supplemental evidence only.

28. Broad Revising Check

Read the paragraph:

The school should extend recess because students began class faster during the trial. Some teachers are concerned about losing skill-lab time. Longer recess is still the better plan.

Which revision would MOST strengthen the rebuttal?

- A. Recess takes place outside on the playground.
- B. The student council asked the principal for a change.
- C. Although skill-lab time is important, the school can protect required small-group sessions and compare whether faster afternoon starts make up part of the lost time.
- D. Many students enjoy recess.

29. Broad Editing Check

Which sentence is written correctly?

- A. Although skill lab is important students also need time to move cooperate and return ready to learn.
- B. Although skill lab is important, students also need time to move, cooperate, and return ready to learn.
- C. although skill lab is important, students also need time to move cooperate, and return ready to learn.
- D. Although skill lab is important students, also need time to move, cooperate and return ready to learn.

Teacher says when students finish:

"Thank you. I am going to use this work to notice the parts of argumentative writing you can already manage and the one or two thinking moves that will help you grow next. You will not be placed into one permanent level, and you will not need to repeat skills you already control."

Teacher Scoring & RPLD Interpretation Guide

Score the thinking, not just the number correct

● Foundational (Beginning)	■ Emergent (Developing)	▼ Visible (Engaging)	▲ Independent (Independent)	◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)
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Three Sources of Evidence

Assessment evidence	What it measures best	Highest level it can support by itself	Teacher interpretation
Part 1	Recognition and discrimination among argumentative choices	■ Emergent (Developing)	Correct answers show that the student can recognize effective argumentative thinking. Recognition alone does not prove independent production.
Part 2	Guided construction of individual CREATURES™ components	▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student's thinking becomes observable because the student must generate the component, but the structure and labels are supplied.
Part 3	Independent transfer into a complete argument	▲ Independent or ◆ Reflective	Use this writing as the primary evidence for sustained independence, strategic decision-making, audience awareness, and transfer.
Part 4	Broad revising and editing evidence	Supplemental only	Use as supporting evidence. Do not let conventions override the primary argumentative-writing profile.

A useful teacher question

Instead of asking “How many points did the student earn?” ask “What is the highest level of thinking this student can demonstrate consistently in this CREATURES™ strand, and what is the smallest scaffold that will make the next level attainable?”

How to Assign a Level to Each Strand

- Use the highest level supported by the student's actual work across recognition, guided construction, and independent writing.
- When evidence fluctuates between two adjacent levels, begin instruction at the lower level while continuing to invite evidence of the higher level.
- Independent and Reflective levels require student-generated writing. Selected-response success cannot establish either level by itself.
- Do not average the nine strand levels into one label. Record the profile and use it to form temporary, skill-specific groups.

CREATURES™ RPLD Student Thinking Profile

One student can—and often will—have nine different levels

CREATURES™ strand	Current RPLD level	Evidence from this diagnostic	Next instructional target
C — Claim	_____		
R — Reasons	_____		
E — Evidence	_____		
A — Argument	_____		
T — Thinking	_____		
U — Understanding Others	_____		
R — Rebuttal	_____		
E — Ending	_____		
S — Significance	_____		

Teacher Growth Conversation Template

Teacher says:

“I noticed that your _____ is currently at the _____ level because I saw you _____. That means you already know how to _____. Your next target is to _____. I will give you _____ support while you practice, and then I will remove that support so you can show the skill independently.”

Example

“Your Claim is Independent because you stated a clear position and kept it consistent across the whole response. Your Thinking is Visible because you explained the evidence when the organizer named the job, but some evidence was left unexplained in the independent essay. We will keep your claim independent and target one evidence-to-thinking connection at a time.”

Worked Example: Turn the Profile into an Instructional Plan

Sample student profile: C ▲ Independent | R ▲ Independent | E ▼ Visible | A ▲ Independent | T ■ Emergent | U ▼ Visible | R (Rebuttal) ■ Emergent | E (Ending) ▲ Independent | S ▼ Visible

Instructional decision	What the teacher does	What the teacher avoids
Preserve strengths	Allow Claim, Reasons, Argument, and Ending to remain independent during new writing. Name the evidence of control and keep the student writing authentic responses.	Do not assign basic claim-identification, paragraph-order, or conclusion worksheets for strands already demonstrated independently.
Target first	Teach Thinking and Rebuttal together: explain one evidence detail, state the opposing concern fairly, and answer the exact concern.	Do not reteach all nine CREATURES™ components at once.
Use the least scaffold	Provide one evidence → “This matters because...” frame and one “Although... however...” rebuttal frame. Remove each frame after success.	Do not keep full sentence frames after the student can generate the connection independently.

Teacher can say:

“You already know how to make a clear claim, organize reasons, and close the argument. I am not going to make you start over on those skills. Our next work is to explain why each piece of evidence matters and to answer the strongest concern from the other side. First I will give you a frame; then you will do the same thinking without it.”

What Progress Should Look Like

- The student moves from naming evidence to explaining how it changes the reader’s understanding of the reason.
- The student moves from “Some people disagree” to a fair, specific counterargument.
- The student moves from repeating the claim after “however” to directly answering the concern with reasoning or evidence.
- Stronger components remain available for independent use while the targeted components receive temporary support.

C — Claim

Does the student state a clear, defensible position that directly answers the issue and can be supported with reasons and evidence?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	No defensible position is stated. The response may copy the topic, list both sides without choosing, or give a preference such as “I like recess” without answering the decision.	Use issue/position sorts. Ask the student to choose yes/no/which plan orally, then complete “The school should ____ because ____.” Compare a topic, a preference, and a defensible claim.	The student can choose a side and state a relevant claim with one supporting idea.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student often recognizes a strong claim in Part 1 and can state a position with a full frame, but the claim may be broad, absolute, or dependent on teacher wording.	Move to a partial frame. Ask, “What exact decision are you answering?” and “Could the passage support this?” Revise always/never language and connect the claim to a reason.	The student independently writes a complete, supportable claim in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student constructs a complete claim in the guided task, but the wording may be formulaic, drift in the full essay, or fail to match every reason.	Fade the claim frame. Conduct a claim–reason audit: underline key words in the claim and check whether each reason proves that exact position.	The student transfers a focused claim into the independent composition and sustains it.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently states and maintains a focused, defensible claim that controls the response and is supported by the selected reasons and evidence.	Increase precision and complexity. Use issues with more than two possible plans, ask the student to qualify the claim, and consider audience or conditions.	The student begins to make deliberate claim choices and revise wording for precision.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student crafts a nuanced or qualified claim, revises it as evidence and counterarguments develop, and can justify why the chosen wording is stronger than alternatives.	Use unfamiliar issues, paired sources, and multiple defensible positions. Ask the student to compare possible claims and explain the tradeoffs each claim creates.	Transfer strategic claim control across issues, audiences, sources, and purposes.

R — Reasons

Does the student develop distinct, logical reasons that explain why the claim should be accepted?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The student provides facts, examples, or preferences instead of reasons, or cannot yet answer “Why should the reader accept this claim?” even when choices are provided.	Use reason/not-a-reason sorts. Ask “Why?” orally and turn one detail into a broad reason by naming what the detail proves.	The student can recognize a reason and generate one relevant reason with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes strong reasons but generates only one general reason, overlapping reasons, or reasons that require teacher prompting.	Generate several possibilities together, then rank them. Use “Does this answer why?” and “Is this different from Reason 1?” checks.	The student generates at least two relevant, distinct reasons in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student produces relevant reasons in the organizer, but one may be broad, uneven, repetitive, or lose focus in the independent response.	Fade the organizer and require independent reason selection. Ask the student to name the job of each paragraph and test whether two reasons could be combined.	The student independently uses distinct reasons to organize the full response.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently develops clear, distinct reasons that directly support the claim and guide the organization of the argument.	Raise the decision-making demand: prioritize reasons, choose the strongest sequence, and connect related reasons rather than merely listing them.	The student becomes strategic about which reasons matter most and why.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student selects, prioritizes, and sequences reasons intentionally, recognizes relationships and tradeoffs among them, and may refine reasons as evidence develops.	Use issues with competing valid reasons. Ask for justification of order, relative importance, and the relationship between reasons.	Transfer strategic reasoning to complex, unfamiliar, and multi-source arguments.

E — Evidence

Does the student select and integrate accurate, relevant evidence that supports the reasons, claim, and rebuttal?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	Evidence is absent, unrelated, copied without purpose, or based only on personal opinion. The student may struggle to identify strong source evidence even when choices are provided.	State the reason first, then hunt for proof. Use evidence/not-evidence sorts and matching cards. Model why one detail supports the reason and another does not.	The student recognizes relevant evidence and can match one source detail to a reason.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student often recognizes evidence in Part 1, but student-selected evidence is vague, incomplete, weakly matched, or dependent on highlighting and choices.	Offer two or three candidate details and ask the student to defend the strongest. Gradually remove highlighting and require the reason before the evidence choice.	The student independently selects specific, relevant evidence in the Part 2 organizer.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student selects appropriate evidence when reasons and evidence spaces are provided, but may choose the first relevant detail, copy too much, or integrate evidence weakly in the essay.	Ask, "Is this merely relevant, or is it the strongest available?" Fade evidence boxes and require locating, paraphrasing, and placing evidence independently.	The student independently selects and integrates strong evidence in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently selects accurate, specific evidence that supports each reason and uses evidence when responding to the opposing concern.	Increase complexity by requiring evidence from different parts of a source, multiple pieces, or paired texts. Ask the student to check sufficiency, not just presence.	The student makes strategic evidence choices and begins to synthesize proof.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student evaluates evidence for strength, sufficiency, relevance, source relationship, and limitations; synthesizes details; and can explain why one piece is more useful than another.	Use competing or partially conflicting evidence sets. Ask the student to weigh counterevidence, identify missing information, and justify which evidence should carry the most weight.	Transfer evidence evaluation and synthesis across sources, issues, and audiences.

A — Argument

Does the student organize all CREATURES™ components into one coherent, logical case rather than a list of disconnected parts?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The response is a list of opinions or facts. A claim may be absent, and ideas do not form a logical line from position to support to response.	Use color-coded sentence strips for claim, reason, evidence, thinking, other side, rebuttal, and ending. Build one short argument together and name the job of each move.	The student can arrange a simple claim–reason–evidence sequence with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student attempts an argument with a claim and at least one reason, but important links are missing, repeated, or out of order. Counterargument and rebuttal may be absent.	Use a partially completed map. Ask “What must the reader understand next?” and connect each section with a transition that names the relationship.	The student constructs a complete, logical sequence in the Part 2 organizer.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student builds the full structure when the organizer names every part, but the independent response may become formulaic, choppy, or lose one component.	Fade section labels while preserving a short planning list. Require the student to choose the order of reasons and explain why the counterargument belongs where it does.	The student transfers a coherent argument structure into the complete independent response.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently coordinates claim, reasons, evidence, thinking, counterargument, rebuttal, ending, and significance into a coherent whole.	Increase flexibility. Invite different organizational patterns, stronger transitions, and decisions about where to address the opposing side for the greatest clarity.	The student becomes strategic about structure, pacing, and reader needs.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student intentionally sequences ideas for effect, anticipates reader questions, varies structure to fit the issue, and revises the whole line of argument when one part changes.	Use complex issues, authentic audiences, and source sets. Ask the student to defend the organizational plan and revise it after evaluating reader impact.	Transfer intentional argument design across forms, audiences, and levels of complexity.

T — Thinking

Does the student explain how and why the evidence supports the reasons and claim instead of merely repeating the source?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	Thinking is absent or simply repeats the evidence or claim. The student may write “This proves it” without explaining what the evidence shows or why it matters.	Explicitly contrast evidence with thinking. Use oral “This shows... because...” practice and one causal question at a time: “So what?” “How does that help the claim?”	The student recognizes an explanation and attempts one connection beyond repetition.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student can identify a strong explanation and may use a frame, but written thinking remains brief, general, formulaic, or partly repetitive.	Keep a partial frame but require the student’s own words. Ask “What changed, caused, allowed, or demonstrated?” and “Why would that matter to a reader?”	The student produces a clear evidence-to-reason explanation with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student explains evidence in the organizer and makes reasoning visible, but the explanation may be one-layered or disappear in the independent response.	Fade the frame and require a second layer of reasoning. Mark evidence and thinking in different ways to check that both jobs are present.	The student independently links evidence → reason → claim in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently explains how evidence proves a reason and strengthens the claim without merely retelling the source.	Push depth through cause/effect, comparison, conditions, tradeoffs, and why the evidence is especially convincing or limited.	The student becomes analytical and strategic in the reasoning.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student builds layered reasoning, weighs tradeoffs and limitations, connects evidence to multiple ideas, and revises the explanation when the claim or counterargument changes.	Use paired evidence, competing interpretations, and metacognitive reflection. Ask the student to compare surface reasoning with deeper reasoning and justify the difference.	Transfer analytical thinking to complex evidence, unfamiliar issues, and authentic decisions.

U — Understanding Others (Counterargument)

Does the student represent an opposing viewpoint accurately, fairly, and specifically enough to be meaningfully answered?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The opposing side is ignored, misrepresented, or dismissed with language such as “They are wrong.” The student may not identify a real concern.	Use two-column “My side / Other side” sorts. Model neutral language and ask, “What is the strongest reasonable concern someone could have?”	The student can identify one plausible opposing concern without insulting or changing it.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student writes “Some people disagree” or names the other side vaguely. The wording may be loaded, incomplete, or dependent on a frame.	Provide a partial counterargument frame and ask for the reason behind the concern. Replace judgment words with accurate, neutral wording.	The student states a specific, fair counterargument in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student accurately states one opposing concern in the structured task, but the concern may be underdeveloped or omitted from independent writing.	Fade the frame. Ask the student to explain why a reasonable person might value that concern and where it belongs in the argument.	The student independently represents a plausible opposing viewpoint in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student fairly explains an opposing concern, including the reason or value behind it, without weakening or caricaturing the other side.	Increase complexity by asking for the strongest counterargument, multiple stakeholder perspectives, or conditions under which the other side may be right.	The student begins to compare perspectives and identify underlying values or assumptions.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student identifies and synthesizes multiple perspectives, distinguishes stronger from weaker counterarguments, and understands the conditions or values driving each view.	Use authentic stakeholder roles and nuanced issues. Ask the student to explain how understanding the other side should refine the claim or response.	Transfer perspective-taking across complex, contested, and unfamiliar issues.

R — Rebuttal

Does the student answer the opposing concern directly with evidence, reasoning, qualification, or a practical solution?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	No rebuttal is present, or the response dismisses the other side with “They are wrong,” “I disagree,” or a repeated claim.	Place the counterargument and possible responses side by side. Ask, “What exact concern must be answered?” Model a respectful “Although... however...” response.	The student can recognize and attempt a rebuttal that addresses the concern rather than the person.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student uses “however” or “but” but mainly repeats the claim, changes the subject, or gives an unsupported answer.	Underline the concern and require the response to use the same key words. Add one reason, evidence detail, condition, or solution that answers that exact concern.	The student writes a relevant rebuttal with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student responds to the counterargument in the organizer, but the answer may be general, one-sided, or not fully supported in independent writing.	Fade the frame. Ask whether the rebuttal acknowledges any valid part of the concern and whether the evidence actually reduces or answers it.	The student independently answers a counterargument in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student directly answers the opposing concern with logical reasoning, relevant evidence, concession, qualification, or a workable solution.	Use stronger counterarguments and require the student to choose among rebuttal strategies. Ask how the rebuttal changes or strengthens the claim.	The student becomes strategic about concession, qualification, evidence, and response.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student anticipates the strongest counterargument, concedes valid limitations, refines the claim when necessary, and answers the concern without oversimplifying it.	Use multiple counterarguments, incomplete evidence, and authentic audiences. Ask the student to evaluate whether the rebuttal fully resolves, narrows, or leaves a concern open.	Transfer nuanced rebuttal and claim refinement to complex arguments and real decisions.

E — Ending

Does the ending bring the argument to a purposeful close by reinforcing the claim and synthesizing the reasoning without introducing an unrelated new topic?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The response stops abruptly, ends with “That is all,” repeats an unrelated detail, or introduces a new idea that was never developed.	Sort endings into stops, summaries, new-topic endings, and purposeful closures. Orally complete: “Therefore, the reader should understand…”	The student recognizes a purposeful ending and writes a simple claim-based close with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student restates the claim with “In conclusion,” but the ending is generic, repetitive, or dependent on a full frame.	Use a partial frame and ask the student to combine the claim with the strongest reason or decision. Remove unrelated new information.	The student produces a complete ending in Part 2 that fits the argument.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The ending reinforces the claim and summarizes ideas in the guided task, but it may sound mechanical or lose connection to the independent argument.	Fade the conclusion frame. Ask the student to synthesize rather than list and to echo the exact decision the reader is being asked to make.	The student independently closes the complete argument without adding an unrelated topic.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently reinforces the claim, brings the main reasoning together, and creates a clear sense of completion appropriate to the audience.	Increase intentionality through audience, tone, next steps, or a concise synthesis that prepares for significance without exaggeration.	The student begins to make deliberate ending choices and self-revise for effect.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student crafts a purposeful, audience-aware ending that synthesizes the argument, may recommend a warranted next step, and aligns naturally with the significance.	Use authentic audiences and compare several possible endings. Ask the student to explain which ending best matches the purpose and evidence.	Transfer purposeful closure across formal arguments, letters, speeches, and multimodal presentations.

S — Significance

Does the student explain why the issue, decision, or principle matters beyond personal preference and the immediate passage?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The response ends with personal preference, a vague moral, or no explanation of why the issue matters beyond “I want this.”	Teach preference versus significance. Ask orally: “Who else is affected?” “What larger school value is involved?” “Where else could this principle matter?”	The student recognizes significance and attempts one broader connection.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student attempts a broader idea, but it may be generic, exaggerated, inspirational without support, or closely tied to the immediate topic.	Use temporary significance categories—learning, fairness, safety, responsibility, community, future decisions—then require the student to connect the category to the argument.	The student produces a relevant broader connection with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student extends beyond the passage in the structured task, but the connection may be general or only loosely connected to the independent reasoning.	Fade stems. Require “beyond this school” plus “why it matters,” and trace the significance back to the claim, reasons, and evidence.	The student independently develops a meaningful, relevant significance statement.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently explains a larger lesson, implication, or principle that grows from the argument and matters to a broader audience or decision.	Increase sophistication through audience, real-world systems, long-term effects, and transfer to another context. Require the significance to be warranted, not merely inspiring.	The student becomes nuanced and intentional in extending the argument’s significance.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student develops a nuanced, transferable significance statement, identifies limits or conditions, and explains how the issue reflects a broader principle or system.	Invite connections across disciplines, audiences, and civic decisions. Ask why the significance follows logically from the evidence and where the principle may not apply.	Transfer significance and synthesis to increasingly complex arguments and authentic public purposes.

How Teachers Move Students from One Thinking Level to the Next

The scaffold should change as the thinking changes

● Foundational → ■ Emergent

Goal: move from not yet demonstrating the skill to recognizing and attempting it.

Teacher move: model one argumentative decision at a time, use oral rehearsal, examples/nonexamples, sorting, and immediate feedback.

Teacher language:

"Watch how I decide what this part of the argument must do. Now tell me which example works better and why. Next, you try one with me."

■ Emergent → ▼ Visible

Goal: move from recognition or partial attempts to generating the skill when the task names it.

Teacher move: remove answer choices, provide a targeted organizer or partial frame, ask guided questions, and require the student's own idea.

Teacher language:

"You already recognize what this looks like. Now I want you to build one. I will give you the question, but the claim, reason, evidence, or response must come from you."

▼ Visible → ▲ Independent

Goal: move from successful guided construction to transfer inside a complete argument without reminders.

Teacher move: fade labels and frames, require authentic writing, and check whether the skill appears when the teacher does not name it.

Teacher language:

"You can do this when I point to it. Now I am going to stop naming it for you. Show me where you decide it belongs in your own argument."

▲ Independent → ♦ Reflective

Goal: move from competent independent use to strategic, intentional, audience-aware decision-making.

Teacher move: offer competing choices, ask for justification, increase source and issue complexity, and invite revision for effect.

Teacher language:

"You can already do this on your own. Now decide which version is strongest for this audience, revise intentionally, and explain why your choice improves the whole argument."

Do Not Over-Scaffold Strong Strands

Important

If a student is ▲ Independent or ♦ Reflective in a strand, do not require repeated Foundational or Emergent practice for that same strand simply because another component is weaker. Preserve independence in the strong strand, target the weaker strand, and reconnect the two inside authentic argument writing.

Embedded Progress-Monitoring Tools

A second full diagnostic is not required

Strand	2–5 minute embedded check	What counts as growth
C — Claim	Give a new school issue and ask for one defensible claim in two sentences.	The student states a supportable position with less prompting and sustains it in the next short response.
R — Reasons	Provide a claim and ask the student to generate and rank two distinct reasons.	Reasons are relevant, nonoverlapping, and increasingly selected without a reason frame.
E — Evidence	Offer three source details and ask the student to select and justify the strongest evidence.	The student chooses specific proof, explains relevance, and eventually locates evidence without choices.
A — Argument	Give seven sentence strips representing the CREATURES™ moves and ask the student to sequence and justify them.	The student creates a coherent sequence, then transfers the structure without labeled strips.
T — Thinking	Give one reason and one evidence detail. Ask for the sentence that explains how the evidence supports the reason.	The explanation moves beyond repetition and appears without “This shows...” prompting.
U — Understanding Others	Give an issue and ask for the strongest fair concern from the opposing side.	The counterargument is specific, neutral, plausible, and increasingly independent.
R — Rebuttal	Provide one counterargument and ask for a respectful response using evidence, reasoning, or a condition.	The response directly answers the concern rather than repeating the claim.
E — Ending	Give a weak conclusion and ask the student to rewrite it without adding a new topic.	The ending synthesizes the claim and reasoning with less use of a conclusion frame.
S — Significance	Ask the student to turn “I like this plan” into a broader statement about why the decision matters.	The student connects the issue to a defensible larger principle and can transfer it to another context.

Use the smallest recheck that matches the target.

A short claim, one evidence–thinking pair, one counterargument–rebuttal exchange, one revised ending, or a three-minute conference can provide enough evidence to update the student’s strand level. Do not readminister the entire diagnostic unless a full new baseline is genuinely needed.

Progress-Monitoring Cycle

Instructional Cycle

Argumentative Diagnostic → CREATURES™ RPLD Profile → Target One or Two Strands → Provide Level-Matched Support → Short Embedded Writing Check → Reduce or Adjust Support → Update the Profile → Increase Independence

Quick Teacher Conference Record

Use this record for a brief strand-specific conference. Document one observable strength, one next thinking move, the temporary scaffold, and the evidence that will show readiness to move up.

Student / Date	Student: _____ Date: _____
Priority Strand / Current Level	Strand: C R E A T U R E S Level: ● Foundational ■ Emergent ▼ Visible ▲ Independent ◆ Reflective
Evidence I Saw	In the student work, I noticed: _____ _____ _____
Next Target / Scaffold / Recheck	Next thinking move: _____ Temporary support: _____ Recheck task and date: _____ _____

Conference Language

"I can see that you can already _____. Your next thinking move is to _____. I am going to give you _____ support while you practice. I will know you are ready to move up when you can _____ with less support."

Update the Profile, Not the Child's Label

- Record the new strand level only when current work supports it.
- Allow different strands to move at different rates.
- Return students to mixed, authentic writing tasks after targeted practice so transfer can be observed.
- Use level names to describe current evidence and next instruction—not identity, ability, or potential.

Teacher Answer Key & Evidence Map

Recognition items support—but do not replace—writing evidence

Item	Answer	Primary evidence
P1	B	C — Claim
P2	C	R — Reasons
P3	B	E — Evidence
P4	D	A — Argument
P5	C	T — Thinking
P6	B	U — Understanding Others
P7	D	R — Rebuttal
P8	C	E — Ending
P9	B	S — Significance
1	C	C — Claim
2	B	C — Claim
3	B	R — Reasons
4	D	R — Reasons
5	C	E — Evidence
6	A	E — Evidence
7	D	A — Argument
8	B	A — Argument
9	C	T — Thinking
10	A	T — Thinking
11	B	U — Understanding Others
12	D	U — Understanding Others
13	C	R — Rebuttal
14	A	R — Rebuttal
15	B	E — Ending
16	D	E — Ending
17	C	S — Significance
18	B	S — Significance
28	C	Broad revising
29	B	Broad editing

Scoring Reminder

Do not convert the recognition-item total into the student's RPLD level. A student can answer every recognition item correctly and still be Visible rather than Independent if the skill appears only when choices, labels, or frames are provided. Independent and Reflective levels must be supported by student-generated argumentative writing.

Flexible Grouping by Strand

Group for the thinking move—not for a global “ability” label

A student may need a Foundational group for Rebuttal, a Visible group for Evidence, and an Independent conference for Claim. Build temporary groups around the exact component and release students as soon as new evidence supports less assistance.

● Foundational groups

explicit modeling, oral rehearsal, examples/nonexamples, concrete choices, and one decision at a time.

■ Emergent groups

remove answer choices, use partial frames, and require the student to generate one component with guided questions.

▼ Visible groups

fade the organizer and require transfer into a short authentic argument, paragraph, or counterargument–rebuttal exchange.

▲ Independent groups

preserve autonomy; use more complex issues, evidence sets, audiences, and strategic revision rather than repetitive worksheets.

◆ Reflective groups

increase nuance, competing perspectives, tradeoffs, source evaluation, public audience, and metacognitive justification.

Final Instructional Mindset

The CREATURES™ RPLD profile is a map for growth, not a label for the child. Identify the strongest evidence of current thinking, provide the least amount of support needed for successful next-level thinking, remove the support as independence develops, and keep the student engaged in meaningful grade-level argumentation throughout the process.