

Lesson Plan

LIE POEMS

Author, artist, and T&W writer-in-residence [Sarah Porter](#) uses a seventh-grade poetry class to teach common logical fallacies. After reading a list of different fallacies, the class becomes better acquainted with them by writing “lie Poems.” This lesson plan offers a fun, no-stress way to gain skills these students can employ throughout their academic careers.

Grade(s) taught: 7th

Genre(s) taught: Poetry, argumentative writing

Common Core State Standards:

(Refer to the [ELA Standards > History/Social Studies > Grades 6–8](#) and [ELA Standards > Writing > Grade 7](#))

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.7.8
Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.A
Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.10
Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Guiding Questions:

- How do people try to “prove” their point when the evidence is against them?
- Do people employ some of these tactics in daily life, perhaps to manipulate others?
- If someone frequently employs invalid logic, is it a good idea to examine their motives?
- If you catch yourself using invalid logic, what should you do to improve your argument?



LESSON

Introduction:

Pass out a handout listing common logical fallacies with examples. A *sample handout is included at the end of this lesson plan.*

Discuss the various logical fallacies and solicit additional examples from the class; e.g. the “birther” hysteria as an example of an ad hominem attack against President Obama. With input from students, write absurd lies on the board and then ask students to come up with invalid justifications for their lies and identify the logical fallacy employed.

Main Activity:

Translate this exercise into independent writing. Have the students independently write “lie poems” in which they make an absurd claim and use at least three different types of fallacies to prove their lies. If there is time, students can share with each other and guess what type of fallacy their partners used.

Closing:

A volunteer makes an absurd statement, and the class goes in a circle alternately supporting and contradicting the statement with invalid arguments.

Materials:

Logical fallacies handout

Vocabulary:

Fallacy, logic, red herring, ad hominem, straw man, false analogy, false dilemma, non sequitur

Multi-Modal Approaches to Learning:

This lesson appeals to **logical** learners, with its clear forms and definitions; **interpersonal** learners, as the group creates examples together; and **linguistic** learners, as they verbally address new definitions, concepts, and examples.

INVALID ARGUMENTS: SOME LOGICAL FALLACIES

Logical fallacies are invalid arguments that often appear when someone is trying to manipulate or deceive the reader/listener, or when someone is fooling himself/herself.

1. **Red Herring:** A red herring is designed to mislead by presenting irrelevant information that distracts the reader/listener from the real issue.

Example: I don't see why you're worrying about our soldiers dying if we start a war with China! After all, fifty thousand Americans die every year in car accidents.

2. **Ad Hominem:** This literally means "to the man." Ad hominem arguments attack an opponent personally rather than actually trying to prove the opponent wrong.

Example: How can anyone possibly accept Professor Simpson's ideas about the importance of increased funding for the schools when Professor Simpson was accused of shoplifting ten years ago?

3. **Straw Man:** Pretending your opponent believes something silly and easy to prove wrong, and arguing against that instead of against his *real* beliefs. Often this involves exaggerating something your opponent believes until it becomes ridiculous.

Example: The President says that we should give every citizen a free BMW, but obviously if we do that the country will go bankrupt!

4. **False Analogy:** Pretending two situations are similar or parallel when there are actually important differences.

Example: We all know that nails only work correctly when we hit them on the head. Therefore, we should not hesitate to hit our students to make them work.

5. **False Dilemma:** Pretending that there are only two choices, when in reality there are other alternatives.

Example: Either you're for me no matter *what* I do, or you're against me!

6. **Non Sequitur:** Literally this means "it does not follow." Non sequitur involves pretending there's a logical connection between two things when there really isn't.

Example: I know you'll tell me all your secrets. I have a right to know everything because we're friends.