Argument Analysis Reference Sheet

An argument may be *visual* or *textual*. Political cartoonists, photographers, and artists make *visual* arguments through their drawings, their photographs, or their artwork. Likewise, journalists, screenplay writers, novelists, and even the everyday, ordinary writer render *textual* arguments through the words they place on papers or screens.

In order to analyze an argument (figure out what is being said and why), or even to create an effective argument ourselves, we must begin by asking and answering some essential questions about whatever it is we are analyzing or arguing. Use the questions below to help guide you through your analysis or creation of a visual or textual argument.

Whether you are looking at a visual or textual argument, the most important starting point is simply, ***What do I see?*** In a visual argument, what is being portrayed? What details do you notice in the picture? In a textual argument, look at the words the writer uses (his or her *diction*) and the verbal picture the writer is creating. What details do you notice?

**What do I see?**

**Speaker (refers to the person making the argument)**

* Who is making the argument? (from whose perspective is the argument?)
* How do we know? What details help us identify the speaker?

**Audience**

* Who is the speaker addressing? To whom is the argument being made?
* What details help us identify the audience?
* What does the audience (probably) already know about the subject? What details would the audience need to be given in order to fully understand the subject?
* Why do the details in this argument appeal to this audience?
* Was the speaker effective in providing enough information for the audience?

**Argument/Claim**

* What is the main argument the speaker is making?
* Where is this claim located in the text (visual or textual)?
* Is the argument clear? Do we know exactly what the speaker is trying to say?
* What details allow us to identify the claim?

**Purpose (the ‘So what?’)**

* Why is the speaker making this argument? How do we know?
* What details help us identify the purpose?
* Are the details in the argument effective in revealing the reason for the argument?

**Evidence**

* Does the speaker provide evidence to support the claim(s) being made in the argument?
* What evidence is given?
* Does the speaker explain how the evidence proves the claim? How is the evidence explained?
* From where did the speaker take this evidence?
* Is/are the source(s) of this evidence credible? How do we know?
* Does the speaker provide *enough* evidence to support the claim?
* Does the speaker provide a counterargument (the opposite point of view) for the argument? Is/are the counterargument(s) explained?

**Structure (chronological? counterargument-rebuttal-counterargument-rebuttal? cause-effect? claim-claim-counterargument-rebuttal-conclusion?)**

* Does the speaker use a particular pattern of organization in the argument? How is the argument organized?
* Where is/are the counterargument(s) located in the argument?
* Is the organization effective for the argument? Why?
* What would be an alternative way the speaker could have organized the argument? How would a different structure change the purpose? the audience?

**Tone**

* What type of language does the speaker use? Is it formal? Informal? Technical? Humorous? Negative? Positive? Neutral?
* What are some examples of language the speaker uses?
* Is this tone effective for the intended audience? Why?
* Would a different tone have been more effective for conveying the argument? Why or why not?