**Making Well-Reasoned Arguments using *Thinking Caps***

Created by Alyssa Paylor

**Teaching Context:**

My students from Myanmar often had difficulty making well-reasoned arguments because they had difficulty recognizing that arguments have multiple sides. They often could not articulate their own viewpoints, or viewpoints of others.

*Thinking Caps* can be done as reading, writing, speaking, or listening activity. It can be particularly useful for classes in academic writing where students must create thesis statements, in debate classes, in history or social studies classes, or in a class where the goal is to have a lively discussion.

**Preparation:**

1. Write a clear question that allows different types of people to have different viewpoints. Write a question that relates to the topic you are teaching, or that matches a question the student might receive on an exam.

Example: *Should everyone be free to own a gun?*

1. Choose 3-6 viewpoints. Try to make these viewpoints as distinct as possible and make each viewpoint a literal character or *cap*, so that the student can empathize and more closely associate people they recognize from society with viewpoints.

Example: *You are a retired police officer. You worked with guns for 25 years and have been trained how to use them safely.*

(law and order viewpoint)

Example: *You are a sportsman and enjoy hunting animals as a hobby. Your father used to take you hunting, as his father (your grandfather) did with him. You hope to someday take your sons hunting as well.*

(tradition viewpoint)

Example: *You are a teacher in a large city. Many of your students belong to gangs and last year, one of the students at your school brought a gun to school and accidently shot that gun while showing it to a friend. Other students could have been hurt.*

(gun control viewpoint)

1. Provide a handout or description for each viewpoint. Students in the class will be divided into different viewpoints at random. These viewpoints can be simple or complicated, depending on the level of your class and the purpose of the activity.
2. Once class begins, divide students and provide them with a piece of poster paper or a handout where they can record the viewpoints of their group.

Ask students to decide if their *character cap* would agree or disagree with the question. Ask them to record their reasons for why they are for or against the question; ou will probably have to check-in with students as they work on their reasons and remind them to only look at the question from the viewpoint of their character.

T hen have each group present their viewpoint and reasons. The rest of the students should listen carefully and take notes.

1. Students work as individuals now. They must decide if they as individuals agree or disagree with the question. They can use their own reasons, or use the reasons from one or more of the viewpoints to support their opinion.

For a more challenging version of this activity, ask each viewpoint group to think of reasons supporting both for and against the question according to how their *character cap* would view the issue.

To help students really absorb the activity, provide literal hats, costume pieces, or props that match the characters for each viewpoint group.

**Extensions**

Ask opposing viewpoint groups to send representatives to the front of the class and start a formal debate.

In classes with internet access, ask students to research the topic question based on the viewpoint of their *character cap.*