

The Objectivity of History

Lesson 4: Essay Task

Focus: How can knowledge users develop strong, structured arguments?

Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write a fully developed essay claim.• Apply real-world examples and counterclaims to support arguments.• Engage critically with TOK concepts (e.g., responsibility, evidence, certainty).
Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction (5 mins) Guiding Question: "How do we develop a strong argument in a TOK essay?" Recap: What makes a TOK essay unique?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on knowledge (not merely opinions).• Use real-world examples drawn from multiple Areas of Knowledge (AOKs).• Include counterclaims.• Refer to TOK concepts (e.g., responsibility, certainty, evidence).• Reflect on the implications and limitations of your argument.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Teacher Tip: Show a quick visual of the TOK essay structure (introduction, body claims, conclusion), highlighting where this developed paragraph fits in.2. Examining a Strong TOK Essay Claim (10 mins)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Break down an example paragraph of your choice with students. Ask them to annotate:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Claim: The stance or argument addressing the TOK prompt.◦ Example: A real-world situation supporting or illustrating the claim.◦ Counterclaim: A contrasting perspective that challenges the claim.◦ TOK Links: Explicit connection to TOK concepts and reflection on how knowledge is produced or validated.• Discussion Questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ How does the example strengthen the claim?◦ Which Ways of Knowing (WOKs) or Areas of Knowledge (AOKs) are relevant here?◦ Does the counterclaim effectively challenge the claim, encouraging deeper exploration?3. Writing Task: Drafting a TOK Paragraph (15 mins)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select a prompt: Provide students with a list of essay prompts to choose from. These could be prompts that you have prepared (e.g., “Does the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge from official records reveal bias in how history is constructed?”) or a prescribed title from the official IB list that ties to cultural appropriation. • Students plan the paragraph, including notes on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Claim: A statement connecting directly to the prompt. ○ Example: A real-life scenario (e.g. Bruce Paul’s take on aboriginal agricultural history) that demonstrates the claim. ○ Counterclaim: An alternative viewpoint or critique that challenges the initial argument. ○ TOK Link: Exploration of how responsibility, evidence and certainty considerations shape knowledge in this scenario. • Write the paragraph: Emphasise clarity, coherence, and the TOK focus (not just describing the event but analysing how it affects knowledge). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teacher Tip: Ensure students reference relevant AOKs — e.g., how the assumed objectivity of history may erase other forms of historical evidence such as oral traditions. 4. Peer Review & Refinement (10 mins) • Students exchange their writing in pairs or small groups, and use the essay checklist to give feedback. Use the following discussion points to help students’ develop their feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Claim: Is it clearly stated, and does it tie back to the prompt? ○ Example: Is it concrete, relevant, and well-explained? ○ Counterclaim: Is it meaningfully different or just a weaker version of the claim? ○ TOK Link: Does it show awareness of how knowledge is justified, constructed, or challenged? ○ Language and Clarity: Are there any vague statements or unclear references? • If time permits, students revise immediately based on peer feedback.
Critical Thinking Concepts	<p>Confronting Biases and Assumptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrogating Claims of Objectivity: Reflect on how presenting history as “neutral fact” can mask cultural or colonial bias, and consider whose perspectives are excluded when evidence is treated as value-free. • Uncovering Evidential Privilege: Examine why written archives often outrank oral traditions, and how that hierarchy shapes which voices appear authoritative in students’ paragraphs. <p>Exploring Contexts and Expert Opinions</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contextualizing Evidence Standards: Assess how disciplinary training (e.g., historiography vs. archaeology) influences what counts as reliable proof, and how choosing different experts can tilt an argument's credibility. ● Locating Power in Source Selection: Analyse how political or institutional contexts determine which records are preserved, framed, or erased, and integrate that awareness into example-selection. <p>Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrating Peer Critique: Adapt claims and counterclaims after feedback, demonstrating a willingness to refine reasoning when new perspectives or contradictory data emerge. ● Balancing Certainty and Responsibility: Evaluate how degrees of certainty should shape the language of the paragraph, especially when evidence is contested or incomplete. <p>Extrapolation and Reapplication of Principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Linking Essay Craft to Public Debates: Consider how drafting the paragraph parallels real-world disputes over whose testimony — archival or oral — should guide policy on reparations or land rights. ● Transferring Evidential Reasoning Across AOKs: Apply lessons from historical source evaluation to scientific peer review or media literacy, showing how criteria for “good evidence” shift across knowledge domains.
Reflection	<p>Reflection (5-10 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What was the most challenging part of writing this? ● How do different perspectives influence debates on the validity of historical evidence? ● How does this practice help prepare for the TOK essay assessment? <p>Extension / Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Option A: Expand the paragraph by adding another real-world example or a deeper analysis of the counterclaim. ● Option B: Research a different context (another region or era) to see if the claim holds universally or changes with cultural/political conditions. ● Option C: Draft an introductory or concluding paragraph linking the argument to a broader TOK theme.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lesson Slides ● Example TOK Essay prescribed titles

TOK Concepts

- **Power:** How do political and colonial power structures shape which historical knowledge is preserved, silenced, or erased?
- **Responsibility:** Is it ethical to construct historical narratives that exclude or misrepresent Indigenous contributions to agriculture and society?
- **Perspective:** How do differing cultural worldviews (oral vs. written, settler vs. Indigenous) influence what is recognized as valid historical knowledge?