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### Practicing Abstraction Argument and Explanation: The Little Goat and the High Priest

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### The Little Goat and the High Priest

Once upon a time, by a river, a high priest was preparing to sacrifice a little goat to the gods. The goat started to laugh. The high priest asked the goat, “Why are you laughing?”

“After being sacrificed 499 times and being reborn as a goat, I will be reborn as a human being,” replied the little goat.

Then the little goat began to weep. The high priest asked, “Why do you weep?”

“I weep for you, poor priest. 500 lives ago I was a high priest who sacrificed goats to the gods.”

Make five statements about the reading that you believe are true. Write them down:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Handout

Put them in Claim form

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Using evidence from the story and your own experience, create arguments of two premises to support your conclusion

Conclusion 1) \_\_\_\_\_

Premises

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion 2) \_\_\_\_\_

Premises

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion 3) \_\_\_\_\_

Premises

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

**The Assignment is designed for low-level critical thinking students to practice concepts of abstraction, argument, and explanation.**

1. **There is a reading. Fables lend themselves well to this activity. Pick your own favorite.**
  - a. The reading is brief, but may cause difficulties with weak readers because the references require more background knowledge than many come to us with. Most students, however, can come up with a “moral” to the story. Usually the class will settle on something like “What goes around comes around” although some classes have come up with interesting alternatives.
    - i. This can lead into a discussion of the mental process of abstraction.
      1. FYI in the original the moral is something like *we should never sacrifice animals to the gods*
2. **The next part requires that they make statements (inferences) about the reading they believe are true.**
  - a. This often requires a little coaxing and encouragement. Students will object “but the story isn’t true!” to which I reply That is a true statement about the story. Make another one. Coaxing can get them to make statements about scene setting action form etc. This is a good group activity to have them generate and compare their true statements about the reading.
3. **Putting their statements into claim form and then argument form.**
  - a. This is always a struggle, but critical to the next phase.
  - b. Create premises to support the true claim will inspire responses like i
    - i. Eg. The story is fiction because animals don’t talk.
    - ii. The goal is to get to a well-formed argument from this
      1. Premise 1 In reality, animals don’t talk to people.
      2. Premise 2 In the story, the goat talks to the priest.
      3. Conclusion: The story is fiction.
4. Sometimes they will pick a fact from the reading rather than making inferences that requires an explanation
  - a. It can be instructive to show how an explanation of a fact differs from an argument
    - i. Eg. The author started the reading with “Once upon a time” because he wanted readers know this was a story for children.

Passage adapted and abridged by David Marshall from  
Chalmers, Robert. “No. 18 Matakabhata-Jātaka.” *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, edited by E. B. Cowell, vol. 1, Oriel College, Oxford, 1895.

Source: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j1/j1000.htm> Accessed 3/23/18

