

CLAIM TESTING – INTUITION

Preparation

Post the following claims around the room.

1. The Earth is flat.
2. Humans can live without food or water for a month.
3. If an object is dropped, it will fall.
4. Humans are the only species capable of love.
5. Abraham Lincoln was a championship wrestler.
6. A quantum computer can solve any computer science problem in a split second.
7. Neanderthals and Denisovans occupied the same caves in Siberia.



Have three different colors of sticky notes available. Designate one color as the “agree” color, one as the “disagree” color, and one as the “need more information” color.

Post directions so that students know that as they come into the room, they should walk around the room and put a sticky note on each claim to either signify that they agree, disagree, or need more information to make a decision. Instruct students to write their names and their reasons for disagreeing or agreeing on the appropriate sticky note.

Purpose

This quick activity digs into the intuition claim tester. Intuition is often a difficult claim tester for students to understand and use, because using this claim tester usually relies on the background knowledge of the person testing the claim. For a lot of what students encounter in history, they probably don't have the requisite background knowledge, so relying on their intuition to make quick judgments about a claim becomes difficult. This activity should help students understand how and why intuition can be important, and what to do when they can't rely on their intuition.

Process

As students come into the room, have them take about 5 minutes to walk around to the different claims and decide if they agree or disagree with the claim, or if they need more information to make a determination about a claim. They should write their names on all their sticky notes, and if they're agreeing or disagreeing with the claim, they should include their reasoning.

Once everyone is done, go through the claims one by one and discuss which claim testers students used as support.

The Earth is flat.

Most students should disagree with this after examining the claim “The Earth is round” from Unit 1. If any students agree with the claim “The Earth is flat,” ask them to share how they know the Earth is flat, and what claim tester they're using as support. Students could cite evidence and authority here; if they say intuition or logic, find out why.

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Humans can live without food or water for a month.

Most students will disagree with this claim. Ask them what led them to disagree. If they don't get there, point out that their own knowledge of what it takes to survive gives them the context and understanding to be able to make an intuitive choice about whether or not the claim is true.

If an object is dropped, it will fall.

Students should say they agree with this statement. Ask them why they know it's true. Some might point to scientific theory as evidence, others will say that they have experience watching objects fall, so we know intuitively what will happen. Ask students if one type of support here is better than another. Students tend to think that authority and evidence are the gold standard of claim testing, but that's not always the case. If students have the background knowledge and intuition to make a determination about a claim, sometimes that's better than going in search of evidence. It's faster and more efficient. Also, intuition is sometimes the only thing we have to go on to make a decision. There isn't always evidence.

Humans are the only species capable of love.

Answers will likely vary here and that's fine. Ask students how they made their determination, and which claim tester is the "best" to use here. There is likely not a lot of readily available scientific evidence related to human versus animal love; however, most students will likely have some experience with a pet, or have witnessed other people with their pets.

Abraham Lincoln was a championship wrestler.

Unless you happen to have a Lincoln scholar in your classroom, you would expect students to say that they "need more information." Most students aren't Lincoln scholars, so they won't have the relevant background information or historical context to answer this question. So, how will they answer it? Some might use intuition: If they remember seeing pictures of or learning about Lincoln, they might remember that he was tall and thin, not the best physical characteristics for a wrestler, and so intuit that it's unlikely he was a champion in that sport. Otherwise, they will need more information about Lincoln to make this determination.

A quantum computer can solve any computer science problem in a split second.

Most students will probably say they need more information here, unless they have a strong background in computer science. A lot of them won't have the context or background knowledge to make a guess, although a lot of them may agree with the statement, due to misconceptions about how computers work. However, the statement is incorrect.

Neanderthals and Denisovans occupied the same caves in Siberia.

Most students should say they need more information here. While they might have had a gut instinct about the quantum computer statement, it's unlikely they have the background knowledge to say much about this claim.

Now that you've reviewed each of the claims, ask students: Can you decide if a claim is true if you don't know anything about it? Discuss this as a class, and be sure to explain that one of the things about studying history that can be hard is when we encounter claims that we have no background knowledge about. How do you believe something (or not) that you know nothing about? It's nearly impossible without more information or context. That's why historians almost always engage in what's called "contextualization" when they put together a historical account. Historical context refers to the details that surround a historical event or process. Context is what gives meaning to the details, and without those details, it's hard to use any of the claim testers, but especially difficult to use intuition.

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