



Pattern, Puzzle, Position

Duration: 20-30 minutes | **Overview:** Students will look for patterns in evidence and identify outliers to make and complicate claims.

Materials:

- Strategy slide with steps
- Student notebooks or paper for writing
- Text and/or other evidence amassed on the topic of study.

Steps:

Before the Activity:

1. Remind students of the topic you are currently studying and the evidence that you have already encountered.
2. If you have worked with evidence beyond a single text (as is particularly the case in social studies classes), you might want to make a list together as a reminder.
3. Tell your students that sometimes to come up with an interesting claim about a text, we need to work with the evidence we have to see what the evidence reveals.

During the Activity:

1. **Pattern – Sort before you synthesize.**

Look at your evidence. Then, group your evidence into categories of your own choosing. Ask: what do several pieces have in common? What groupings emerge?

2. **Puzzle – Find the outlier.**

Identify evidence that resists your groupings – evidence that complicates the pattern, contradicts another piece, or just doesn't fit cleanly anywhere.

While it would be easier to ignore it, this is often where the most interesting, defensible claims live.

3. **Position – Write the tension, not the topic.**



Complete this frame: *"Most of the evidence suggests ___, but ___ complicates that, which means ___."*

The third blank is where your actual claim gets forged.

4. **Pressure-test.**

Trade your claim with a partner, who tries to find one more piece of evidence that would challenge it. If the claim survives, it's specific and arguable enough to build on. If it collapses, that's useful too – revise before you draft.

After the Activity:

This activity can be enough on its own! You can conclude by telling students that they can come back to this strategy any time they need to develop a claim about a topic.

If you want to take this activity further, here are a few ideas for extending this work:

- **Puzzle Swap**

Students trade only their *puzzle* – the outlier piece of evidence they identified – with a partner, without sharing their own claim. Each partner then has to write a brand-new Position sentence using someone else's outlier. Afterward, compare: did two people land on different claims from the exact same puzzle? This works well because it tests whether a chosen outlier is actually rich enough to support more than one claim – if it only ever leads to one obvious sentence, that's often a sign the outlier isn't as generative as it seemed.

- **Pattern Challenge**

In small groups, students present only their *Pattern* – the categories they sorted their evidence into – without revealing their puzzle or claim yet. The rest of the group tries to guess what piece of evidence might not fit that pattern before the presenter reveals their actual puzzle. If the group's guesses differ from the student's own choice, that's worth pausing on: multiple plausible outliers usually mean multiple possible claims, and the student gets to pick the strongest one with more information than they started with.

- **Claim Bracket**

Have each student write two or three different Position sentences – either by finding multiple puzzles in their evidence or by re-sorting their Pattern a different



way. Then run a quick bracket: in pairs or small groups, students pit their own claims against each other one at a time, arguing which is more specific, more arguable, and better supported by the evidence, eliminating one claim per round until one survives. This turns claim selection into a structured comparison instead of a gut-feel choice, and it doubles as informal pressure-testing since students have to defend each claim out loud against a real challenger.

3.2B Examples of Pattern, Puzzle, Position

Prohibition

Step 1: Pattern — Sort before you synthesize.

Sample evidence pile:

- Anti-Saloon League speeches
- consumption statistics
- speakeasy/organized crime records
- immigrant community accounts
- private drinking records among elites.

Here are some groups that emerge:

- *moral arguments* (League speeches)
- *outcomes/effects* (consumption stats, speakeasies)
- *who was targeted* (immigrant accounts)
- *who was exempt* (elite drinking records)

I can start to see that we have two sides – the moral argument against alcohol consumption and then the actual application of those laws which were unfairly enforced.

Step 2: Puzzle — Find the outlier.

Looking at this pile of evidence, I can see that the piece that doesn't quite fit is the elite private-drinking records.. Everything else fits a coherent story about a law that failed to do what it promised. But the elite drinking records suggests a failure, and, perhaps even more than that, it suggests that the laws were never really designed to be applied universally.

**Step 3: Position – Write the tension.**

"Most of the evidence suggests Prohibition failed to reduce drinking, but the pattern of who kept drinking without consequence complicates that, which means **the law's failure wasn't just poor enforcement – it was built into a policy that was only ever meant to constrain certain people's behavior.**"

Step 4: Pressure-test.

A partner might push back with: "Couldn't that just be normal hypocrisy? How do you know the laws were designed with that intent?" That forces the writer to clarify whether they're claiming *design* or just *effect* – a good, productive challenge that sharpens the final claim.

Lord of the Flies**Step 1: Pattern – Sort before you synthesize.**

Let's gather up some evidence from the novel that feels interesting and important. How about the boys' early attempts at democratic order (the conch, the assembly), the descent into violence, Piggy's role, his spectacles, and his treatment throughout, Simon's death, the ending's arrival of the naval officer.

Looking at this evidence, I can start to see some groups emerge:

- *systems/rules* (the conch, the spectacles, assemblies),
- *breakdowns of those systems* (the hunts, the violence),
- *characters who represent reason vs. natural instinct vs. spiritualism* (Piggy and Ralph vs. Jack vs. Simon)
- *The outside world/adult world* (the naval officer at the end).

Looking at this, the novel seems to be building toward a simple claim – systems, or civilization, is fragile and reverts to savagery without structure.

Step 2: Puzzle – Find the outlier.

Here's the important piece of evidence that doesn't fit: The arrival of the naval officer at the end. He's not just *any* adult, right? His presence and the war he's fighting, suggests the "civilized" adult world isn't actually different in kind from what happened on the island – just larger in scale.

**Step 3: Position – Write the tension.**

Okay. Putting this together, here's my position: "Most of the evidence suggests the boys' descent into violence shows how quickly children abandon civilization without adult structure, but the naval officer's arrival – representing an adult world also in the midst of war – complicates that, which means **the novel isn't really contrasting childhood savagery with adult civilization, but suggesting that the impulse toward violence isn't a childish failure at all – it's just as present in the adult, 'civilized' world, only better organized.**"

Step 4: Pressure-test.

A partner might challenge: "Doesn't the officer's shock at what he finds suggest adults *are* different from the boys?"