



React and Reason

Duration: 10-15 minutes | **Overview:** Students will use their reaction to a single moment in a text or a topic of study to create a draft of a claim.

Materials:

- Strategy slide with steps
- Student notebooks or paper for writing

Steps:

Before the Activity:

1. Remind students of the topic/ text you are currently studying and the evidence that you have already encountered.
2. Tell students that our gut reactions are really important. In real life, they can keep us from danger or give us the courage we need to do something outside our comfort zone. Listening to our own gut reactions is a skill we should hone. This is true at school, too. Sometimes our human, gut-level reaction to something that happens in a text or something we learn about in social studies can help us arrive at an idea for a claim.

**** Note:** You might want students to write down their work step-by-step, or it might okay with you for students to simply talk out these steps with a peer. Both ways work! ******

During the Activity:

1. **Pick one moment in the text/topic.**

Don't try to have an idea about the entire subject yet – that's too big. Just name one specific moment, fact, or detail that stuck with you, even if you're not sure why yet.

2. **Name your gut reaction in one word.**

Surprised. Annoyed. Confused. Unfair. Unsettled. It doesn't need to be sophisticated – it just has to be honest.



3. Ask "why did this bother/stick with me?"

Push past the one word. This is the step that actually generates content – most of the time, the answer to "why did this jump out at me" is an opinion in disguise.

4. Turn it into a sentence.

Use the frame: "*I think* ____ *because* ____." That's a rough claim – messy, but real, and something to build on.

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:

- **Reaction Swap**

Students share only their chosen *moment* – not their reaction or claim – with a partner. The partner has to supply their own one-word gut reaction to that same moment, then push through their own "why." Afterward, compare: did two people react differently to the exact same moment? If so, that's worth sitting with – it usually means the moment is rich enough to support more than one claim, and students can decide whose direction feels more worth developing.

- **One Word, Two Ways**

Students take their own one-word reaction (say, "unsettled") and are challenged to find a second, different moment from the same text or topic that produces that *same* word. Then they run "why" on both. This tests whether the reaction is really about the specific moment or about something bigger running through the whole text/topic – if the same word keeps showing up, that recurring feeling is often a stronger, more defensible claim than either moment alone.

- **Opposite Reaction Check**

After a student reaches their claim, have them imagine someone else looking at the exact same moment and landing on the *opposite* one-word reaction (if their reaction was "unfair," what would make someone feel "justified" instead?). They write a quick one-line "why" for that opposite reaction too. Then they revise their own claim to account for it – either by explaining why their reaction is more convincing, or by



folding the opposite view in as a complication. This works well because it's a quick, built-in pressure test: instead of a student just going deeper into their own gut reaction, they have to briefly imagine a reasonable disagreement, which usually makes the final claim sharper and less one-sided without requiring a partner or a second full "why" cycle.

Examples of React & Reason

Prohibition

Moment: The fact that wealthy, politically connected Americans kept drinking privately with little consequence, even while regular people were being raided and arrested.

Gut reaction: Unfair.

Why: "Because the law was supposed to apply to everyone, but it seems like the people with money and connections just... didn't have to follow it the same way. It makes the whole 'moral crusade' thing feel less honest."

Claim: "I think Prohibition wasn't really about morality for everyone, because it was mostly enforced against people without money or power."

A second example, different moment:

Moment: Organized crime and speakeasies exploding in popularity almost immediately after alcohol became illegal.

Gut reaction: Ironic.

Why: "Because the law was supposed to make society safer, but it basically created a whole new, more dangerous criminal industry that didn't really exist in the same way before."

Claim: "I think Prohibition actually made things more dangerous, not less, because banning alcohol created a profitable black market that criminals were happy to fight over."

Lord of the Flies

Moment: The boys chanting and working themselves into a frenzy together during the hunt.

Gut reaction: Unsettled.

Why: "Because none of them would probably do something that violent alone – it only



happens once they're all doing it together, like being part of the group makes it feel okay."

Claim: "I think the group makes the boys more dangerous than any one of them would be on their own, because being part of a crowd lets them do things they'd never do alone."

A second example, different moment:

Moment: The naval officer's shocked reaction at the end, right after we've been told he's part of a war himself.

Gut reaction: Ironic.

Why: "Because he's acting like the boys' violence is shocking and childish, but he's here because grown-ups are doing basically the same thing on a bigger scale."

Claim: "I think the ending is criticizing adults just as much as the kids, because the guy who's shocked by their violence is literally part of a much bigger war."