Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grade 6-12 / Scores 1 and 2
Rubric Category	Development
Grade/Score	Grade 6-12 / Scores 1 and 2
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1b
Argument Type	Literary Argument

Establishing Evidence in Literary Arguments

Students will practice varied ways of incorporating literary evidence into their arguments.

Understanding the Expectations

When we hear the word "evidence," we often think of a courtroom lawyer holding up a bag labeled "Exhibit A," or of fingerprints at a crime scene. When we're building a case for an argument about literature, though, we may not always know where to look. This lesson focuses on the next step after putting a claim together. How will you build your case? Step one involves looking at your claim and brainstorming responses to the question *How do you know this claim is true?* As in all good writing, here is where you must show, not just tell the audience, why your claim is valid.

There are a few common types of evidence that show up when writing about literature: quotes that *directly* support a claim, quotes or examples that *indirectly* support a claim, and recurring themes and patterns from a story that, *taken*

together, support a claim. Take a look at some examples of these below:

1. First, you might have a quote that *directly and obviously supports your claim*. If part of your argument relies on establishing how one character feels about another, you might find a part of the text that *tells* the reader this information. For example:

   » *While Alex is hesitant to tell anyone about his feelings for Rachel, he clearly spends his free time daydreaming about her. At one point he even thinks to himself, "Sometimes, when I'm watching people go by in a store or on the bus, I think I see her in the crowd—but then I realize it's just because I've been thinking about her again. Like always."*

   Here, the quote gives a very clear, direct example of how Alex is constantly thinking about Rachel. It hardly requires any explanation from the writer.

2. Another common approach is similar to the one above, but requires a bit more explanation. Here, you are quoting or paraphrasing an example from the text that *indirectly supports your claim*, and then unpacking it a little for the reader to make the connection clear. In this case, you're probably making what we call an *inference*.

   » *Emotionally, Peter is not ready to move away to college, even though he has always been a strong student. When his mother mentions that he only has two weeks before he leaves, he only "smiled weakly" in return and "opened his senior yearbook again, running his finger over the signatures." His earlier excitement has faded, and instead he seems to be thinking about his friends and the community he will be leaving behind.*

   In the example above, the quote from the text doesn't directly state, "Peter was feeling too sad to leave." Instead, the reader pulls telling details out of the story and explains how they apply.

3. Finally, another powerful form of evidence from a story is a *repeated pattern or idea* that shows up—something that might not seem significant if it were only mentioned once, but becomes meaningful because it keeps coming up in a story in multiple different places:

> » *At first, it is hard to tell why Savannah does not trust Celine. She tenses up when she finds out Celine is coming over, but instead of explaining why, she starts cleaning up her room. At one point she says, "I was careful to put my earrings away, pushing them far back into my sock drawer," as though she is convinced Celine might steal them, and when Celine does enter the room, Savannah watches her closely: "I kept my eyes on her hands, mostly." Later in the story, the reader learns that things have been going missing from Savannah's room: "A watch. A twenty-dollar bill I left sitting on my desk. Even a fake ring I had, the plastic kind you get from a quarter machine." In Savannah's mind, the only person who might have taken these items is Celine. "She used to ask me if she could borrow the watch," she says, "Even just for a day."*

Here, the writer pulls several specific quotes and examples from across a story to show a pattern of distrust and suspicion between the characters. Where one example might not have been very convincing, a series of repeated behaviors shows pretty clearly how Savannah feels about Celine.

Playing the Game

First, identify the claim you're making in your paper—or, if you haven't written it yet, write down the strongest idea that you can recall from earlier discussions. Whether you are writing a new paper or revising a draft, you'll want to have the text handy so you can pull more evidence as needed.

Next, complete the work below to help you focus on selecting a variety of evidence to support your claim.

Using your draft (if you have one), your notes from class discussion, and the text itself, what evidence can you find that fits into each of the three categories?

1. Direct quotations that offer clear evidence
2. Moments or scenes in the text that allow one to infer evidence
3. Noticeable patterns in the plot or a character in the story

Organize your evidence into two columns. Keep in mind that, depending on your literary text, you may have more of some kinds of evidence than others.

My claim:	
Type of evidence	Explanation of evidence/ What it shows…
Quotations	
Detailed moments or scenes	
Detailed patterns	

Share ideas with a partner. Exchange feedback. How have you strengthened your evidence to back up your claim? How has implementing new evidence in set categories affected your organization? What aspect of your evidence still needs work?

Writing it Up

If you are still in the early stages of drafting, continue to plan how you will support your ideas with textual evidence. Try planning paragraphs using all three methods of supporting with literary evidence discussed here.

If you are in the later drafting or revising stages, where might adding more evidence or a different kind of literary evidence help? Consider rewriting paragraphs using a texture of different evidence types.