Lesson 19
Understanding Supporting Evidence

Learning Target
Understanding the reasons and evidence an author uses to support points will help you better understand a text.

Read
When reading informational texts, look for the points the author presents to convince you an idea is true. To figure out whether an author’s points are supported, look for any reasons and evidence he or she supplies for each point. A reason is an explanation for why the idea might be true. A piece of evidence is a fact that can be proven true.

In the comic strip below, identify the reasons and evidence the girl gives for needing a secret code.

Hey, wanna go outside?
Can’t. I’m developing a code for secret messages.
Why do you need that?
It’s my brother. He keeps reading my diary.
He does? What’s your evidence?

Well, my diary keeps moving around my room...
I keep finding it open...
and he keeps telling me to write more neatly.
Only if it’s not a problem.
**Think** What have you learned about points, reasons, and evidence? Complete the chart below for the comic strip on the previous page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Does the Girl Think?</th>
<th>Why Does She Think This?</th>
<th>What Evidence Supports Her Thinking?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She needs a code.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Talk** Share your chart with a partner.
- What does the girl think?
- Why does she think what she thinks?
- What evidence supports her thinking?

**Academic Talk**
Use these words to talk about the text.
- **points**
- **reason**
- **evidence**
1 Secret codes and power go hand-in-hand. Why is this so? Because a code lets one group of people communicate information in a way that keeps it secret from other groups. The group that knows the code has an advantage over the group that doesn't.

2 Take the example of Julius Caesar, an emperor of ancient Rome who conquered much of Europe and northern Africa. Caesar used letters to communicate his military plans to faraway generals. But what if an opposing army obtained copies of his letters? His plans might be foiled. So Caesar developed a code that only he and trusted members of his army understood. If an enemy intercepted Caesar's letters, they would not understand them or be able to prepare for his plans. The code gave Caesar an advantage over his opponents, letting him keep and increase his power.

3 Not all codes were as successful as Caesar's, however. In the 1500s, when Elizabeth I was Queen of England, her cousin Mary plotted to overthrow her. Mary communicated with her allies through coded messages. However, Mary's code was easy to crack, so her plan was discovered. If Mary had used a better code, she might have risen to power as the Queen of England.

4 Codes remain important in modern times. During World War II (1939–1945), German submarines communicated in code so complicated that it was nearly unbreakable. But a brilliant Englishman named Alan Turing cracked the German code. Now that the English knew when and where a British ship would be targeted, they could fight back. When the Germans' code was broken, they lost a powerful advantage.

5 Secret codes aren't just about power, of course. It's fun to develop a code to communicate secrets. But when rulers and armies use codes, they're not doing so for fun. For them, it's serious business.
Explore

What reasons and evidence does the author use to support his idea about codes?

Think

1. The author states, “Secret codes and power go hand-in-hand.” Complete the chart to explain why the author thinks this and describe three pieces of evidence supporting his thinking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Does the Author Think?</th>
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<th>What Evidence Supports His Thinking?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Secret codes and power go hand-in-hand.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Talk

2. How does the author support his idea about secret codes? If necessary, revise the second and third columns of your chart.

Write

3. **Short Response** The author states that a group with a secret code has an advantage over groups that do not. Explain how the author supports this idea. Use details from the passage in your response. Use the space provided on page 342 to write your answer.

**HINT** Use phrases such as “one example” and “a second example” to organize your response.
The Slave Quilt Code

Fact or Fiction?

by Ron Fridell

1 Back in the 1990s, an intriguing idea arose. People began claiming that during the American Civil War, 1861–1865, African slaves in the southern states used a secret code to help one another escape north to freedom.

2 This code consisted of patterns sewn into quilt blocks by slave women. For example, a pattern called wagon wheel meant to quickly load up a wagon and prepare to head north. And a pattern called shoo-fly signaled that a friendly guide waited nearby to help. Such quilts helped runaway slaves make their way along a network of routes known as the Underground Railroad to freedom.

3 Films and books sprang up about how these bedcovers with their secret messages sewn by slave women saved lives and led enslaved people to freedom. The popular Oprah Winfrey TV show even featured these claims and stories. The public loved these thrilling accounts of adventures from America’s past.

4 But wait. How true were they? These quilt code accounts were exciting, yes, and people wanted them to be historically accurate. But were they?

5 Many historians have studied slavery and the Underground Railroad. These historians reviewed the evidence. None of it appeared to come directly from the slaves, they concluded. There were no letters and no news articles quoting the slaves themselves. It all came from stories passed along by word of mouth. And none of the quilts used to help runaway slaves could be found.

6 Still, many books were written concerning these oral accounts, exciting stories of secret hiding places, life-threatening encounters, and midnight escapes. But there were no documents to back up these quilt code claims. Based on the lack of strong evidence, we must conclude that quilts played no special role in the Underground Railroad.

Close Reader Habits

How does the author support the idea that quilts played no special role in the Underground Railroad? Underline any information supporting this idea.
Think  Use what you learned from reading the article to answer the following questions.

1  This question has two parts. Answer Part A. Then answer Part B.

Part A  How does the author support the idea that people wanted to believe African slaves in the South used a secret code?

A  by showing that the history of the quilt code wasn’t known before the 1990s, and then it became a popular topic
B  by showing that experts believe the quilts’ patterns had different meanings and gave signals to escaping slaves
C  by showing that the slave quilt codes were related to the Underground Railroad, which is an interesting topic
D  by showing that the stories about the quilt codes were the subjects of popular books, films, and shows

Part B  Which detail from the article supports the answer in Part A?

A  “The popular Oprah Winfrey TV show even featured these claims. . . .”
B  “Many historians have studied slavery and the Underground Railroad.”
C  “It all came from stories passed along by word of mouth. . . .”
D  “. . . there were no documents to back up these quilt code claims.”

Talk

2  The author states that quilts with secret messages played no part in helping enslaved people escape to the North. How does the author support this idea? Use the chart on page 343 to record your ideas and the evidence.

Write

3  Short Response  How does the author support the idea about quilts not having secret messages? Provide two examples of the evidence the author uses to support the idea. Use the space provided on page 343 to write your answer.

HINT  Start by restating the author’s conclusion. Then tell how he supports it.