EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO GIVE TO STUDENTS FOR CREATING AN ARGUMENT

Pretend that I have given you an assignment in which you are supposed to discuss _______ critique of _______ article ________, and then to take a personal stand on the issues presented. Please use the following rhetorical signposts from They Say/I Say to prompt your argument. Put your reading of _______ critique in the first paragraph, and your stand on the issue in the second paragraph.

In recent discussions of _______________, a controversial issue has been whether _________. On the one hand, _______ argues that ______________________________. On the other hand, ______ also argues that ______________. In ______ words, _________________. According to this view, ______________. In sum, then, the issue is whether _______________ or _______________.

My own view is that _______________. Though I concede that _______________, I still maintain that _______________. For example, __________. Although some might object that ________________, I would reply that _______________. This issue is important because, ________.

INCLUDE YOUR OWN ARGUMENT! USE THE TEMPLATE ABOVE TO SHOW YOUR STUDENTS HOW YOU UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS!!

EXAMPLE:
My attempt at a possible argument, given the template above:

In recent discussions of the origins of current-day environmental ethics, a controversial issue has been whether Lynn White, Jr. was right to claim that the Judeo-Christian worldview was at the heart of post-medieval human exploitation of the natural world. On the one hand, J. Baird Callicott argues that White’s critique of Christianity as “the ultimate cause of our contemporary environmental malaise” (Callicott 1995:15) was “brassy and cavalier” (14). On the other hand, however, Callicott also argues that White’s strident claims in fact caused a revolution in religious thinking in the Western world since the 1960s. In Callicott’s words, “the stewardship interpretation of the God-‘man’-nature relationship set out in Genesis… would not have come about, or at least it would not have come about so soon, if White’s despotic interpretation not provoked it” (15). According to this view, White set in motion a “rethinking of our old religion” (15) that has benefitted the human-nature relationship immensely. In sum, then, the issue is whether White’s argument should be rejected because it lacks nuance and specificity regarding the multifarious interpretations of the Judeo-Christian tradition, or that it should be appreciated because it caused such a stir within the community of Judeo-Christian religious leaders.

My own view is that White was too quick to reject the idea that a Western conversion to an ecological worldview based on Zen Buddhism, such as that championed by the Beatniks in the mid-20th century, is possible. Though I concede that, as White says, Zen is “deeply conditioned by Asian history” (White 1967:10) and therefore might seem incompatible with Judeo-Christian viewpoints, I still maintain that any ethical view that is “very nearly the mirror image of the Christian tradition” (10) would be a useful corrective for the logic of perpetual economic progress. For example, an ecological ethical code based on Zen Buddhism might
drive humans to see animals on equal ontological terms as themselves. Although some might object that I am shortsighted and optimistic on this conviction, I would reply that jumpstarting a radically alternate religious worldview, one that goes beyond the simple “stewardship” interpretation of Genesis (Callicott 1995:15), is needed given the complexity of the global economy and the scale of environmental degradation we face. This issue is important because, as White says, the union of “science” and “technology” since the middle of the 19th century, based fundamentally on a Judeo-Christian view of the human-nature relationship, has become the default way that people in Europe and North America assume the world must work.

These templates can be adapted to fit other subjects as needed. See how a similar template to the one used above can be used to discuss creating a research project.

In recent discussions of _____, a controversy has been whether ______. On the one hand, some argue that _____. On the other hand, others say that ______. The essential issue then, is whether _____ or ______. My own thought is that perhaps _______. To find out, I designed a research project to ______. My central question was ____. To help me draw conclusions, I relied on the following kinds of data: _____. My key methods for generating this data were ______. Some of the problems I ran into were ______. But it was also quite exciting when ____ happened. My findings are important because ______.

All templates are adapted from Graff and Birkenstein (2006)

