

INVESTIGATING OUR WORLD

A Research & Argumentation Project on Real-World Issues



STUDENT NAME: _____

CLASS: _____ DATE: _____

PROJECT # IOW-001 · LESSONS WITH MR. B
FROM THE FILE ROOM



Welcome.

A B7 Collective project
v2 · Case File Edition

Inside this folder is a small, finite world with one job: *to make a kid's writing better*. No app. No streak. No leaderboard. Just paper documents and a project that takes about two weeks to run.

The folder is built to be opened, marked up, drawn on, and stapled back together. **Rip it. Spill coffee on it. Print it twice.** It's already been printed by other families this week.

01 / THE BUSINESS

One purchase. One household.

A single purchase covers every kid under your roof, forever. Print it as many times as you need.

If you're running these with kids from other families — co-op, microschool, private school, classroom, after-school program — pick up a copy for each family or email us about group licensing. We answer those notes ourselves and we make it work.

GROUP LICENSING → lessonswithmrb@b7collective.com

02 / THE REAL ONE

If you can't afford it, take it anyway.

If the cost is genuinely what's keeping this out of a kid's hands, take it anyway. No application. No income proof. No paperwork.

Email lessonswithmrb@b7collective.com, tell us which kit your kid wants to run, and we'll send it. We'd rather the work happen than the work sit on a shelf.

What this teaches.

Tier · MIDDLE SCHOOL (6–8)
Subject · ELA · Research · Civics
Project type · Research-Argument Essay

This project is designed for kids in **grades 6–8** and aligns with the Common Core State Standards listed below. It runs for about **two weeks** with roughly 45–60 minutes per day. The deliverable is graded against a four-category rubric inside the folder; the rubric maps directly to these standards.

STANDARDS MET · CCSS GRADES 6–8

Common Core alignment.

CCSS.ELA-W.6-8.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
CCSS.ELA-W.6-8.7	Conduct short research projects, drawing on several sources and refocusing inquiry.
CCSS.ELA-W.6-8.8	Gather relevant info from multiple sources; assess credibility; cite without plagiarism.
CCSS.ELA-W.6-8.9	Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis and reflection.
CCSS.ELA-RI.6-8.8	Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text.

WHAT TWO WEEKS LOOKS LIKE

Week 1 — Reading & Drafts: Source-gathering, evidence log, ugly first draft. **Week 2 — Polish & Final:** Self-audit using rubric, banned-word check, polished final filed in the archive.

The Brief.

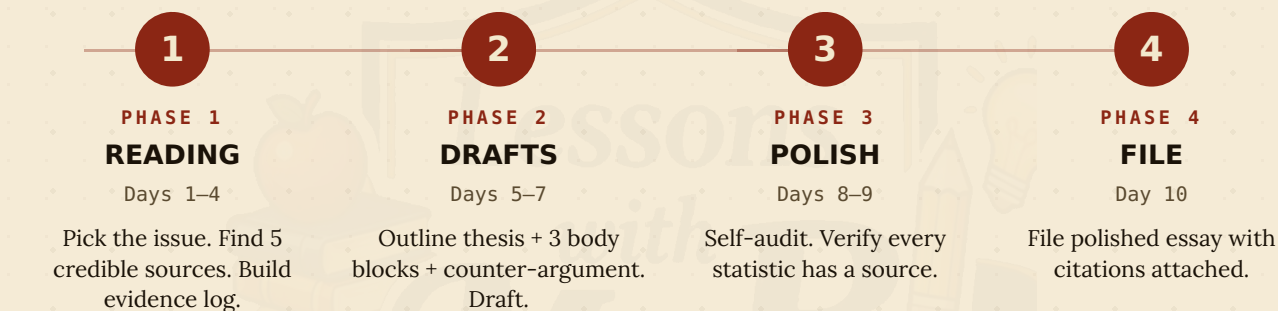
How to run this project.

Investigating Our World

AT A GLANCE

DURATION 2 weeks ~45–60 min/day	DELIVERABLE 900–1500 word argument essay	ROLE Investigator <i>Research-Argument Essay</i>	STANDARDS 5 CCSS aligned to MS 6–8
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THE PROJECT ARC



HOW IT RUNS

▶ WHAT'S INSIDE

- Letter from the Features Desk + six issue options
- Source Evaluation cheat sheet (.gov vs .com)
- Evidence Log + drafting boards + counter-argument worksheet
- Two gold-standard essays + grading rubric

▶ THE DELIVERABLE

- 900–1500 word argument essay with citations
- Thesis, 3+ body blocks, counter-argument, conclusion
- Graded on Detective Work, Argument-Match, Banned Words, Sentence Variety

▶ WHAT YOU NEED

- Notebook + pen
- Computer with internet (.gov / .edu / .org sources)
- Library database access (preferred)

WHEN TO STEP IN

- 1** Kid can't name 3 credible sources by Day 3
- 2** The thesis sounds like an opinion, not a claim
- 3** No counter-argument addressed in the draft

Mostly, don't. The packet is built for the kid to run.

FILE № IOW-001 / FEATURES DESK
INVESTIGATING OUR WORLD

CONFIDENTIAL

FOR THE RECORD

A folder of evidence.

Inside, you'll find: a brief, a topic menu, a schedule, a research log, two field guides, an outline blueprint, a model paper, and a rubric. Total damage: ~2 weeks of work.

— MB.

LESSONS WITH MR. B

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF · FEATURES DESK · INVESTIGATIVE
Day One of Ten.

File #: IOW-001
Re: Your assignment

Investigative Reporter —

Welcome to the features desk. Reporters cover what happened. You're here to do something harder: cover *what should happen* — and prove it.

An **argumentative paper** is not a book report dressed up in a tie. It picks a fight. It takes a side. It marshals evidence and earns the verdict.

Your job: pick a real-world issue, build a case, and defend it for 500–800 words. Six topics on offer. The topic that picks *you* is the one you'll finish.

Three rules of the desk before we begin:

1. Every claim earns an attribution. *Every.*
2. ~~Stuff costs more because of inflation, the end.~~
That reporter does not get a byline.
3. Address the counter-argument. Beat it on merit.

Yours from the editor's desk,

A "report" tells.
An "argument" convinces.
That's the whole game.

Addressing the other side
= strength.
Ignoring it
= weakness.

Mr. B.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

P.S. Your topic proposal is due at the end of Day Two. Pick early. Doubt yourself later. Move forward anyway.

If you can Google your thesis in 10 seconds — pick a sharper one.

— MB

Six possible issues.

— pick the one you can argue, not just describe.

1. **fast fashion** (true cost: enviro + ethics)
"who pays for cheap?" →
2. **food deserts** (barriers to fresh food)
★ map your block
3. **child labor in chocolate** (cocoa supply chain)
tough but rich.
4. **the "digital divide"** (internet access & school)
close to home —
5. **ethics of zoos** (conservation vs. welfare)
classic two-sider!
6. **water privatization** (human right or commodity?)
heaviest of the six.

Next page:
the visual
breakdown.
Pick the one
that won't let
you sleep.



1. The True Cost of Fast Fashion:
Buying cheap, trendy clothing contributes to environmental waste and ethical labor concerns.



2. Food Deserts and Inequality:
Systemic barriers prevent some neighborhoods from accessing fresh, healthy food.



3. Child Labor in the Chocolate Industry:
The reliance on child labor in the global cocoa supply chain.



4. The "Digital Divide" in Education:
The gap between those who have reliable internet/technology and those who do not.



5. The Ethics of Zoos and Aquariums:
The debate between animal conservation efforts and animal welfare.



6. Water Privatization vs. Human Rights:
The ethical and environmental impact of private companies controlling water sources.

LESSONS WITH MR. B

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF · FEATURES DESK · INVESTIGATIVE

File #: IOW-001

Re: House Rules

REJECTED IF MISSING

Reporter —

Below: the things every paper from this desk *must* do. None of these are negotiable. The features desk is a craft, not a checklist — but here's where the checklist wins.

// FORMAT

- [] 500–800 words. Not 499. Not 801.
- [] 12pt serif, double-spaced, MLA or similar.
- [] Headline at top. Your name underneath.
- [] Foundation → Body Blocks → Roof.

// EVIDENCE

- [] Three credible sources, minimum. Cited.
- [] At least one direct quote, in quote marks.
- [] Every statistic has a source attached.
- [] Counter-argument addressed & refuted.

// VOICE

- [] Third person. No "I think" or "in my opinion".
- [] Specific nouns. Strong verbs. Real numbers.
- [] "According to" introduces every statistic.
- [] **Banned words:**

very really stuff things basically a lot
obviously

"According to..."
is the most important phrase in this packet.

No counter-argument = no paper.
Grade ceiling = a B-.

If your draft has zero of the banned words, you're already halfway.

— MB

P.S. "Obviously" is the laziest word in argument writing.

If something were obvious, you wouldn't need a paper.

— A TWO-WEEK PLAN —

Four milestones. One *case*.

1. **Topic Proposal.** — *Day 2.*

Pick your issue. State your initial position. Name two questions you'll answer.

*first guess.
you'll change it.*

2. **Outline & Evidence Log.** — *Day 5.*

Three sources logged with quotes. Skeleton outline drafted using the Blueprint structure.

the bones first.

3. **Rough Draft.** — *Day 8.*

Hook → Context → Thesis → Body Blocks → Counter-argument → Conclusion. Ugly draft is fine.

*first drafts are
allowed to be
bad.*

4. **Final Paper.** — *Day 10.* ★ **file it**

500–800 words. Polished. Cited. Counter-argument intact. Read aloud to a real person before filing.

Are you *actually* ready?

Three index cards. Three checks. Tear them off. Mark them up. Staple.

CHECKLIST • № 01

The Proposal. *Did you pick a real argument?*

- ☐ One specific issue selected. ("fashion" too broad. "fast fashion" works.)
- ☐ Initial position stated as a sentence — not a question.
- ☐ Two research questions written down.
- ☐ A reasonable counter-argument identified *before* research begins.

CHECKLIST • № 02

The Bones. *Is the case structured?*

- ☐ Three credible sources logged with full citations.
- ☐ At least one direct quote captured per source.
- ☐ Skeleton outline matches Blueprint: foundation → blocks → roof.
- ☐ Counter-argument has its own block in the outline.

CHECKLIST • № 03

The Final. *Could a stranger read it & be convinced?*

- ☐ 500–800 words. Counted with a tool.
- ☐ Hook earns the reader's attention. Thesis ends paragraph 1.
- ☐ Every statistic has a source. "According to..." appears repeatedly.
- ☐ Counter-argument acknowledged AND refuted.
- ☐ Read aloud. No banned words. Ends on a kicker.

The proposal.

Pitch the editor. One page. No padding.

1. The issue. — specific, not "fashion."

2. Your initial position.

A complete sentence. Take a side. Use the word "should" or "must."

3. Two research questions.

Specific. Answerable. Not "what is fast fashion?" – "How much textile waste did fast fashion produce in 2024?"

Q1.

Q2.

4. The strongest counter-argument.

What would the smartest person who disagrees with you say?

The evidence.

Three sources. Three quotes. *No source = no claim.*

SOURCE № 01

TITLE / AUTHOR

PUBLICATION / DATE

URL

KEY QUOTE – exact words, in quote marks

SOURCE № 02

TITLE / AUTHOR

PUBLICATION / DATE

URL

KEY QUOTE

SOURCE № 03

TITLE / AUTHOR

PUBLICATION / DATE

URL

KEY QUOTE

What counts as a *real* source?

*Not all websites are equal. The investigator's first instinct: **where did this come from, and who paid for it?***

x SUSPICIOUS

- ▶ Random blog (.com)
- ▶ Reddit comment
- ▶ AI-generated summary
- ▶ Wikipedia (alone)
- ▶ "10 Shocking Facts About..."
- ▶ Anything anonymous
- ▶ TikTok / YouTube takes
- ▶ A company's own marketing
- ▶ Sites that won't tell you who runs them

these aren't all worthless — they can *point you* toward real sources. but they don't get cited.

✓ CITABLE

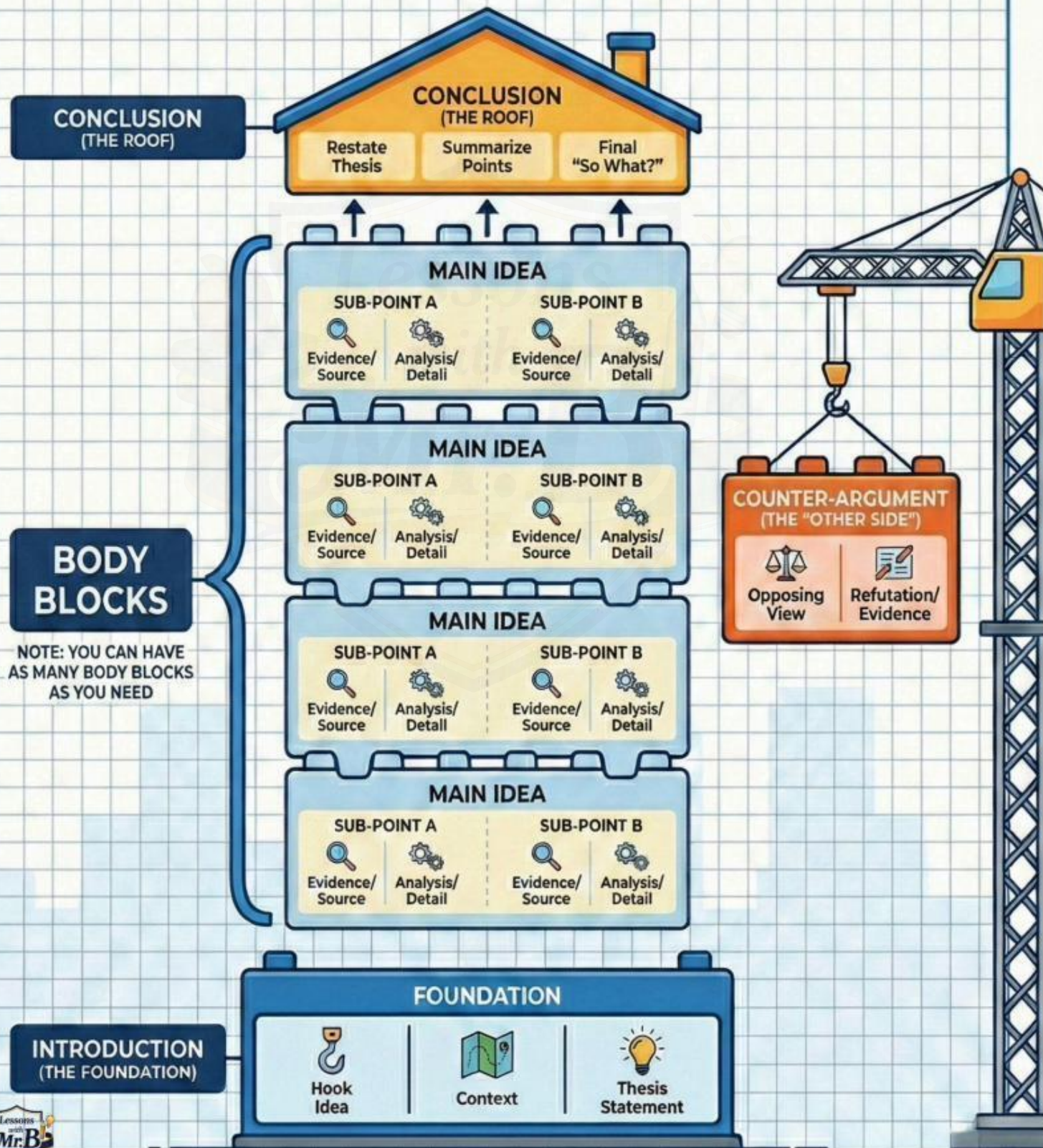
- ▶ Government data (.gov)
- ▶ University research (.edu)
- ▶ Major newspapers (NYT, WSJ, WaPo, BBC...)
- ▶ Magazines with editors (Atlantic, New Yorker...)
- ▶ Peer-reviewed journals
- ▶ Established nonprofits (with named authors)
- ▶ Books with publishers

rule: if you can name *the human* who wrote it AND the *institution* that vouches for them, you're probably fine.

"But I read it on TikTok" is the sentence that ends a research career. *Real journalists check.*

they also *cite the original* — not the website that screencapped it.
— MB

ESSAY BUILDER BLUEPRINT



The skeleton system.

An outline isn't homework — it's how a paper becomes possible to write.

THE THREE-LEVEL OUTLINE

- I. Roman numerals = the big sections
(Introduction, Main Arguments, Counter, Conclusion)
 - A. Capital letters = the main idea of each paragraph
 - 1. Numbers = the evidence (a fact + its source)
 - a. Lower case = the analysis (why this fact matters)

mix and match. the only rule: every claim has evidence; every piece of evidence gets analyzed.

You don't have to write in this order. But every layer must be there.

— MB

Lazy outline. Pro outline.

Same topic. Same student. The difference is whether the writing is possible.

x LAZY

- I. Zoos are bad.
 - A. They are sad.
 - B. They pace.
 - C. They die young.

WHAT'S WRONG:

- "are bad" is a feeling, not a thesis.
- Three points, all the same point.
- No evidence. No source.
- Writing this paper is *impossible*.

✓ PRO

- I. Psychological harm in captivity.
 - A. Zoochosis = repetitive behavior
 - 1. 80% of polar bears (Born Free)
 - a. shows enclosure size matters
 - B. Reduced lifespans
 - 1. Elephants die 17 yrs younger
 - (Nat Geo, 2008)

WHAT WORKS:

- "Psychological harm" is specific.
- Two distinct sub-points.
- Each fact has a named source.
- The paper is now *writable*.

The lazy outline says "*this is what I feel.*"
The pro outline says "*here is the evidence — let me show you why I feel this way.*"

That's the whole job.
— MB

The outline.

FOUNDATION — the introduction

HOOK — a fact, question, or scene that earns attention

CONTEXT — two sentences: what is the issue + why now?

THESIS — your position, in one declarative sentence

BODY BLOCK I. — main idea + 2 sub-points

MAIN IDEA:

SUB A · evidence + source:

SUB B · evidence + source:

BODY BLOCK II. — another main idea

MAIN IDEA:

SUB A · evidence + source:

SUB B · evidence + source:

More *blocks*.

Need more space? Use these. Skip them if your argument only needs three body blocks.

BODY BLOCK III. — deeper evidence or counter

MAIN IDEA:

SUB A • evidence + source:

SUB B • evidence + source:

ANALYSIS • what this proves:

BODY BLOCK IV. — optional. only if needed.

MAIN IDEA:

SUB A • evidence + source:

SUB B • evidence + source:

Three blocks is plenty for most arguments. Four if you've got real heat. — MB

The counter.

The smartest person who disagrees with you. Steel-man them, then beat them.

1. Their *best* argument.

Not their dumbest version. The version that would make you nervous if you weren't sure of your case.

2. The evidence they would cite.

Look it up yourself. Be honest. What's their best fact?

3. Your refutation. — how you beat it on merit.

Not "they're wrong because." Show why your evidence outweighs theirs.

if you can't
name a counter,
your thesis
isn't actually
arguable.

The *draft*.

Title and byline at top. Then write. Use the outline. Don't try to make it perfect.

TITLE / HEADLINE – < 12 words. earns the click.

BYLINE

DATE

WORD COUNT

BEGIN DRAFT



★ WHAT "RIGHT" LOOKS LIKE

A \$5 t-shirt costs more than \$5.

The hidden price of fast fashion.

By J. Park | Investigative Reporter, Features Desk

At Shein, a graphic tee retails for \$4.99. The company adds 7,000 new items to its app every day, according to a 2023 report from the consulting firm McKinsey. The price is a marvel. The math behind it is a problem.

Fashion is now the world's second-largest industrial polluter, the United Nations Environment Programme reports, responsible for 8–10% of global carbon emissions — more than international aviation and shipping combined. Garment workers in Bangladesh, the Clean Clothes Campaign found, earn a minimum wage of about \$113 a month, well below the \$214 a person needs there to live above the poverty line.

The argument here is straightforward: **fast fashion's \$5 price tag is subsidized by people and ecosystems we cannot see.** The shirt costs \$5 in America because the costs are being paid in a Bangladeshi factory, in a Pakistani river, in a landfill in Ghana that *The New York Times* reported in 2023 receives 15 million used garments a week from the West.

Defenders of the industry have a point. "Fast fashion has democratized style," argued Vanessa Friedman, fashion director of *The New York Times*, in a 2022 essay. For low-income consumers, the alternatives are often unaffordable. A \$5 shirt is real to a worker who earns \$15 an hour.

But democratization through invisibility is not democratization. It is exporting the cost. The same *Times* investigation found that the dyes from those Ghanaian landfills are now contaminating the Atlantic. The "savings" Americans get on \$5 t-shirts are loaned, not earned.

Real democratization of fashion would mean repair, secondhand, and durability — clothing that lasts ten washes instead of three. The industry will not do this voluntarily. Consumers, regulators, and reporters will have to ask the question on every price tag: *who's actually paying the rest?*

580 words. 4 sources.
Counter handled.
THIS is the bar.

— MB

The editor's cut.

File № IOW-001
Re: Final mark

CRITERIA	FRONT PAGE · 4 pts	INSIDE PAGE · 3 pts	SPIKED · 2 / 1 pt
1. Argument & Focus – Thesis & verdict	Specific, debatable thesis. A clear verdict held throughout. The paper picks a fight worth having.	Thesis present but slightly soft. Holds focus mostly. One drift moment.	Thesis is a topic, not an argument. Or shifts mid-paper.
2. Evidence & Research – The receipts	Three+ credible sources, properly cited. Direct quotes. Statistics with sources. Counter-argument addressed and refuted.	Three sources but one weak (random blog). Minor citation gaps. Counter-argument present but thin.	Fewer than three sources. Or no counter-argument at all. Statistics without sources.
3. Organization – Structure & flow	Clear Foundation → Body Blocks → Roof. Smooth transitions. Each paragraph builds on the last.	Structure mostly intact. One awkward transition or one paragraph that drifts.	Sections out of order. No transitions. Reads like a list of facts.
4. Conventions & Polish – Voice & finish	Third-person voice. Zero banned words. Clean grammar. Headline earns the click. Kicker lands.	Slips into "I" 1-2 times. Minor errors. Headline functional. Kicker fades.	First-person throughout. Banned words. Errors. No headline or kicker.

SCORE CONVERSION

- 15–16 pts Front page, above the fold. (A)
- 12–14 pts Inside the paper. Strong. (B)
- 09–11 pts Filed; needs revision. (C)
- 00–08 pts Spiked. See the editor.

TOTAL SCORE

_____ / 16

EDITOR'S SIGNATURE

X _____



CASE • CLOSED

Investigating Our World

FILE № IOW-001 • FILED IN THE ARCHIVE

There are more folders on the desk.

More artifacts, more drafts, more worksheets that don't look like worksheets. Pick the next one.

★ FIND YOUR NEXT PROJECT ★

lessonswithmrb.com

Built with care. Delivered with excellence.