Scaffolds / Pre-Teaching for WR 115 & 121 On-Demand Essay Tasks

My AP English Language class (juniors) did a sort of 2-week practice series on the major steps and skills needed for an argumentative essay. These skills worked great both for the WP tasks, and as training for the synthesis argumentative essay on the AP test:

- We read 3-4 persuasive/argumentative articles on the debate over societal interventions vs. personal responsibility regarding fast food/junk food in America, titled “Is Fast Food the New Junk Food” in the book They Say; I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing by Graff, Birkenstein and Durst. Each article was a reading and note-taking assignment with review/discussion in class.
  - “Don’t Blame the Eater” by David Zinczenko, reprinted from The New York Times in They Say; I Say
  - “What You Eat Is Your Business” by Radley Balko, also in TS; IS and found on Cato.org
  - “Junking Junk Food” by Judith Warner, also in TS; IS and found at The New York Times
  - “How to Eat Now: The Truth about Home Cooking” by Mark Bittman, from Time, October 20, 2014, with images
  - *optional additional text: Michelle Obama’s “Remarks to the NAACP National Convention” on July 12, 2010

- Students practiced identifying and annotating/highlighting:
  - claims/assertions
  - evidence/proof
  - signal phrases introducing authors or evidence
  - “they say” and “I say” statements that reveal both the societal dialogue that the author is entering, and the author’s own argument
  - “naysayers” (counter-argument, rebuttal, opposing or various perspectives)

- We reviewed (and looked for in the texts) the P.E.E. paragraph structure (point-evidence-explanation) that readers generally expect of persuasive and argumentative single-topic paragraphs. We reviewed that evidence could take the form of analogy, metaphor, personal experience, vicarious or secondary experience, reasoning, logic or research (and that in on-demand essays, additional research wouldn’t be possible).

- We reviewed the use of “I” and when first person might or might not be appropriate. I encouraged students to bring their own experiences to this first paper using introductory phrases like “As a teen,” or “In my family,” or “In our town” or “In our school” that validate their use of personal evidence as a member of a group or community.

- Students then wrote a 2-3 page timed argument essay with the requirement of using any 2 of the provided sources in the essay. They were encouraged to use at least 1 paragraph of personal experience or evidence in this essay, and they had to provide citations and a W.C. page.

- After writing, students used highlighters to identify their own P.E.E. structures by marking all claims/assertions in green, all evidence/support/examples in blue, and all explanation in yellow. Last, they highlighted introduction phrases, signaling phrases, citations and connecting phrases in pink. We also did this with clean copies as a peer workshop so students could see if they understood these different functions clearly, and for some accountability.

- For grading, I graded both this practice on-demand and the 2 required on-demand essays, and students kept only the highest grade of all 3 as their assessment score.