



Identity Leverage

Persuasion & Influence · Tier 2 · Component 4 — instructor overview

Grades: 9–10 **Time:** ~45 min (flexible) **Format:** whole-class reading, then individual or pairs

The strongest move in the tier ties a belief to *who you are*, so that agreeing feels like loyalty and doubting feels like betrayal. This component teaches students to pull the identity hook off the actual claim — and to ask the one question that dissolves the trick.

WHAT STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO DO

- Explain how the "a real [X] would..." move turns a question of *truth* into a question of *loyalty*.
- Separate an **identity hook** from the **buried claim** it smuggles past you.
- Recognize out-group caricature and what it lets a persuader skip.
- Apply the test: *would this convince me coming from the other side?*

WHY IT MATTERS

Identity is the most powerful lever here because it changes the *subject*: from "is this correct?" to "whose side are you on?" For teenagers, whose sense of self and group is under active construction, this is especially potent — in marketing, in friend groups, and in politics. Once students can hold "what's true" apart from "what proves I belong," a whole class of manipulation loses its grip.

The goal is not to abandon groups or loyalties — those are real and good. It's to notice when belonging is being used as a substitute for evidence.

PACING

SEGMENT	TIME	WHAT HAPPENS
Reading	10–12 min	Read the Student pages; pause at the Vipers example.
Split the hook	10 min	Activity Part A in pairs.
Flip the source	12–15 min	Activity Parts B–C.
Debrief	8–10 min	Discussion prompts (Instructor p. 4).

MATERIALS

The 4 Student pages per student or pair. Optional: a real ad or post that uses group identity.



Identity Leverage

The mechanism in depth — part 1 of 2

Identity leverage reframes "is this true?" as "which side are you on?" Because belonging is one of the deepest human drives, welding a belief to a group makes accepting it feel like loyalty and questioning it feel like defection. The running example is **the Vipers**, a sports team whose merch and message trade on fan identity — but the same machinery runs in politics, brands, and friend groups.

THE US-AND-THEM ENGINE

We favor our own group and extend its claims a generous benefit of the doubt (in-group favoritism). At the same time we flatten the other side into a single, easily-mocked type (out-group homogeneity) — "they're all just sheep," "they don't care about facts." A caricatured *them* makes *us* feel obviously right without anyone having to make an argument. The Vipers' rival fans aren't people with reasons; they're a punchline. That contrast does persuasive work no evidence had to.

THE "REAL [X]" MOVE

The sharpest version welds the position directly to the label: "A real Vipers fan buys the new jersey." "No true patriot doubts this." "If you were really my friend, you'd agree." Now disagreeing seems to cost you the identity itself. And once identity is engaged, reasoning bends to serve it — we defend the conclusion first and hunt for supporting reasons afterward (motivated reasoning). The tell is stark: the exact same fact is believed when it comes from our side and doubted when it comes from theirs.



Identity Leverage

The mechanism in depth — part 2 of 2

WHY IT'S SO HARD TO RESIST

Framing and social proof aim at your judgment. Identity leverage aims at your sense of self, which you'll defend harder than any belief. Admitting the other side has a point can feel like admitting *you* are on the wrong team — a social and emotional cost, not just an intellectual one. That's why identity-loaded arguments produce so much heat and so little movement: people aren't defending a claim, they're defending a membership.

Notice, too, that the buried claim rarely gets argued at all. "A real Vipers fan buys the jersey" contains a hidden premise — that buying the jersey is good, or necessary, or a mark of loyalty — which is never defended, only assumed. The identity hook's whole purpose is to get you past the claim without examining it.

THE TEST THAT DISSOLVES IT

One question does most of the work: **would this exact claim, with this exact evidence, convince me coming from the other side?** If a fact would satisfy you from your team but not from the rival, then identity — not the evidence — is doing your thinking. The follow-up is to name the buried claim out loud and ask whether it stands on its own, stripped of the "real [X]" wrapper.

ONE LINE TO CARRY

Belonging isn't evidence. You can belong to a group and still think for yourself — in fact, that's the only kind of belonging worth having. Separate what's true from what proves you're on the team.



Identity Leverage

Discussion guide — modular; assemble to fit your period

These blocks are timed so you can build a lesson from them: a single period, or a full unit day. Run the activity with an opener before and a debrief after — pick what fits.

TIME BUDGET — MIX AND MATCH

BLOCK	TIME	USE
Opener (before)	5–8 min	Pick one, below.
Activity	22–25 min	The student pages.
Debrief (after)	~5 min each	Pick 1–4 prompts.
Close	3 min	The takeaway.

Single period: opener + activity + one debrief + close. **Full lesson:** opener + activity + two or three debriefs + an extension.

BEFORE — THE OPENER (PICK ONE · 5–8 MIN)

FORMAT: think-pair-share or a quick hands-up. GOAL: surface what students already notice and pose the question. END RESULT: every student has committed to a prediction or named a real example you can return to in the debrief.

- **Predict.** Put up "A real [our school] fan would buy the new hoodie." Ask: does that make you want it? Note reactions; revisit after the flip test.
- **From their world.** Ask for one "real [X] would..." or "people like us..." line they've heard; keep two for the debrief.

THE ACTIVITY (BUDGET 22–25 MIN)

CONCRETE GOAL — STUDENTS CAN: separate an identity hook ("a real [X] would...") from the actual claim it smuggles, and apply the flip test.

AFTER — THE DEBRIEF (PICK 1–4 · ~5 MIN EACH)

FORMAT: whole-class; call on the examples students generated in the opener and activity. END RESULT: students can state the takeaway in their own words and back it with one concrete example from their own life or the activity.

- How does "a real [X] would..." turn a fact question into a loyalty question?
- Why do we judge the same claim differently depending on who says it?
- What does a caricature of the other side buy the persuader?
- Take one line from the board: what's the buried claim, and does it survive the flip test?

CLOSE (3 MIN)

Have a few students state the takeaway in their own words: **Would this convince me from the other side? If not, it's identity, not evidence.**



Identity Leverage

Leading the discussion — pacing, redirects, and warm-ups

The previous page is the plan; this page is for running it. Budget the period from the total below, and keep the redirect moves handy — most discussions falter in one of these four ways.

DOES IT FIT THE PERIOD?

ONE PERIOD (~45–50 MIN): opener 6 + activity 22–25 + one debrief 5 + close 3 = **36–39 min.** BLOCK (~90 MIN): add two more debriefs and a differentiation extension from the facilitation page.

WHEN DISCUSSION STALLS OR DERAILS

IF...	MOVE
Silence, or “I don’t know”	Shrink the question: “Just name the first thing you noticed.” Give 30 seconds of silent think-time, then call on a pair, not an individual.
One or two voices dominate	“Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t gone yet.” Run it as think-pair-share first, so every student has an answer ready to offer.
It turns personal or heated	Move the trial from the person to the message: “What in the text makes you say that?” Keep the claim on trial, never the classmate.
Answers stay on the surface	Push for evidence: “Where exactly — quote the line.” Then “What would change your mind?” to surface the reasoning underneath.

WARM-UP BANK (SWAP IN FOR ANY OPENER)

Interchangeable with the opener on the previous page. Vary them across a unit so the hook stays fresh.

- **Two-minute hunt.** Find one real example of today’s move on your phone right now; keep the best one for the debrief.
- **Steelman it.** What’s the most honest reason someone would use this technique? Persuasion isn’t always dishonest — name the legitimate version first.
- **Rate and defend.** Put one message on the board; everyone rates it 1–5 for how persuasive, then defends the spread of answers.
- **Odd one out.** Three short examples, one isn’t the move — which, and how can you tell?

Identity Leverage

Facilitation, anticipated moves & answer key

ANTICIPATED STUDENT RESPONSES & MISCONCEPTIONS

- **"So I shouldn't have loyalties."** Loyalty is fine and human. The point is not to let loyalty *replace* judgment — you can love the team and still question the jersey.
- **"But my side really is right."** Maybe — then it survives the flip test. If it only convinces from your side, that's the signal to examine.
- **Heat in the room.** Identity examples can get personal fast; keep it to low-stakes group identities (fans, brands, fictional groups) before anything charged.
- **Missing the buried claim.** Students name the hook ("real fan") but stop there — push them to state the actual claim being smuggled and judge *it*.

DIFFERENTIATION & EXTENSIONS

Support: supply the hook/claim split as a two-column template. **Stretch:** have students find a real ad or post using group identity and rewrite its argument without the identity hook, then compare strength; or analyze how a brand builds a tribe. **Cross-curricular:** propaganda and nationalism in history; characterization and "othering" in literature.

ANSWER KEY — ACTIVITY

ITEM	SAMPLE RESPONSE
A1 "real fans don't question the coach"	<i>Hook: prove you belong by not questioning. Buried claim (coach is right) never argued.</i>
A2 "people like us always buy American"	<i>Ties a purchase to identity; skips whether the product is better.</i>
A3 "only sheep believe that"	<i>Out-group insult; makes agreement feel like weakness, not thought.</i>
A4 "if you were really my friend, you'd agree"	<i>Loyalty test; the actual request goes unexamined.</i>
B (flip the source)	<i>If it convinces from your side but not theirs, identity is doing the work.</i>



Identity Leverage

When agreeing feels like belonging

You're a Vipers fan. The team drops a new jersey and the caption reads: "**A real Vipers fan reps the new kit.**" Suddenly not buying it feels like... not really being a fan. Notice what just happened: nobody argued that the jersey is good, or worth the money, or better than your old one. They tied it to *who you are*, and now the question isn't "do I want this?" but "am I really one of us?" That swap is the most powerful move in this entire tier.

Identity leverage ties a belief or a behavior to your sense of self, so that agreeing feels like loyalty and doubting feels like betrayal — none of which has anything to do with whether the thing is actually true or good.

THE US-AND-THEM ENGINE

We trust our own group and give its claims the benefit of the doubt. At the same time, we shrink the other side into one dumb, easy-to-mock type: "rival fans are all clowns," "the other side just doesn't care about facts." A cartoon *them* makes *us* feel obviously right — no argument required. When the Vipers' marketing makes rival fans look ridiculous, it's not describing them. It's making you feel correct by contrast.

THE "REAL [X]" MOVE

The sharpest version glues the position straight to the label. "A real Vipers fan buys the jersey." "No true friend would say no." "People like us don't do that." Now disagreeing seems to cost you the identity itself. And once your identity is in play, you defend the answer first and go looking for reasons second. The giveaway: you'll *believe* a fact from your side and *doubt* the exact same fact from the other side.



Identity Leverage

Pulling the hook off the claim

WHY IT'S SO HARD TO SHAKE

Framing aims at your judgment. Identity leverage aims at your sense of who you are — and you'll defend that harder than almost any belief. Admitting the other side has a point can feel like admitting you're on the wrong team, which stings socially and emotionally, not just intellectually. That's why arguments about identity generate so much heat and so little actual persuading: people aren't defending a claim, they're defending a membership.

And here's the sneaky part — the real claim usually never gets argued at all. "A real Vipers fan buys the jersey" quietly assumes that buying the jersey *is* loyalty, which is exactly the thing that should be up for debate. The identity hook's whole job is to rush you past the claim without ever looking at it.

THE TEST THAT DISSOLVES IT

One question does most of the work: **would this exact claim, with this exact evidence, convince me if the other side said it?** If a fact satisfies you from your team but not from the rival, then identity — not evidence — is doing your thinking. Then do one more thing: say the buried claim out loud, stripped of the "real [X]" wrapper. "Buying this jersey proves I'm a real fan." Does that stand on its own? Usually it just evaporates.

THE ONE LINE

Belonging isn't evidence. You can love the team, the country, the friend group — and still think for yourself. In fact, that's the only kind of belonging worth having: one that doesn't require you to switch your brain off to prove it.



Identity Leverage

Name: _____ Date: _____

The test: Would this convince me from the *other* side? If not, it's identity, not evidence.

PART A — SPLIT THE HOOK FROM THE CLAIM

For each, name the **identity hook** and the **actual claim** it's smuggling past you.

MESSAGE	IDENTITY HOOK · BURIED CLAIM
1. "Real fans don't question the coach."	
2. "People like us always buy American."	
3. "Only sheep believe that."	
4. "If you were really my friend, you'd agree."	

PART B — FLIP THE SOURCE

Pick one message above. Would the buried claim convince you if the *other* group said it? What does your answer tell you?

**PART C — SPOT THE CARICATURE**

"Everyone on the other side is just lazy and doesn't care about facts." What is this caricature doing for the person who says it? What does it let them skip?

PART D — BELONG AND DISAGREE

Describe a real group you belong to. Name one thing you could disagree with *and still belong*. Why is that sometimes hard to do?

PART E — REWRITE WITHOUT THE HOOK

Take message 1 or 2 and rewrite it as an honest argument — making the actual case, with no identity hook. Is it more or less convincing? Why?
