



Straw Man Fallacy: Lesson Plan

Topic	
The straw man fallacy occurs when one person distorts or disregards elements of an opponent's argument and responds to the distorted point. Therefore, they are not responding to the original argument, but rather an unrelated, extreme, or less relevant point. This is known as attacking a straw man since the false argument merely resembles the original contention.	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Philosophy Rhetoric	45-60 mins
Video link:	
https://academy4sc.org/topic/straw-man-fallacy-thats-not-the-point/	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define straw man fallacy.• Recognize uses of the straw man fallacy in their own lives.	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Fallacy, informal fallacy	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet	
Before you watch	
The teacher asks the class a debate question, then intentionally uses a straw man argument in their discussion with the class, without having told the students what the straw man fallacy is. Then they have a small debriefing about the discussion, asking students whether or not they recognized the fallacious argument and how they reacted to it. For example, the teacher may ask the class "Who is the better NBA franchise, the	



Chicago Bulls or Los Angeles Lakers?" If the students respond that the Lakers are better, the teacher can use the straw man argument that Michael Jordan is better than LeBron James, so the Bulls must be the better franchise. If the students respond that the Bulls are better, the teacher can say that LeBron James is better than Michael Jordan, so the Lakers must be better. These are straw man arguments because they single out specific players rather than capturing the teams as a whole.

While you watch

Complete questions 1-3 on the Worksheet.

After you watch/discussion questions

1. Can you think of a time when you used a straw man argument in a debate?
2. Can you think of a time when someone used a straw man argument against you in a debate?
3. Referring to your answers to the first two questions, did it feel different when you used a straw man argument versus when one was used against you?

Activity Ideas

- Show students some video clip(s) from any recent political debate (the 2020 Democratic primaries, for example). Have them make a note any time a debate participant makes a straw man argument. Discuss those examples as a class after the video.
- Separate the class into groups of two. Each group scripts a fake argument, which may or may not contain a straw man argument. Each group "performs" their argument in front of the class, who then has to identify whether or not there was a straw man, why it was a straw man (if applicable), and suggest an alternative argument that would better address the contention.

Sources/places to learn more

1. Talisse, R., & Aikin, S. F. (2006). Two forms of the straw man. *Argumentation*, 20(3), 345–352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-006-9017-8>
2. Walton, D. (1996). *The straw man fallacy*. Na.



3. Wireless Philosophy. (2016, April 8). *CRITICAL THINKING - Fallacies: Straw Man Fallacy [HD]*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfil34ayaEU>