Deconstructing text activity

Purpose
For students to identify text elements and be able to discuss their function within the text.

Materials
- One copy of the essay "Where anonymity breeds contempt" by Julie Zhuo for each group
https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/opinion/30zhuo.html .
- Scissors for each group.
- Glue or staples to fix text onto paper.
- Color-coded paper and instructions for each group.

Process
1. Group students in pairs or small groups.
2. Explain that we typically approach writing from a construction perspective, but that in this activity students will approach writing from a deconstruction perspective by following the instructions to color-code text elements.
3. Students then work together to identify text elements in Zhuo's article. Students should cut them out of the text and paste them on to colored strips of paper. In Zhuo's text, students looked for: 1 thesis (purple), 2 examples of trolling (pink), 1 definition of trolling (green), 2 pieces of evidence that trolling was harmful (yellow), 1 counter argument (orange), and 2 examples of systems to prevent trolling (blue). The elements that students search for would need to be tailored to the text chosen by the instructor.
4. Students read the text and discuss the elements they are required to find.
5. Since Zhuo's text is not linear, this is a challenging exercise that may lead to a lot of debate. Instructors may scaffold students' thinking by helping them identify the easiest elements to pick out, then encourage them to work towards finding the hardest element by elimination. Instructors may also help students identify the transition word/s, saying: "If you can't find the claim, find the counter-claim by using the transition word."
6. Students should glue/fix the parts of text onto their assigned colors and get out of their seats to fix them onto a collective board to showcase their examples alongside those of the other groups. This will look like this (see next page):
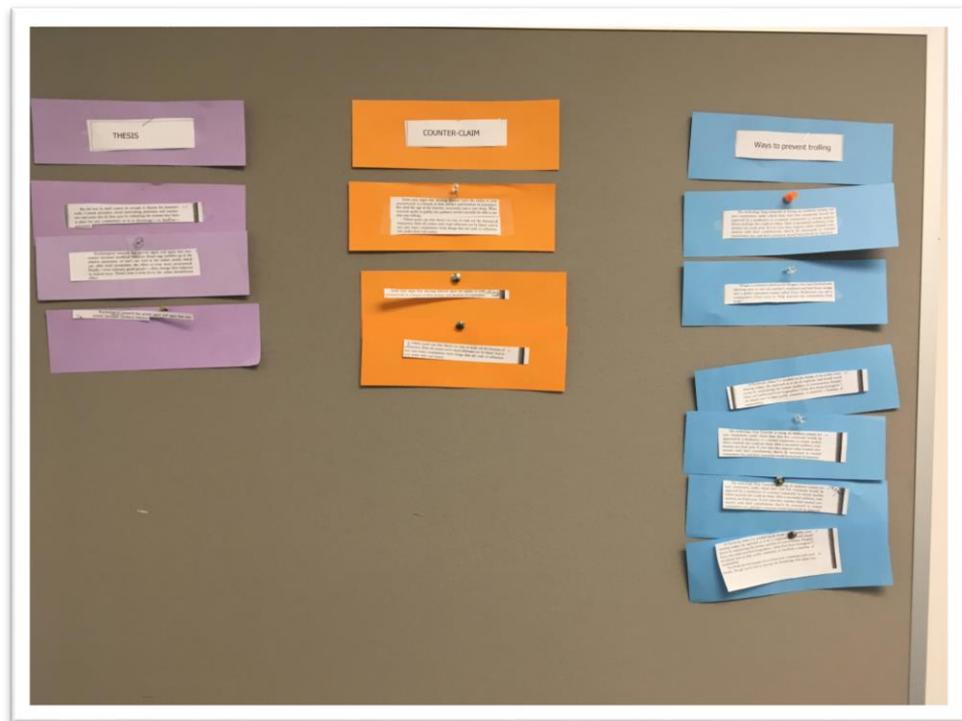
- Students may then analyze what other groups chose as examples, thesis, counter-argument, evidence, etc. and compare it with their thinking.

Discussion points
- How does this text break down linear ideas about text sequence?
- How did the context words help you find the elements that build the story?
- How did the transition word/s help you find the elements that build the story?
- How can you transfer these deconstruction skills to develop your own outline?