



Comparison/Contrast:

Comparison/Contrast - The process of examining two or more things in order to establish their similarities and differences.

Assignment:

After reading two selections, you will write a comparison/contrast essay using the guidelines provided in this packet.

For Your Information:

1. Any relationship between two or more things will involve some degree of SIMILARITY, as well as some degree of DIFFERENCE.
2. Comparisons can be found in any kind of writing: magazine articles, advertising, essays, news articles, letters, editorials, textbooks, scientific writing, reports, political speeches, and pamphlets.
3. We make comparisons when we have to choose between two or more things: careers, products, political candidates, goals, etc.
4. Comparisons underlie everything we do. Scientists use comparisons in their experiments. Logicians use them to draw conclusions. Politicians use them to formulate policies. Judges use them to render decisions. Ministers teach and admonish us with comparisons.

How to Write a Literary Comparison/Contrast Essay

When writing a literary comparison, you will answer the question: *So What?*

In other words, you will not only explain the similarities and differences between the two (or more) literary works, but also explain the significance of your comparison. A comparison intends to inform readers of something they haven't thought of before. Therefore, for a comparison to be illuminating, the things compared must either:

1. Appear different but have significant similarities; i.e., Star Wars and Return of the Jedi.
2. Or, appear similar but have significant differences; i.e., Classic Star Trek and Star Trek: The Next Generation.

You must have a purpose for your comparison. The reader of the comparison should not have to ask SO WHAT? at the end of your essay.

In a comparison/contrast essay you are explaining the differences between two or more things, as well as explaining, or at least alluding to, what the two things have in common.

*How to Write a
Literary
Comparison/Contrast Essay*
continued

Remember that comparison and contrast is an organizational and analytical structure that supports your ideas, but you still need a thesis in the introduction.

The introduction should contain:

- 1) The names the items to be compared
- 2) The purpose of the comparison
- 3) What is being compared and/or contrasted

Sample Thesis Statements:

Unacceptable — “I am going to compare the similarities and differences between the films *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T., the Extraterrestrial*.”

Acceptable — “A close examination of the way Roy Neary, the protagonist of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and Elliott, the protagonist of *E.T., the Extraterrestrial*, react to their encounters with aliens demonstrates that director Steven Spielberg uses both films to tell similar stories about the difficulties of growing up.”

Thinking Ahead

1. Choose the works of literature you want to compare.
2. Choose the grounds for comparison; i.e. is there something they have in common that makes it worthwhile to show how they are different?
3. Answer the question So What? by determining a purpose for making a comparison.
4. Gather information and evidence from each literary selection to describe and support your grounds for comparison. Use a graphic organizer like the one below and on page 4 of this packet.
5. Outline your essay.
6. Compose your thesis.
7. Write the draft of your essay.

HOW ARE THEY ALIKE?		
Comparison Points	(Title)	(Title)
Characters		
Theme		
Conflict		
Style		
Cultural Connection		
Purpose		
Genre		

Assignment Directions

Step One

Select two literary texts that can be compared and contrasted for the authors' point of view, literary style, or other points of comparison. Once you have the literature, it's time to decide "what" within each selection you will compare.

Step Two

Make a graphic organizer OR use the graphic organizers contained in this packet (see page 4). Making notes on the organizer will help visually show you how items, such as characters, author's development of the plot, author's use of literary devices, theme, etc. are similar and different. If you decide to focus on just "theme," for example, then you will want to create a Venn diagram or comparison chart that helps you analyze how the two authors' word choices, style, sense of audience, etc. are used to reveal the theme to the reader or support the message. And, of course, compare the authors in this regard.

Step Three

Once you have jotted notes in the graphic organizer, make an outline for your essay, that includes:

Paragraph 1: The Introduction - Introduce your topic and state your thesis.

First
support
paragraph

Example Thesis: "Although James Jackson's novel, *Reaching the English Moors*, was written in 1895, the theme can be compared to H.B. Bartlion's poem, 'Green Grasses of Home' written a century later. Both Jackson and Bartlion are urging the reader to consider the life lessons presented in nature. However, Jackson addresses this theme through the use of personification and Bartlion relies on visual imagery."

← Third
support paragraph

↑ Second
support
paragraph

In the above example, the writer has established why the two selections are **comparable** (common themes), but clearly states that the authors have used two **contrasting** methods of developing their themes. So, will the writer focus on the alikeness (comparison) of the theme, or the different ways (contrast) the authors developed their theme?

Paragraph 2: First Support Paragraph. Set the groundwork for the similarities in the literary selections. In the case above, you would describe the common theme found in each selection. Write a topic sentence and add details to support your topic sentence.

Example Topic Sentence: "Both Jackson and Bartlion are urging the reader to consider the life lessons we can learn from nature." Provide specific examples of this in the paragraph.

Paragraph 3: Second Support Paragraph. Again, write a topic sentence and add at least 3 details. This paragraph will focus a difference between the two literary selections by stating that Jackson uses personification to develop the theme. Provide specific examples of this in the paragraph.

Paragraph 4: Third Support Paragraph. This paragraph will focus on another difference between the two literary selections by stating that Bartlion uses visual imagery to develop the theme. Provide specific examples of this in the paragraph. Include several supporting details.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion. Go back and state what you've already said in the introduction using different wording, wrapping things up.

Step Four

Use the outline (above). Write each section of the paper, until finished. Go back and edit, checking for spelling, correct grammar, punctuation, and flow. Use the scoring guide/rubric (page 7 in this packet) to check the completion and correctness of your essay. Compare and contrast essays are just like any other paper and should flow from one paragraph to the next, making sense as you read it. Read and reread.

Step Five

Use a word processor to type your essay. Polish things up and print.

Sample Structure

HOW ARE THEY ALIKE?

Comparison Points	(Title)	(Title)
Characters		
Theme		
Conflict		
Style		
Cultural Connection		
Purpose		
Genre		

HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

Comparison Points	(Title)	(Title)
Characters		
Theme		
Conflict		
Style		
Cultural Connection		
Purpose		
Genre		

Shades of Being Human

Alice Walker and Maya Angelou are two contemporary African-American writers. Although almost a generation apart in age, both women display a remarkable similarity in their lives. Each has written about her experiences growing up in the rural South, Ms. Walker through her essays and Ms. Angelou in her autobiographies. Though they share similar backgrounds, each has a unique style which gives to us, the readers, the gift of their exquisite humanity, with all of its frailties and strengths, joys and sorrows.

Tragedy struck both of these women at the age of eight. Ms. Walker lost her sight in one eye. Ms. Angelou was raped. Each described the incident as part of a larger work. Ms. Walker related her experience in the body of an essay published in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. Ms. Angelou told her story as a chapter in her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Although both wrote about their traumatic experience, the way each depicted the incident was distinct and seemed to be told for very different purposes.

Alice Walker reports the facts to the reader with short sentences written in the present tense. She chooses words which elicit a forceful emotional response from her audience. For example, in telling how her brothers were given BB guns and she was not, Ms. Walker writes, "Because I am a girl, I do not get a gun. Instantly, I am relegated to the position of Indian." The word "relegated" causes the reader to be irate and indignant. Most people do not like being "relegated" to anything. Another illustration of Ms. Walker's use of dynamic words can be found in her description of the encounter with her parents following the accident. She speaks of being "confronted" by her parents. "Confronted" is a combative word. When people are confronted by others, they want to launch an attack. Her style and choice of words make the reader aware that she is alone and fearful. She is left to fight her battles by herself.

Maya Angelou narrates her account in a conversational tone. She uses the past tense which tells her audience "it's over" for her. Her words are free from severity. They encourage the reader to see hope in the midst of sadness. Instead of trying to elicit a particular emotional response, Angelou invites her audience to share in her thoughts and feelings. For instance, having given an account of the rape, she writes, "I thought I had died--I woke up in a white-walled world, and it had to be heaven." The reader feels a connection with her pain, yet realizes redemption lies close at hand. Whereas Walker tells how she was confronted by her parents, Angelou explains, "she [mother] picked me up in her arms and the terror abated for a while." There is no impression of combativeness. There is only tenderness and care. Once again, she invites the reader in. Walker wants the reader to feel for her; Angelou wants her audience to feel with her. They achieve their objectives by directing the reader's attention to specific emotions.

The emotional focus of Alice Walker's story is rage, red-hot and isolating. As I read this piece, I became livid, not only at the thought of her devastating injury and her family's apparent disassociation, but also at Ms. Walker herself. It appeared to me that she never let go of it. Instead, she seemed to embrace her anger. On the other hand, Ms. Angelou's anger is subtle and short-lived. Though I was incensed by what happened to her, she quietly insisted that I leave it behind. She concentrated less on her anger and more on the warmth and support of her family.

It would be impossible not to address the ways in which both women refer to the intense physical pain each of them suffered as little girls. Ms. Walker gives little description of her anguish, but I clearly felt it. When I read, ". . . I feel an incredible blow in my right eye . . ." and, "my eye stings, and I cover it with my hand," my immediate response was to quickly cover my eye with my hand. My body reacted to her pain.

Ms. Angelou's description produced another effect. She wrote, "Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart." Instead of a physical reaction, I felt a wrenching of the heart. Ms. Walker focused my attention on the injury to her body, while Ms. Angelou focused on her emotional scars.

My most powerful emotional response throughout both stories was one of incredible sorrow. I felt the tremendous weight that sadness and despair can fold around a heart, not only for a child's trauma, but also for the devastating repercussions that tragedy can produce - loss of dignity, self-esteem, and childhood itself. I wanted to comfort them both. However, by the end of Ms. Walker's account of the incident, I not only wanted to comfort her, I wanted to shield her as well. Her wounds were still open. At the end of her narrative, she wrote, "Now when I stare at people - a favorite pastime up to now - they will stare back. Not at the 'cute' little girl, but at her scar. For six years, I do not stare at anyone, because I do not raise my head." I wanted to intervene and help her.

Although in Ms. Angelou's story I yearned to comfort the child, it was obvious that the adult Maya Angelou did not need my protection. She ended her account with these words:

"I would have liked to stay in the hospital the rest of my life. Mother brought flowers and candy. Grandmother came with fruit and my uncles clumped around and around my bed, snorting like wild horses. When they were able to sneak Bailey in, he read to me for hours."

Her family loved her all the way through her trauma, and she moved from despair to hope with their help.

Alice Walker and Maya Angelou are both extremely courageous writers. From each we receive a rare and poignant gift. As her book suggests, Alice Walker challenges us to search for resolution in the face of loneliness and despair. Maya Angelou, who "knows why the caged bird sings," reminds us that loneliness and despair never have the last word. She gently points us to a window of hope. Both women bless us with shades of being human.

Students Name: _____

**Scoring Guide for a
LITERARY
Comparison/Contrast Essay**

Writing Trait	Criteria	Score			
		F 1-2	A 3	M 4	E 5-6
Ideas & Content	1. Topic lends itself to a comparison or contrast .				
	2. Adequate and interesting details support each point being compared/contrasted .				
	3. The purpose for the comparison is clearly provided.				
	4. Clear focus is maintained throughout the paper.				
Organization	5. Provides an effective introduction to the comparison .				
	6. Ideas are organized using paragraphs.				
	7. The end brings an effective closure to the essay.				
	8. Provides a logical and sequential organization of ideas.				
Voice	9. Writer conveys a sense of commitment to the topic.				
	10. Tone shows awareness of audience and topic.				
	11. Includes liveliness, sincerity, or humor when appropriate.				
Word Choice	12. Words effectively and accurately convey intended message.				
	13. Uses a variety of words that are functional and appropriate to the topic, purpose, and audience.				
	14. Attempts colorful language to make writing more interesting.				
	15. Avoid clichés and slang.				
Sentence Fluency	16. Some repeated patterns of sentence structure.				
	17. Shows strong control over simple sentences.				
	18. Fragments, if present, are usually effective.				
Conventions	19. Has solid control over subject/verb agreement.				
	20. Generally correct punctuation, capitalization, and verb tense.				
	21. Generally correct spelling.				
	22. Basically sound paragraph breaks that reinforce the organizational structure.				

FINAL SCORE: _____ /6

(Calculating the Score: Total the score and divide that total by the number of criterion items listed on the Scoring Guide. This number over 6 equals the score for the paper. It can be no higher than 6/6.)