

English Language Arts

Resource Guide

PART II.E

Diagnostic Comparison/ Contrast Essay.....	2
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NOTE: This document is a work in progress. Parts II and III, in particular, are in need of further development, and we invite the submission of additional learning experiences and local performance tasks for these sections. Inquiries regarding submission of materials should be directed to: English Language Arts Resource Guide, Room 681 EBA, New York State Education Department, Albany, NY 12234 (tel. 518-474-5922).

Diagnostic Comparison/Contrast Essay

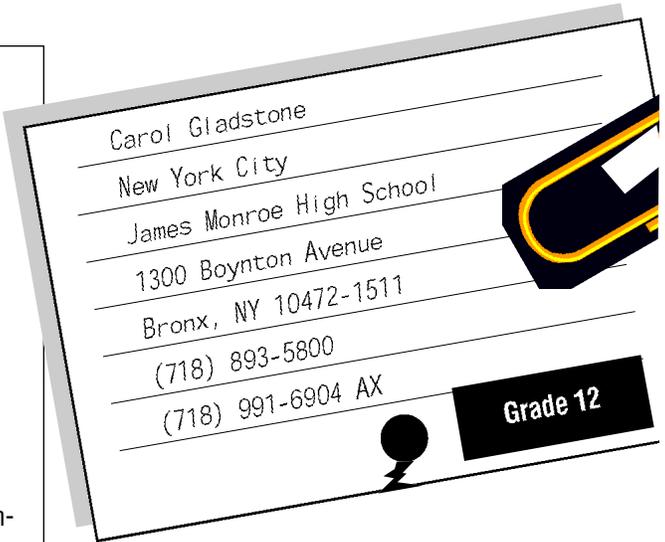
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LISTENING & READING – students will

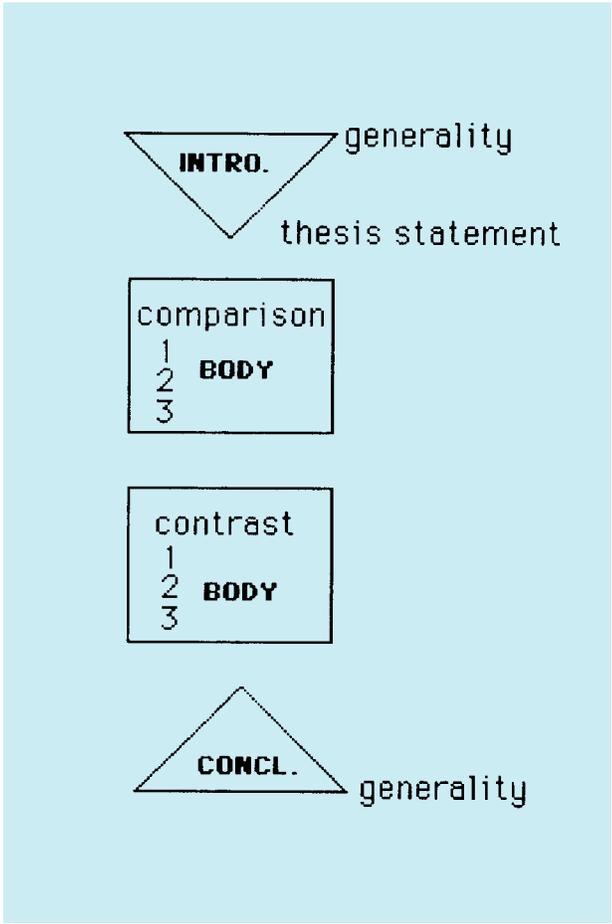
- ▲ read/form opinions
- ▲ evaluate their own strategies
- ▲ analyze, interpret/evaluate
- ▲ evaluate/compare their/others' work

SPEAKING & WRITING – students will

- ▲ express opinions
- ▲ present arguments for certain views
- ▲ monitor/adjust for competent performance
- ▲ present orally/in writing well-developed analyses of issues



In my classroom, I regularly make allowances for different learning styles by using visuals, graphic organizers, tactile experiences by having students draw, and role play. I connect their learning to other disciplines, use community resources, bring in speakers, and incorporate technology into the curriculum.



Youngsters need to know how to write an effective essay and back it up with facts or evidence from a literary work. The implications of students' ability to organize, analyze, state an argument, back up the opinion with relevant, concrete examples, synthesize, and draw logical conclusions lead well beyond the Advanced Placement English Literature and Language Examination or its applicability to expository college writing. These skills are termed "habits of mind" by Robert Marzano in his book, *Dimensions of Thinking*. Today's students will face a complex world in which they will have to think clearly about what they hear, see, and read. Since writing is thinking on paper, students are being trained in using higher-order thinking skills, in other words, making critical thinking a habit of mind.

Thus, the diagnostic composition is the touchstone both for the youngster and teacher. It illuminates the youngster's ability to organize, think logically and sequentially, and create new ideas from information at hand. It gives youngsters the tools to transfer a pedestrian classroom experience into a useful approach to personal and professional, political and social issues that will face them all their lives.

To begin the term, the class listed, reviewed, and defined elements of analysis. For homework students read a chapter in their textbook about how to write an essay. Next they read and discuss an excerpt from the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus tricks Polyphemus, the Cyclops, so that Odysseus and his men could escape. The class followed a modified *reciprocal teaching model* in this lesson to summarize, identify what was unclear to each student, and clarify by asking other students to supply information. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher models the questioning technique. Then the class is divided into small groups and students continue questioning one another. Following this session, the class read the Bible story

(*I Samuel:17*) of David and Goliath, and again engage in the modified *reciprocal teaching model*. Students generalized similar characteristics of each hero and listed differences in their charts. Some responses elicited for similarities were: courageous, intelligent, faithful to men, faithful to beliefs. Students noted some of the differences as: setting, choice of weapons (burning stake vs. slingshot), age of hero. The class substantiated both stories with evidence from the text. They reviewed how to write a comparison/contrast essay from a thesis statement with the schematic.

Students analyzed the character traits of a hero from reading about the exploits of Odysseus and David.

After class discussion about analysis of literature, specific analysis of Odysseus and David, and what constitutes the elements of an essay, the students wrote a diagnostic comparison/contrast composition about David and Odysseus.

Youngsters need to know how to organize an essay from a thesis statement and give supporting evidence from a generalization.

The implication of their ability to do this leads beyond the Advanced Placement English Literature and Language Examination or its applicability to expository college writing. It is what Robert Marzano terms "habits of mind." In short, students who can organize, analyze, state an argument, logically take a stand by giving evidence from the text, and synthesize the implications of the point, think more clearly.

The image shows a worksheet titled "Odysseus Character Trait" and "David Character Trait". It is divided into four main sections: "Odysseus Character Trait", "Similarities", "David Character Trait", and "Differences". Each section has numbered lines (1, 2, 3) for student input. The "Similarities" and "Differences" sections also include a column for "Proof from Story".

Reciprocal Teaching Model: In the reciprocal teaching model students first tap into prior knowledge about a subject and predict what will happen. After reading, summarizing, identifying ambiguities, and clarifying, they check their predictions about what actually happened and predict again.

Teacher Model of Paragraphs

Comparison/Contrast Essay David and Odysseus

Paragraph 3—*Contrast*

Despite David's and Odysseus's similarities, there were a number of notable differences in their status, settings, and professions. Odysseus was already a proven leader as victor in the Trojan War. He had the respect of his men and enjoyed a following. David, on the other hand, (transition) was a lowly shepherd. Skeptics among the Israelites doubted whether or not he could fell the dreaded giant Goliath. On a journey back to Greece from Troy, Odysseus was engaged in a battle on what is now the European continent. The Biblical story takes place across the Mediterranean Sea in the Middle East between David and the Philistine.

Paragraph 4 —*Conclusion: What I learned about literature and others*

What is most notable about these classical heroes is not so much their distinctions as their similarities (transition). Perhaps the parallel stories set on both sides of the world as people before the time of Christ knew it serve to indicate that great leaders come from the humble as well as the mighty. The characteristics of David and Odysseus evoke a certain awe in those who observed them as well as the modern reader. Leadership has not changed over the centuries (Universal (truth)). People still look up to men and women who demonstrate courage, cleverness, and fortitude in the face of difficulty. Consequently, (transition) stories written thousands of years ago and their characters have timeless appeal (universal truth).

Grade: 0

Rubric: Content

1. Essay has not addressed the question.
 2. Essay is illegible, i.e., includes so many indecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response.
 3. Essay is incoherent, i.e., words are legible but syntax is so garbled that no sense can be made of the response.
 4. Essay is a blank paper.
 5. Essay is not turned in.
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Rubric: Content

1. Essay makes a superficial attempt to address the question.
2. Essay exhibits no discernible structure and lacks an introduction and conclusion.
3. Essay presents an unprovable thesis statement which is not supported by examples of similarities or differences from both stories or contains irrelevant or inaccurate information.
4. Essay may lack either comparisons or contrasts between Odysseus and David.
5. Writer makes little attempt to analyze or synthesize information in essay. Writer makes no attempt to draw logical conclusions or generalizations about self, others, or the world of literature.

Rubric: Mechanics

6. Writer employs vague, inappropriate, and/or incorrect level of language in essay.
7. Essay exhibits many errors in conventions of English grammar and usage.
8. Mechanical errors often impede communication of message.

Rubric: Pacing

9. Writer cannot produce more than a paragraph within a class period.

Rubric: Content

1. Essay attempts to address the question.
2. Essay exhibits a discernible structure but may lack either an appropriate introduction or conclusion.
3. Essay presents a tentative thesis statement which is supported by one or two examples of similarities and differences from both stories.
4. Essay may lack either comparisons or contrasts between Odysseus and David.
5. Writer cannot analyze or synthesize information in essay. Writer cannot draw logical conclusions and generalizations about self, others, or the world from the literature.

Rubric: Mechanics

6. Writer employs ordinary, often imprecise, level of language in essay.
7. Essay exhibits errors in conventions of English grammar and usage.
8. Mechanical errors often impede communication of message.

Rubric: Pacing

9. Writer can produce a partially developed two-paragraph essay within a class period.

STUDENT SAMPLE OF PARAGRAPHS

ORIGINAL

Odysseus and David were two characters who overcame an obstacle that led them to a great triumph. However, they had a few differences as to how they went about obtaining such great success.

To begin with, Odysseus from Greece was an older man who was a sailor. His determination was to defeat a kyklops who was eating Odysseus' people. He first began by using his cunning skills. Odysseus told Polyphemus that his ship got wrecked in a storm. Next, he said his name was Nobody so Polyphemus wouldn't know his name. Then Odysseus and his men waited until the kyklops fell fast asleep and they blinded him. This was done by taking out his eyeball from his sockets. With this ascendancy Odysseus was able to free his people from a cannibal who was doing harm to them and became their hero.

David from the Bible story was a young child who became a hero in Israel after defeating Goliath. Goliath who was a soldier from the Philistines was more than willing to go against anyone to defend his title and his people.

David who was a Sheppard for his father's sheep, went up against Goliath instead. His accomplishment came about when David used his slingshot and hit Goliath on his forehead knocking him down. He then took Goliath's own sword and stabbed him with it. It was pretty ironic that a child was able to save his people from becoming slaves, but it was done and for this reason he became a hero as well.

Grade: 3

Rubric: Content

1. Essay generally addresses the question.
2. Essay is organized into four paragraphs including an introduction, two body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
3. Essay presents a thesis statement which is supported by two examples of similarities and differences from both stories.
4. Essay compares and contrasts Oydeseus and David.
5. Writer analyzes and synthesizes information in essay and draws logical conclusions and generalizations about self, others, or the world capturing some complexity of heroic traits on a person's actions from the literature.

Rubric: Mechanics

6. Writer employs ordinary level of language in formal essay.
7. Essay follows most conventions of English grammar and usage.
8. Mechanical errors generally do not impede communication of message.

Rubric: Pacing

9. Writer can produce a developed on-demand essay within a class period.

Grade: 4

Grade: 4

Rubric: Content

1. Essay addresses the question.
2. Essay is organized into four paragraphs including an introduction, two body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
3. Essay presents a focused thesis statement which is supported by three examples of similarities and differences from both stories.
4. Essay compares and contrasts Oydeseus and David.
5. Writer analyzes and synthesizes information in essay and draws logical conclusions and generalizations about self, others, or the world capturing most complexity of heroic traits on a person's actions from the literature.

Rubric: Mechanics

6. Writer employs generally appropriate level of language in formal essay.
7. Essay follows most conventions of English grammar and usage.
8. Mechanical errors generally do not impede communication of message.

Rubric: Pacing

9. Writer can produce a generally developed on-demand essay within a class period.
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Rubric: Content

1. Essay addresses the question.
2. Essay is organized into four paragraphs including an introduction, two body paragraphs, and a conclusion effectively linked with appropriate transition.
3. Essay presents a focused thesis statement which is supported by three examples of similarities and differences from both stories.
4. Essay compares and contrasts Odysseus and David.
5. Writer analyzes and synthesizes information in essay and draws logical conclusions and generalizations about self, others, or the world capturing full complexity of heroic traits on a person's actions from the literature.

Rubric: Mechanics

6. Writer employs appropriate level of language in formal essay. Writer effectively uses sentence structure and length to convey ideas.
8. Essay follows correct conventions of English grammar and usage.
9. Mechanical errors do not impede communication of message.

Rubric: Pacing

9. Writer can produce a fully developed on-demand essay within a class period.

STUDENT SAMPLE OF PARAGRAPHS

REWRITE

Both Odysseus and David were nimble men. Odysseus used his cunning skills to distract Polyphemus the giant. He first got the cyclops drunk and blinded him by putting a stake through his eye. He then misled Polyphemus by saying his name was "Nobody" so that he would move the boulder from the cave allowing Odysseus and his men to escape. David, as well, skillfully used his slingshot to defeat the leviathan Goliath. These two men had a strong belief in their gods. David, in God; Odysseus in Zeus and Athena. Due to their courage, their mental stability and strong faith, these men were able to save their people as well as themselves.

Reflection

Students could have been asked to write a one or two paragraph summary of each story instead of listening to one another recount them. Several students were confused with the details, plot, and characters.

Current scholarship includes constructivism. Students make meaning out of what they read based on their own backgrounds. However, I am a strong advocate of scaffolding and modeling. The literary charts provide students with the framework of a composition. Models show the class what good student writing and professional writing looks like to give students excellent examples for which to strive.

REFLECTION:
REFLECTION: