

Reading a Comparison-Contrast Essay

Pupil's Edition, page 120



Reading Skill

Points of Comparison

Reading Focus

Comparison-Contrast Structure

Overview

To identify points of comparison between two topics in a comparison-contrast essay, students must engage in a number of critical thinking skills: They must classify traits, identify and solve comprehension problems, and predict likely similarities and differences, among other mental tasks. Many students have difficulty identifying points of comparison because they are reading passively; these readers need practice interacting with the text as they read.

This lesson includes

- a comparison-contrast essay **MiniRead**, including **Active-Reading Questions** (page 24)
- an **Alternative Strategy** for teaching comparison-contrast essays to struggling readers (page 22)
- an **Alternative Strategy Practice** worksheet for students to apply the strategy and skill to the MiniRead (page 27)

MiniRead Summary: "School Days: A World of Differences"

This comparison of the Japanese and American educational systems points out the similarities and differences of each system. The points of comparison are the amount of time students spend in school, how much they study outside of school, what they are taught, and teaching methods.

Using the MiniRead

NOTE: The Alternative Strategy on the next page guides students through a during-reading activity.

BEFORE READING Students may preview the MiniRead by looking at the title, illustrations, and lead sentences of paragraphs. They may also think about related topics they already know about, such as their own experiences in school. What might the essay be about? What do students know about Japan?

DURING READING Students may want to work in pairs to read and answer the questions or take turns reading portions of the MiniRead aloud before they answer each question. They can write their responses in the margins of the MiniRead. If students are using the Alternative Strategy, they may answer the Active-Reading questions while making their Think-Aloud comments.

AFTER READING Students can complete the **Alternative Strategy Practice** worksheet in pairs and then discuss their responses to the MiniRead with the rest of the class.

USING THE MINIREAD WITH THE PUPIL'S EDITION

After students have read and discussed the MiniRead, they may be better prepared to read the Reading Selection, "The Nixon-Kennedy Presidential Debates," in the Pupil's Edition. If the MiniRead is taught in place of the Reading Selection, students will still be able to complete the Mini-Lessons and Writing Workshop.

Reading a Comparison-Contrast Essay *(continued)*

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

Think-Aloud

Students pause periodically while reading to “think aloud” to a partner about the portion of text they just read. They can identify problems, solve problems, picture the text, predict, or make comments or comparisons. The partner listens and records on a tally sheet the type of comments being made. The strategy is designed to help students identify comprehension problems and analyze the text as they read.

Modeling the Strategy

You may wish to write the types of Think-Aloud comments on the chalkboard, in chart form, as shown below.

Think-Aloud Comments	Tally
Identifying a problem	
Solving a problem	
Predicting what happens next	
Picturing the text	
Making comparisons	
Making comments	

Then, choose a passage from the MiniRead and read it aloud to the class. As you read, stop occasionally to “think aloud” about what you are reading. After you make each comment, put a check mark in the appropriate “tally” column. Following is paragraph three of the MiniRead with sample Think-Aloud comments in brackets.

Both countries require students to stay in school from the ages of five or six to fifteen or sixteen. However, Japanese children tend to enter kindergarten at three and stay in school until they are eighteen. [*I think the writer is going to explain why Japanese students start school at such a young age. Check Predicting what happens next.*] They need to pass an exam just to enter grade school, and they face even more tests to get into high school. [*Students in the United States don't have to take exams to enter grade school. Check Making comparisons.*] Japanese students are under a lot of pressure to succeed, not just for themselves but for their families. Failing any of these tests is considered shameful to both the students and

Reading a Comparison-Contrast Essay *(continued)*

STRATEGY OPTIONS

Students can stop to “think aloud” after every paragraph or at specific points in the text that you designate.

If some students are having trouble thinking of what to say, you might suggest stems such as “This sentence reminds me of . . .” or “If I had to do that, I would . . .”

After discussing their Think-Aloud comments with their partners, students can discuss as a class the comparisons they made while thinking aloud. After the discussion, you might ask students to list the main points of comparison that emerged in the discussion.

their families. [*I don’t think that the whole family should be ashamed if their child doesn’t pass a test. On the other hand, that probably really motivates everyone to study.* **Check Making comments.**]

Discuss with students the types of comments you made and any other Think-Aloud comments students might wish to make about the passage.

Applying the Strategy

Students should complete the worksheet in pairs, then discuss with their partners the types of Think-Aloud comments they made. Encourage students to make different types of comments.

Extending the Strategy

You may want to have students

- discuss how the strategy helped them understand the comparisons being made in the MiniRead
- apply the strategy to the Reading Selection in the Pupil’s Edition
- apply the strategy to other types of texts, such as editorials and book reviews

School Days: A World of Differences

DIRECTIONS Write your answers to the questions in the space below.

Twelve-year-old Akira lives in Tokyo, Japan. He races out of school on Friday afternoon, but he is not heading home or going off to play with friends. Instead, he is on his way to “cram school” where he will spend hours studying for a special test. Akira needs to pass this test to get into middle school. When he gets home that evening, he will study his notes and do homework assignments for several hours.

Like Akira, most students in Japan work very hard to succeed in school. Students in the United States are also hardworking and eager to succeed, but they do not spend as much time in school or hitting the books after school. The school systems in Japan and the United States share many of the same goals, but the approach to education in each country creates a world of differences in schools and in students’ lives.

1. What two things do you think the writer will compare in this article?

Both countries require students to stay in school from the ages of five or six to fifteen or sixteen. However, Japanese children tend to enter kindergarten at three and stay in school until they are eighteen. They need to pass an exam just to enter grade school, and they face

2. What differences between Japanese and American schools are explained in the third and fourth paragraphs?

even more tests to get into high school. Japanese students are under a lot of pressure to succeed, not just for themselves but for their families. Failing any of these tests is considered shameful to both the students and their families.

Students in Japan spend far more days in school during the year than students in the United States. A Japanese student attends school 240 days a year, whereas a student in the United States goes for 180 days. In addition to Monday through Friday, Japanese students are in school for a half day on Saturday with one or two Saturdays off each month. The average summer vacation for students in Japan lasts only six weeks, while summer vacations in the United States can last twelve weeks.



In both countries the school day usually ends around three o’clock. After school, though, many Japanese pupils attend “cram

School Days: A World of Differences *(continued)*

schools" two or three days a week where they study for their next major test. These sessions last two or three hours. Like students in the United States, they may also take private lessons in music or

3. In this paragraph, what main difference in after-school activities is described?

sports after school or belong to school clubs. Then, in the evening, Japanese students usually do several hours of homework. In fact, they may do as much as five or six hours each night.

Overall, students in the United States probably spend more time after school on sports, hobbies, and friends than on schoolwork and tests. Many students in the United States finish their homework before they get home.

Students in Japan and the United States are taught many of the same subjects. Japanese children are also taught to respect their teachers and take care of their school.

For example, students are responsible for cleaning the school's rooms, hallways, and bathrooms. Although students in both countries learn the same subjects, students in the same grade all

4. How does the writer organize the similarities and differences described in paragraph six?



School Days: A World of Differences *(continued)*

over Japan study the same lessons from the same books. Teachers must teach “by the book,” following set lessons. There is no flexibility for students to learn in their own ways. Gaining knowledge and skills is considered more important than thinking creatively. In the United States, on the other hand, different teachers teach a subject in different ways. In addition, students are often encouraged to learn in their own individual ways. Many states and school districts have their own rules about what is taught.

People sometimes disagree about whether Japan or the United States has a better educational system. Each one has strengths and weaknesses. Compared to students in the United States, students in Japan spend more time attending school, studying, and taking tests. Students must first show that they have the knowledge and skills they will be tested on again and again before they are allowed to learn in their own ways and be creative. The approach to education in each country may be different, but both encourage students to work hard, do their best, and succeed in whatever careers they choose.

Think-Aloud

DIRECTIONS Use these steps to apply the **Think-Aloud** strategy to the MiniRead, “School Days: A World of Differences.”

► **STEP 1:**

- Working with a partner, read “School Days: A World of Differences.” One of you should read the first three paragraphs aloud, pausing to make Think-Aloud comments.
- For each comment, the listener puts a check mark in the *Tally* column beside the type of comment.
- Switch roles and continue to the end of the MinRead.

Think-Aloud Comments	Tally	Listener:
Identifying a problem		
Solving a problem		
Predicting what happens next		
Picturing the text		
Making comparisons		
Making comments		

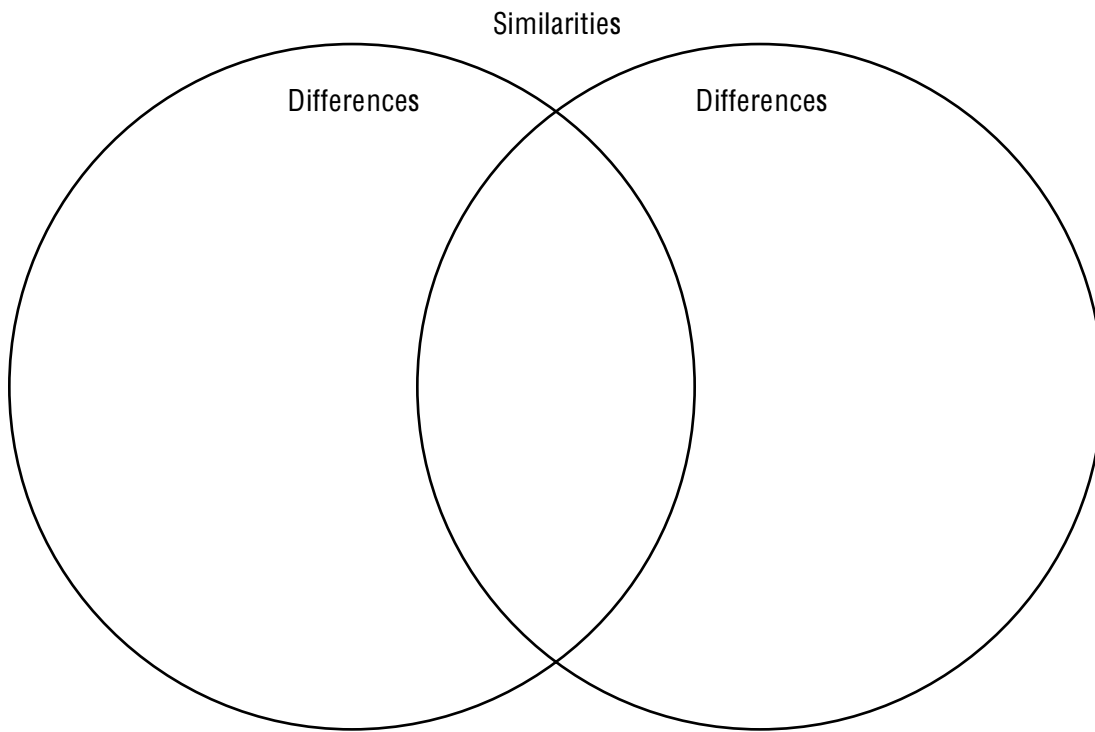
► **STEP 2:**

Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. Which types of Think-Aloud comments did you make most often?

Which did you make least often?

2. According to the MiniRead, how are the two school systems alike? How are they different? To help you answer, fill in the diagram below with details from the MiniRead.



3. What questions do you have about the MiniRead that are still unanswered?

has been described in paragraph two. The last three paragraphs simply give further information about the tombs and their importance.

p. 14 | Alternative Strategy Practice

Answers will vary. A sample response follows.

Step 1: secrets

Step 2: I chose this word because the tombs seem to contain many secrets about ancient Egypt, and the secrets were kept for over 2,000 years. Also, because the tombs were kept secret for so long, they were well preserved for scientists to study.

Step 3: The 1996 discovery of a series of tombs at Bahariya, Egypt, is likely to reveal to modern scientists many secrets about the ancient Egyptians.

Step 4: I changed my mind about my most important word. Now I think “discovery” is the most important, because the finding of the tombs is a great discovery. Researchers made new discoveries about the lives of the ancient Egyptians under Roman rule. Also, the researchers are probably the first to discover this particular site.

Chapter 3

“The Hand Is Quicker Than the Eye”

p. 17 | Active-Reading Questions

Answers will vary. Sample responses follow.

1. I think the trick will involve the ripping of some of the construction paper.
2. Some of the words are “like an accordion or fan” and “the little package.” They helped me picture how the paper should be folded.
3. If the audience sees the back of the strip, the trick will probably be spoiled.
4. The words “next,” “then,” and “now” help me remember which steps come when. Also, the word “should” helps me double-check that I have followed the instructions correctly.

p. 19 | Alternative Strategy Practice

Responses will vary widely. Students should be able to support their opinions with specific evidence from the MiniRead.

Chapter 4

“School Days: A World of Differences”

p. 24 | Active-Reading Questions

Answers will vary. Sample responses follow.

1. The writer will probably compare the educational systems in Japan and the United States.
2. The differences include the ages at which students attend school, the degree of social pressure to succeed in school, the use of national exams, and the number of days spent in school each year.
3. Japanese students spend most of their time after school on homework or school-related activities, while American students’ after-school activities tend to be focused more on friends, hobbies, and sports.
4. The writer describes first a similarity (American and Japanese students are taught many of the same subjects) and then a difference (American and Japanese teachers differ in their teaching styles and flexibility). In describing the difference, the writer discusses first the more structured teaching style used in Japanese schools and then the variety of teaching styles used in American schools.

p. 27 | Alternative Strategy Practice

Comments and tallies will vary widely. Students should try to make different types of comments as noted on the worksheet.

Chapter 5

“A Review of *Farewell to Manzanar*”

p. 32 | Active-Reading Questions

Answers will vary. Sample responses follow.