

Independent Application

Browsing Bins

Create *browsing bins* featuring sets of texts you want your students to compare and contrast. Label each bin according to the topic or theme of books it contains (such as Goldilocks stories, books about pets, books about funny characters). Allow students to use the bins during independent or paired reading times, pointing out the topics on the bins and taking time to ask about the observations they are making across books. To ensure accountability and reflection, you may wish to ask that they record their observations using a compare-and-contrast organizer, as featured in Figures RL 9.3 to RL 9.5. Or each student could be required to record one or two text-to-text connections.

Graphing Favorites

Display two to four stories your students have read or listened to, and ask them to choose a favorite. Work with students to graph their favorites, encouraging them to use comparisons among the texts to provide rationales for their choices. Have students then write a comparative statement indicating why they chose one text over the other(s).

Graffiti Boards

Graffiti boards (Short, Harste, and Burke 1996) serve the important function of helping students identify and organize connections between texts.

1. Arrange for students to sit in small groups with a large piece of paper in the middle. Each group should have a text set (a collection of different texts that are related in some way, such as by topic or setting).
2. As students read, they work alone, recording words and phrases and sketching ideas and images that come to mind. To differentiate, include texts representing varying levels of difficulty and allow English learners to read in the first language if possible.
3. After the reading session, students discuss their graffiti with the group as a way to build knowledge on the topic.

Text Link Talks

Text link talks provide a structured opportunity for students to think together about different authors' approaches to similar themes and topics. For this lesson you will need five or six copies each of two books that are related by theme. Each student will also need a piece of paper that's been folded in half.

1. Read aloud and discuss the two related texts over the course of two days. After each day, guide students to use one half of the page to write down what they see as a key message or lesson from the book. They may be asked to illustrate as well. Do not work as a class to convene on a key theme/message; allow students to do this on their own and use the opportunity to assess their understandings. Students will bring their individual work to a small-group meeting on day 3.
2. On the third day, place students in groups and give each group a copy of each book and a piece of paper for recording their ideas. Present the students with the following prompts:
 - What does your group see as the central message or theme of each book? Write down your response.
 - How do the themes connect? Write down your response.
3. Bring the class together to compare their findings. Follow up with a discussion regarding the groups' different interpretations, showing that texts often can be interpreted in more than one way.

What's the Connection?

After the class reads or listens to two stories that connect in some way, each student writes or draws on a sticky note one or two observations about the ways in which the two texts connect. Then, students work in small groups to create a group web featuring their sticky-note observations. The notes are placed on a large piece of paper to form the web. If two students have observed the same connection, the notes are stacked. After each group creates a web, the same process is followed with the whole class, leading to a classwide web featuring all the connections students have made between the books.

Comparative Reviews

In preparing *comparative reviews*, students analyze and compare various elements of two or more texts through drawing or writing. It is recommended that these reviews be discussed with the class and then compiled as part of a class literary magazine that is published and kept on the classroom shelf. Publishing the reviews shows students that their own work is valued and allows them to gain new insights by reviewing the work of peers.

Kindergarten and First Grade: Let students know that they will be drawing two characters from two different texts that you have read aloud to them. Help them choose characters that are similar in some way. Students are to divide their paper in half and write the titles of the two books at the top. Then, they draw each character in an important part of the story. You may ask that they write words that describe each character. Encourage talk and collaboration as students work.

Second Grade: Let students know that they will be comparing two versions of the same story. Ask students to draw the main character of one of the stories—at one point in time—using as much detail as possible. They then draw the same main character from the other version—at the most similar point in time—again using as much detail as possible. Students then describe in writing what is happening in each of their illustrations, showing the similarities and differences.

Third Grade: Let students know that they will be comparing two texts written by the same author, about the same or similar characters. To format the comparison, they should create a two-column page, with one column for each book. It is suggested that students use the following prompts.

- Describe the setting for each book.
- Describe the problem/goal faced by each main character.
- Describe how each problem/goal was addressed.
- Describe the theme or lesson of each book.

Fourth Grade: Let students know that they will be comparing two stories/myths/pieces of traditional literature written on a similar topic. To format, students use two columns to the following questions (suggested by Norton 2011, 71) for each text:

- Is this a good story?
- Did the main character overcome the problem, but not too easily?
- Did I understand the characters' personalities and the reasons for their actions?
- Did the characters in the story grow?
- Did I feel that I was really in that time or place?
- Was the theme worthwhile?

To conclude:

- Which seems to be the stronger text?

Fifth Grade: Let students know that they will be comparing two stories written in the same genre and on a similar topic. Historical and contemporary realistic fiction work well, but other genres may be used as well. Students prepare a written evaluation of each text by writing a narrative describing each author's approach to the topic and answering the following questions (suggested by Norton 2011, 71) for each text:

- Is this a good story?
- Is the plot believable?
- Did the main character overcome the problem, but not too easily?
- Did the characters seem real?
- Did the characters grow?
- Did I feel I was really in that time or place?
- Was the theme worthwhile?

To conclude:

- Which seems to be the stronger text?