

Grade 6 Playlist: Comparing Two Accounts

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.9:

- Compare and contrast one author’s presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).

Welcome

Kevin is writing a paper for class on the Great Depression. At the library, he checks out a big stack of books and reads all about what life was like in the United States during that time: food was scarce, businesses and companies closed down left and right, and millions of people were forced to leave their homes after losing their jobs in order to find work elsewhere. It seemed to be a miserable time in history. Later that day, Kevin tells his great-grandmother, who was born in the 1920s, about the paper he is writing. “I was very young, but I remember the Great Depression quite well,” she says to him, smiling. “Food was scarce, so we had to grow our own. I enjoyed working in the garden with my mother and father. That was what awakened my love for gardening... As long as we worked hard, we had more than enough to eat.” Kevin’s great-grandmother’s firsthand account of the Great Depression is considerably different from what he read in books. What should Kevin write in his paper?

Objective

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- compare and contrast one author’s presentation of events with that of another.

Review

Key Terms

- The way an author sees an event is the author’s **point of view**. Many factors can influence an author’s point of view, including the author’s relationship with the events and his or her personal feelings about them.
- A **biography** is a nonfiction text in which the author writes about another person’s life. It can give details about its subject’s entire life or just part of it.
- A **memoir** is a nonfiction text in which the author writes about past events and experiences in his or her own life. It gives a firsthand account of the events it describes.

Watch!

Watch this video to learn about different types of nonfiction texts:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/genres-of-narrative-nonfiction/1553906>



Exploring the Standard

Nonfiction texts can be either firsthand or secondhand accounts. The authors of firsthand accounts write about events they have personally seen or experienced. The authors of secondhand accounts write about events they have not personally experienced.

Authors who write secondhand accounts typically research the topic very thoroughly to make sure their account is as accurate as possible. However, no matter how careful authors are, their account will simply not be the same as that of someone who experienced the event firsthand. In addition, two authors who write secondhand accounts of the same topic might focus on different details, or they might interpret their research differently. As a result, the texts they write can differ greatly.

When reading two texts about the same topic, it is important to compare and contrast how the authors present information. Readers should ask themselves these questions to figure out how the texts are similar and different:

- What is each author’s purpose for writing?
- Is the text a firsthand or secondhand account?
- Which details are in both accounts? Which details are in only one account?
- Do the two accounts conflict with each other? If so, what might be the cause of the conflict?

Watch!

Watch this video to learn more about comparing and contrasting informational texts:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/espark-learning-compare-and-contrast-reading-strategy-instructional/427247>

A Closer Look: Purpose in Writing

One factor that may influence an account is the author’s purpose for writing. When people tell a friend about an event that happened recently, such as a vacation or a birthday party, they are not usually speaking to inform. Their purpose in telling their story is to reflect on a personal experience and to share their own feelings about it. Such a reflection is often very opinionated: “The cake was chocolate, which is my favorite”; “I wanted to go to Florida, but everyone else wanted to go to South Carolina”; “We all had a great time, and I can’t wait until it happens again next year.”

A secondhand account is likely to be much different. That author’s purpose is probably to inform. The author of a secondhand nonfiction text may try to inject a personal opinion about history, or the author may interview people who did experience the events firsthand. For this type of author, personal reflection is rarely the goal. Instead, the author wants readers to learn about past events.



Teaching Notes: Comparing Two Accounts

The goal of RI.6.9 is for students to compare and contrast different accounts of an event. In teaching this standard, explain that a firsthand account is likely to contain more vivid details than a secondhand account, but that does not necessarily make an account more reliable; emotions and other factors can interfere with a firsthand account's overall validity.

Activity

Ask students to visit the following website and read different firsthand accounts of the Civil War. Then divide students into groups and have each group choose two accounts to compare and contrast. Each group should create a poster showing a comparison of the two accounts. (Students may draw a Venn diagram or chart to display their findings.) Then have each group present their poster to the class.

- <http://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/education/upload/Letters%20and%20Diaries%20of%20Soldiers%20and%20Civilians.pdf>

Writing Prompts

1. Instruct students to locate two current events articles that discuss the same topic. (Students can check two different print or online newspapers.) Have students write an essay comparing and contrasting the two accounts. Is either account more reliable than the other? Why or why not?
2. Elizabeth Shutes's account of the *Titanic's* sinking was written from the perspective of a first-class passenger who served a wealthy family and was most likely one of the first to be allowed access to the lifeboats. Have students read the firsthand account of the tragedy written by Elin Hakkarainen, a third-class passenger (see <http://www.yankeemagazine.com/article/features/titanic-survivor>) and write a brief response comparing and contrasting her account to that of Shutes.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RI.6.9:

- **Comparing Two Texts on a Similar Topic:** In this lesson plan, students use a Venn diagram to compare two informational texts about the desert:
<http://www.pdesas.org/module/content/resources/18239/view.ashx>
- **Compare and Contrast Chart:** This graphic organizer helps students compare and contrast two texts. It acts as an alternative to the traditional Venn diagram:
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/compare-contrast-chart-30198.html>
- **Elie Wiesel:** In this lesson plan, students compare two firsthand accounts of World War II:
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/elie-wiesel-born-september-20706.html>

