Britannica Expedition:LEARN!

Teacher Toolkit

Compare and Contrast: Grades 3–5

OVERVIEW:

Without realizing it, students compare and contrast everyday. They might compare snacks in their lunch boxes, games, toys, or activities. By comparing these things, students begin to learn about the world around them. This skill becomes more challenging, however, when students are asked to compare and contrast information presented in a text, including events, ideas, and people found in historical and scientific texts. This is because often the similarities and differences in these texts are not as obvious. With support and scaffolding, students can be encouraged to look beyond the surface and consider ways in which the information, ideas, and events are similar and different.

Comparing and contrasting is a strategy that deepens students' comprehension and content knowledge as it encourages them to pay attention to the fine details. It also helps students develop their evaluation skills as they pay attention to different aspects of the text or topic, clarify their thinking, and look deeper at a text. The following strategies are designed to scaffold the skill of comparing and contrasting by providing explicit instruction around the associated thinking steps.

Mini-Lesson I

Looking Beyond the Surface (15 minutes)

Background: By third grade, most students are able to see external similarities and differences between two objects; however, many have trouble looking deeper without support. Both science and social studies require students to move beyond the surface when making comparisons between two ideas, events, people, or phenomena. In addition, students must be taught to look beyond explicitly stated text details. The following teaching suggestions are based on the article "Plant and Animal Cells" from the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson "What Are Cells?"

- As needed, remind students what it means to compare and contrast, reinforcing how comparing and contrasting ideas, events, and topics helps us better understand the concepts.
- Explain that we can compare and contrast by looking at surface-level similarities and thinking about deeper level information.
- Display an image of something simple, like an orange.
- Ask students to describe the outside of the orange. For example:
    - *round; orange; textured; has a little nub where it attached to the tree*

- Explain that these are examples of surface-level details, or things we can immediately see.
- Ask students to describe the inside of the orange, including the smell and taste. For example:
  - *comes apart in sections; smells good and citrusy; usually tastes sweet; can be very juicy when you bite it*
- Share that these are still examples of surface-level, or explicit details. They are things we can observe or experience with our senses.
- Explain that there are other things we know about the orange; deeper details we know are true, but that we can't necessarily see. For example, we know that oranges have minerals and vitamins, are one of the most popular fruits in the United States, and are often juiced.
- Display an image of a related object, such as an apple, and repeat the process, inviting students to describe the outside, then inside, then deeper details about an apple. For example:
  - *Outside details: roundish; red, green, or yellow; has a little nub where it attached to the tree; smooth and shiny*
  - *Inside details: white; has seeds; crunchy; sweet; has a core in the middle*
  - *Deeper details: has a lot of fiber; has vitamins and minerals; can be juiced*
- Invite students to compare the orange and the apple, discussing what is alike about the two. For example:
  - *both are fruits; both are roundish; both taste sweet; both have vitamins; both can be juiced*
- Highlight that when you compare two things, you are able to use both the explicit, or surface-level details, as well as the deeper level details.
- Introduce the lesson "What Are Cells?," and read the article "Plant and Animal Cells."
- Invite students to work with a partner, and assign pairs either "plant cells" or "animal cells." Ask student pairs to read the article, jotting surface-level and deeper details about either plant or animal cells.
- Once student pairs have finished reading and jotting notes, invite them to join a pair that took notes on the other kind of cell.
- Ask groups to share the information they recorded and then jot down how plant and animal cells are similar and different. For example:
  - *Similarities: can use nutrients to make energy; can reproduce; have cytoplasm, nucleus, and cell membrane*
  - *Differences: plant cells have chloroplast and a cell wall and animal cells do not; plants cells make their own food and animal cells do not*
- Emphasize that comparing the surface-level and deeper details about objects, ideas, or events can help us to better understand them.

Mini-Lesson II

Using Comparisons to Deepen Conceptual Knowledge (20 minutes)

Background: It can be helpful for students to use their compare and contrast skills when learning about a new idea or concept. Not only does comparing and contrasting help students activate their background knowledge, it can help them recall more details, make more connections, and develop general ideas and rules about what something is or how it works. The following teaching suggestions are based on the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson "The Planets."

- Share the topic of the lesson and explain that students will learn about the planets of our solar system, considering how they are alike and how they are different.
- Begin a read-aloud of the first article, "Planets in Our Solar System," inviting students to think about how the planets are alike.
- After reading the passage, display and distribute the **Compare and Contrast organizer**.

- Invite students to record "Inner Planets" and "Outer Planets" in the two boxes at the top of the organizer.
- Share with students that you will read the passage a second time, stopping to think aloud and jot notes about how the planets are alike. For example:
  - *Similarities: orbit the Sun; circle the Sun on a path shaped like an oval; spherical; spin around their centers; covered by a layer of gases called atmosphere*
- Explain that you will now read the second article, "The Inner and Outer Planets," and invite students to think about how the inner and outer planets are different.
- Share with students that you will read the passage a second time, stopping to think aloud and jot notes about how the planets are different. For example:
  - *Differences: inner planets are closer to the Sun and outer planets are further from the Sun; inner planets have solid, rocky surfaces and outer planets have no solid surfaces*
- Invite students to turn and talk, answering the following questions
- Imagine you are describing the planets of our solar system to someone who does not know about them. What would you tell them about the inner planets? The outer planets? Use your Compare and Contrast organizer to support your thinking.
- Ask a student to share their responses. Highlight that the planets have many things in common, but they also have some very significant differences.

Mini-Lesson III

Compare and Contrast Firsthand and Secondhand Accounts (30 minutes)

Background: Teaching students to read and understand primary accounts and to compare them with secondary accounts helps students build understanding of point of view and purpose of texts. Note that the explicit teaching and modeling suggestions below are based on the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson "What Are Primary and Secondary Sources?"

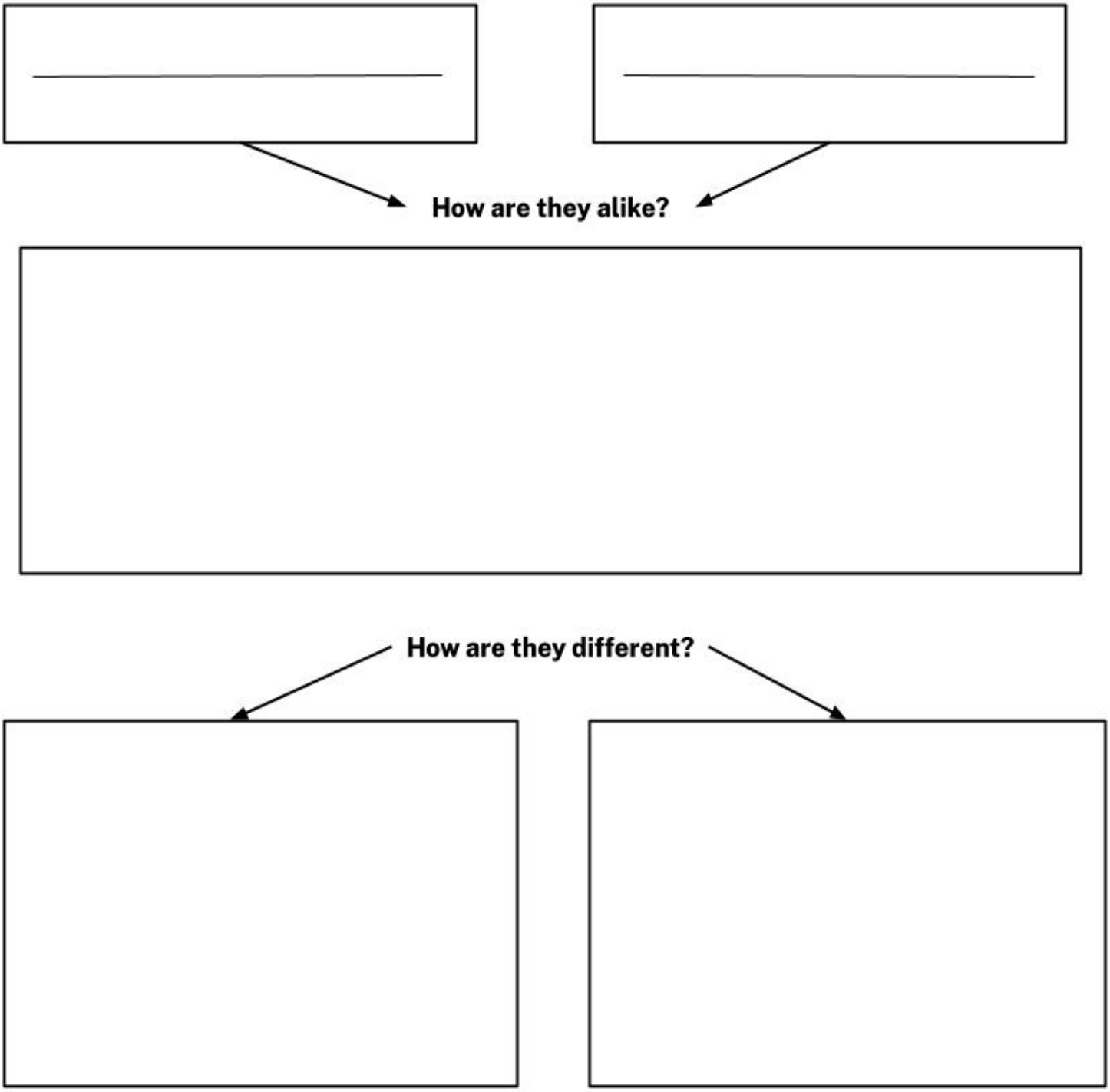
- Invite students to turn and talk to discuss what they know about the lesson vocabulary: firsthand account, secondhand account.
- Ask a student to share an accurate response, or provide definitions. For example:
  - *firsthand account: a description of an event or topic from someone who was there and experienced it*
  - *secondhand account: a description of an event or topic from someone who was not there to experience it*
- Explain that oftentimes in history and science texts, we will see both firsthand and secondhand accounts.
- Invite students to turn and talk to discuss the following questions:
  - What is the value of a firsthand account? Why might we want to read one?
  - What is the value of a secondhand account? What information might we get from it?
- Invite students to share out their answers. For example:
  - *A firsthand account can give us sensory details from the person experiencing the event. It also can tell us their perspective and their feelings about it. A secondhand account can give us more background information about the event and help us to better understand the setting of the event.*
- Distribute and review the **Compare and Contrast Firsthand and Secondhand Accounts organizer**.
- View the photo "Rosa Parks" and conduct a read-aloud of the section "Example of a Primary Source."
- Model completing the section of the organizer for Rosa Parks's quote. For example:
  - Content*: This quote is about Rosa Parks getting arrested.*
  - Creator*: The quote is from Rosa Parks, the person getting arrested.*
  - Context*: She wrote this in 1955 after getting arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white man.*
  - Connections*: I know that in the U.S. in the 1950s, there were laws that segregated Black people from white people.*
  - Communication*: She says that she couldn't take being pushed around anymore.*
  - Conclusions*: This source tells me that Rosa Parks knew that these laws were unjust and she had had enough of it.*

- Conduct a read-aloud of the paragraph that begins "Secondary sources sound very different..." from the second article in the lesson "Secondary Sources."
- Model completing the section of the organizer for this secondhand account. For example:
  - Content: *This is about Rosa Parks getting arrested.*
  - Creator: *The quote is from an encyclopedia entry.*
  - Context: *This was written at some point after Rosa Parks was arrested.*
  - Connections: *I know that in the U.S. in the 1950s, there were laws that segregated Black people from white people.*
  - Communication: *The author wants to give me information about what happened, but I don't really know what their point of view is about it.*
  - Conclusions: *This source gives me more information about the specifics of what happened when Rosa Parks was arrested.*
- Invite students to work with a partner to review their organizers, identifying similarities and differences. Ask students to share their findings. For example:
  - *The firsthand account tells us what Rosa Parks was feeling when she got arrested and what she and the arresting officer said to each other. The secondhand account gives us background information about where, when, and why she was arrested.*
- Emphasize that secondhand accounts often give us more information about the where, when, and why of an event and that firsthand accounts tell us what the people involved were thinking or feeling as the event was happening. Share that reading both firsthand and secondhand accounts of an event can help us develop a more thorough understanding of the event.

Check for Understanding

If you observe ...	Then try ...
students struggling to find similarities and differences between ideas, events, or topics	chunking the text so that students read and take notes about one idea, then another. Lead a discussion about each topic before inviting students to work in small groups to identify similarities and differences and then discuss using sentence stems such as the following: • One thing that is true about both ___ and ___ is ... • ___ is true about the first idea, but not the second. • One thing that is true about ___ but not about ___ is ...
students struggling to explain similarities and differences between ideas, events, or topics	creating visual representations as appropriate. For example, if students are comparing types of animal adaptations, invite small groups to draw and label one example of an adaptation. Have students complete a gallery walk, reviewing each group's drawing and taking notes about similarities and differences.

Compare and Contrast



Compare and Contrast Firsthand and Secondhand Accounts

1. Read each account of the event and complete the organizer.
2. Record the similarities and differences you notice.

	Firsthand Account	Secondhand Account
Content What is it about?		
Creator Who made the source?		
Context When was it created?		
Connections What do you know about the topic?		
Communication What does the creator believe?		
Conclusions What have I learned from this source?		

How are the sources similar? What is the same about them?

How are the sources different? What information is included in one but not the other?