



Compare and Contrast: Grades 6–8

OVERVIEW:

As students enter middle school, the ideas, information, and texts they encounter become increasingly more complex. One way to support students is by teaching them to use compare and contrast as a tool to analyze and evaluate information. Research has shown the benefits of using compare and contrast as a strategy when students are learning about a topic. Multiple studies have demonstrated remarkable gains in student achievement when students are explicitly taught to use compare and contrast as an analysis and evaluation strategy. In science, compare and contrast is often used as a precursor to sorting and classifying.

Mini-Lesson I

Setting a Purpose When Comparing and Contrasting (30 minutes)

Background: One of the biggest mistakes teachers make when utilizing compare and contrast in the classroom is asking students to compare without providing criteria or guidance. This often leads students to focus on surface level details. With clear criteria and expectations, students learn to look deeper to the essential attributes of the topic of study. In addition, setting the purpose and providing clear criteria keeps students focused on the relevant details. The following teaching suggestions are based on the Expedition: Learn! lesson “Limited and Unlimited Government.”

- Invite students to turn and talk to share what they know about elections.
- After a minute, invite students to share what they have discussed. Emphasize that elections are an important part of our government—they allow the people in our country to choose who will lead us.
- Explain that in this lesson, students will learn about and compare two types of government—limited and unlimited.
- Display and distribute the [Compare and Contrast organizer](#) and model. Ask students to write “Limited Government” and “Unlimited Government” at the top of the two columns.
- Share with students that they will compare and contrast the structure of these governments and should jot notes about the following: who rules or leads, how these people get their power, who the rules apply to, and how the media works.
- Explain that students will first complete the top portions of the organizer, jotting notes about each type of government. After reading and taking notes, they will compare and contrast the two types.

- Begin a read-aloud of the first passage, “Limited Governments.” Consider modeling thinking aloud as you read, jotting notes. For example:
 - *Who rules/leads: citizens, or people elected by the citizens*
 - *How these people get their power: elections*
 - *Who the rules apply to: everyone*
 - *How the media works: free*
 - *Examples: constitutional republics (South Africa, U.S.), constitutional monarchy (Bhutan)*
- Repeat the process with the second passage, “Unlimited Governments.” Consider the following points to stop, think aloud, and model jotting notes. For example:
 - *Who rules/leads: one person or small group of people (monarchs, oligarchs, dictators)*
 - *How these people get their power: birth, force, or fraud*
 - *Who the rules apply to: everyone except the leaders*
 - *How the media works: run by government, propaganda*
 - *Examples: dictatorship (North Korea, Italy under Mussolini), oligarchy (Iran), absolute monarchy (Japan before 1946)*
- After reading both passages, invite students to turn and talk, reviewing their notes and discussing how limited and unlimited governments are similar or alike.
- Invite students to share out, recording their responses on the organizer under “Similarities.” For example:
 - *have laws*
 - *have media*
 - *some people have more power than most*
- Repeat the process, inviting students to discuss how limited and unlimited governments are different and then share their ideas. Record their responses on the organizer under “Differences.” For example:
 - *In limited government, the people have power. In unlimited government, they do not.*
 - *In limited government, people elect the rulers. In unlimited government, the rulers automatically get power or take it violently.*
 - *In limited government, there is free media. In unlimited government, the government controls the media and uses propaganda.*
- *Share with students that comparing and contrasting allows us to understand a topic more thoroughly and enables us to make a well-thought-out and supported claim.*

Mini-Lesson II

Compare, Contrast, Extend (30–40 minutes)

Background: In many classrooms, the identification of similarities and differences is treated as the end of the comparison process when in reality, it is just the beginning. Students should be taught to use the similarities and differences to draw conclusions. They should extend their thinking about the significance of the similarities and differences, including how they relate to students’ understanding of concepts. The following teaching suggestions are based on the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson “The Federalist and Anti-Federalist Debate.”

- Remind students what it means to compare and contrast and why it is important. Share that when studying history, comparing and contrasting ideas, beliefs, or people can help us to better understand the context and era of a decision or event and allows us to draw conclusions or make claims.
- Introduce the topic (federal government) and share that as students read, they should pay attention to how the viewpoints of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists were similar and different.



- Display and distribute the [Compare and Contrast organizer](#). Invite students to title the columns “Federalist” and “Anti-Federalist.”
- Share with students that as they read, they should jot notes about each side’s beliefs and ideas about government.
- After reading, invite students to work in groups of three, sharing the notes that they jotted down. Invite students to share out, recording their ideas on the board. For example:
 - Federalists:
 - *A strong central government was necessary for safety and stability.*
 - *A strong central government would create stable economy.*
 - *A strong central government would not endanger personal rights and freedoms.*
 - *A strong central government would limit the influence of factions, or groups that ignore the nation’s interests in favor of their own.*
 - *A single, capable leader was necessary to make swift and informed decisions, especially in times of crisis.*
 - *Three branches of government would balance power.*
 - Anti-Federalists:
 - *Powerful central government could lead to tyranny, or absolute and oppressive rule.*
 - *A president would have as much power as a king.*
 - *Individuals and groups could work behind the scenes to control the vote and get the president they wanted.*
 - *Three branches of government could never be truly balanced*
 - *Individual states must have the power to defend their citizens’ rights.*
 - *Central government would cater only to the interests of the wealthy while the lives of working-class and poor people grew worse.*
 - *Protections for individual rights must be explained in detail to prevent the federal government from disregarding them.*
- Think aloud with students to determine similarities and differences between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Model recording on the organizer. For example:
 - Similarities:
 - *Both believed in having both state and federal government.*
 - *Both believed that people should have individual rights.*
 - Differences
 - *Federalists wanted a very strong central government, and Anti-Federalists did not.*
 - *Anti-Federalists wanted individual rights spelled out, and Federalists thought this was not needed because laws could never cover all topics. Federalists believed three branches would share power equally. Anti-Federalists did not think this was possible.*
- After completing the organizer, ask students to respond orally to the following prompts. Note the sample responses:
 - What was the argument between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists mostly about?
 - *The argument was about how much power the central (or federal) government should have in the United States.*
 - Which side do you think had a stronger argument, the Federalists or the Anti-Federalists? Which piece of their argument was the strongest?
 - *The Federalists’ belief that they needed a strong central government to protect themselves makes sense, since they had recently fought in the American Revolution and were probably concerned with defending themselves.*
 - *The Anti-Federalists’ fear of a strong central government made sense because a powerful central government could lead to abuse of power and a country where only the rich were protected, which they had felt was the case under the King.*
- Debrief the task by asking students to share their responses.



Mini-Lesson III

Using Characteristics to Classify Organisms (40 minutes)

Background: In science, classification and comparison are important because they allow students to better understand relationships and connections between objects and ideas. Additionally, systems of classification provide a language that scientists use worldwide to communicate with one another. To teach students the connection between comparison and classification refer to the following lesson in *Expedition: Learn!*

- Use the lesson “Using Characteristics to Classify Organisms” as a way to explicitly teach students how to use the skill of compare and contrast to sort and classify. This lesson introduces students to classification in the biological sciences, explaining the system and inviting students to compare and contrast living things in order to classify them.

Check for Understanding

If you observe ...

Then try ...

students struggling to make comparisons between ideas, objects, etc.

providing a word bank of common descriptors used for the items. Have students sort the descriptors based on which item it describes. After students have sorted all the descriptors they can use them to write comparative sentences. Providing students with common language used when comparing can help them focus on the skill and scaffolding their ability to describe and compare objects.

students struggling to determine which side had the stronger argument

invite students to rank their evidence before they discuss. By providing students with time to consider and rank each item they identified they are afforded time to process. In addition, many students benefit from breaking down the task to look at each piece of evidence independently from the others.



Compare and Contrast

Similarities:

Differences: