Comparing Characters in Rudyard Kipling’s “Rikki-tikki-tavi”

WRITING PRODUCT: Comparison-and-Contrast Essay

Recommended time: Approximately 4 class sessions

OVERVIEW
This lesson guides students through activities that focus on comparing characters in Rudyard Kipling’s short story “Rikki-tikki-tavi.” It culminates in the writing of a comparison-and-contrast essay.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION
Lesson activities integrate reading standards for literary response and analysis with writing standards for comparison-and-contrast essays.

OBJECTIVES
Students will do the following:
• examine the personality traits of the animal characters
• write an essay in which they compare and contrast two or three of these characters

READING FOR WRITING
Have students complete the following activity during and after reading to prepare for the writing assignment.

1. Create a chart
Purpose: to compile examples of characters’ actions and behavior.

Have students note in a chart examples of the animal characters’ thoughts, actions, and behavior. They should be sure to include the page numbers where they found the examples in case they need to refer back to them when writing their essays. Students should also tell what each example indicates about the character. Here is a sample chart:
### Character chart for “Rikki-tikki-tavi”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Thoughts, actions, and behavior</th>
<th>What it means about the character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rikki-tikki-tavi (mongoose)</td>
<td>• gets up throughout the night to check on any noise he hears (p. 76)</td>
<td>He has a lot of curiosity and wants to find out about everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuchundra (muskrat)</td>
<td>• “. . . never comes out into the middle of the floor but always creeps round by the wall . . .”(p. 74)</td>
<td>Chuchundra is bashful and doesn’t like to be seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rikki-tikki’s mother (mongoose)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darzee (tailorbird)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nag (snake)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaina (snake)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karait (snake)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The Copy Master that appears at the end of this lesson plan contains an 8 1/2 x 11 copy of a Character chart to hand out to students.

### READING THE PROMPT

Present the following writing prompt to students to focus their attention on the requirements of the writing task. In order to complete this essay, students must

- choose two or three characters to compare
- determine each character’s most important personality traits
- provide ample evidence to support their claims about the characters

**Writing Prompt**

**Writing Situation:**
In the story “Rikki-tikki-tavi,” the human characters don’t play nearly as large of a role as the animal characters do. In fact, the animals almost seem like people because Kipling gives them human characteristics.

**Writing Directions:**
Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the personalities of two or three animals in the story. Show the qualities and values the animals possess. Be sure to support your ideas with evidence from the text.

Keep the following key traits in mind as you write your essay:

**Key Traits**

**Ideas**
- Includes a thesis statement that tells how the characters are similar or different
- Supports the thesis statement with details and examples from the story

**Organization**
- Has an introduction that “hooks” the reader
• Has a well-developed main body that examines the personalities of two or three characters
• Has a conclusion that goes beyond the introduction to deepen the meaning

**Voice**
• Writes with authority, using an appropriate tone
• Shows the writer’s investment in and commitment to his or her position

**Word Choice**
• Uses precise, appropriate, and descriptive language
• Includes words such as *similarly* and *in contrast* to introduce comparisons

**Sentence Fluency**
• Varies sentence structure and length

**Conventions**
• Follows the conventions of written English

---

Note: The Copy Master that appears at the end of this lesson plan contains an 8 1/2 x 11 copy of the Writing Prompt to hand out to students.

Have students underline the key words and phrases in the Writing Directions that tell them what they need to do in the essay.

**PLANNING**
After students have read the prompt, have them complete these activities to help them prepare their responses.

1. **Cluster the characters’ traits**
   Purpose: to help prepare students for writing about the characters’ personality traits.

   Using their Character charts as a reference, students should take a few minutes to cluster the personality traits of the characters. Complete one or two examples together as a class and then have students cluster the remaining characters on their own. Here are some examples:

   ![Cluster Example](image)

   - Curious, good, confident, lovable, brave, loyal, protective, fighter of evil, emotional, afraid, scatterbrained

2. **Review clusters**
   Purpose: to choose two or three characters to compare in the essay.
After completing their clusters, students should decide which characters they would like to write about in their essay. Tell them to decide, based on their clusters, how similar or different the characters are and then choose which two or three would be most appropriate for comparing and contrasting. Students might find it helpful to highlight any similar traits they find among the characters in order to make the similarities and differences more obvious.

Once they’ve chosen the characters they would like to write about, students should decide which traits are most important for each character. These are the traits they will want to focus on in the essay.

3. **Brainstorm additional details/Organize ideas**  
   **Purpose:** to develop ideas and collect information for drafting the essay.

Ask students to review what they are being asked to do in their essays. Then have them look back at their Character charts and clusters. After looking over these materials, students should brainstorm any other additional ideas they might have and put a checkmark next to any details that they would like to include in their essays.

4. **Develop a thesis statement**  
   **Purpose:** to form a thesis statement around which to build the essay.

After brainstorming for additional details and organizing their notes, students should develop a thesis statement that tells the main point of their essay. The thesis statement should make a claim about how two or three characters in the story are similar or different.

**DRAFTING, SHARING, AND REVISIONING**  
These activities will take students through the rest of the writing process.

1. **Structure the introductory paragraph**  
   **Purpose:** to help students lay down the foundation of their essays.

Have students consider what kind of attention grabber or hook they can begin their essay with. They could, for example, describe an exciting moment or include a quotation from the story or pose a thought-provoking question. Instruct students to follow their hook with a TAG—a sentence that identifies the Title, Author, and Genre of the literature selection. Students should then conclude the introductory paragraph with their thesis statement. A sample introductory paragraph follows:

“He is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed...”  
**Hook**  
So begins the short story “Rikki-tikki-tavi” by Rudyard Kipling.  
**TAG**  
Immediately, the reader is presented with the struggle of the mongoose Rikki-tikki in his battle against Nag and Nagaina, the deadly cobras who want control of the garden. While Rikki-tikki is the embodiment of good—brave, honorable, and loyal in his protection of himself and others—Nag and Nagaina are the embodiment of evil, proving themselves to be selfish, sneaky, and threatening to the other animals.  
**Thesis Statement**

2. **Complete a Microtheme**  
   **Purpose:** to assist students in structuring their essays to ensure they have an organizational plan, key ideas, and enough supporting evidence from the text.
Distribute copies of the Microtheme form that is included in the Copy Master at the end of this lesson plan and have students transfer their introductory paragraphs to the appropriate place. Once their Microthemes are finished, students might do a pair/share to help one another make sure that the introductory paragraphs have a thesis statement, that the body paragraphs have supporting ideas, and that the conclusion is strong.

3. Write the first draft
Purpose: to get ideas down on paper in an appropriate essay format.

Refer students to the writing prompt and have them review the key traits for the essay. Students should use this information, along with their completed Microthemes, to write the first draft of their essays.

4. Complete word choice and sentence fluency activity
Purpose: to improve sentence flow in the essay.

Tell students that an appositive is a word or phrase that identifies or renames a noun or pronoun that comes right before it. Commas should be used to set off an appositive when it adds extra information, but they should not be used when the information is necessary to make the meaning clear. Appositives and appositive phrases allow a writer to include information about someone or something without having to add another sentence.

For example, Kipling wrote, “It was Darzee, the tailorbird, and his wife.” Ask students to name the appositive phrase in the example (the tailorbird). Point out that if Kipling hadn’t used an appositive to convey that same information, he would have needed two sentences: It was Darzee and his wife. Darzee was the tailorbird. Kipling often uses appositives to introduce and identify the characters in “Rikki-tikki-tavi.” Here are some additional examples from the story:

- Then inch by inch out of the grass rose up the head and spread hood of Nag, the big black cobra, and he was five feet long from tongue to tail. (lines 90–92)
- He jumped up in the air as high as he could go, and just under him whizzed by the head of Nagaina, Nag’s wicked wife. (lines 117–119)
- It was Karait, the dusty brown snakeling that lies for choice on the dusty earth; and his bite is as dangerous as the cobra’s. (lines 148–149)
- . . . in the dark he ran up against Chuchundra, the muskrat, creeping around by the wall. (lines 191–192)

Students should look back at their drafts and see if there are any places where they could use appositives or appositive phrases to make their writing smoother, such as when identifying characters.

5. Engage in share/respond
Purpose: to give and receive feedback about whether the first draft meets the requirements of the prompt.

Once the first drafts are complete, have students pass them to the person behind them. Distribute copies of the Response Guide, located in the Copy Master, so that students can provide feedback for each other. Have students carefully read the essays and thoughtfully complete the Response Guides. All students should end up reading three different students’ drafts. This provides good practice for the readers and gives more feedback to the writers.
6. Fill out a Revision Plan
Purpose: to strengthen the clarity of ideas, organization, and language.
Distribute a copy of the Revision Plan form, located in the Copy Master, to students. Review the key traits section of the writing prompt with the class and have students carefully read the three completed Response Guides for their essays. With the information culled from the Response Guides, students should decide what changes to make to their essays and add these items to their Revision Plan form. (If students choose to disregard any of their partners’ suggestions, they should explain why on the form.) Students should then prepare their revised copies.

EDITING

Proofread in read-around groups
Purpose: to focus on the technical correctness of the essay.
Students should check each other’s papers to ensure that proper English conventions have been maintained. Writers should make corrections as necessary.

EVALUATION

Refer to the Student Writing and Teacher’s Assessment Criteria
Purpose: to use as a guide for revising and as an assessment tool.
Give students the criteria for an exemplary paper, as shown on the Student Writing and Teacher’s Assessment Criteria form in the Copy Master. Students may use this guide when revising their papers. Teachers can also adapt these criteria into a scoring rubric.
Would you repeatedly risk your own life to save the lives of others? This is what the main character does in the short story “Rikki-tikki-tavi” by Rudyard Kipling. While Rikki-tikki is the embodiment of good—brave, honorable, and loyal in his protection of himself and others—Nag and Nagaina are the embodiment of evil, proving themselves to be selfish, sneaky, and threatening to the other animals.

Nag and Nagaina, the husband-and-wife cobras, are hated and feared by all of the other animals in the garden, who see the snakes as a threat to their lives. Indeed, Nag and Nagaina are determined to kill every animal and family member living at the house so that they can have the entire place to themselves. The first time Rikki-tikki encounters the snakes, for example, Nagaina sneaks up on Rikki-tikki and tries to strike him while he talks to her husband Nag. If the tailorbird Darzee had not warned Rikki-tikki, he might not have escaped Nagaina’s bite. And that was not the only time the snakes had tried to strike at someone. Just one day before Rikki-tikki’s encounter with them, Nag had eaten one of Darzee’s babies.

Although he fears the cobras, Rikki-tikki has the courage to face his fear. He knows that all the other animals and the family members depend on his assistance. Time and again, he proves his loyalty and bravery to those around him. He protects Teddy, the boy, from the snakeling Karait by biting Karait on the neck. Later, when Rikki-tikki hears Nag and Nagaina plotting to kill the family, he lies in wait until he can attack Nag while he sleeps. Afterwards, Darzee sings out in praise of Rikki-tikki, “Let us sing about the great, the red-eyed Rikki-tikki!” Rather than pausing to brag about his success, though, Rikki-tikki marches on to face his greatest challenge of all: Nagaina. After destroying all but one of her eggs, eggs that would have soon turned into baby cobras, he confronts Nagaina just as she is about to strike at Teddy. By distracting her with the remaining egg, Rikki-tikki gives the father time to pull Teddy out of harm’s way. After Nagaina manages to take hold of the egg and slither off, Rikki-tikki gives chase, following her right down into a rat hole. All the animals give Rikki-tikki up for dead, but he soon emerges triumphant, having killed Nagaina in the hole.

Unlike the cobras, who kill to benefit themselves, Rikki-tikki kills in defense of himself and others. Though the cobras undoubtedly consider themselves and their plots very clever, they
are repeatedly outsmarted by the brave mongoose. Rikki-tikki does more than just prove himself to be brave, honorable, and loyal, though. He teaches the cobras, and the reader, that good will always triumph over evil.
Copy Masters

(CM)
Writing Prompt

**Writing Situation:**
In the story “Rikki-tikki-tavi,” the human characters don’t play nearly as large of a role as the animal characters do. In fact, the animals almost seem like people because Kipling gives them human characteristics.

**Writing Directions:**
Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the personalities of two or three animals in the story. Show the qualities and values the animals possess. Be sure to support your ideas with evidence from the text.

Keep the following key traits in mind as you write your essay:

**Key Traits**

**Ideas**
- Includes a thesis statement that tells how the characters are similar or different
- Supports the thesis statement with details and examples from the story

**Organization**
- Has an introduction that “hooks” the reader
- Has a well-developed main body that examines the personalities of two or three characters
- Has a conclusion that goes beyond the introduction to deepen the meaning

**Voice**
- Writes with authority, using an appropriate tone
- Shows the writer’s investment in and commitment to his or her position

**Word Choice**
- Uses precise, appropriate, and descriptive language
- Includes words such as similarly and in contrast to introduce comparisons

**Sentence Fluency**
- Varies sentence structure and length

**Conventions**
- Follows the conventions of written English
**Character chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Thoughts, actions, and behavior</th>
<th>What it means about the character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rikki-tikki-tavi (mongoose)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuchundra (muskrat)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rikki-tikki’s mother (mongoose)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darzee (tailorbird)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nag (snake)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaina (snake)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karait (snake)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Microtheme

**Introduction:** To hook my reader, I could begin my paper one of the following ways ...

- 
- 
- 

**Thesis:** The claim I want to make and support in my essay is as follows:

- 
- 
- 

**Main Body:**

**Main points I want to make:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Specific references from the text to support my main points:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Conclusion:** A feeling, impression, or message that I want to leave my reader with is . . .
Response Guide for “Rikki-tikki-tavi” Essay

Writer______________________ Reader_____________________

Introductory paragraph
1. What method—a quotation or a question, for example—does the essay writer use to hook the reader?

2. Does the introductory paragraph include a TAG and a thesis statement?

3. What claim does the essay writer make in the thesis statement?

Supporting paragraphs
4. What story details does the essay writer use to support his or her thesis statement?

5. Does the writer include enough details, or should he or she have included more?

Concluding paragraph
6. Does the conclusion do more than just restate the introduction? Explain.

Overall essay
7. Does the writer sound authoritative and use appropriate language?

8. Does the writer vary the sentence structure and length?

9. What are the strengths of this essay?

10. How could the writer improve this essay?
Revision Plan

1. Did the reader(s) correctly identify the claim you were trying to make in your thesis? If not, how could you make your claim clearer?

2. Did the reader(s) think you included enough details to support your claim?

3. What other comments and questions did the reader(s) have about your paper? Do you think the comments and questions are valid? Why or why not?

4. Make a plan for revision. What specific items need to be revised? In what order are you going to work on them?
An **exemplary** paper is superior in its insight, organization, and language. It has most or all of the following characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Includes a clear thesis statement that tells how the characters are similar or different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supports the thesis statement with ample evidence from the story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Has a compelling introduction that “hooks” the reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has a well-developed main body that examines the personalities of two or three characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has a thoughtful conclusion that goes beyond the introduction to deepen the comparison</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Writes with authority, using an appropriate tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shows the writer’s investment in and commitment to his or her position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Uses precise, appropriate, and descriptive language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Includes words such as <em>similarly</em> and <em>in contrast</em> to introduce comparisons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Varies sentence structure and length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seamlessly integrates any quotations from the story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Has few, if any, errors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copyright © McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin Company.