

Comparing and Contrasting Texts

LAFS

6.RI.3.9: 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).

Theme: *American Icons*

If you've ever read two articles about a movie star, you often come away with two different impressions. Even if two pieces of writing are about the same topic, they don't always present the same ideas. Each author might have a different purpose for writing, a different point of view about the topic, or access to different information. For example, an author writing a **biography**, or a true account of a person's life, will have a different perspective than the person writing his or her own **autobiography** that tells about the same events from personal experience.

Read the following texts. The first describes the 1969 moon landing from the viewpoint of a woman who saw the event. The second is from a student's history report.

I'll never forget the day that *Apollo 11* landed on the moon. It was July 20, 1969, and I had just turned 12. Although it took place late on a Sunday night our time, my parents let me stay up past my bedtime to join the millions of people watching Neil Armstrong take the first step on the moon's surface. I still recall how my imagination raced. Would I be able to live on the moon one day? At that moment, anything seemed possible.

At 10:56 PM Eastern Daylight Time on Sunday, July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first person to set foot on the surface of the moon. Astronaut Buzz Aldrin followed Armstrong onto the lunar surface 20 minutes later. These historic events were broadcast from the moon's surface and watched by perhaps the largest television audience ever—approximately half a billion people around the world.

Now read both accounts a second time. Circle information that is similar in both texts. Then underline details in each text that do not appear in the other.

Both texts discuss the same event, but each author wrote for a different purpose. The first author discusses her personal experience. The second author writes to inform readers.

When reading different texts on the same topic, you can compare and contrast the authors' purposes and points of view. This can help you understand why each author chose to include certain details and leave out others.



Read the following short biography of Amelia Earhart.

Genre: Biography

Born to Fly *by Ann Randall*

Amelia Earhart didn't always dream of becoming an aviator. While she had seen airplanes growing up, it wasn't until her early twenties that she realized she was born to fly. When Earhart was 20 years old, she and a friend attended a stunt-flying contest. Their fun ended, however, when one of the planes came zooming toward them. In spite of the danger, Earhart stood firm, displaying the same fearlessness that she would continue to show all her life. This encounter proved to be a sign of things to come: just a few years later, Earhart found herself flying inside an airplane.

On December 28, 1920, pilot Frank Hawks changed Earhart's life by taking her on her first plane ride. It was then that she knew she was meant to be in the air. Earhart attended her first flying lesson just five days later, and by 1922, she was already setting records: She became the first woman to fly to an altitude of 14,000 feet. Over the next 15 years, Earhart would continue to make her mark on the record books time and time again, proving that flying was truly in her blood.

Explore how to answer this question: *"How does the author's purpose influence the focus of the text and the details presented?"*

The author wants to focus on the early part of Earhart's life to explain her passion for flying. Which facts has the author presented to show how Earhart's experiences started her on the path to becoming a famous and fearless aviator?

On the lines below, explain the author's purpose. Find evidence from the text to support your answer.

With a partner, discuss the author's point of view about Amelia Earhart and how these feelings are shown throughout the text. How might the author's point of view toward Earhart have affected her choice of details and her presentation of events?



Read another biography of Amelia Earhart. Use the Close Reading and the Hint to complete the activity.

Genre: Biography

Earhart on Equality *by Brian Vargas*

As a famous female aviator, Amelia Earhart did much to advance equality for women. In 1928, she became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, and she spent the rest of her life fearlessly flying farther, faster. Earhart was first to fly many long, dangerous routes, and she encouraged other women to fly. She championed women in the sciences as a guest professor at Purdue University. She said, "Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others."

Close Reading

Underline important facts about Amelia Earhart that the author includes in this biography. What do they help you understand about Earhart? Why might the author have chosen to include them?

Hint

Both biographies contain some of the same facts, but the authors use them differently. How does this help convey different messages about Amelia Earhart?

Fill in the chart below based on the two biographies you read.

Write facts that are different under the title of each biography. Write facts that are similar in the two biographies under Both.

"Born to Fly"	Both	"Earhart on Equality"



Show Your Thinking

On a separate piece of paper, write two paragraphs comparing and contrasting the information provided in the biographies on pages 188 and 189.



With a partner, discuss why these two biographies about Earhart are different. Consider the authors' purposes for writing, their points of view, and the information they chose.



Read the following memoir and biography about Helen Keller. Use the Study Buddies and the Close Readings to guide your reading.

Genre: Memoir



As I read, I'll think about how Helen Keller's memory and emotions influence her writing.

Close Reading

Circle words in the title and first two sentences that tell you who is writing this passage.

Underline words and phrases that show Keller's thoughts and feelings. What do you think she wants the reader to understand?

from *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller

- 1 My teacher had been with me several weeks before I understood that everything had a name. One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled “d-o-l-l” and tried to make me understand that “d-o-l-l” applied to both. Earlier in the day we had had a tussle over the word “m-u-g.” Miss Sullivan had tried to impress it upon me that “m-u-g” is *mug* and that “w-a-t-e-r” is *water*, but I persisted in confounding the two. In despair she had dropped the subject for the time, only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor. I felt my teacher sweep the fragments to one side of the hearth, and I had a sense of satisfaction that the cause of my discomfort was removed. She brought me my hat, and I knew I was going out into the warm sunshine.
- 2 We walked down the path to the well-house. Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!



Genre: Biography



I wonder why the author wanted to write this biography of Helen Keller. I'm going to look for clues that help me understand her purpose.

Close Reading

What event is described in Keller's memoir on page 190? **Box** the information about the same event in this biography.

Underline at least three important facts that the author of this biography includes that are not present in Helen Keller's memoir. How do these facts help you know the author's purpose for writing is different than Keller's?

A Remarkable Life

by Mary Wilkes

- 1 For a year and a half after Helen Keller's birth on June 27, 1880, she was a healthy, bright child. She started to talk at six months old and walked at one. However, all of that changed when, in February of 1882, she came down with a high fever. Although she survived, her family soon discovered that the illness had left her blind and deaf.
- 2 Young Helen found ways to cope with her new situation, such as developing a limited system of signs with a playmate. By the time she was seven, though, she had also become wild and undisciplined. Desperate, her family finally contacted the Perkins Institute for the Blind, which recommended a recent graduate, Anne Sullivan, to work with Helen. Of course, most people know the story of how Sullivan helped Helen realize that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the liquid running over her hand. Helen learned thirty new words that first day and went on to quickly master finger signs, touch-lip reading, and Braille reading and typing.
- 3 Determined to complete college, Helen graduated with high honors from Radcliffe in 1904; she also wrote and published her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, in 1903. She wrote ten other books and many articles in her lifetime. Her greatest achievements, however, were her efforts to help others around the country and throughout the world. Many of her visits prompted the creation of new resources for blind and deaf-blind individuals. Because she could relate to people's difficulties, she worked with leaders to improve their situations. Everywhere she went, she spread a message of strength and courage, a legacy that stands to this day.



Hints

Think about the kinds of facts provided by each author. Why do they include these facts? What do they each hope to achieve?

What text did you draw a box around in the biography on page 191?

What do you learn from a memoir that you can't from a biography? How does learning about many parts of a person's life in a biography help you understand one part?

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- 1 How does Helen Keller's purpose for writing her memoir differ from that of the biographer who wrote about her life?
 - A Helen tries to inform people about the facts of her life, but the biographer wants people to know about Helen's personality.
 - B Helen tries to explain her childhood actions, while the biographer writes to tell people about Helen's wild childhood.
 - C Helen wants to reflect on her experiences, while the biographer writes to inform people about events in Helen Keller's life.
 - D Helen wants to entertain people by describing her point of view, but the biographer wants to amaze people with facts.

- 2 What event appears both in Helen Keller's memoir and the biography of Helen Keller?
 - A how she lost both her hearing and sight
 - B how she learned that things have names
 - C how she learned to touch-read people's lips
 - D how she helped the blind all over the world

- 3 Describe how the two accounts of Helen Keller's life are different. Think about the event they both describe. Explain what you learn from the memoir compared to what you learn from the biography. Use at least two details from the text in your response.



Read the two articles about the creation of Spider-Man. Then answer the questions that follow.

Stan Lee and Spider-Man

by Simmi Patel

1 Spider-Man is a popular comic book superhero who continues to delight his fans some 50 years after his creation. In the autobiography *Excelsior! The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, his creator, Stan Lee explains his version of how Spider-Man came to life.

2 Stan Lee had been working in the comic book business for over twenty years. He wanted to create a hero who had a realistic life in addition to superpowers. Lee presented his idea to his boss and publisher, Martin Goodman.

3 “I told Martin I wanted to feature a hero who had just a touch of super strength but his main power was that he could stick to walls and ceilings,” Lee says.¹ Lee explained that his hero, Spider-Man, would also be a normal teenager. Spider-Man would be raised by his Aunt May and Uncle Ben and have all the normal problems of an adolescent. The hero would be worried about money, allergies, girls, and anything else that Lee could think of.

4 According to Lee, the creation of Spider-Man had sprung from his reading as a child. One of his favorite magazines was called *The Spider—Master of Men*, and Lee loved that name. He remembers the character wearing a slouch hat and a special spider ring. If The Spider hit someone, he would leave the impression of a spider on his victim. Although Lee remembers The Spider vividly, he clarified that this character never had superpowers like Spider-Man.

5 According to Lee, Martin Goodman hated his idea. Goodman felt that a superhero couldn’t be a teenager with personal problems. He said that Spider-Man seemed more like a comedy character than a powerful superhero. Since most people don’t like spiders, Goodman thought that the name “Spider-Man” was a terrible choice.

6 But Lee couldn’t give up on his idea of Spider-Man. He gave artist Jack Kirby a plot line for Spider-Man and asked him to illustrate it. As Lee tells it, “Jack started to draw, but when I saw that he was making our main character, Peter Parker, a powerful-looking, handsome, self-confident typical hero type, I realized that wasn’t the style I was looking for. So I took Jack off the project. He couldn’t care less because he had so many other strips to draw at the time, and Spider-Man wasn’t exactly our top-of-the-line character.”²

7 Lee reassigned the project to Steve Ditko, who used a more subtle and stylized style of drawing. Ditko’s rendition was exactly what Lee had in mind. They finished the comic strip, and it was published in the last issue of *Amazing Fantasy* in 1962. When sales figures of that publication came in, they showed that the Spider-Man issue was a huge success. According to Lee, Goodman ran into Lee’s office to congratulate himself

¹ Stan Lee and George Mair. *Excelsior! The Amazing Life of Stan Lee* (New York: Fireside, 2002) p. 126.

² Lee and Mair, p. 127.



and Lee on the new character. Lee says, “I can still hear his now-classic comment, ‘Stan, remember that Spider-Man idea of yours that I liked so much? Why don’t we turn it into a series?’”³

8 Spider-Man became one of the most successful comic book characters ever. When Spider-Man headed up Marvel comic books’ line of heroes, sales increased from 7 million copies in 1961 to 13 million copies in 1962.⁴

9 After Steve Ditko stopped drawing Spider-Man, artist John Romita took over. He slowly incorporated his own style, and Peter became tall and handsome as he grew up. The characters gradually took on a new look, and the Spider-Man comic strip continued to increase in popularity.

³ Lee and Mair, p. 128.

⁴ Lee and Mair, p. 132.

The Birth of Spider-Man

by Max Bruno

1 What do you think of when you hear the name Spider-Man? A superhero who can cling to almost anything? Devices that shoot spider webs? A “spider sense” to outwit enemies?

2 Since his appearance in the early 1960s, Spider-Man has been different than other comic book superheroes. Initially, he was a teenager who had to deal with loneliness, rejection, and other realistic problems. Over the years, Peter Parker went to college, got married, taught high school, and became a freelance photographer. By 2011, he had become a member of two superhero teams, the Avengers and the Fantastic Four. But how did Spider-Man crawl into existence?

3 In his autobiography, *Excelsior! The Amazing Life of Stan Lee*, Lee explains his version of the birth of Spider-Man. Stan Lee had been working in the comic book business since 1939. Lee always wanted to be a writer, and he began by writing comic book text filler. Later, he wrote features and became an editor before he was 20. According to Lee, he had been trying to develop a superhero who also needed to deal with the normal problems of daily life. He presented his idea to his boss, Martin Goodman. Lee maintains that Goodman thought Spider-Man was a terrible idea.

4 Lee claims he asked artist Jack Kirby to illustrate his plot line but later reassigned the job to artist Steve Ditko. Lee liked Ditko’s stylized approach. The comic strip was published in 1962, and it became a huge success.

5 Others, however, have called Lee’s version of events into question. In the book *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book*, authors Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon take a different viewpoint. They claim that the original Spider-Man was the result of the work of several artists and writers. Stan Lee wanted to create a spider superhero, but artist Jack Kirby also wanted to draw an insect superhero. Raphael and Spurgeon explain, “Stan Lee expressed the desire to do a teenage superhero using the spider motif. Jack Kirby had long wanted to do an insect-related superhero.” Kirby started to put together a slightly different version of the tale. He rejected “some of the more fantastic Lee story elements,” instead adding “a kindly aunt and uncle, and giving the superhero a secret origin revolving around a neighbor who happened to be a scientist.”¹

¹ Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon, *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book* (Chicago Review Press, 2003), p. 93.



6 The character of Spider-Man was eventually given to artist Steve Ditko. He worked from a story summary and Kirby’s ideas, and eventually he created the drawings of Spider-Man and Peter Parker with “bottle-thick glasses, slumped shoulders, and a homemade costume. Ditko was nearly as sharp as Kirby when it came to shaping characters in ways that would make them effective on the page. The Spider-Man millions of readers came to know and love got his youth and voice from Stan Lee and his human frailty from Steve Ditko.”² And the first cover drawing of Spider-Man was drawn by Jack Kirby.

7 According to Raphael and Spurgeon, Lee often built on contributions from other artists. Comic book publishers tried to produce as many books as possible in a short amount of time, and Lee encouraged everyone to contribute ideas. As more writers and artists were hired, everyone shared ideas. Later, legal and financial questions arose regarding who actually created which comic book character. But during the early 1960s, superhero comic books flourished through this collaborative process.

² Raphael and Spurgeon, pp. 93–94.

Answer Form

- 1 (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 2 (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 3 (A) (B) (C) (D)

Number Correct **3**

1 How does the author’s purpose for writing the first article, “Stan Lee and Spider-Man,” differ from the author’s purpose for writing “The Birth of Spider-Man”?

- A The first author describes Stan Lee’s version of the creation of Spider-Man. The second explains that there are different versions of how Spider-Man was created.
- B The first author wants readers to understand why Stan Lee is so popular. The second wants readers to understand why Spider-Man is so popular.
- C The first author wants readers to reflect on Stan Lee’s point of view. The second wants readers to reflect on facts about Stan Lee’s career.
- D The first author wants to describe Stan Lee’s vision of Spider-Man. The second wants to describe Jack Kirby’s vision of Spider-Man.

2 What did **both** authors want the reader to understand about Martin Goodman and the creation of the Spider-Man character?

- A Martin Goodman headed the team who developed the Spider-Man concept.
- B Martin Goodman respected Stan Lee’s decisions as a writer.
- C Martin Goodman shaped the character to make him effective on the page.
- D Martin Goodman didn’t deserve credit for the creation of Spider-Man.

