

Writing a Comparison/Contrast Paragraph on Character Using “The Clumsy One” by Ernest Buckler

Definition

A **character** is a word construction of a human being whose person is revealed to the reader by means of:

- his actions
- his speech
- what other characters say about him
- what the narrator tells the reader (appearance, environment, social and/or economic status, etc.)

Characters must have sufficient and plausible **motivation** (what causes a character to do what he does) in order for the reader to find the story realistic or effective. Usually circumstance and temperament determine a character's actions.

Types of Characters

1. **Round** – are lifelike and realistic having several sides to their natures, strengths as well as weaknesses. There is enough detail given about them to render them full and memorable. These characters may also **be dynamic** because they recognize, change with, or adjust to circumstances. As a result there is generally a significant, lasting change which may be revealed by action, realization of a new strength, the acceptance of a new condition and subsequent action, or the discovery of an unrecognized truth. Generally, the round character plays a prominent role in the story and may be the story's **protagonist**.
2. **Flat** - are limited in their development and do not grow or change. They may have only one apparent quality. Because they end where they begin, they are **static**. Typically, they will be minor characters. They are used to highlight the development of the round characters.
3. Often in a story there is a **foil**, a character whose behaviour, attitudes, and opinion contrast with those of the protagonist. The foil helps the reader to understand better the character and motivation of the protagonist.

To help write about characters in a short story, one should first process the following:

Ask specific questions to help in pre-writing

1. Who is the main character? What do you know about him from his actions, speech, appearance, environment, social/economic status, and what others and /or the narrator says about him ?
2. Which characters oppose the main character? How do the main character and the opposing character interact? What is the effect of these interactions?

3. Is the character round and dynamic? How does the character recognize, change with, or adjust to circumstances?
4. Is the character flat or static? What function does he serve? For example, does he serve to bring out qualities of the main character? How?
5. Is the character lifelike or unreal? Consistent or inconsistent? Believable or not?

Organize the discussion on character (possible approaches to writing on character in a story)

1. Focus on showing *how* a central trait or major characteristic is developed by the author (speeches by others, actions by the character, etc.).
2. Explain the dynamic character's growth or change. (Not only describe the changing traits but also analyze how they are brought out within the work.)
3. Identify key actions, objects, or quotations that serve as signposts or guides to understanding the character.
4. Consider the function and significance of the flat character. Is he a stereotype? What is his relationship to the round character?
5. In your conclusion show how the character's traits are related to the work as a whole. Examples: if the person is good but came to a bad end, does this misfortune make him or her seem especially worthy? If the person suffers, does this fact suggest any attitudes about the class or type of people of which he is a part? Does it illustrate the author's general view of human life?
6. Compare and contrast characters. Are the characters foils to one another?

Observe the Guidelines to writing a comparison/contrast paragraph

- a. **There must be a purpose** for the comparison/contrast. For example, it could show your liking of one particular story over another or emphasize a method or idea you think is especially important or appropriate. To simply compare and contrast two characters is **not** an adequate reason!
- b. There are two methods of organization:
 1. Make all your points about one work and then about the other.
 2. Refer to both characters in your discussion of each argument.

Note: The second method is superior for at least two reasons: you do not have to repeat your points for you develop them as you raise them; secondly, by constantly referring to the two, you make your points without requiring a reader with a poor memory to reread previous

sections.

- c. Avoid bouncing back and forth with your points in a 1,2, 1,2, 1,2 arrangement. This is repetitive and doesn't allow for much explanation.

For example:

Joanne is a young married woman; Mrs. Smith is also young but a widow. Joanne has a social life, even though she doesn't have more than one friend. Mrs. Smith chooses a life of solitude. Joanne dreams about becoming wealthy. Mrs. Smith is wealthy but isn't happy. Joanne is made unhappy because of her own shortcomings, but Mrs. Smith is saved because of her defects in character. In the end each becomes a stronger person by recognizing her deficiencies.

SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS

The following paragraphs compare and contrast the siblings in the short story "The Clumsy One" by Ernest Buckler.

1.

In the story "The Clumsy One" by Ernest Buckler there are two brothers, David and Danny. David is the older bro whose strengths lie in his abilities to work with his hands. He can plough a field, saw wood, and work long hours lifting heavy logs without rest. His younger brother, Danny, is physically weak by contrast. He cannot plough a field properly, or saw wood, or carry heavy logs for long periods of time. However, Danny's strength is his brains. He is good at book learning. David is not. So Danny gets to go to college and David stays behind to work on the farm. You would think that David would be jealous of Danny, but, in fact, he is not. David does all he can to protect and encourage Danny, while Danny, in turn, snaps at David and in one instance is very mean to him and thinks his brother is also mean to him in retaliation. What Danny does is he doesn't introduce David to his college friends when they come to visit and speaks to them in a way David wouldn't understand just to show how great Danny is. He makes sure that David overhears their conversation. Then afterwards Danny feels sorry he did this to his bro, but cannot bring himself to talk about it with him. David, meanwhile, humiliates Danny another day by not allowing him time to rest and thus showing Danny's weakness in front of the other workers. What Danny comes to realize is that David did that to help Danny; he didn't want Danny to feel bad anymore about what Danny had done to him. In the end brothers can be different from one another, but if they love one another, it's okay.

2.

The sometimes tumultuous relationship of two brothers is presented in “The Clumsy One” by Ernest Buckler to show how the protagonist, Danny, comes to realize something important about his own character and that of his brother, David. On the first impression they appear to be foils to one another; but, actually they share a significant value: a deep love and respect for one another. It is through the elements that make them foils to one another and through their immature actions and hurtful speech that the protagonist discovers the depth of the love his brother has for him. On the farm Danny tries to be as accomplished as his older brother, David in contributing to the physical chores that need to be done, but is always falling short of his brother’s aptitude and physical strength. At these times he becomes rude and gets angry at his brother but his brother responds with patience.

“You’re trying to plough too deep, Dan,” David said.
The hairspring broke. “Oh, is that so!” I shouted. “Well, do
it yourself then, if you’re so smart.”
I turned to leave the field. When I was in a temper, the anger
seemed to strike all light and breath out of the place.
I was standing, like a blow in the stomach.
“Danny! For God’s *sake*,” David said. Not angrily, but
patiently. Because, for all his own quiet mind, he
understood me so well he knew there was no sting of meaning
in the words I couldn’t stop. (Buckler, p. 56)

One wonders if this is just an adolescent showing anger just to save face, or if he wanted to give his brother’s talents recognition. Perhaps this foreshadows Danny’s self-realization at the end of the story. In contrast, Danny’s potential lay in his intellect so Danny goes off to college while David must remain on the farm. Yet, there is no ill-will or jealousy on David’s part not even when Danny “always had the best of things.” However, there were two incidents, two pranks, that each brother play upon one another which crystallize for the reader the exact nature of their relationship. Danny, for his part, tries to hurt his brother by showing off to his college friends who visit him on the farm one day when he and his brother are working the land. “I still talked their way, for him to hear. I let him believe that the glibness of my mind and theirs was a strangeness between him and people like us that he could never hope to overcome. That he wouldn’t fit in with us at all. I put him outside, in the cruelest way it is possible to be put outside.” Ironically, their respective pride does not allow an apology to occur. “How could my mind show me the answer now, the mind my brother was always so proud of, though he couldn’t speak his pride-when it was that mind which I had used as the instrument to strike him!” David, however, resolves the impasse when uncharacteristically he exhausts Danny and does not allow him any breaks. When David dismisses him in front of the others, Danny thought it is a matter of revenge and that David “must hate me now” for in the past David would always protect Danny. “I remembered the night David had taken me

[Continued]

on his shoulders when I stumbled on the path from camp and carried me all the rest of the way home; pretending not only to the other kids but to me too that he thought I'd broken a bone in my ankle. So that even with him I needn't have the shame of tiring before the rest." David, however, didn't hate Danny at all. Danny comes to understand by being called by his brother a simple name "as old and earthy as the land he hoed" that things were "one hundred percent perfect" between them. Danny, at this instant, realizes the point of "doing something as mean to me as I had done to him" was done to allow Danny to forgive himself for being cruel to David. In fact, Danny realizes that David was *not* "the clumsy one" at all; Danny is.

Quick Scale: Grade 10 Writing About Character

Writing is usually required to be carefully revised, edited, and proofread.

| Aspect | Not Yet Within Expectations | Meets Expectations (Minimal Level) | Fully Meets Expectations | Exceeds Expectations |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| <i>SNAPSHOT</i> | <i>The writing features problems with style, form, and mechanics that make it difficult to determine the purpose and meaning. Reflects little knowledge of character and writing conventions and techniques.</i> | <i>The writing is generally clear, with a beginning, middle, and end. Development may seem uneven. The writer has difficulty controlling the form and style. Tends to tell about characters rather than “show” them.</i> | <i>The writing is clear and carefully developed, with some sense of audience and purpose. Some variety and engaging features. May overexplain in places, telling rather than showing.”</i> | <i>The writing creates an impact, with a sense of vitality, economy, and finesse. Features some complex, engaging ideas, language, structures, and techniques. Relies on “showing,” not telling. Good comprehension of character.</i> |
| MEANING • sense of audience • understanding of character • types • characteristics • development • presentation • support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> little sense of audience or purpose (unfocussed) may be too short with few examples and details no underlying structure or development (ideas not developed) inadequate material and understanding of character and its elements details, examples, or quotes not clearly linked to character description | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some sense of audience; little impact includes basic understanding of character easy-to-follow development with a simple understanding of character simple details, examples, or quotes sometimes linked to description of character | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sense of audience; some impact clear, focused thesis with sound understanding of elements of character clearly and logically developed demonstrating good understanding of character relevant details and examples support main ideas of the essay | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong sense of audience; engaging clear if not provocative thesis; strong sense of direction efficiently developed around relatively mature understanding of elements of character; attempts to interpret well-chosen details, examples, and quotations |
| STYLE • voice and tone • syntax • word choice • techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> little awareness of audience simple sentences and coordination; limited range basic vocabulary; may make errors; repetitive as well as colloquial immature style | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> voice and tone may be inconsistent some sentence variety; often problems with subordination some variety in word choice; not concise direct, conversational; difficulty expressing abstract ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> appropriate voice and tone varies sentences varied word choice; some complex vocabulary some risk-taking to create effects; uses a variety of stylistic or rhetorical techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> creates and sustains effective voice and tone; may use humour or irony syntactic maturity effective, economical word choice takes risks, often showing originality and inventiveness |
| FORM • beginning • structure and sequence • transitions • paragraphing • ending | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> beginning unclear sequencing is often confusing few transitions; may seem disjointed paragraphing illogical or missing weak ending | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organization adequate but ineffective connections among ideas often unclear transitions awkward; paragraphs not well developed conclusions often short or formulaic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organization carefully and logically structure transitions make connections clear comptently developed paragraphing explicit, logical conclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> structure appears natural and spontaneous well-chosen transitions create unity effective paragraphing creates continuity ending has some “punch” |
| CONVENTIONS • spelling • sentence structure and punctuation • usage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> frequent noticeable errors in basic sentence structure, spelling, and usage that distract the reader and may interfere with meaning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> noticeable errors that may cause the reader to pause or reread; often surface errors could be fixed by careful proofreading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> few errors; these do not affect meaning; appears to have been carefully edited and proofread | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> few errors; these do not distract the reader (may only be noticeable when the reader looks for them) |