



Reading & comparing

3.1 Reading for comparison

READING TO IDENTIFY TEXTUAL FEATURES & KEY CONCEPTS

In Part 2, you are provided with the opportunity to focus on a single text and to complete an individual close reading of it. The comparative study of a pair of texts requires reading with a comparative focus in mind, understanding each text on its own and thinking about the relationship and connections between them. After your initial reading of each text, you will need to be able to identify the points of comparison across both texts. These points of comparison may be similarities or differences between the texts, such as the presentation of key concepts including ideas, issues and themes, or the textual features such as plot, character and setting that authors use to convey particular perspectives. Identifying points of comparison allows you to consider the ways that the **intertextual** connections contribute to and help to shape new and enriched meanings for readers. Your ability to analyse the impact of these connections on the reader will form the basis of your comparative response.

➡ Your turn

- 3.1 Read the following descriptions of a range of texts and match up the pairs that would provide the most interesting combinations for comparative study. Look for related issues, ideas and themes when making each match. Once you've recorded the titles of each pairing, write a sentence that explains your reasons for creating this combination. An example has been provided for you.



Year of Wonders, Geraldine Brooks

Inhabitants of a small community turn against one another as they are confronted with the spread of the plague and death on a large scale. As the story progresses, people begin to question their faith as well as the morals and ethics of others and even themselves.

Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell

In a totalitarian society ruled by Big Brother, Winston Smith begins to commit small acts of rebellion that gradually open his eyes to the realities of his world. After finding love, Winston is eventually caught and punished for his behaviour, finally admitting that his only love is for Big Brother himself.

To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee

Narrated by Scout, the young daughter of lawyer Atticus Finch, the book relates the trial and eventual conviction of Atticus' client Tom Robinson. The text explores the way in which prejudice can prevent justice from taking place, and it teaches a valuable lesson about tolerance for the marginalised.

My Brother Jack, George Johnston

David relates the story of his relationship with his older brother Jack as both characters grow from youth into adulthood. Initially hero-worshipping his brother, David gradually changes his perspective until the brothers' relationship undergoes a total role reversal.

The Complete Maus, Art Spiegelman

Spiegelman's graphic novel tells the story of his father's experiences during the Holocaust. Alternating between memories of war and the after-effects of conflict, the text provides an exploration of the impact of past trauma upon the present.

Girl with a Pearl Earring, Tracy Chevalier

At the behest of her impoverished family, Griet begins working as a maid for the family of the artist Johannes Vermeer. Gradually drawn into a complex relationship with the artist, Griet comes to learn about human relationships as well as her own value in society.

Twelve Angry Men, Reginald Rose

The 12 angry men of the title are jurors at the trial of a young man accused of murdering his father. Set entirely within the jury room, the play follows the deliberations as the jury members gradually change their verdict from guilty to not guilty, demonstrating that prejudice can be overcome with persistence.

On the Waterfront, Elia Kazan (director)

After unwittingly becoming involved in a murder, Terry Malloy is forced to confront the reality of his work for his brother Charley in service to a local mobster. The film questions the cost of family loyalty and asks whether it should always be maintained.

Night, Elie Wiesel

Based on Wiesel's wartime experiences, *Night* relates the story of a young man's horrifying experiences in the Nazi concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. The text depicts the ongoing struggle to maintain faith and morality in the face of cruelty and despair.

Stasiland, Anna Funder

Anna Funder explores the totalitarian rule of the Stasi, the spy agency that maintained order in East Germany until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Funder interviews some of the Stasi's many victims, considering how and why people are willing to rebel in the face of such widespread oppression.

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë

Jane, a penniless orphan, takes on the role of governess at Thornfield Hall in the employ of the mysterious Mr Rochester. As their relationship develops into a romance, she is confronted with the truth about his past and discovers long-held secrets about her own.

The Crucible, Arthur Miller

The village of Salem contends with chaos as accusations of devilry and witchcraft cause all members of the community to take sides against each other. As representatives of the Church act as both jury and executioner, the villagers begin to doubt their authority and question the truth of the original accusations.

- **First text pair:**
Year of Wonders and *The Crucible*

Reason for pairing:

Both texts explore small communities confronted with crisis. The texts consider how such conflicts shape relationships and values, and they question the value of faith in times of need.

- **Second text pair**

Reason for pairing

- **Third text pair**

Reason for pairing

- **Fourth text pair**

Reason for pairing

- **Fifth text pair**

Reason for pairing

- **Sixth text pair**

Reason for pairing



MODEL FOR READING A PAIR OF TEXTS

There are four steps that you can follow when reading texts for comparison. First, read each work, then think about ways in which the two texts are similar. Once you've identified these connections, sort them into categories or organise them by theme. Finally look at your groups to identify points of comparison between the texts.

INITIAL READING

Your **initial reading** of both texts will be similar to your reading of a single text ('Part 2: Reading & creating') in that you will be reading for meaning. You will go through the process of comprehending and decoding the texts so that you are able to work more closely with them. Once you have a clear understanding of the texts as individual works, you can consolidate your reading by making some notes about each text. This process involves clarifying the plot, understanding the relationships between characters and having a sense of the setting of the narrative, as well as considering the themes that are raised by the text that invite further investigation.

These notes will become an important reference tool when you return to the texts to begin your comparison. Therefore, it is important to record key aspects about each work that you feel reflect the major concerns of both texts. As this is an initial reading, your notes will tend to be broad and to encompass both the textual features and the concepts that stand out to you as a reader. The following outlines of *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, by Tracy Chevalier, represent individual close readings of each text. In each example, the points of comparison and the key concepts have been identified.



How to read a pair of texts

- 1 Complete an initial reading of each text.
- 2 Identify connections: textual features and key concepts.
- 3 Group connections together.
- 4 Identify points of comparison: similarities and differences.

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë



→ Mia Wasikowska as Jane Eyre in the 2011 film adaptation

Jane Eyre, the eponymous heroine of the novel, suffers great cruelty at the hands of adults as a poverty-stricken orphan during her time at Gateshead with her aunt and her years at Lowood School. Despite this, Jane emerges unbroken in spirit and determined to forge a life unshackled by her past. Her early adulthood sees her employed at Thornfield Hall as governess to Mr Rochester's ward. At Thornfield, Jane falls in love with Mr Rochester. After the rejection and crisis that follows, she finds some solace with her cousins at Marsh End. Through Jane's challenges as a plain, poor woman Brontë explores the role of power and class in nineteenth-century Victorian England, the position of women in society and the pressures to conform to gender stereotypes. The final section of the novel sees Jane marry Mr Rochester, a man who is but a shadow of his former self after he was injured in a fire lit by his first wife, Bertha Mason.

Girl with a Pearl Earring, Tracy Chevalier

The portrait *Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer lies at the heart of this novel, set in seventeenth-century Delft. Griet, the protagonist, is forced to become a servant in the Vermeer household when she becomes the primary income earner for her family. Griet is responsible for the domestic duties in Vermeer's house, but her astute observations of her surroundings lead her to also become employed as Vermeer's assistant. Her work in the studio provides respite from her harsh daily routine; Vermeer eventually has her sit for him as a model. Through Griet, Chevalier explores the life of a young woman thrust into an unfamiliar world out of financial necessity. After causing tension between Vermeer and his jealous wife, Griet unwittingly challenges the conventions of her class and gender. In the end, however, Griet conforms to social expectations and follows the pointed star in the marketplace towards her life as the wife of a butcher.



➔ Griet from *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, played by Scarlett Johansson

Initial reading templates

JANE EYRE, CHARLOTTE BRONTË

General observations

- Jane Eyre – protagonist
 - young
 - poverty-stricken
 - orphan
 - plain
 - governess
 - strong in spirit
 - determined
 - falls in love with Mr Rochester
- Mr Rochester – wealthy
 - married to Bertha Mason
 - injured in fire and marries Jane

Key concepts (ideas, issues & themes)

- cruelty
- rejection
- crisis
- marriage
- power
- class
- gender stereotypes
- conformity
- position of women
- nineteenth-century Victorian England

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING, TRACY CHEVALIER

General observations

- Griet – protagonist
 - young
 - primary source of income
 - servant
 - harsh conditions
 - beautiful
 - models for painting
 - astute observer
 - marries butcher
- Johannes Vermeer – Dutch artist
 - paints portrait of Griet
 - has jealous wife

Key concepts (ideas, issues & themes)

- unfamiliar world
- seventeenth-century Delft
- class
- gender
- conformity
- tension between Vermeer and his wife
- social expectations of marriage
- pointed star

Part 3

➡ Your turn

- 3.2 Use the initial reading templates provided for *Jane Eyre* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* as a model to record your own notes about each text in your set pair. Remember that these notes are your early response to the texts.
- Brainstorm the key points that you remember from your reading, including observations about the textual features such as plot, character and setting, and key concepts such as ideas, issues and themes.
 - Summarise your initial reading of each text in your set pair in a 140-character tweet. Send your tweet to five of your classmates and save their responses. Use these tweets to support your understanding of the points of comparison in the pair of texts.



IDENTIFYING CONNECTIONS

Once you have established an understanding of the individual texts you will need to consider them in relation to each other, so that you can form links between them. Before moving into more detailed readings, establish the broad relationship between the pair. In order to do this, ask the following question: what are the **connections** between the two texts?

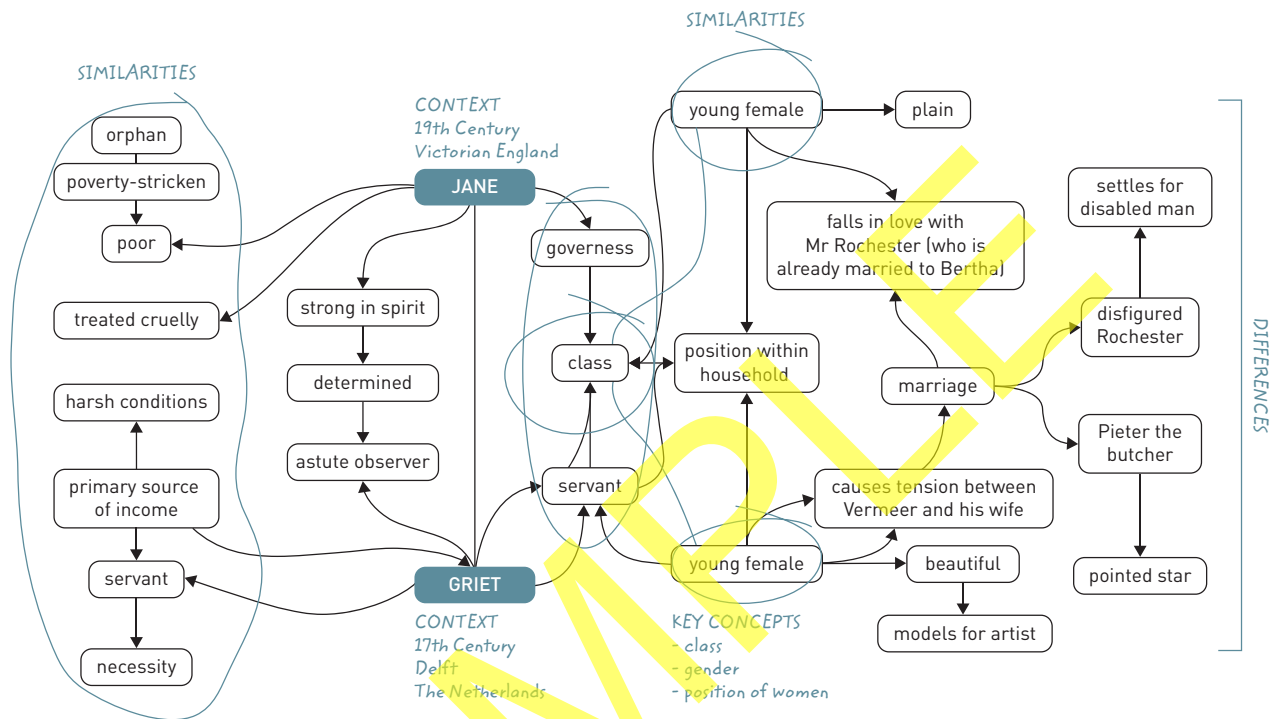
By considering your initial reading and then linking your ideas about the relationship between the pair, you will become aware of aspects that the texts have in common, as well as those that are in contrast. You can place your two completed initial reading notes side by side and make links across the two tables to gain an insight into the connections between the two texts.

<i>Jane Eyre</i> , Charlotte Brontë		<i>Girl with a Pearl Earring</i> , Tracy Chevalier	
General observations	Key concepts (ideas, issues & themes)	General observations	Key concepts (ideas, issues & themes)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane Eyre – protagonist – young – poverty-stricken – orphan – plain – governess – strong in spirit – determined – falls in love with Mr Rochester • Mr Rochester – wealthy – married to Bertha Mason – injured in fire and marries Jane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cruelty • rejection • crisis • marriage • power • class • gender stereotypes • conformity • position of women • nineteenth-century Victorian England 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Griet – protagonist – young – primary source of income – servant – harsh conditions – beautiful – models for painting – astute observer – marries butcher • Johannes Vermeer – Dutch artist – paints portrait of Griet – has jealous wife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unfamiliar world • seventeenth-century Delft • class • gender • conformity • tension between Vermeer and his wife • social expectations of marriage • pointed star

➡ Using a graphic organiser to identify connections between *Jane Eyre* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*

GROUPING CONNECTIONS

Once you've identified the ways two texts are connected, you can organise your observations into a logical order. Part of this process will involve making decisions about what you think the central concerns are in both texts, as well as how the authors use specific textual features to convey meaning to the reader. By grouping similar points together and making note of interesting differences, you are generating the **points of comparison** between the pair. These points of comparison provide you with a framework from which to develop a deeper interpretation of the texts in relation to each other.



➔ Mind-map graphic organiser identifying points of comparison between *Jane Eyre* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring*

IDENTIFYING POINTS OF COMPARISON

By using a **graphic organiser** such as a mind-map to represent your reading of the texts, the connections between the pair should become more apparent. The grouping of key points allows you to determine which aspects of the pair you would like to explore further. It also provides you with a number of perspectives from which to view the texts when you read them for a second time and when you study them in class. The mind-map that represents readings of *Jane Eyre* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* broadly suggests that the following points may be worthy of comparison:

- class – both protagonists face poverty and are forced to work in order to survive. Jane works as a governess and Griet is a household servant.
- gender – because they are women, both protagonists have limited choices about their future.
- societal position – both protagonists must obey the authority of their 'master'. They both live in a time in which marriage is a social expectation.

➔ Your turn

3.3 You have been assigned to study *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by George Orwell, and *Stasiland*, by Anna Funder. Use the initial reading notes provided to design your own graphic organiser to represent the connections and points of comparison between the two texts.

NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, GEORGE ORWELL

General observations

- Winston – protagonist
- predicts future
- written in 1948
- Newspeak
- ‘paper weight’
- destruction of history
- Julia – has forbidden relationship with Winston
- Room 101
- Ministries of Truth, Love, Peace & Plenty

Key concepts (ideas, issues & themes)

- totalitarianism
- propaganda
- surveillance
- power
- control
- fear
- torture

STASILAND, ANNA FUNDER

General observations

- non-fiction
- interviews
- intrusive narrator
- explores past
- East Germany
- informers
- Departments of Defence, Economy, State Apparatus, Church, Sport, Culture & Counter-Terrorism
- the Wall
- puzzle makers
- the forbidden Italian boyfriend

Key concepts (ideas, issues & themes)

- interrogation
- subordination
- nostalgia
- torture
- power
- distorted reality
- mind control
- censorship

➡ Your turn

- 3.4 Apply the four-step process (complete initial reading, identify connections, group connections, identify points of comparison) to your own pair of set texts to prepare for further comparative analysis.

MOVING INTO A MORE DETAILED READING

Once you have consolidated your understanding of each individual work through taking notes on your initial reading and completing a graphic organiser, you will need to examine the two texts in a more detailed way. This will involve drilling down even further into each text and getting to the heart of the authors’ messages to the reader. In order to achieve this, further analysis of the textual features and key concepts is required.