

# Comparative Analysis of Short Stories

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# Introduction

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Comparisons in literature may be based on CONTENT and FORM.

A comparative study focuses on both similarities and

differences: compare = similarities, contrast = differences

In general, comparisons on the basis of the author's biography / context are not accepted. These factors may *\*inform\** our readings.

# Basis for Comparison (1)

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Three main factors may be used on the level of CONTENT

## Plot

Do similar things happen in the stories?

Do the beginnings or endings have anything in common?

\*as stories are all different only similarities are useful here.

## Characters

Are there similarities between characters in terms of:

gender,  
age,  
economic / social status  
intrinsic qualities?

## Setting

Do the settings of the stories have anything in common?

Rural / Urban  
Asian / Western  
Contemporary / Historical

# Selection and Parameters

- Most exam questions ask students to discuss an abstract concept:
  - Desire
  - Time
  - Self-awareness
- It is key that students choose another story with enough connections on this concept.
- It is also advisable that students define their parameters in the introduction.

# Basis for Comparison (II)

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Three main factors may be used on the level of FORM

## Use of dialogue

How much of each story  
is devoted to dialogue?  
What point of view is  
the story told from?  
(first/second/third  
person)  
What about  
monologues?

## Style

How would the style be  
described:  
  
Realist?  
Fantastical?  
Poetic?  
  
omniscient narrator?

## Literary devices

Simile / Metaphor  
Allusion  
Symbolism  
Imagery

# ADVANCED COMPARISON

# More advanced factors can be included

## Theme

Do the stories have similar themes?

For example: two stories with different settings may both be concerned with the position of women in society.

## Narrative tone and voice

Do the stories share a first person narrator for example?

do both writers use a form of 'free indirect discourse' when dealing with different topics?

## Language choice

Are types of words repeated in both examples?

Use of adjectives  
length / complexity of sentences.

# Two Examples

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'The Daemon Lover' by Shirley Jackson (1948)

'Sweetness' by Toni Morrison (2015)



# The Daemon Lover

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Setting: in and around the protagonist's apartment (unnamed town)

Characters: unnamed female protagonist, Jamie (James Harris), unnamed men/ women, Mrs Royster

Plot: the woman says goodbye to her fiancé, wakes up on her wedding day to find he has disappeared....

# Points to remember:

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**Confusion / misunderstanding**

**symbolism of the flowers, the rat.**

**use of dialogue to show the reaction of the people whom she meets (and who echo the voice of the reader)**

**Ambiguous ending (passing of time)**

**most obvious answer is correct**

# Sweetness

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Setting: a nursing home where the main character lives  
(Winston House)

Characters: Lula Ann and her mother ('Sweetness'), Louis  
(Lula Ann's father)

Plot: a woman reflects on her relationship with her daughter  
and the difficulties caused by their different skin tones.

# Points to remember:

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justification of the mother's behaviour

'passing' (being accepted as white)

Colourism: 'high yellow' 'blue-black'

Lula Ann's success / hatred of her mother

Warning for the future child.

ambiguous ending

# POINTS FOR COMPARISON

Which areas of  
comparison would  
you choose?

# Thematic Level

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- Both stories deal with a problem in a significant relationship.
- Both stories are formed around an idea of betrayal.
- Both stories leave the reader with no resolution or reason.
- Both stories show mistakes based on love.

# Formal level

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- Unnamed protagonist - what is the significance of the main character not having a 'proper' name?
- third person descriptive narrative / first person confessional narrative: what difference does this make?
- Dramatic irony - in both stories, the reader can 'see through' the characters to what is 'really' going on.
- Symbolism - the empty apartment / the cheaper nursing home



# Template for comparison:

- Let's turn to the handout to narrow down the comparison around the idea of 'betrayal'.

# Steps to plan a comparative analysis

- Pick the primary texts first.

'Sweetness' by  
Toni Morrison  
(2015)

'The Daemon  
Lover' by Shirley  
Jackson (1948)

# What are the main factors for comparison?

## **Setting:**

A: a small town  
B: unnamed in the South

## **Characters:**

A: an unnamed woman  
B: an unnamed woman

## **Plot:**

A: a woman searches for her missing fiancé  
B: a woman explains her relationship with her daughter

## **Dialogue:**

A: lots of dialogue with different people  
B: no dialogue

Start with the content aspects.

Do any of these seem productive? In this example, the setting and characters.

# What are the main factors for comparison?

## **Sentence structure**

A: told in the past tense, simple sentences.  
B: told in present and past

## **Literary devices**

A: symbolism: e.g. flowers.  
B: symbolism: e.g. daughter's beauty

## **Vocabulary**

A: simple, everyday  
B: simple, everyday

## **Narrative point of view**

A: third person, omniscient narrator  
B: first person, unreliable narrator

Then cover the formal aspects. Which would be more productive? In this example, the symbolism.

"When analyzing two texts, you might look for unexpected contrasts between apparently similar texts, or unexpected similarities between apparently dissimilar texts, or for how one text revises or transforms the other. Keep in mind that not all of the similarities, differences, and transformations you identify will be relevant to an argument about the relationship between the two texts." (Syba, 2008, Harvard College Writing Center)

Now we have decided on the points of comparison.

# Essay outline:

- Intro: thesis statement
- Point 1: setting
- Point 2: characters
- Point 3: symbolism
- Conclusion: recap thesis