


How to Compare and Contrast with the Common Core in Fourth Grade

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Jill Eisenberg, our Resident Literacy Expert, began her career teaching English as a Foreign Language to second through sixth graders in Yilan, Taiwan as a Fulbright Fellow. She went on to become a literacy teacher for third grade in San Jose, CA as a Teach for America corps member. She is certified in Project Glad instruction to promote English language acquisition and academic achievement. In her column she offers teaching and literacy tips for educators.



Fourth grade is a significant juncture for readers because the Common Core State Standards prescribes that 50% of reading material should be nonfiction. One of the critical skills on Common Core-aligned end of year assessments is compare and contrast. By the end of the fourth grade, students need experience in comparison for both fiction and nonfiction works. Practice in comparison not only improves a student's close reading abilities, but also enables educators to gauge student comprehension and interpretation.

In honor of [Parrots Over Puerto Rico winning the 2014 Robert F. Siebert Medal](#) for the most distinguished informational book for children published in 2013, I am comparing *Parrots Over Puerto Rico* with *Puffling Patrol*. This book comparison is useful because the books tackle similar central ideas, yet have very different text structures and presentations of information.

I have created sample questions to teach towards and check mastery of each of the three Common Core categories. These are by no means the only questions to ask in each category, but these provide an overview of the progression in question complexity and mastery of the texts.

By creating a range of compare and contrast questions across the standards, we are able to differentiate for students within a class, provide extension opportunities for ready learners, or move the whole class from literal- to higher-level thinking over the course of several lessons.

Texts:

[Parrots Over Puerto Rico](#) (level: Q)

[Puffling Patrol](#) (level: R)

Why: I have chosen these two texts because they share the same genre and examine similar subject matter (endangered bird species) that pushes students beyond their personal experiences, while presenting the information in a different format, point of view, and structure.

Key Ideas and Details:

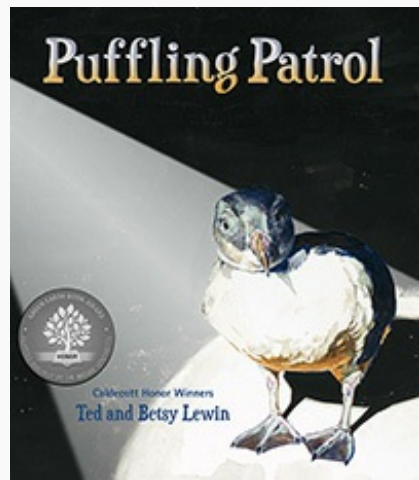
1. What causes Puerto Rican parrots and Westman Islands puffins to become endangered? What role do humans play in the declining numbers of each species?
2. How are the scientists and volunteers in both books similar or different? What actions does each team take to protect the parrots or puffins? How does each of their actions impact the success of protecting these endangered species? How do both groups demonstrate creativity and persistence? Study how the authors each describe the actions of the scientists and volunteers. Do the authors

want you to aspire to be like these scientists or not? What makes you think so?

3. Compare the food webs of the pufflings and parrots. What do their diets consist of and what predators do they have? What in their food webs affects their chances of survival? How does each book explore the interdependence of nature?
4. Compare the environments of the two species. What is the geography of the Westman Islands and Puerto Rico? How does each book explore the impact of geography and climate on the pufflings' and parrots' survival?
5. Compare the purpose, or mission, of the Puffling Patrol and the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program. How are their approaches to protecting the two species similar or different? What unique challenges does each program have? Compare the relative success of their approaches.
6. Look back in the text for evidence of the parrots' and pufflings' behavioral and physical adaptations. What do they need to be able to do in order to survive in their respective environments? How is each species physically adapted to survive in its unique habitat? What adaptations is each group of scientists focusing on to improve each species' chance of survival?
7. What is the central idea(s) in both books? How are these central ideas similar or different from each other?
8. What role do the authors of *Puffling Patrol* and *Parrots Over Puerto Rico* want humans to play in their environment? What evidence in each book demonstrates the authors' views on sustainability?



Parrots Over Puerto Rico



Puffling Patrol

Craft and Structure:

1. How is the information in *Parrots Over Puerto Rico* arranged? What evidence do you have that each book is organized by chronology, comparison, description, classification, cause/effect, or problem/solution? How is the information in *Puffling Patrol* presented similarly or differently to *Parrots Over Puerto Rico*?
2. How does each book use primary and secondary source information? Where did each book get its information? How do you know what part is primary and what part is secondary source information?
3. Why would the authors of *Puffling Patrol* choose to convey information through a narrative style? What effect does that have on readers about the subject? How is this presentation of facts different from *Parrots Over Puerto Rico*? What effect does chronology/sequence of events have on presenting information



Parrots Over Puerto Rico

in *Parrots Over Puerto Rico*?

4. Betsy and Ted Lewin of *Puffling Patrol* choose to narrate the story themselves and name the children who are active in the story. In contrast, Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore, the authors of *Parrots Over Puerto Rico*, choose NOT to name the scientists. Why might *Parrot Over Puerto Rico* authors want to withhold the identity of the scientists? How might this choice change what you focus on as you read? What does this choice suggest about the authors' perspective?
5. What evidence do you have that these are nonfiction books? What text features does each book have? What subgenre of nonfiction is each book?
6. Why might the authors of *Puffling Patrol* choose to name the book about the program protecting the pufflings, while the authors of *Parrots Over Puerto Rico* choose to title the books about the parrots, not the program? What does this suggest about the focus and central ideas of each book? What does this choice demonstrate about the authors' perspectives?

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

1. At the end of each book, there is additional background information. How do these text features contribute to the central ideas of each book? How do they extend understanding on the subject matter?
2. Read a magazine excerpt from the *Audubon Magazine* about another endangered bird species, [the Florida grasshopper](#). Compare the central ideas, purposes, text features, and text structure of these three texts.
3. The authors of *Parrots Over Puerto Rico* and *Puffling Patrol* both chose NOT to use photographs for their nonfiction books. Instead, illustrators created images with paint or collage. What does this suggest about the focus and central ideas of each book? What does this choice demonstrate about the authors' perspectives?
4. Both books present cases of humans saving an endangered (bird) species. If you were to write a report on another endangered species, what central ideas, text features, and characteristics should the report include? Why?



Betsy Lewin painting a puffling in *Puffling Patrol*

What have you found successful in teaching how to compare and contrast? Share with us at curriculum@leeandlow.com!

Further reading on teaching literacy in Fourth Grade:

- [Using Dual Language And Bilingual Books In Third And Fourth Grade](#)
- [What Does Close Reading Look Like In Fourth Grade?](#)
- [Integrating Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening In Grades 4-5](#)

Further reading on Compare and Contrast series:

- [How To Compare And Contrast With The Common Core In Kindergarten](#)
- [How To Compare And Contrast With The Common Core In Second Grade](#)

- [How To Compare And Contrast With The Common Core In Third Grade](#)
- [How To Compare And Contrast With The Common Core In Fifth Grade](#)