Critical Thinking through Comparisons

Subject Area: All subjects

Grade Level: 6 – 12 (ages 11 - 18)

Time: At least two 45-minute class periods; time outside of class as necessary

Lesson Objective:
Students will use Webspiration Classroom™ to help them think critically about the similarities and differences between any two things.

Common Core State Standards¹:
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading:
  Standard 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing:
  Standard 1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
  Standard 6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Overview:
Making comparisons is a powerful exercise to get students thinking critically. In order to effectively compare two things, students must first research and understand each of them. Then they must think critically about the similarities and differences. Use the Comparison template (Webspiration Classroom Starter>Starter Docs>Thinking & Planning>Comparison) to help make the process easier for students. Completed diagrams can then be used as visual aids in class presentations, or as good starting points for effective essays as discussed in the Adaptations / Extensions section at the end of this lesson.
Preparation:

- This lesson requires Internet access and the Webspiration Classroom software application published by Inspiration® Software, Inc. It can be accessed by visiting <http://www.webspirationclassroom.com>.
- Access to library resources would also be helpful for student research.

Lesson:

1. Open the *Comparison* template and demonstrate for students how it can be used to compare any two things. Engage students by asking them to suggest two things or people that they have learned about in your class that they could compare. Enter one of them as “A” and the other as “B.” As a class, brainstorm similarities and differences and add those ideas to the appropriate parts of the diagram.

2. Explain that students will be adding visual symbols, as well as text, to their diagrams. Adding symbols will help them and their readers to better understand and remember the content. Optional: Additional graphics can be inserted into diagrams via the Edit menu.

3. Optional: Open the example file (*Webspiration Classroom Starter>Examples>Social Studies>Comparison Example*) and talk the students through it, as well, so they have a better idea of what a finished diagram might look like.
4. Be sure to point out how additional information can be added in Notes. Demonstrate how notes that have been added to symbols can be shown by clicking the Note Quick Controls in the upper-right corner of the symbol with the note. All notes in a diagram can be shown quickly at the same time in Outline View.

5. Students should be organized into groups of 2-4 to complete the project. Groups will then choose two topics to compare, such as two revolutions in history. You may want to provide a list of acceptable topics, or you may have groups choose topics and then submit their proposals for review.

6. Suggest that one or two group members focus on one topic, and one or two focus on the other. Then groups can share what they learn with each other to determine similarities and differences. Optional: Tell students that completed diagrams will be used as visual aids during class presentations.

7. Student groups can collaborate on their diagram and obtain feedback from the teacher using the collaboration tools. Documents can be shared with others using the Collaborate Tab. The Comment Tab can be used to comment on the document, or the Chat Tab can be used, if it is turned on at your school, to discuss ideas in real time.

8. Encourage students to add Hyperlinks to their sources of information, including any multimedia files available on the Internet.

9. Tell students they can go to Outline View to finish organizing their information. Demonstrate how items can be reorganized within the outline.
Adaptations / Extensions:
• Have students “publish” their work by making presentations about their comparisons to the class. A data projector or interactive whiteboard could be used, if one is available, to display diagrams as visual aids. Subtopics can be hidden or viewed using the Subtopic Quick Controls to allow focused attention on the topics being discussed.

• Webspiration™ may be used to create more in-depth diagrams of each topic. For example, the Revolution! template could be used: Webspiration Classroom™ Starter>Starter Docs>Social Studies>Revolution!.

• Students can download their project to Inspiration® or a word processor, or transfer it to a Google Doc, to complete a written essay about their comparison. The Compare-Contrast Essay Planner template is useful to first help students structure their essays: Webspiration Classroom Starter>Starter Docs>English Language Arts>Compare-Contrast Essay Planner. There is also an example (Webspiration Classroom Starter>Examples>English Language Arts>Compare-Contrast Essay Planner Example) and a lesson plan entitled Using Structure to Enhance Compare-Contrast Essays.

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