

Compare and Contrast Essay

Task Requirement (Question)

ENGL111: Introduction to Poetry and the Short Story

This paper is an individual assignment. Your final paper (including references list) is due by MIDNIGHT on Friday, July 1st. Papers must be submitted through MyCC. The essay will require you to compare & contrast two of the short stories studied in class. You will compare one of the science fiction stories from the second half of our semester with one of the stories we read in the first. This assignment will require you to read ahead! Comparison/contrast essays require you to look at how certain elements—ideas, themes, characters, etc.—are similar and/or different in two pieces of writing. This exercise will require you to have a firm understanding of both the stories themselves and the literary elements that you are examining. It is intended to broaden your understanding of how different pieces of literature —such as science fiction and non-science fiction stories—can explore similar themes and literary devices. More information about crafting a compare & contrast essay can be found here: [https:// owl.excelsior.edu/rhetorical-styles/compare-and-contrast-essay/](https://owl.excelsior.edu/rhetorical-styles/compare-and-contrast-essay/)

The paper should be approximately 1200-1500 words in length and must follow MLA formatting and citation guidelines throughout. The paper must contain the following elements: • An introduction including a thesis statement that takes a clear position on the chosen topic. • Contain a minimum of five well-framed quotations (at least one from each story). • Be written entirely in your own words, except for direct evidence from the text. Do not consult any secondary sources online. This is not a research assignment. Use of secondary sources will result in a grade of 0. • Close reading of the text. • A Works Cited list (of the stories or poems you are examining) and in-text citations. For our major term assignment, you must plan and write a formal paper in MLA style. Your paper must offer a thesis statement that takes a clear position on your chosen topic. Your claims and ideas must be supported by a close reading of the text. You will then take a short, five-to-ten minute oral examination over Zoom based on your paper. Should you require assistance with narrowing down your topic, I am more than happy to provide guidance. Information on MLA formatting can be found here: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/> General information on writing college-level essays can be found here: [https:// owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/01/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/01/)

Topics: 1. Consider the plot twists in “The Lottery” and “Story of Your Life.” How do both of these stories foreshadow their surprise endings? What affects do these shocking endings have on us, the readers?

2. Examine situational irony in “The Lottery” and “Escape from Spiderhead.” While both of these stories appear very different, both take place in settings that mislead the reader into thinking the stories will go differently. Why are both of these settings examples of situational—not verbal or dramatic—irony?

3. Write an essay examining the relationship between plot and dialogue in “Hills Like White Elephants” and “They’re Made Out of Meat.” How do both authors convey the elements of dramatic structure (exposition, conflict, climax, etc.) through dialogue, rather than prose?

4. Look at the allegory in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” and “The Necklace.” Both of these pieces are examples of allegory (a story of poem that can be interpreted to reveal a moral or political lesson). What are those lessons? How are they similar and/or different?

5. Special All Sci-fi Option! Examine the aliens in “They’re Made Out of Meat” and “Story of Your Life.” How is alien life represented in both of these stories? More importantly, how do these authors use aliens to explore human themes?

Any essay written on a topic not listed above will receive a grade of 0. Any paper that consults or includes secondary sources will receive a grade of 0.

Answer

Plot Twists in “The Lottery” and “Story of Your Life”

What make a short story special are its respective plots and the twist and turns introduced throughout the story until the end. Every author has their way of spinning a plot while including irony, symbolism, and different character genre. Two such stories are “The Lottery” and “Story of Your Life”, where plot twists lead to the foreboding and ominous feelings resulting in shocking events. “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson tries to show the adverse impacts of an inhuman cultural tradition that leads to the real plot twist of murder, whereas “Story of Your Life” by Ted Chiang showcases the answers to seemingly unanswerable questions of timelessness while traversing the impediments of metaphysical time by penetrating the themes of determinism and language. In both stories, the authors use for shadowing to restrain attributes of the stories by including irony to lie to the readers, creating an exploration of events that go through past, present, and future while taking a detached yet deterministic tone.

In both stories, writers hinted at the foreboding and ominous reflection that something was going to occur, which had been layered with a heavy dose of irony. In “The Lottery Although”, it has been at although the story begins on a beautiful sunny morning where the villagers are busy preparing something; the children seem uneasy and quiet and start collecting stones while making a pile in one corner. The overall feeling of the scenery seems to be strange from an average perspective, as it may seem to be the most natural children’s play scheme after their schools got shut; however, it should have been a joyous occasion, yet they are quiet. The sentences that proved it are, “School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them; they tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play, and their talk was still of the classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands. Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones..... eventually made a great pile of stones in one corner of the square and guarded it against the raids of the other boys” (Jackson 1). This further depicted a process of

forebodingness. Also, the irony comes in the form that no one wants to win the lottery, and no one is excited to proceed with it and wants to get over with it as soon as possible (Jackson 3). The lottery in real life seems to be an exciting event since everyone wants to win something through it, yet the villagers are not very keen to continue with the process, and as the story progressed, it became clear why people do not want to go through the process in the name of the lottery. On the other hand, in “Story of Your Life”, Ted Chiang utilizes situational irony to help the audiences engross in the story. However, his irony is immersed in sarcasm. For example, his main character Dr. Louise Bank mentioned, “That’s right,” I’ll say. “Thirteen years ago I knew the carpets would need vacuuming around now, and having a baby seemed to be the cheapest and easiest way to get the job done. Now kindly get on with it” (Chiang 1). As the story progressed, the audience learned that Dr. Banks knew what would happen thirteen years later as Heptapod B showed her the future. Moreover, throughout the story, there are bits and pieces that show that Dr. Banks knew about the future, yet she never tried to change it. For example, Dr. Banks purchased a bowl when she knew that it would fall on her daughter’s head. Therefore, even if she knew that her daughter would die, she never acted contrary to the future. Therefore, it is undeniable that foreboding irony was ever-present in the scenario of the stories.

Moreover, both stories explore past, present, and future themes. For example, in *The Lottery*, the tradition of the lottery has been going on for years; despite being known that the act leads to the murder of a living soul. However, they cannot come out of the tradition and still value the barbaric act, which hints that those acts will not be over anytime soon. The tradition has been in the village for a long time, and the author mentioned, “The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago, and the black box now resting on the stool had been put into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town, was born”, thus signifying the past of the lottery (Jackson 1). In the present, the lottery’s original box is lost, yet people cannot forego the original tradition, hence mentioning the foreboding presence of the past over the present and the future. Moreover, one of the citizens, Old Warner, has been participating for seventy-seven years, yet he never once protested against the act; some rituals need to be changed with time. In the end, when Tessie Hutchinson was selected as the victim, no one tried to save her, and villagers started throwing stones, even giving her daughter stones so that she could throw, signifying that in the future also, they do not have any intention of stopping the barbaric act. On the other hand, “Story of Your Life” shows the foreboding nature of the past, present, and future within the human life that overshadows everything. When Heptapods were launched in different parts of the world, Dr. Louise was chosen as the interpreter and the government assistant to figure out their purpose in coming to the world. In contrast to humans, who live in the past, present, and future, heptapods are aware of all three times simultaneously. The story’s premise is that humans may reach a level of consciousness in which time itself becomes malleable and naive and that this is achieved through language to circumvent the constraints of time. Through her interactions with the aliens in the past and the knowledge she has gained from them, Louise can see into the future and make plans for herself. Therefore, it is skillfully described by Chiang, “What distinguishes the heptapods’ mode of awareness is not just that their actions coincide with history’s events; it is also that their motives coincide with history’s purposes.

They act to create the future, to enact chronology” (Chiang 33). But she travels back in time to observe; she has accepted her past actions, each loss and discovery, and most of all, her daughter’s life narrative. Louise becomes a silent advocate after learning her daughter will die young. She keeps her talent hidden from the world.

Both the stories have been spoken in a deterministic yet detached tone that signifies the foreboding nature of the story. In “The Lottery”, Jackson never once reveals the story’s foreboding nature. Yet, on the contrary, her tone remained neutral, almost tranquil that the audience never gets to guess where the story is heading. It is not until the lottery begins that we observe slight changes in the demeanor of the villagers. Despite that, the whole scenario was not presented in front of the audience until the last stanza, where the villagers surrounded Tessie Hutchinson, and she desperately screamed, “It isn’t fair”. “A stone hit her on the side of the head. Old Man Warner was saying, “Come on, come on, everyone.” Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him” (Jackson 7). The abrupt ending of the story made it clear to the audience the real picture of the tradition that has been present in human society, which further shocked people to its core since they never expected people to be this barbarian, defying the basic humanity to uphold an age-old tradition that does not have any value in modern society. The detached yet deterministic tone further made the story more successful. Likewise, in “Story of Your Life”, Chiang utilized a detached tone showing that knowing the future comes with a price, which is losing free will. The story opens with a couple enjoying a romantic dance, and the story soon moves to the aliens and the need to establish communication with them. The tone throughout the communication between Louise remained the central focal point of the story, intermingles Louise’s past, present and future. While describing the journey, Chiang utilized a tone that reminded us of a scientific documentary as he tried to establish the metaphysical concept of time and showed that it is a constant cycle, which can be viewed as one through the experiences of Dr Louise. Heptapods showed Louise the future, yet she never could change her future as if her free will was not present. “These questions are in my mind when your father asks me, “Do you want to make a baby?” And I smile and answer, “Yes,” and I unwrap his arms from around me, and we hold hands as we walk inside to make love, to make you” (Chiang 39). Therefore, the ending definitely surprised the audience as they expected Louise to reject the offer, yet she accepted it as if she had no other choices.

Both the stories described a foreshadowing of ominous things, which shocked and surprised the audience, yet the feeling is different for both of them. For example, in The Lottery, the audiences were horrified to see the final scene unfolding before their eyes, making them think about the true face of humanity or whether it exists. However, in “Story of Your Life”, the audience was surprised to know that despite learning about the child’s death, Dr Louise was unable to control her future and had to surrender to her destiny as if the moment she communicated with the aliens, she lost her free will and had to accept what was presented to her. In whichever case, the audience surely remained surprised at the end.

Works Cited

Chiang, Ted. “Story of Your Life”. (2000).

Jackson, Shirley. "The Lottery". (1948).