Success With Paired Texts

An analysis of STAAR questions shows that students are primarily asked to recognize connections between selections and identify similarities. Differences are queried as well, but the main focus is on similarities. While instruction should address both similarities and differences, it is suggested that the focus be placed on similarities. To illustrate, consider the questions for the 2015 released test for fifth grade. There are four questions that compare the two selections. Three of the questions relate to similarities, and only one to differences in the author's view point. The fourth grade questions have the same pattern.

To successfully analyze paired texts, students must learn to make connections between ideas within and across texts. Students must develop skill for discerning similarities and differences between **ideas, themes, and/or author's viewpoints.** It can be complicated for students to make these judgments. This becomes an instructional process that places emphasis on the synthesizing, comparing, and contrasting the ideas, messages, and themes included in the text.

It is suggested that teachers use familiar texts to launch the unit of study, and use STAAR stems to get students to consider new ways to think about text. Typically, students are analyzing and interpreting a single text. The challenge now becomes to read texts as paired selections instead of a single text and answer questions about the similarities and differences between the two.

Students must become adept at thinking about various ways the texts are similar and different. This will include thinking about the characters,similar ideas, and similar messages and themes. Moreover, students should consider if authors have a similar point of view and ideas they agree upon.

STAAR Question Stems

Use the following question stems when working with students on paired texts:
Similarities:
• Both selections discuss-
• Both selections suggest that-
• One way that _____ and _____ are alike is that:
• One similarity between the two selections is that both discuss/emphasize:
• Which of these ideas is found in both selections?
• Which statement/idea would both authors of the selections most likely agree?
• The speaker of the poem and the author of the selection both emphasize:
• Which sentence from from_____ suggests that experts have a similar concern when...
• Based on the information in both selections, the reader can conclude that:
• How is_____ and the speaker in_____ similar/alike?

Differences:
- What is one difference between (topic of both texts) described in the two selections
- One difference between_____ and _____ is that:
- What is one way that _____ is different from_____?
- _____ is different from the _____ in that:
- How is the point of view in _____different from that of_____?

Academic Vocabulary

Similar/Similarity, alike, compare, contrast, difference, agree.speaker, selection, emphasize, importance, statement, differ/different, suggests, point of view.

Instructional Tips

It is suggest that:
- Teachers use familiar text to launch the study of paired texts.. Mentor texts are especially recommended for use for the introduction.
- Students answer the questions for each text prior to attempting to answer the questions that relate to the paired texts.
- Students should determine the author's message or point of view for each text before attempting to respond to the paired text questions.
- Use the STAAR stems when modeling and when questioning students.
- Launch each lesson by modeling first before asking students to respond to the STAAR stems.
- When using selections begin with short selections such as Aesop's Fables or other short selections that have a clear unambiguous message.
- Combine various genres as the unit develops. Pair poetry with fiction and informational text. Pair informational text and fictional text.
- Use a graphic organizer to support students as they develop expertise. Introduce various types of graphic organizers including, but not limited, to Venn Diagrams. For example, Create a simple T-Chart with similarities in the left column and differences in the right hand column. Create a H chart. An H chart has three big blocks. One for facts/information about text one on the left and one block for facts about text two on the right. In the middle of the H, list information/facts that are included in both texts.
- Launch the unit of instruction in a whole group setting, but employ small group as you go forward especially with students who struggle.

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