

ESSAY WRITING: HOW TO WRITE A COMPARATIVE ESSAY: BNW & 1984 ON THE TOPIC of HOPE

A comparative essay needs to explore and **compare the similarities and differences of the themes and ideas *through* a discussion of the textual features.**

There will be THREE different types of essay topics:

- Characters based
- Themes based
- Quotes based (which could be either character and/or theme based)

All essay topics will be HOW questions. This means, for example

Through the:

- > **settings**
- > **characters** – major characters, side characters, relationships between characters
- > **plot** = key scenes, key moments, the exposition (beginnings), denouements (endings), climaxes, turning points,

* See separate sheet “Textual Features” for more examples

You will ALSO need to mention other textual features whenever you discuss a piece of evidence = **show HOW the evidence is presented – e.g.**

One: *choose your essay topic*

Two: interrogate the topic, identify the themes or characters suggested, see if there are any words you can manipulate.

Three: Brainstorm a list of as many ideas and examples from both texts that are relevant to the topic.

Four: Workout 3 key ideas and examples for each text you could compare in your body paragraphs e.g:

Compare how BNW and 1984 offer hopeless visions of the future

KEY: breakdown the word “hopeless” – this is where you can grapple with/bend the topic to suit your arguments – as this word could mean different things.

1. You could interpret it as a vision of the future world where there is hope, or no hope, in the world
2. Or, as a vision of the future that *is* hopeful for the audience (i.e. – wouldn’t be a bad way to live)

Now ask yourself: is there any hope in this future world? *Write down some dot points of **hope** or **hopelessness** on this sheet below:*

HOPE:

HOPELESSNESS

Five: go through your list and see if you can find 3 examples for each text that you could write about.

Six: workout which textual features are central to each example, so that you can 'pair them' together. E.g., from above:

Group 1: **characters** from both texts – their **actions** and their **values**, can be used to explore whether there is hope – I am going to use *John and Helmholtz* who seek **truth** and **beauty** vs *Winston* (who seeks both truth and beauty).

Group 2: **love as a symbol of hope** is explored through **relationships between characters** (Lenina & John vs Winston and Julia).

Group 3: **the greatest example of hope** can be found in **the ending**** of 1984 (= **plot**) and *the island* for John and Helmholtz (= **setting**)

**** 2020 students note: this is only relevant for the PLAY not the FILM.**

Seven: start writing out some contentions. They can take up a few sentences, and need to mention the textual features from each text you are going to discuss in your body paragraphs, and **one overall key idea from each text in relation to the essay topic.**

EXCERPT OF INTRO #1

In 1984, hope exists in the striving of **characters**, the **relationships between characters** and **key plot moments** including the beginning, ending and the foreword. In Brave New World, while most of the characters do not even understand the concept of hope, hope still exists also in the **characters** and their **relationships**, and also in the **setting** of the island. Therefore, while hope is hard to come by for the majority of characters in both texts, and indeed the worlds themselves in both texts appear to hold little hope for humanity, neither text presents an entirely hopeless world.

Underline = contention

BODY PARAGRAPHS – how to structure – using the semi-integrated approach **

Topic sentence 1: *In both texts hope is presented through the striving of **characters** for truth and beauty.*

= John (truth) and Helmholtz (beauty) vs Winston & the old woman (truth and beauty)

- Now bring in your evidence and explain your evidence – this could anywhere from 2-5 examples.
- Now use a **connecting phrase** “*Similarly, in 1984, Winston also represents hope*”.
- Now bring in examples of how Winston represents hope (beauty and truth), including quotes.
- Now conclude your paragraph by comparing the two texts again, making a conclusion about each text which, **preferably**, will include the **views, values** and **concerns** of each text:

e.g.:

Conclusion to paragraph 1: *While John is not part of the ‘brave new society’, he is still part of the world presented in BNW, and he, along with Helmholtz, **show that beauty is an inspiring force that can lead to hope for humanity**; whereas in 1984 – despite all the ugliness of the world, Winston recognises the beauty in human beings [the old lady – which I would have discussed], suggesting*

that, similar to Huxley, **Orwell believes in the innate beauty of human beings to transcend the ugliness of their physical environments.**

Topic sentence 2: Hope can also be **found to some extent**, in both texts, in the love that exists in the **relationships between characters.**

= Lenina and John vs Winston and Julia

... ..

Conclusion to paragraph 2: *Even though neither relationship is ultimately successful [I would have explained why in the paragraph], the fact that the capacity for love still exists in these future worlds suggests **that both authors believe that love is a fundamental human trait, and that so long as love exists, there will be hope that humanity will have the desire to fight against the dehumanising control of authoritarian power.***

Topic sentence 3: The **ending** of 1984 and the **setting** of the island in Brave New World offer the greatest example of hope for humanity.

*I would then go on to explain how the ending, supported by the foreword and the idea that “Newspeak **was** the official language of Oceania” – suggests that Winston’s endeavours ultimately suggest that there is hope that humanity.... And in BNW, that Bernard and John are allowed to go to the island to explore their desires and differences shows that, even in a world where the majority of people don’t need hope, for those who don’t fit in, hope is provided in the opportunity to lead a more human existence. I would probably use the bit of evidence from the start of chapter 18 where Bernard, John and Helmholtz are all “truly happy” for the first time*

note: While I haven’t mentioned language features for BNW or stage directions for 1984, I would bring them in with the evidence I give and discuss them in one or more of the body paragraphs.

Note 2: Because I am taking the “hope” angle, most of my paragraphs are ending with **values.**

CONTENTION 2

While there are examples of hope in both texts, including **characters** and their **relationships**, these instances of hope are short lived and doomed to failure. The **ending** of 1984 suggests that, while Oceania might fall, it is more likely that Big Brother has simply evolved into an even more effective totalitarian regime, while the **ending** of Brave New World shows that the system is so well designed to not need hope, that it can withstand the disruptive influence of a completely deconditioned subject in John. Therefore, ultimately, the worlds presented in both texts present a hopeless vision for the future.

Some other good **textual features** to mention could be the **mood** in the play – of hopeless inevitability. For BNW, you could mention **soma** as a motif that is used to make people endlessly happy and therefore not needing hope in their lives.

Note: I would point out in my key ideas/VVCs at the end of paragraphs **why** Huxley and Orwell are presenting these hopeless visions – e.g. for 1984 in order to warn current society about the dangers of totalitarian regimes, and to inspire them to want to protect their freedoms, e.g. through being more politically conscious; and for Huxley to warn against consumerism, over-population and mindless happiness...

Note 2: because I am taking the “hopeless” angle, more of my paragraphs will end with **concerns.**

Another idea/**view** of Huxley’s could be that for an entirely efficient social system to operate, the idea of hope is irrelevant, for to hope for something better suggests that not everything is perfect.

OTHER POSSIBLE CONTENTIONS

- That BNW presents a hopeless world while 1984 does not.
- That 1984 presents a hopeless world while BNW does not.

They are all potentially valid – so long as you can give evidence from the text and explain clearly why your interpretation is valid.

OTHER WAYS TO EXPLORE THIS TOPIC (depending on which way you argue, *hopeless* or *hopeful*)

- Through the **settings**: introduce the settings and how initially they give a very **contrasting** perspective – 1984 presents a hopeless world with few material luxuries with surveillance, propaganda, hate and fear which presents a hopeless vision of the future;
VS the setting of BNW in which people seem to have everything they need & are happy all the time which seems (on one level) like a hopeful vision of the future.
- Through **the endings** of both texts: 1984 and two ways of interpreting, vs BNW and the death of John and what this suggests will happen to anyone who is different = hopeless.
- Through the **key scenes** of the babies being conditioned vs Winston being tortured as a way of trying to eliminate hope and the need for hope.
- Through the character of Bernard, who doesn't fit in, and so hopes that he will, and who then does fit in and so loses most of his hope *but it doesn't stop him complaining, hoping for change in the system...*
- Through the **setting** of Malpais, whose citizens are not conditioned, but are ultimately living in a hopeless way because the wider world around them has entrapped them and who live as 'amusements' to the dominant culture.
- Any probably many others...

HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR INTRODUCTION

Introduce both texts, their form (what type of text), when they were published, and who created them.

Then you may wish to make a general comment about the key themes/characters suggested in the topic – e.g. that they are important to both texts.

They write your contention, being sure to include the **textual features** and your **main argument/s**.

OVERALL STRUCTURE:

- Introduction
- 3 shared body paragraphs (discuss both texts in each)
- Conclusion

**** Two ways of structuring your paragraphs:**

1. The **semi-integrated approach**:

Your topic sentence compares the two texts in a broad way.

You then discuss one text.

Then use a linking term: *however, in comparison, similarly, not dissimilarly, etc.* to introduce the second text.

And start discussing the second text.

*If you can, while discussing the second text, throw in any extra comparisons back to the first text as you think them up; it is recommended, as it will strengthen the **comparison** criteria.*

2. Take an **integrated approach**, where you discuss both texts in a 'running comparison', throughout each body paragraph. This is a more sophisticated approach and may be harder; but some also find it easier... see what works for you. Topic sentences and link/concluding sentences should be used in the same way as for the **semi-integrated** approach.