

A QUILT OF A COUNTRY

Comparing Texts

In this lesson, you will read and compare the essay “A Quilt of a Country” and the essay “The Immigrant Contribution.” First, complete the first-read and close-read activities for “A Quilt of a Country.” The work you do on this selection will help prepare you for the comparing task.



THE IMMIGRANT CONTRIBUTION

About the Author



Anna Quindlen (b. 1953) started working in the newspaper business at the age of 18 as an assistant. After graduating from Barnard College in 1974, she wrote for the *New York Post* and then for the *New York Times*, where her career in journalism began to flourish. She was only the third woman to have a column in the *Times’s* Opinion Pages, for which she won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992. Three years later, Quindlen decided to leave the newspaper and pursue her passion for writing fiction. She has written several best-selling novels, as well as nonfiction and children’s books.

Tool Kit

First-Read Guide and Model Annotation

STANDARDS

Reading Informational Text 9.RI.RRTC.10 Read and comprehend a variety of literary nonfiction throughout the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with a gradual release of scaffolding at the higher end as needed.

A Quilt of a Country

Concept Vocabulary

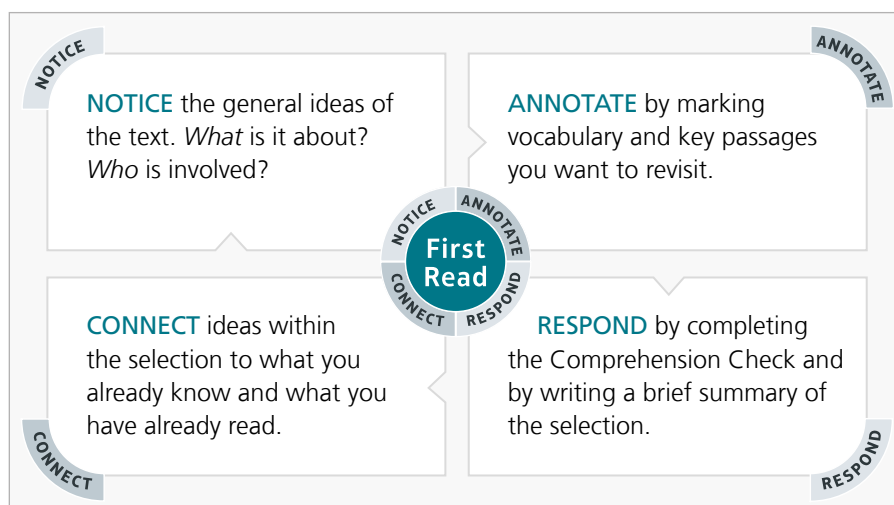
You will encounter the following words as you read “A Quilt of a Country.” Before reading, note how familiar you are with each word. Then, rank them each on a scale of 1 (most familiar) to 6 (least familiar).

WORD	YOUR RANKING
disparate	
discordant	
pluralistic	
interwoven	
diversity	
coalescing	

After completing the first read, return to the concept vocabulary and review your rankings. Mark changes to your original rankings as needed.

First Read NONFICTION

Apply these strategies as you conduct your first read. You will have an opportunity to complete the close-read notes after your first read.



A Quilt of a Country

Anna Quindlen

BACKGROUND

This essay was published in *Newsweek* magazine about two weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In New York City, almost 3,000 people were killed when hijackers crashed two airliners into the World Trade Center. In Washington, D.C., 224 people were killed when a hijacked jet crashed into the Pentagon. On hijacked United Airlines Flight 93, passengers tried to regain control of the plane. All 44 people on board died when the aircraft crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

- 1 **A**merica is an improbable idea. A mongrel nation built of ever-changing **disparate** parts, it is held together by a notion, the notion that all men are created equal, though everyone knows that most men consider themselves better than someone. “Of all the

NOTES

disparate (DIHS puhr iht) *adj.*
essentially different in kind

NOTES

discordant (dihs KAWR duhnt)
adj. unrelated; out of place

pluralistic (plur uh LIHS tihk)
adj. having multiple parts or aspects

CLOSE READ

ANNOTATE: Reread the final sentence in paragraph 2. Mark the repeated adjective in this statement.

QUESTION: Why has the author chosen to use the same adjective to describe two very different things?

CONCLUDE: What effect does this deliberate use of repetition create?

nations in the world, the United States was built in nobody's image," the historian Daniel Boorstin wrote. That's because it was built of bits and pieces that seem **discordant**, like the crazy quilts that have been one of its great folk-art forms, velvet and calico¹ and checks and brocades.² Out of many, one. That is the ideal.

- 2 The reality is often quite different, a great national striving consisting frequently of failure. Many of the oft-told stories of the most **pluralistic** nation on earth are stories not of tolerance, but of bigotry. Slavery and sweatshops, the burning of crosses and the ostracism of the other. Children learn in social-studies class and in the news of the lynching of blacks, the denial of rights to women, the murders of gay men. It is difficult to know how to convince them that this amounts to "crown thy good with brotherhood," that amid all the failures is something spectacularly successful. Perhaps they understand it at this moment, when enormous tragedy, as it so often does, demands a time of reflection on enormous blessings.
- 3 This is a nation founded on a conundrum, what Mario Cuomo³ has characterized as "community added to individualism." These two are our defining ideals; they are also in constant conflict. Historians today bemoan the ascendancy of a kind of prideful apartheid⁴ in America, saying that the clinging to ethnicity, in background and custom, has undermined the concept of unity. These historians must have forgotten the past, or have gilded it. The New York of my children is no more Balkanized,⁵ probably less so, than the Philadelphia of my father, in which Jewish boys would walk several blocks out of their way to avoid the Irish divide of Chester Avenue. (I was the product of a mixed marriage, across barely bridgeable lines: an Italian girl, an Irish boy. How quaint it seems now, how incendiary then.) The Brooklyn of Francie Nolan's famous tree,⁶ the Newark of which Portnoy complained,⁷ even the uninflected WASP⁸ suburbs of Cheever's⁹ characters: they are ghettos, pure and simple. Do the Cambodians and the Mexicans in California coexist less easily today than did the Irish and Italians of Massachusetts a century ago? You know the answer.
- 4 What is the point of this splintered whole? What is the point of a nation in which Arab cabbies chauffeur Jewish passengers through the streets of New York—and in which Jewish cabbies chauffeur Arab passengers, too, and yet speak in theory of hatred, one for the other? What is the point of a nation in which one part seems to be

1. **calico** *n.* printed cotton cloth
2. **brocades** *n.* fabrics with raised patterns in gold or silver.
3. **Mario Cuomo** politician and former New York governor.
4. **apartheid** (uh PAHR tyd) *n.* system of racial segregation and discrimination.
5. **Balkanized** *adj.* broken up into smaller, often hostile groups.
6. **Nolan's famous tree** . . . reference to Betty Smith's novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*.
7. **the Newark of which Portnoy complained** . . . reference to Philip Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint*.
8. **WASP** short for white Anglo-Saxon Protestant; typically refers to a member of the dominant and most privileged class of people in the United States.
9. **Cheever's** reference to John Cheever, an American novelist and short story writer.

always on the verge of fisticuffs with another, blacks and whites, gays and straights, left and right, Pole and Chinese and Puerto Rican and Slovenian? Other countries with such divisions have in fact divided into new nations with new names, but not this one, impossibly **interwoven** even in its hostilities.

- 5 Once these disparate parts were held together by a common enemy, by the fault lines of world wars and the electrified fence of communism. With the end of the cold war there was the creeping concern that without a focus for hatred and distrust, a sense of national identity would evaporate, that the left side of the hyphen—African-American, Mexican-American, Irish-American—would overwhelm the right. And slow-growing domestic traumas like economic unrest and increasing crime seemed more likely to emphasize division than community. Today the citizens of the United States have come together once more because of armed conflict and enemy attack. Terrorism has led to devastation—and unity.
- 6 Yet even in 1994, the overwhelming majority of those surveyed by the National Opinion Research Center agreed with this statement: “The U.S. is a unique country that stands for something special in the world.” One of the things that it stands for is this vexing notion that a great nation can consist entirely of refugees from other nations, that people of different, even warring religions and cultures can live, if not side by side, then on either side of the country’s Chester Avenues. Faced with this **diversity** there is little point in trying to isolate anything remotely resembling a national character, but there are two strains of behavior that, however tenuously, abet the concept of unity.
- 7 There is that Calvinist¹⁰ undercurrent in the American psyche that loves the difficult, the demanding, that sees mastering the impossible, whether it be prairie or subway, as a test of character, and so glories in the struggle of this fractured **coalescing**. And there is a grudging fairness among the citizens of the United States that eventually leads most to admit that, no matter what the English-only advocates try to suggest, the new immigrants are not so different from our own parents or grandparents. Leonel Castillo, former director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and himself the grandson of Mexican immigrants, once told the writer Studs Terkel proudly, “The old neighborhood Ma-Pa stores are still around. They are not Italian or Jewish or Eastern European any more. Ma and Pa are now Korean, Vietnamese, Iraqi, Jordanian, Latin American. They live in the store. They work seven days a week. Their kids are doing well in school. They’re making it. Sound familiar?”
- 8 Tolerance is the word used most often when this kind of coexistence succeeds, but tolerance is a vanilla-pudding word, standing for little more than the allowance of letting others live

10. **Calvinist** *adj.* related to Calvinism, a set of Christian beliefs based on the teachings of John Calvin that stresses God’s power, the moral weakness of humans, the idea that one’s destiny is set and unchangeable.

NOTES

interwoven (ihn tuhr WOH vuhn) *adj.* intermingled; combined

diversity (duh VUR suh tee) *n.* variety of different ethnic or cultural groups


coalescing (koh uh LEHS ihng) *n.* coming together in one body or place

unremarked and unmolested. Pride seems excessive, given the American willingness to endlessly complain about them, them being whoever is new, different, unknown or currently under suspicion. But patriotism is partly taking pride in this unlikely ability to throw all of us together in a country that across its length and breadth is as different as a dozen countries, and still be able to call it by one name. When photographs of the faces of all those who died in the World Trade Center destruction are assembled in one place, it will be possible to trace in the skin color, the shape of the eyes and the noses, the texture of the hair, a map of the world. These are the representatives of a mongrel nation that somehow, at times like this, has one spirit. Like many improbable ideas, when it actually works, it's a wonder. 🐾

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Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read.

1. According to Quindlen, what familiar object serves as an ideal representation of America?
2. According to Quindlen, how have people's attitudes about her being a product of a mixed marriage changed over time?
3. What does Quindlen think unified America's diverse ethnic groups before the end of the cold war?
4. According to Quindlen, how have other countries often handled deep ethnic divisions?
5. According to the former head of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, how are today's neighborhood stores similar to and different from the old neighborhood stores?
6.  **Notebook** Write a summary of "A Quilt of a Country" to confirm your understanding of the essay.

RESEARCH

Research to Clarify Choose at least one unfamiliar detail from the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an idea expressed in the essay?

Research to Explore Choose something that interests you from the text, and formulate a research question.



A QUILT OF A COUNTRY

Close Read the Text

- The model, from paragraph 5 of the essay, shows two sample annotations, along with questions and conclusions. Close read the passage and find another detail to annotate. Then, write a question and your conclusion.

ANNOTATE: These phrases make comparisons between people’s emotions and physical barriers placed by warring nations.

QUESTION: Why does the author use these comparisons?

CONCLUDE: The comparisons create a sense of danger and clarify the idea of a “common enemy.”

ANNOTATE: These words characterize a new concern that arose at the end of the cold war.

QUESTION: What do these words suggest about the nature of the problem?

CONCLUDE: “Creeping” suggests that the problem grew slowly and secretly. “Evaporate” adds that it was hidden and not immediately noticed.

Once these disparate parts were held together by a common enemy, by the fault lines of world wars and the electrified fence of communism. With the end of the cold war there was the creeping concern that without a focus for hatred and distrust, a sense of national identity would evaporate, that the left side of the hyphen—African-American, Mexican-American, Irish-American—would overwhelm the right.

Tool Kit

Close-Read Guide and Model Annotation

STANDARDS

Reading Informational Text

• **9-10.RI.CS.5** Analyze how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text.

• **9-10.RI.CS.6** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

- For more practice, go back into the text, and complete the close-read notes.
- Revisit a section of the text you found important during your first read. Read this section closely, and **annotate** what you notice. Ask yourself **questions** such as “Why did the author choose these words?” What can you **conclude**?

Analyze the Text

CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE to support your answers.

Notebook Respond to these questions.

- (a) **Analyze** Explain Mario Cuomo’s conundrum. (b) How does this detail contribute to the development of Quindlen’s ideas?
- (a) **Generalize** Why is Quindlen reluctant to define “anything remotely resembling a national character”? (b) **Connect** What qualities does she propose are essentially American? Explain.
- (a) **Deduce** At the end of paragraph 3, Quindlen says, “You know the answer.” Explain what that answer is. (b) **Interpret** Why do you think she leaves that answer open-ended?
- Essential Question:** *What does it mean to be “American”?* What have you learned about American identity from reading this essay?

Analyze Craft and Structure

Purpose and Rhetoric An **author's purpose** is his or her reason for writing. The four general purposes for writing are to inform, to persuade, to entertain, and to reflect. Writers also have specific purposes for writing that vary with the topic and occasion. A writer may want to explain a particular event or reach a special audience. Those intentions shape the choices the writer makes, including those of structure and **rhetoric**, or language devices.

Anna Quindlen organizes this essay around a central **analogy**—a comparison of two unlike things that works to clarify an idea. Quindlen was moved to write this essay shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Consider how her purpose and use of analogy reflect the concerns of that moment in history.

Practice

CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE
to support your answers.

 **Notebook** Respond to these questions.

1. **(a)** Identify three details in the first paragraph that support Quindlen's idea that America is a mash-up of different cultures. **(b)** According to Quindlen, what "notion" unites American culture into a single whole?
2. For Quindlen, why does the idea of a crazy quilt capture a tension at the heart of American culture?
3. **(a)** Use the chart to explain how each passage adds to Quindlen's analogy of the crazy quilt. **(b)** Select a fourth passage from the essay that you think belongs on the chart. Explain your choice.

PARAGRAPH	PASSAGE	HOW IT DEVELOPS THE ANALOGY
2	<i>Many of the oft-told stories . . . ostracism of the other.</i>	
4	<i>Other countries with such . . . even in its hostilities.</i>	
8	<i>When photographs of the faces . . . a map of the world.</i>	

4. Why might the analogy of a quilt have seemed fitting at a time that the nation was suffering from a great trauma? Explain.



A QUILT OF A COUNTRY

Concept Vocabulary

disparate**pluralistic****diversity****discordant****interwoven****coalescing**

Why These Words? These concept words convey unity and fragmentation. For example, at the beginning of the first paragraph, the author describes America as “a mongrel nation built of ever-changing disparate parts.” The word *mongrel*, a mixed-breed dog, reinforces the idea of disparate elements that come together to form a unique whole.

1. Which concept vocabulary words contribute to the idea of unity, and which contribute to the idea of fragmentation?
2. What other words in the selection connect to the concepts of unity and fragmentation?

Practice

Notebook The concept vocabulary words appear in “A Quilt of a Country.”

1. Use the concept vocabulary words to complete the paragraph.

America is a _____ society, a nation in which groups of people from many _____ backgrounds come together to live. The members of these groups often raise their voices in disagreement, but their _____ opinions are essential to our democracy. Despite the great _____ of America’s population, Americans find ways to bridge their differences, usually by _____ around important social, economic, or political principles. Indeed, the strength of our nation seems to originate from the _____ strands that create its fabric.

2. Write the context clues that help you determine the correct words.

Word Study

Latin prefix: *dis-* The prefix *dis-* shows negation or expresses the idea of being apart or away. In the word *discordant*, *dis-* combines with the Latin root *-cord-*, meaning “heart.” Over time, the word became associated with music that was harsh or out of tune. Today, *discordant* is often used to describe anything that is out of place.

1. Write another word you know that begins with the prefix *dis-*. Explain how the prefix helps you understand the meaning of the word.
2. Reread paragraph 5 of “A Quilt of a Country.” Mark a word (other than *disparate*) that begins with the prefix *dis-*. Write a definition for the word.

WORD NETWORK

Add interesting words related to American identity from the text to your Word Network.

STANDARDS

Reading Informational Text
9-10.RI.CS.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

Language
9-10.L.VAU.4.b Use common grade-appropriate morphological elements as clues to the meaning of a word or a phrase.

Author's Style

Word Choice Fiction writers and poets are not the only ones who choose words carefully. Nonfiction writers like Anna Quindlen also use **vivid language**, or strong, precise words, to bring ideas to life and to communicate them forcefully. Strong verbs and precise adjectives make informational writing more interesting and convincing.

Ordinary adjective: We sailed through the *rough* water.

Precise adjective: We sailed though the *churning* water.

Ordinary verb: I *fell* into the hole.


Strong verb: I *tumbled* into the hole.

Read It

Read the passages from "A Quilt of a Country" and identify the precise adjectives and strong verbs in each one. Then, rewrite each passage, changing the vivid word choices to ordinary ones. Explain how Quindlen's original word choices contribute to the accuracy and liveliness of her writing. Use the chart to record your answers.

PASSAGE	PRECISE ADJECTIVE OR STRONG VERB	REWRITE	EFFECT
<i>What is the point of this splintered whole?</i> (paragraph 4)			
<i>Historians today bemoan . . .</i> (paragraph 3)			
<i>. . . but tolerance is a vanilla-pudding word . . .</i> (paragraph 8)			
<i>And there is a grudging fairness among the citizens of the United States . . .</i> (paragraph 7)			

Write It

 **Notebook** Revise each sentence by replacing verbs or adjectives with stronger, more vivid word choices.

1. The crowd yelled at the player after the game.
2. Eloise was happy when she got her driver's license.
3. The campers carried their gear through the tall grass.
4. The garbage smelled bad after it was in the sun.