

Victims



The evening news these days pays much attention to the ills of modern society. Among the victims of these ills are the homeless, notably the bag lady who lives in the streets and public areas of American cities. During international segments, often the satellite pictures show homeless refugees. During a recent news program, similarities between the homeless bag lady and the refugee lessened the obvious contrasts.

Consider the likenesses. First, both the bag lady and the refugee carry everything they own with them. Neither is assured of shelter on any given night or in inclement weather. The bag lady depends on local hostels or volunteer medical assistance while the refugee has to depend on volunteer medical teams or international rescue organizations. Most bag ladies are undernourished, and refugees are often on the brink of starvation. Furthermore, both are subject to diseases caused by exposure, poor nutrition, and stress.

There are contrasts, too, between these homeless people. The bag lady usually stays in one city whereas the refugee is forced to move from place to place. Because she usually stays in one city, the bag lady can more easily find or be aware of shelters where she is welcome. On the other hand, in most cases, the refugee is unwanted, and there are never enough resources to care for her. The bag lady is typically elderly or in late middle age, but the refugee can be any age. The homeless woman may also have mental or addictive problems; the refugee is often the victim of war or prosecution. Finally, neither bag lady nor refugee has a very promising future. The bag lady dies before her time because of inadequate care and poor nutrition while the refugee often is the innocent victim of war or the epidemics caused by serious disruptions in a nation's life.

In spite of the contrasts, the similarities between the bag lady and the refugee are too striking to ignore. It is also ironic that many Americans are generous to refugee causes but oblivious to the refugees on their own city streets.

DEV 110 Sample Essay: Comparison/Contrast

Reformed



One June day, I staggered into a high school classroom to take my final exam in United States History IV. Bleary-eyed from an all-night study session, I checked the “cheat sheets” taped inside the cuffs of my long-sleeved shirt. I had made the usual desperate effort to cram the night before, with the usual dismal results, making it only to page seventy-five of a four-hundred-page textbook. My high school study habits, obviously, were a mess. In college, however, I’ve made an attempt to reform my note-taking, study routine, and test preparation.

Taking notes is one skill I’ve learned to do better since high school days. I used to lose interest in what I was doing and begin doodling, drawing Martians, or seeing what my signature would look like if I married the cute guy in the second row. Now, in contrast, I try not to let my mind wander, and I pull my thoughts back into focus when they begin to go fuzzy. In high school, my notes often looked like something written in secret code. In college, I’ve learned to use a semi-print style that makes the notes clearer. When I would look over my high school notes, I couldn’t understand them. There would be a word such as “Reconstruction,” then a big blank, and then the word “important.” Weeks later, I had no idea what the word meant or why it was important. Now, I write connecting ideas even if I have to take the time to do it after class.

Ordinary during-the-term studying is another area in which I’ve made changes for the better. As a high school student, I let reading assignments slide. I told myself that I’d have no trouble catching up on two hundred pages during the fifteen-minute bus ride to school. College courses have taught me to keep pace with the work. Otherwise, I feel as though I’m sinking into a quicksand of unread material. When I finally read the high school assignment--or whatever part of it I had time to read--my eyes would run over the words, but my brain would be plotting how to get the car for Saturday night. On the other hand, I now use several techniques that force me to concentrate on my reading. First, I preview the material to get an idea of how complicated it will be. This gives me an idea of how long to allow for concentrated reading. As I read, I mark important passages so that when I review the material, these parts will stand out. Finally, I keep a note pad next to me as I read, and I write down any questions about the reading; then, during class I ask the teacher to clarify these points. By following these steps, I maintain a high level of concentration on my college reading instead of daydreaming and procrastinating the way I used to in high school.

In addition to learning how to cope with daily work, I’ve also improved the way I prepare for big tests. My all-night study sessions in high school were experiments in self-torture and futility. About 2:00 A.M., my mind, like a soaked sponge, simply stopped absorbing information. Currently, I space out exam study sessions over several days; this way the night before can be devoted to an overall review rather than panic-stricken memorizing. Most important, though, I’ve changed my attitude about tests. In high school, I thought tests were mysterious things with completely unpredictable questions. Today, as a wiser college student, I ask teachers about the kinds of questions that will be on the exam, and I try to “psych out” which areas or facts my teachers are most likely to include. These practices really work; in fact, they’ve taken much of the fear and mystery out of studying for and taking tests.

Since I’ve reformed, note-taking and studying are not as tough as they once were. Furthermore, I feel better about myself now that I approach my school work with an effective plan for success. Looking back, I wish I had wised up a little sooner so that my high school teachers could have seen me working up to my potential instead of barely passing their classes. If they could see my college grade sheets, I’m sure they would be as impressed as they would be surprised. Without a doubt, those grade sheets, so unlike my high school ones, make all the hard work worthwhile.