

Example Compare-Contrast Essay on Two Related Images in *Napoleon Dynamite*

Here is one way to organize your ideas into a four-paragraph essay comparing two elements of a story.

| Section of Essay | Example Essay Focusing on <i>Napoleon Dynamite</i> |
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| <p><u>Introduction</u></p> <p>-Begin with a reasonable “hook.”</p> <p>-Transition from your “hook” to the movie, identifying the <i>title</i> and author of the movie.</p> <p>-State your thesis clearly.</p> | <p>High school can be an alienating and hostile place, especially for young people who don't easily fit in with large groups or don't enjoy "playing the game" of high school social life. It is natural and understandable that each of us wants to fit in and find friends, but this need can also make people adopt a false image or shape themselves into someone they're really not, just in order to belong and be accepted. This conflict plays an important role in <i>Napoleon Dynamite</i>, a movie written by Jerusha and Jared Hess. Through two important images in the movie—the Happy Hands Club and Napoleon’s climactic dance at the movie’s end—we learn that Napoleon, the protagonist, tends to have the courage to be himself and do what he loves, even if people make fun of him for it. Moreover, this pair of images in the movie shows us that by following his passion and doing what he loves, Napoleon discovers one of his natural talents, a talent that enables him to help out his best friend in a truly courageous way.</p> |
| <p><u>Body Paragraph 1</u></p> <p>-Begin with a topic sentence/claim identifying your <u>first chosen element</u> of the movie.</p> <p>-Use specific details from the movie (and meaningful quotations, too) to illustrate your main idea.</p> <p>-Explain your reasoning clearly.</p> | <p>Early in the movie, we encounter one significant image when Napoleon performs as a member of the Happy Hands Club. Standing with four female students at the front of the full classroom (in a group that includes a pair of identical twins), Napoleon and the four young ladies move their hands mostly in unison to the song “The Rose.” From Napoleon’s facial expression, we can tell that he takes seriously what he is doing. It’s difficult to tell if Napoleon enjoys performing like this in front of his peers, but he at least seems to be giving his best effort, rather than making a joke out of it. However, the camera in this scene repeatedly shifts to the face of the student named Don, who sits in the front row and glares mockingly at Napoleon. As the camera shifts back and forth from Napoleon’s face to Don’s face, its movement emphasizes that Don disapproves of Napoleon’s performance and wants to make it obvious that he thinks Napoleon is ridiculous. Moreover, the camera work emphasizes that if Napoleon wants to “be himself” at school and do the things he enjoys, he must deal with the ridicule, mockery, and even bullying of people like Don. Clearly, Napoleon doesn’t take part in the Happy Hands Club in order to be seen as “cool.” He does it because he enjoys music and movement. This fact ends up foreshadowing both Napoleon’s development in the movie and his actions in the movie’s most climactic scene.</p> |
| <p><u>Body Paragraph 2</u></p> <p>-Begin with a topic sentence/claim identifying your <u>second chosen element</u> of the movie.</p> <p>-Use specific details from the movie (and meaningful quotations, too) to illustrate your main idea.</p> | <p>Napoleon’s performance with the Happy Hands Club is related to the movie’s later images of Napoleon as a dancer. The first images of him dancing occur when Napoleon find a VHS tape called <i>D-Qwon’s Dance Grooves</i> in the thrift store, brings the videotape home, plays it in his bedroom, and begins practicing his dance moves. Like the scene with the Happy Hands Club, these glimpses of Napoleon dancing in his bedroom also remind us that Napoleon enjoys moving to music. Moreover, when Napoleon takes a sweaty break from dance practice to drink some Gatorade in the kitchen, he meets LaFawnduh, Kip’s visiting girlfriend, who is surprised to hear that he likes to dance. The small gift LaFawnduh offers him—a mix-tape of songs that her cousin made—is what ends up enabling Napoleon to help his friend Pedro in the movie’s most climactic scene. After Summer Wheatley’s speech and her group dance-performance, when Pedro feels anxious and embarrassed because he hasn’t written a speech or planned a skit, Napoleon tells him, “Pedro, just listen to your heart. That’s what I do.” In a move nobody expects, Napoleon helps his friend by performing a solo dance-routine to LaFawnduh’s music in front of the entire student-body. The image we</p> |

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| <p>-Explain your reasoning clearly.</p> <p>-Use transitions to discuss the meaningful similarities and the meaningful differences between your two chosen elements of the movie.</p> | <p>see repeatedly of Napoleon dancing onstage emphasizes how fluidly he can move and what natural talent he possesses as a dancer. One similarity between this scene and the Happy Hands scene is the presence and behavior of Don, who again grimaces in mockery and disgust at Napoleon the whole time Napoleon performs. However, one important difference between this scene and the earlier one involves how the second scene ends: Don’s mockery of Napoleon, which he makes so obvious during Napoleon’s performance, is completely covered up when the other students in the auditorium give Napoleon a standing ovation. The movie makes it clear to us that Don is only one person, and that his disapproval and mockery of Napoleon do not matter much at all. All the other students recognize and celebrate that Napoleon is a great dancer, and we recognize that Napoleon has discovered one of his talents and courageously used it to help Pedro.</p> |
| <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>What is the <i>take-away</i>?</p> <p>-In other words, from studying these two elements of the movie, what are <u>the most important things we can learn or understand</u> about the <i>characters</i>, about the movie’s <i>meaning</i>, or about the movie’s <i>relevance to life</i>?</p> | <p>In one of the earliest scenes in the movie, a boy on the school bus asks Napoleon what he is going to do today, and Napoleon replies, “Whatever I <i>feel</i> like I wanna do.” In retrospect, by the movie’s end, we can see from this line that Napoleon truly cares about his independence and about “listen[ing] to his heart”; he wants to do what he enjoys, and he tries hard not to care too much about whether other people approve of him. Napoleon joins the clubs he wants to join, he enjoys music and dance, he follows his passions and listens to his heart, and he ends up learning that he is capable of true greatness—as both a dancer and as a friend.</p> |