 Form and structure of ‘A Comparison’

Form:

Sylvia Plath’s ‘A Comparison’ (1962) is a non-fiction text, written in the form of an essay. Key elements of an essay include:

* An introduction and thesis
* Supportive arguments within the body of the essay, which prove the thesis
* Concrete evidence (facts/quotes/statistics etc.) to prove the supportive arguments
* Reasoning: ideas are presented in a logical and structured manner
* A counter-argument might be incorporated and refuted
* High modality language to persuade
* A conclusion where the composer’s line of argument is reasserted.

Student activities:

1. Using a different colour for each one, highlight the elements listed above on your copy of ‘A Comparison’.
2. Does Plath’s ‘A Comparison’ contain each of the elements? Explain your answer.
3. What makes Plath’s essay different to some of the essays you have read (or written)?
4. What effect do these differences have upon you as the responder?

Structure:

Structure refers to the way in which the ideas are revealed in a text. Are they chronological or non-linear? Are they conveyed using a unique sentence structure/syntax? Use the following questions to guide your exploration of Plath’s structure in ‘A Comparison’.

1. What do you notice about the lengths of the paragraphs?
2. What do you notice about the lengths of the sentences?
3. How do these variations in length enable Plath to develop power and authority in her essay?
4. Plath’s ideas can be tracked throughout the essay as follows:
5. Plath presents her initial argument
6. Plath shifts her argument
7. Plath provides a counter-argument
8. Plath discredits the counter-argument
9. Plath presents her final position

On your copy of ‘A Comparison’ locate and number the sections of the essay where these structural shifts take place. Comment on Plath’s inclusion of the counter-argument (the other poets she might ‘anger’). Why do you think she incorporates this?

Overall, do you think Plath’s essay structure is effective? Explain your response.

1. Plath incorporates a number of metaphors throughout her essay, adding creativity, originality and an aesthetic quality to the structure of her response. Write down one SIGNIFICANT metaphor Plath uses to aid in her construction of argument.
2. What idea does this metaphor represent?
3. Does this metaphor enable Plath to convey the idea in a powerful and precise way? Why?

Experiment with writing – extended metaphor

First, visit the [URL](https://litreactor.com/columns/drag-it-out-how-to-use-extended-metaphors-for-maximum-effect):

1. Write your own extended metaphor.
2. Choose an abstract object, place or idea that interests you (e.g. fear). Write this down.
3. Next, think of a concrete object that could represent your abstract idea (e.g. thunder). Write this down.
4. Brainstorm all of the features you can think of about the second, concrete object.

E.g. thunder is:

1. Apply these features to your original object, place or idea.

E.g.fear is:

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about your abstract idea (fear) by implying throughout your paragraph how it feels/looks/sounds like your concrete object (thunder).