

## Five Comparative Controversy Frames

### More Alike or Different?

More Alike or Different? is useful when students are studying related pairs of items, events, concepts, or individuals. To use this frame, have students review what they know about each item, decide whether the items are more alike or different, and support their choices with relevant details. Asking students to decide whether two items are more alike or different and explain their reasoning forces them to examine the items more closely and attend to the most salient similarities and differences. Here are some sample prompts:

- Are spiders and insects more alike or more different?
- Are fractions and decimals more alike or more different?
- Are Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee more alike or more different?
- Are the heroines in these two stories more alike or more different?
- Are lithium and potassium more alike or more different?
- Are these two paintings more alike or more different?

### Which Is More ... Better ... the Best ... the Most?

This frame asks students to make and defend judgments based on quality or degree. Prompts contain comparative or superlative words such as *more*, *better*, *best*, *most*, and *greatest*. Here are some examples:

- Which is the best season: spring, summer, winter, or fall?
- Which of these articles provides the most realistic advice for dealing with bullying?
- Which type of graph is best for presenting this kind of data?
- Which is the most powerful line in this text?
- Which of these scientific discoveries had the greatest impact on world history?

### Which One Doesn't Belong?

This frame asks students to examine a set of three or four items, search for similarities and differences among the items, and identify one item that doesn't belong with the others. With the traditional use of this frame (see Silver, Brunsting, Walsh, & Thomas, 2012), the teacher deliberately selects one item in the set that is meant to be identified as the outlier (e.g., one non-right triangle among two or three right triangles). Here, however, the idea is to promote controversy by presenting students with a set of items that has no obvious outlier and allowing them to argue the case for any item they want ("This item doesn't belong with the others because ..."). Here are some sample prompts:

- Question mark, period, exclamation point: Which one doesn't belong?
- Butterfly, honeybee, mosquito, firefly: Which one doesn't belong?
- Square, rectangle, rhombus, trapezoid: Which one doesn't belong?
- Jazz, blues, soul, R & B: Which one doesn't belong?
- *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Glass Menagerie*: Which one doesn't belong?
- George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt: Which one doesn't belong?

### **Perfect Pairs and Odd Couples**

With this frame, students are presented with a set of five or more related items that they've recently learned about (e.g., six organs in the human body, the ten amendments in the Bill of Rights, five classes of vertebrates, eight classic films). Students are then asked to decide which two items in the set they believe make a "perfect pair" (items they believe have a lot in common) and which two items are an "odd couple" (items that are very different from one another). Clarify that students can nominate any items they want for their pairings, as long as they can back up their choices with solid reasoning and details. Encourage students to support their choices with as many similarities or differences as they can think of. In response to the question "Which two planets in the solar system do you believe are an odd couple?" for example, a student might say something like this: "Mercury and Neptune are an odd couple, because almost everything about them is different! Mercury is closest to the sun, while Neptune is farthest away. Mercury is small and rocky, while Neptune is large and gaseous. Mercury is extremely hot during the day, whereas Neptune is always extremely cold."

### **Metaphorical Duels**

Metaphorical Duels (Silver, Brunsting, Walsh, & Thomas, 2012) exploits the power of metaphorical thinking to promote depth of understanding. To use this frame, design two possible similes around a topic of interest, ask students which they feel is the most accurate, and have them justify their choices. Making the unusual connections that this frame requires forces students to think deeply and creatively about the critical attributes of the initial topic—a move that can have a powerful impact on comprehension and lead to deep insight. Here are some sample prompts:

- Is a good friend more like a teddy bear or a flower?
- Is prejudice more like an iceberg or a runaway train?
- Is the circulatory system more like a bicycle or a delivery truck?
- Is the scientific method more like a recipe or a map?
- Are graphing calculators more like microscopes or telescopes?
- Are hieroglyphics more like a comic strip or a short story?

Encouraging students to describe the attributes of the items they're comparing can help them make more thoughtful and well-supported choices. ("Before deciding whether prejudice is more like an iceberg or a runaway train, jot down everything you know about prejudice, everything you know about icebergs, and everything you know about runaway trains.")