**Practice Noticing: Contrasts and Contradictions**

You will never find a book or a story without a Contrasts and Contradiction signpost.  If you did, it would probably be so dull that you wouldn’t read more than a few pages before giving up on it entirely.  You want to see something happen that *contrasts* with what you would have expected.  And you want to see someone behave in a way that is different from--that *contradicts*--the way he or she has been acting.

This signpost surprises us with something unexpected, but we have to be alert for it.  And--just as important--we have to stop and think about what it means.  When the writer gives us this signpost, he’s letting us know that here is a clue to something important.  It’s as if he’s saying, “This passage doesn’t solve the mystery for you, but it’s a clue that will help *you* figure things out.”

So when you spot a contrast or a contradiction, stop and ask yourself a simple question: *Why is the character acting this way?*

Here’s an example. You have a friend who has sat beside you at the cafeteria table at lunch every day of the school year so far. She eats her peanut butter and jelly sandwich; you eat your Swiss cheese and turkey, and then you both go off to your next class. But what if, today, you came into the cafeteria, sat down, and spotted her at a table in the far corner? You would certainly notice that, and you would say to yourself, I wouldn’t have expected her to be over there instead of right here where she usually is.” You’d say that because her behavior on this day *contrasts* with what you would have predicted, that it *contradicts* the pattern she has followed for the whole year. And you would wonder, “Why is she acting this way?”



**QICK TIP**

When you read something in social studies or history class, you will need to change the anchor question to "*Why would the people act this way?*" or "*Why would the government act this way?*"

That contradictory behavior was a clue that something has changed. Authors show us change with contrast and contradictions, too. For instance, take a look at Passage 1.

**PASSAGE 1**

Here is an example of Contrasts and Contradictions from a book we both like, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, by Christopher Paul Curtis. At one point in this book, we see that the main character, Kenny, is thinking about something mean his older brother, Byron, just did. Kenny calls Byron a nickname, Daddy Cool.

Leave it to Daddy Cool to kill a bird, then give it a funeral. Leave it to Daddy Cool to torture human kids at school all day long and never have his conscience bother him but to feel sorry for a stupid little grayish brown bird. (p. 84)

**What Did You Notice?**

Reread those two sentences and underline the part that makes you think of a contrast or a contradiction. Then, in the blanks below, answer the anchor question, *Why do you think the character—Daddy Cool—acts that way?* Reading both sentences will help you answer that question.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Here’s What We Noticed**

Mrs. Beers saw this as a C & C

Leave it to Daddy Cool to kill a bird, then give it a funeral. Leave it to Daddy Cool to torture human kids at school all day long and never have his conscience bother him but to feel sorry for a stupid little grayish brown bird. (p. 84)

***From Dr. Beers:*** When I read these two sentences, I thought that killing a bird and then giving it a funeral was an interesting contradiction. And then when Kenny pointed out that Daddy Cool tortures kids all day but feels sorry for a little bird, I knew I was seeing real contradictions in how Daddy Cool—Byron—acted. When I asked myself, “Why would Byron act this way?” I had to admit I wasn’t sure, but I realized that there must be some part of Byron that is good or he wouldn’t want to give the bird a funeral. That helped me realize that the author is showing me that Byron isn’t all bad, that he has a tender side.

***From Dr. Probst:*** I agree. Byron’s behavior is confusing. At one point he kills a bird, but then he gives it a funeral. His brother points out that he tortures kids at school but seems upset about a dead bird. I think the author shows us this contradictory behavior to help us realize that there’s more to Byron than being a bully. I’ll watch and see how his character develops through the rest of the story.

**PASSAGE 2**

Here’s another contrast and contradiction that we spotted in another book, *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry. In this example, the contrast and contradiction appears suddenly in just one sentence as a character called The Giver does something. Read the sentence and underline what you see as the contradiction, and then in the blanks below, answer the anchor question, *Why does the character act this way?*

The Giver smiled, though his smile was oddly harsh. (p. 105)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Here’s What We Noticed**

***From both of us:*** To be honest with you, the two of us never saw a contrast or contradiction in this sentence! It was Mark, a ninth grader from South Carolina, who pointed it out.

***From Mark:*** I stopped here because I noticed how it said he had a harsh smile. Smiles aren’t harsh.

***From both of us:*** WOW! Mark is right—smiles are supposed to show that one is happy. In this case, the author obviously wants us to realize that The Giver has contradictory feelings. He’s smiling on the outside but not feeling that way on the inside. Mark went on:

***From Mark:*** I noted that because it was really a contradiction, and I wondered why he would be sad and smiling. I think that The Giver is smiling because he’s still trying to make Jonas feel good about this assignment, but he also knows something that Jonas doesn’t know. This part made me think that something important is finally going to happen that’s about Jonas finding out something.



My Notes/Thoughts:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

QICK TIP

Contrasts and contradictions usually help us understand how characters are changing. When you talk about the contrasts and contradictions that you noticed, you might use phrases such as "this shows me some interesting character development..."

***From both of us:*** Now as you thought about the anchor question—*Why would The Giver act that way?*—you didn’t have enough information in front of you from that one sentence to have all the detail that Mark gave us. But we hope you realized that smiles aren’t supposed to be harsh. They should be happy. This might make you think that The Giver isn’t happy about something but must pretend that he is.

What’s critical to notice, though, is that a contrast and contradiction can be found in a single sentence.

