

Compare contrast of
two short stories –
river nemunas and
things we'll need for
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The River Nemunas by Anthony Doerr and Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties by Valerie Vogrin are primarily related by a common theme of isolation.

Isolation is certainly the main link between the stories but there are other parallels that can be drawn as well. On the other hand, there are things that the two authors did differently while still staying with this common idea. Along with analyzing the theme of isolation, this paper will also serve to compare and contrast the writing style of the stories as well as the way the two authors used images, character development, and conflicting/post-modern ideas within the stories. The overbearing theme of both stories is isolation, however this is an idea that the two authors took different paths with. In The River Nemunas the main character Allie is isolated in many ways. The story starts with emotional isolation. " I'm fifteen years old.

My parents are dead" (Doerr, 19). These are the first two sentences of the story, which set the mood of a young girl really being all alone. The reader then learns that Allie is leaving America, and the life that she had known, to fly to Lithuania and live with her grandfather in a form of physical isolation. The difference between Allie's isolation and the theme of isolation in Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties is that Allie's isolation is involuntary. She obviously didn't choose to be separated from her parents and once they were gone it would have been very hard for her to stay in America. Leaving for Lithuania was pretty much her only option but she uses her faith to cope with the difficulties.

Isolation is used in *Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties* a little differently, but the theme is, again, the most prominent theme of that story as well. The setting of the story, a remote home off the middle of the woods in an undisclosed location, really drives home the idea of being away from everything. Shay and Mason live alone, away from everyone and everything.

The author intentionally leaves out any detail about where exactly they are located, how far away from society they are, how they got there, or how long they have been there. This is great post-modern technique used to reaffirm the idea of isolation. Again, the difference between their isolation and Allie's isolation is that they voluntarily created this life for themselves. The reader of the story is never actually told why they took themselves out of society but we are given hints and clues that it may be out of (primarily Mason's) neurotic sense of survival. For two stories with such a similar primary theme they have very different writing styles. First of all, *Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties* is told from the point of view of a limited third person narrator, a common technique of post-modern writing.

A limited narrator contributes to the fact that the reader is just as much in the dark about Wayne's appearance and intentions as Shay and Mason are, giving a feeling that the reader isn't getting the full picture of what is going on. Vogrin writes from the narrator's perspective "[Wayne] had left no clue, no note. There would be no answers about the radio or the riders. Here he'd gone, whether he'd return" (Vogrin, 390). This technique is interesting, sort of like reverse psychology by Vogrin on the reader. She is telling the audience "you don't know what any of that was about" in a way that almost provokes the audience to then have to discuss what they think everything

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meant (as we did in class). Even though *The River Nemunas* was not written from the perspective of a narrator, I think the two stories did have some similarities in the style of writing. In *The River Nemunas* the story is told from the perspective of Allie, and it does not read the same as *Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties*.

The River Nemunas has almost a dreary poetic feeling to the writing. There was a great reference to Emily Dickenson in the beginning of that story, about how Allie was carrying an Emily Dickenson book with her, perhaps because she is a fan, which I think is very fitting because the story is supposedly told by Allie, and it has a similar feel to an Emily Dickenson piece. *Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties* has almost no poetic feel to it, however, what links the writing styles of these two pieces is the way they both switch back and forth from flowing sentences to fragmented writing. In *Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties* there are the abrupt lists throughout the story. In *The River Nemunas*, the way Doerr tells the story, there are parts where he breaks out of the poetic, flowing, style and hits the reader with very direct, very bold, statements. Doerr writes from Allie's perspective " I saw a Sturgeon. So did Mrs.

Sabo. I go to bed and wake up mad... Mishap barks at me" (Doerr, 28). This quote depicts some of the fragmented language that Allie uses, which provides a sense of frustration, and maybe that she is not dealing with the stress of her new situation as well as she would like to be. The fragmented lists used in *Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties* were similar in that they broke the story up and provided the reader with raw information

and feelings about the characters. Both stories are great examples of post-modern writing, even overlapping in some techniques.

One characteristic of post modern writing is the idea of a “ flat” or open ending. Essentially in post-modern writing rarely will a story end with a giant climax at the end. This is an area where both stories were similar. In *Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties* Wayne mysteriously leaves and the couple goes back to their life of isolation. In *The River Nemunas*, after Allie and Grandpa Z catch the sturgeon, they basically go back to their regular life, and Allie even says “ We hardly ever talk about the fish” (Doerr, 39). Another technique that is shared by both stories is that at face value both stories are completely understandable just to read on their own, but a diligent reader would be able to draw ties to historical stories, in this case both happened to have parallels to the bible. Allie convincing Grandpa Z that sturgeon still exist can easily be related to Allie convincing Grandpa Z that God (and religion) exists.

The sturgeon fish is can be seen as an objective correlative for religion in this instance. On the other hand, in *Things We'll Need For The Coming Difficulties* Wayne and Mason can be seen as a parallel to Jesus and the anti-Christ.

Mason is an objective correlative for Jesus in that he is portrayed as the good guy (not to mention also a carpenter) whereas Wayne is the interruption and temptation that test Shays faith the lifestyle she had adopted with Mason. At the surface the only connection that shows in both of these stories may be the theme of isolation. Isolation is clearly the most prominent tie between both stories but by looking a little deeper there is more in common with

these stories than meets the eye. Of course both authors put their own twist
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on the isolation theme and they do differ in some ways but I after really analyzing the pieces I found them both to be consistent with post-modern techniques in their own ways.