

# Sophie karbjinski comparative analysis

Business



David Foster Wallace's "This Is Water", Text A, is a witty, original and meaningful commencement speech he gave to the graduates of Kenyon College in 2005. The short quote from Kurt Vonnegut's novel "God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater", Text B, is a short speech directed to babies, describing how the world works and what the only rule is. In "This Is Water" Foster Wallace is trying to present a different view on the daily life of grown-ups and the way we interact with people in situations of conflict and stress and the "difficulty of empathy".

The quote from "God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater" seems very light and slightly absurd at first, but gives you the most basic definition of the essence of what should enable mankind to live together in peace. In this essay I will be addressing how the differences in style of the two texts both support a similar greater theme, which is the importance of being warmhearted and tender to mankind and ourselves. The tone used in Text A is very analytical, instructive and informative but humorous and nearly satirical at the same time, making the reader feel like he is reading a manual for leading a blissful and happy life, but at the same time, the slightly informal diction gives of the vibe that it is more of a long answer to a question within a conversation with a good friend. This is also supported by the title "This Is Water", which is one the one hand a direct, factual statement but on the other seems slightly mysterious and out-of-context. This feeling is created mainly through the choice of exact and detailed diction at first, talking about the "deployment of didactic [...] parable-ish stories" which is then followed by a informal style-break mentioning "bullshitty conventions" (l.

4) or him not being the “ wise old fish”. Text B has a very specific diction, which is simple yet catchy, due to the very effective imagery Vonnegut creates, but also the structure catches the reader off-guard. The quote starts off with a sentence fragment; “ Hello, babies”. This comes as a surprise because people do not normally directly address babies so directly or simply as a generic group like this. It raises questions. Who are these babies and why are we talking to them? Then Vonnegut gives us an unusually simple description of the world.

The summer is “ hot”, the winter is “ cold” and the earth is “ round and wet and crowded”. The narrators voice seems very kind, warm and almost humorous, creating a welcoming atmosphere. He addresses the “ babies” twice more, adding further weight to the question of whom he is talking to. However, he then tells us that what really matters, the “ one rule” in the world, is that “ God damn it, you’ve got to be kind”, putting further emphasis on this statement by placing a hyphen before it, creating a silence leading up to his final statement, placing it in its own room. Text A and B share one main similarity; they both deal with the importance of compassion, empathy and kindness in our actions towards other people.

Text A states the necessity of letting go of arrogance and close-mindedness in order to being able to stop thinking of ourselves as the center of the universe. He also mentions the significance of staying “ alert and aware” to prevent yourself from turning into a bitter, miserable and self-centered person who is unsatisfied and frustrated by everything. He says that it takes “ discipline” and you will have to make a conscious decision to have positive thoughts, an understanding mind and a kind heart, which is “ unimaginably  
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hard” to do. Vonnegut is trying to deliver the exact same message in Text B, he only condenses it into three lines, that reach your heart as effectively as Wallace’s five pages, if not more so, due to the genuine truth, which every human feels deep in his bones and Vonnegut stated so nakedly that it hurts “ God damn it – you’ve got to be kind”. Although Text A and B might seem to not share many similarities on a first glance, judging by the text type, structure and tone, once you analyze them more closely and discover the deeper meaning and what they are trying to express, you realize that they both deal such a pressing issue to all mankind, the environment and everything we interact with. The way Vonnegut puts it, it seems so easy, the one rule, just don’t be mean, something which artists and people all throughout history have been expressing.

The infinite longing for peace, that seems so difficult to achieve. This is what both texts come down to in the end, the appeal to humanity to just “ be kind”.