

Steps to  
**Successful  
Reading:**  
*Nonfiction*



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# NEWSPAPER COLUMNS

## 4

“I WAS AN APPALOOSA, IN SEARCH OF HALLOWEEN LOOT”

(by Craig Wilson, *USA Today*)

“A GIFT TO REMEMBER” (by Ellen Goodman, *The Boston Globe*)

*Learning Strategy:* Summarizing

*Reading Skill:* Comparing and Contrasting

*Test-Taking Strategy:* Personal Response Essay

### Setting the Scene

Every newspaper has columnists who serve as a voice, a conscience, a commentator for its readers. Some columnists, like Craig Wilson and Ellen Goodman, reach national fame for their humor or their succinct analysis of popular culture or politics. Both of these columnists are award-winners; clearly they have a following who appreciates their work.

Begin this lesson by bringing a copy of your own local paper to class and inviting students to read aloud one of the regular columnists—you may even have Ellen Goodman carried in your paper via syndication. Or, you might bring in a Wednesday copy of *USA Today* and find Craig Wilson’s column “The Final Word” in the Life section. Engage students in a discussion of why newspapers use columnists on their op-ed pages and what role these columnists play in the day-to-day life of newspaper readers.

Ask students to discuss the importance of newspaper columnists in all their various styles. What role do they feel these writers play for their readers? Why do they think that readers return to columnists’ work time and time again?

### Introducing the Skill

Use a non-text example to begin the lesson on comparing and contrasting. Ask students to compare and contrast two different objects in the classroom, such as two different plants, pictures, books, posters, artwork. Ask the class to discuss ways these objects are alike and ways they are different. Be sure to choose objects that are ordinary and used every day. Emphasize how often they can use the skill of comparing and contrasting. Show students how to apply this skill in other subject areas as well, such as social studies/history, English literature, sports, or even math.

### Especially for English Language Learners

*Sharing Culture* Halloween is a phenomenon that is not shared by all cultures. You may want to explain to your ELLs the ritual of Halloween and why people dress up and go door-to-door looking for treats. Invite those for whom Halloween is a regular tradition to talk about some experiences they have had that might even be similar to the one Craig Wilson describes in his column. Allow your ELLs to express their views of Halloween. For many, All Saints’ Day may have a significantly different meaning and for some people, Halloween

## Teacher Guide

may have a negative or even offensive connotation. Be sure to keep the discussion open so that everyone can express his or her point of view.

*Sharing Language* Craig Wilson uses many slang idioms in his column piece on being an appaloosa on Halloween. Before you read, go over these expressions and ask your ELLs to guess at what the meanings might be. Then ask your native speakers to try to explain these idioms—and better yet, where they come from. Here are a few that might cause some problems:

loot	shenanigans
pickings were slim	vaudeville act
rabble-rousers	mayhem

### Assessing Understanding

Personal response is not as widely used on standardized tests as it is in the classroom and within school districts. However, it is a very useful tool, particularly for use in portfolio assessments used within school buildings and districts. Portfolios offer a very personalized look at the growth of any individual student throughout the year.

A personal response statement can show several things: First, it can reflect a student's understanding of the text as she or he interacts with it. A student can identify with the events, characters, or ideas they are reading about and help themselves to focus even more on their own ideas or beliefs. Second, a personal response is an opportunity to see how a student organizes written information in an informal way. This helps to determine how many writing skills come easily to the student. Third, a personal response enables you to see if there are any areas in which an individual student needs help or remediation.

It is useful to use a variety of assessments throughout the school year, including portfolios containing personal responses. Working with you, students can assess their own growth throughout the year and can take part in their own assessment. This helps them as they set goals for the coming semesters and years.

### Reading Further

*I Know Just What You Mean . . . The Power of Friendship in Women's Lives* by Patricia O'Brien and Ellen Goodman, Simon & Schuster: New York.

### Extending to Technology

To find more information on-line, use the following search terms: Ellen Goodman and Craig Wilson. Or visit these web sites:

Ellen Goodman quotations:  
[www.womenshistory.miningco.com/library/qu/blqgood.htm](http://www.womenshistory.miningco.com/library/qu/blqgood.htm)  
[www.bemorecreative.com](http://www.bemorecreative.com)

Interview with Washington Press Club:  
[www.npc.press.org/wpforal/good1.htm](http://www.npc.press.org/wpforal/good1.htm)

Craig Wilson columns:  
[www.USAToday.com](http://www.USAToday.com)

Ellen Goodman columns:  
[www.BostonGlobe.com](http://www.BostonGlobe.com)

# NEWSPAPER COLUMNS

## 4

“I WAS AN APPALOOSA, IN SEARCH OF HALLOWEEN LOOT”  
(by Craig Wilson, *USA Today*)

“A GIFT TO REMEMBER” (by Ellen Goodman, *The Boston Globe*)

*Learning Strategy:* Summarizing

*Reading Skill:* Comparing and Contrasting

*Test-Taking Strategy:* Personal Response Essay



### STEP 1: LINK IT

#### Before You Read

Who among your friends is a great storyteller? What makes your friend’s stories so great? Are they funny? Are they suspenseful? Does your friend use a lot of vivid detail to show what happened? Can you often relate to what happened to your friend almost as if it happened to you?

Good storytellers can tell a story and make you feel what they feel. Good storytellers are great to listen to—they can make you laugh, cry, and especially think. The best storytellers can carve meaning from very simple moments and apply that meaning to life in general.

People can tell great stories orally and in writing. You are about to read two stories written by newspaper columnists Craig Wilson and Ellen Goodman. These two writers contribute regularly to newspapers read by thousands of people. Wilson’s writing often evokes a mood, making the reader remember, think, or laugh out loud. Goodman’s columns tend to be more political in nature, using everyday events to provoke a way of thinking about the world. Both writers are great storytellers.

As you read, think about how each writer tells his or her story. Read closely and think about what part makes you laugh, what part makes you sad (if any), what part makes you think, and most important, what part you feel you can identify with. On the lines on the next page, make a list of four or five things you think make a good story. Then check back after you have finished reading.



A good story has:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Set a Strategy

You are going to be reading two articles by two different writers. You are going to have to understand what each article *says*. You will also need to know what each article *means*. This way you will be able to talk about them with confidence, especially as you compare them.

Earlier, you learned how to find the main idea by adding up all of the details and creating one sentence that told what the main point of the article on Maya Lin was all about. Now you are going to learn about another reading strategy that goes one step further than finding the main idea. This strategy is called **summarizing**.

Summarizing is a process of organizing what you read. First, you find the most important points, (or characters, or events). Then you find the most important details, and then you state these points briefly in your own words. This strategy is useful because it can help you remember what you read as well as help you monitor your own understanding. Summarizing can help you discover the information that is most important to the author. It can also help you better analyze what you read. If you cannot summarize what you have read, then you do not understand it. If you can, then you can build on what you've learned, and better understand what you read.

The three main characteristics of a summary:

- It is brief.
- It includes the main idea and the most important details.
- It is organized with the most important ideas first and the details second.



**STEP 2: READ IT**

*Craig Wilson is a regular columnist for USA Today as well as a feature reporter. His “Final Word” is often a humorous glimpse of the author’s life and reflections of life in general. Readers can often relate to him, since his experiences are often mirrored in theirs—especially as new generations change the “rules” of how things are done.*

**“I Was an Appaloosa, in Search of Halloween Loot”**

Growing up in the country has its advantages. Trick-or-treating is not one of them.

I remember how envious I was of the kids in town, the ones who had hundreds of houses to go to. I had images of them running from porch to lighted porch, bags so filled with candy they had to be dragged along.

I grew up on a farm, but our place was on the edge of a hamlet of 10 houses, population 52. The place was so small we couldn’t even be called a crossroads because the two roads we had didn’t cross. They only made a T.

10 On Halloween, the pickings were slim. Auntie Bernice, over on the other road, gave out popcorn balls, which to an 8-year-old in the country seemed quite exotic. They were in plastic wrap, tied up with orange ribbon. The rest of the lot weren’t so creative, offering nothing more original than M&Ms. One neighbor gave out dimes. One dime per kid. Yes, she was odd.

15 But whatever we got was never enough to even cover the bottom of the bag. We could have held all the Halloween candy we gathered in a small lunch bag, but having the optimism of youth, year after year, we lugged shopping bags. It didn’t help matters any that two houses never gave out anything, their porch lights as dark as the owners’ spirit.

20 The whole trick-or-treat journey could be done in less than 20 minutes. Then we’d return home, all dressed up with no place left to go.

In the meantime, the older kids, which included my brother and his gang of rabble-rousers, were out being creative—soaping windows and toilet-papering trees. They were 12. Far too cool to trick-or-treat.

25 One year, their Halloween shenanigans got the better of them when they overturned Laverne Hall’s outhouse and in their panic to escape found themselves falling into the hole. My biggest regret in life is I wasn’t there to witness it. To





make matters better, they had to be hosed down before they could enter the house.

30 My pal Patty Miller often accompanied me on my Halloween rounds. She lived up the road and viewed our trick-or-treat situation as I did. Pathetic.

So one year, we decided we would branch out. We would not be confined by the borders of our dreary little life. We would walk down roads not taken.

I was an Appaloosa horse that year. Brown and white. My costume's mask was  
35 so long that whenever I moved my head quickly, I bumped into things, like Patty Miller. The tail was so long, it needed to be held.

Patty was a hobo, so when I wasn't bumping her with my horse head, she was hitting me with the hobo stick that rested on her shoulder. We were a vaudeville act, trapped in the farmlands of upstate New York.

40 Once we finished the 10 houses, we made our move. There were a couple of houses half a mile down the road. Untapped territory. We would go to them, get more candy and keep moving. Maybe we'd walk all the way into town, eight miles away.

The fact that we both were terrified was never discussed. It didn't need to be. I  
45 remember cars barreling down the highway toward us. We must have been a sight. A hobo clutching an Appaloosa clutching his own tail. But no one stopped. No one even slowed down.

When we approached one of the houses we'd never been to before, we saw the porch light was on. Our hearts raced. Then, all of a sudden, out of the sky, maybe  
50 a tree, fell two bodies. They could have been ghosts.

What followed was panic, chaos and mayhem.

I wet my Appaloosa horse costume right there on the spot. And Patty Miller? She screamed a scream so long and so loud that I could believe it was still going on, except for the fact I saw her last year and she appears to have finally pulled  
55 herself together.

My brother, however, is *still* laughing.



**Check Your Strategy**

Notes for summarizing:

Main character(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Main events: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Key details: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**STEP 3: ASSESS IT**

**Check Your Understanding**

Answer the following questions to be sure that you understand what you have read.

- 1. Why did Craig Wilson and his pal Patty Miller decide to venture farther than the borders of their usual trick-or-treating neighborhood?

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- 2. In what way did Wilson’s brother look at Halloween differently from Craig? Give evidence to support your point of view.

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- 3. What do you think happened that made Craig “wet (his) Appaloosa horse costume” and Patty “scream a scream so long and so loud”?

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- 4. What kind of a relationship do you think Craig had with his brother when they were young? What evidence can you find to support your thoughts?

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- 5. Why did Ellen Goodman feel like talking to the man with the bicycle?

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6. How did Goodman feel about some of her presents as a child?

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7. What does Goodman mean when she says, “Maybe in every season, we project from our needs, we giftwrap what was lacking in our own lives”?

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8. In one short sentence, Goodman says what she thinks the “careful” people should do to truly give to each other. What does she say? And what do you think she means by it?

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### Test-Taking Strategy

Some assessments ask you to respond to what you have read by writing a journal entry that shows how you relate to what the author has said. This type of assessment helps you determine if you understood the reading.

Read the following two questions. Then take 20 minutes to write your personal response to one of the questions. Remember to support your answers with specific reasons. If you run out of space, continue your answer on the back of the page. (For example, imagine that the question is *Why did you like the article by Craig Wilson?* You might answer, *Because it was funny.* Be sure to tell *why* you thought it was funny; for example, *I could remember what it was like to be eight years old and really serious about trick-or-treating, so I could relate to Craig’s feelings. I could also as an older person, now, relate to his brother and why he thought it was funny to scare his little brother. And I could just picture those kids’ faces when they got scared—it must have been quite a moment!*)





## STEP 4: THINK ABOUT IT

You've just read two very different stories by newspaper columnists. These two people have the same job, yet they do their job in very different ways.

When you read two articles or stories that are of the same genre—such as a column—a helpful way to distinguish between them is by using a reading strategy called **comparing and contrasting**. When you **compare** two things, you analyze how they are alike. When you **contrast** two things, you analyze how they are different. For example, let's say you are asked to compare the two games of baseball and football. Here's how you might analyze these games using comparing and contrasting:

*When I compare baseball and football, I discover there are many things in common. First of all, they are both played with a ball. Second, they both have two teams who play against one another, and the team with the highest score at the end wins the game. They are both mostly played outside. Both games have professional teams who are extremely well-paid for their participation. Both games play through a season and then vie for a major tournament at the end of the season. Both games have players who are traded among teams. Both games require a lot of running. Both games have team coaches.*

You could come up with even more ways the games are alike. If you were to contrast the two games, this might be something like what you would discover:




*When I contrast baseball and football, I find that they have a lot of differences. The ball in baseball is small and round and fits in a player's hand. In football, the ball is made of pigskin and it is oval. In football, players throw the ball and kick the ball. In baseball, they bat the ball. In football, teams score goals; in baseball, they score runs. Football games are divided into quarters; baseball games are divided into innings. The football field is rectangular and is divided into yards. The baseball field is diamond-shaped and is divided into bases. In football, players wear shoulder pads; in baseball, players do not. Again, there are many other differences, but you can fill them in from here!*

### Comparing and Contrasting

When you read, you use comparing and contrasting to analyze the similarities and differences among characters, events, facts, or authors. You use comparing and



**STEP 5: RELATE IT**

1. Take a look at your local newspaper and identify the regular columnists. Who are they and what type of column do they write? Are there any that you particularly like or agree with? Read three or four columns by one of your favorite columnists. Then summarize each of the columns and present your summary to the class orally. (Speaking/Listening) 
2. Log on to USA Today.com and find several of Craig Wilson's columns. (They are part of the Life Section called "The Final Word.") Read some of the columns and then create a chart that compares and contrasts them. What are the common threads that run through his columns? How are these columns different? (Technology) 
3. Using charcoal or pencil, choose a moment from either Craig Wilson's or Ellen Goodman's column and illustrate it. Use the details the writer gives to determine details. You may need to fill in any details you don't know using your own artistic license. (Visual) 
4. Imagine you have been asked to write the teleplay (a script for television) for either Craig Wilson's or Ellen Goodman's column. Turn the column into a script, complete with stage directions and specific dialogue for each character. Write your teleplay and then, if there's time, invite your classmates to perform it. (Writing) 