Matrices or Charts

(also called Semantic Feature Analysis or Distinctive Features Activity)

Purpose:
To provide a framework for comparing and contrasting similar concepts.

Materials:
Any single or multiple texts that contain elements for comparison. Examples: characters from a piece of fiction, a content article about environmental threats, candidates for election, social studies texts about different forms of government, etc.

Procedure:

1. Teachers may want to develop the charts or matrices beforehand for students to use either alone or in small group activities. After students become accustomed to this format, they may want to develop their own charts or matrices as a note-taking aid or a summarizing/ synthesizing activity.
2. To develop a matrix or chart, first prepare a grid. Along one axis of the grid list the concepts to be compared (e.g., characters, environmental threats, candidates, forms of government). Along the other axis of the grid, list key characteristics that distinguish the concepts (e.g., personality, legal solutions, candidates' positions on issues, ways for determining government leaders).
3. Students make notes in the boxes on the grid by thinking about each concept in light of each key feature. Using the "characters chart" as an example, they would make notes about each character's personality in the corresponding box on the grid.
4. Note: Grids or charts can also be useful for instructional planning. See the example of World War II books located at http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Resc/Trade/WWIIbooks.pdf

For more information, see Rasinski, T., & Padak, N. (2000). *Effective reading strategies* (2nd. Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.