Sample Classification Papers

The students who wrote these papers were creating a classification system for families, drawing on several personal essays they had read.

This is a good example of a classification of families: the principle of classification (the trait used to define the categories) is the type of expectations parents have for children. The list is comprehensive, meaning that any (additional) family you wanted to consider would probably fall into one of these categories.

What To Expect

Family is a complicated word. To every person it means something different. In America there are many different kinds of families and they are hard to classify because different people focus on different areas for classifying families. Some may look at the members, or values, or financial stability of the family. The problem with these things is that some families don’t fit perfectly into one category or another. One way to group families that’s easy to distinguish is by the types of expectations that parents have for their children. There are parents with no expectations of their children, some with a certain set of expectations, others have hopeful expectations and some parents hold very high expectations of their children. These expectations differentiate between families and give you a better sense of what the family is like. There are four essays in Rereading America that are good examples of these different types of families.

When there are no expectations from a parent, it’s easy to not care about anything. A family such as this is not likely to produce very successful individuals. The family depicted in “Looking for Work,” by Gary Soto is one that fits this classification well. The family is a Mexican-American family with three kids and a mother. One of the kids strives to be like the white families that he sees on TV—he even tries to go around town doing jobs so he can make some money—but he gets ridiculed and is not
encouraged when he does this. The essay also talks about how the boy is a “stupid” in school; he knows that he’s not very smart, but he doesn’t care. Although the kids in this family may have potential to do better in life, they don’t because there is no encouragement for them.

A family that may encourage their children a bit more than this would be one that has very specific expectations. The children could be very happy and make great success for themselves if they share the same goals as their parents. In the essay by Andee Hochman, entitled “Growing Pains,” we see a family that doesn’t share the same goals, so there is conflict. The daughter has grown up, gone to college, and her parents are proud of her. When she tells them that she’s a lesbian, though, they aren’t happy for her anymore. They act like they’ve just lost their daughter and they never treat her the same afterward. The fact that she’s done great things in her life no longer matters because now she’s different. To be a happy family, parents need to allow their children to do what they feel fits them.

When there are hopeful expectations, all members of the family can be happy. In a family such as this, the parents hope that their child achieves great things and they encourage them, but they don’t press their own ideas onto the child; they let them find their own way to success. The Indian boy in Roger Jack’s essay, “An Indian Family” is allowed to grow up this way. The boy lives with his Aunt because when his dad got remarried, he was unhappy. His Aunt guides him along his way, but she doesn’t tell him what he needs to do with his life. She asks him what he wants to do, encourages him and shows that she is very proud when he does make something of himself. The importance in this type of family is placed on supporting the child’s actions.
Great importance is also placed on support in a family that has high expectations for their children. In a family like this, the children are expected to achieve more than their parents. The girl in "Envy," by Bebe Campbell, is expected to do well in school and behave so that she will be able to go to college, but she struggles. When the girl gets in trouble at school, she’s upset because she knows that she has disappointed her mother. After this event, the mother shows her daughter that she still loves her, but that she expects it to never happen again. Support is important even when the kid doesn’t succeed. In this case, even more support is needed to achieve greatness.

Choosing to classify families by what kind of expectations are placed on the kids gives us a better picture of what goes on in a family than using values or money for criteria. This is because it gives you an idea of what they want to come out of their family. The more expectations there are, the greater success there is. So think about your family, were expectations few, specific, hopeful or high?
This is a **good** example of a classification of families (perhaps not as interesting/useful as the previous example): the **principle of classification** (the trait used to define the categories) is the **family structure**.

**Family Reconstruction**

What the common parental situation children are put into lately? This question is one that has changed so much over the past twenty years. So many people begin to wonder what has changed this stereotype. Some blame it on music; T.V.; or just a change in ethics, but no one understands what these children are really put through. The main groups of families are: those with both loving parents, single parents, parents who don’t accept their child’s choice, and parents who just don’t care.

None of the stories really touched upon the category of a family with both loving parents, but this is how my family is. My father is a mechanical engineer and my mother is a housewife, which puts my family pretty well set. When my sisters and I were still home almost every dinner was a family dinner, and we usually talked about our days. My sisters and I would both get home around 3:30 from school then my father would come home at about 4:00. Dinner time was usually set for around 6:00-6:30, and afterwards we would have to do our homework. My family has its flaws, but in my opinion it is the best of the above categories, but if I had to choose between the other’s I would choose to have a single parent.

Single parent families are becoming quite popular as of late and three of the stories touched upon this situation. The first story that fits into this category is called “An Indian Family” by Roger Jack. This story talks about a boy who is practically raised by his aunt because his father remarried, and he didn’t like his step brother. This story covers what Native American life is like. The boy and his aunt become good friends and
travel all around together. Then it came time for him to go to college, and to leave his family and start to fend for himself. The second of the stories that fit this category is “Envy” by Bebe Moore Campbell. This story talks about a little black girl who grows up without a father. She goes to school, and is not one of the best students, but seems to get along with the teacher. Then one day a little rich white girl makes a statement about how her father built her a beautiful dollhouse, which made the girl jealous and in private she threatened the girl, but was over heard by the teacher. She gets in trouble by her mother, but she finally says in the end all she wants is her father to come back at any cost. The other story that fits in is “Looking for Work” by Gary Soto. This is a common family situation, but one that has started to pop up lately in the surge for sexual choice is the family that doesn’t accept a child’s choice.

These families tend to be one of the toughest. When a parent has a set idea of how their child should grow up to be, and not allow there to be change, then there is a problem. In the story “Growing Pains” by Andee Hochman it talks about a girl who in her early childhood lived the ideal life. She and her family would all meet at a summer house for a few weeks every summer. Then later on in the story she discovers that she is homosexual. This fact shocks the mother, who hates this idea and doesn’t agree with it. The girl ends up going to Yale and getting a job as a writer. She and her parents send each other letters usually filled with anger and accusations, but in the end she hopes that her family isn’t too disappointed with her sexual choice. This may seem like a bad situation, but the worst of them is a family where the parents just don’t care.

None of the readings cover this topic, but I think it is a very important one to cover because it is become very common lately. Many families have two working
parents who can’t keep their eyes on the children and sooner or later they just let their children make some bad mistakes. This is the worst of all they types because if a parent doesn’t care about their child then they should have the right to take care of them. Children need so much love when growing up, and if the parents can’t give it to them, then they are no parents to the child.

All of these families are found in this world. Families with two loving parents, with a single parent, having parents that don’t accept a child’s choice, and parents who just don’t care are the types of families in today's society. Many people don’t understand the spread in family life. Having a better knowledge of how people are brought up gives you a better idea of what kind of person you might become.
This is an example of a **pitfall to avoid** in writing a classification. The writer talks about each of the families this class had read about, and observes some similarities and differences along the way, but does not take the analysis to the stage of identifying categories: distinct types of families that any family could be put into. Instead, they are treated as individual families. As a result, if we were to bring in a new example, we would not be able to fit it into one of these paragraphs unless it was identical to one of the other families. The list is not comprehensive.

**Differences & Similarities of Families**

While reading the writings of Soto, Hochman, Jack, and Campbell, I noticed that each author’s family differs and also compares to each other. Whether it is the family members themselves, how the family acts towards each other, the expectations each member has for one another, or even the attitude of the family overall—these four families differ and compare in these various ways.

The first family we read about was about a poor Hispanic family. The kid in this story knew that his family was not like others because other families had “no beatings, wore bright clothes, had a lot of toys, had both a mom and dad, had a very loving environment, and a lot of money.” These comments made me have the sense that this family was poor and the attitude of this family was a ‘defend for your own life’ type. The mother did not seem to care too much about the kid’s opinions, so she may not have been the most caring mother.

The second family we read about was much different from the Hispanic family. The family Hochman described seemed really close and caring. I found evidence of this from the first part of story where all the relatives share a cottage. Also, when the girl in the story questioned her own sexual preference, the mother worried about how her daughter would carry on the tradition of having kids to bring to the cottage. This showed that ‘family,’ to this family, was very traditional. Unlike the kid in the Hispanic story, it seemed like money did not mean as much as happiness did to this close family.
The third family we read about by Jack, was about a family of a father, a step mother, the step child, and the father’s own kid. It was quite different than the other two previous stories because of the step-relatives and the fact that one family was white and other was Indian. This family was not a stable one also, because the kid ran away and got into fights. I found a comparison to the second family to this family in the way how this kid’s relative, Aunt Gretchen, took care of him. In the second family, the relatives were close, just like in this third family. I believe that this kid’s parents did really care about his well-being, but the kid was rebellious against the step-relatives. So, the stability of this family lies between the first and second family.

The fourth family we read about by Campbell, was the most different from all of the families. The family pretty much consisted of all women, which meant tremendous amounts of femininity. The women were both living in the residents and working the jobs. The girl in this story seemed to be a bit of a tomboy, even though she was surrounded by girly traditions. She ended up getting into trouble at school. I believe this female society was probably a very loving one, just like the second family. Stereotyping women, the women probably did everything together since women are social beings, just like the second family did.

Each story had a kid in it, which is where most of the attitude of each family came from. The first story had a not-so-caring family, but a boy who wanted to be like a ‘normal’ family. The second story had a very close, traditional family, but a girl who wanted to break the tradition. The third story had a somewhat caring family, but a boy who ran away because of the tension between the step-relatives. The fourth story had a caring group of women as the family, but a rebellious little girl. So in the end, I have
found that each kid rebelled from his or her family in some way. What this tells me is that there is no perfect family for anyone... one just has to learn to live with the family one has.

In conclusion, each of these four families had its own special ways and attitudes, but also compared to the other families with its basic concepts. Some families were warm and loving, others a bit harsh. Each family handled its problems differently, depending on how caring or uncaring each was. Without these differences, none of these families would have their own unique ways, and without the comparisons, I would not have been able to relate or understand the ways of each family. Soto, Hochman, Jack, and Campbell stories and families definitely all had comparisons and differences.
This is an example of another pitfall in writing a classification paper. This writer identifies a number of possible ways to define categories, but doesn’t choose one and run with it. Some families show up in more than one paragraph, a good indication that what this writer calls “categories” aren’t mutually exclusive.

Formal Paper #4

Can you imagine what the world would be like if every single family was identical? I believe that it would be extremely bland and boring. My point in general is that every family is different and that is the way it is supposed to be. Based on the four readings, “An Indian Story” by Roger Jack, “Envy” by Bebe Moore Campbell, “Looking For Work” by Gary Soto and “Growing Pains: Beyond One Big Happy Family” by Anndee Hochman this obvious truth was illustrated very well. Each story shows each family’s individuality in a very unique way. I am going to show you how this was illustrated by putting the families into three different categories and explaining how they are similar. These categories include family values, the expectations or wants that family members have for each other and family traditions or rituals.

The first category I will be talking about is family values and how each family’s values are different due to different cultures and/or beliefs. For example, in the reading “An Indian Story” by Roger Jack, the family has many values that are described throughout the story. Such as when the boy get drunk at Calgary and he is underage and his Aunt Greta is ashamed of what he did. This is a family value. There are family’s that wouldn’t be ashamed of this but rather would encourage this. In my family, this would be frowned upon. This is one of my family’s values. Therefore, my family and the family in the story have this value in common, yet we are so different. In the story “Envy” there is a girl who is extremely frustrated with the fact that her father is never around and threatens to stab her teacher. This is something that she never
learned was wrong. This is a value that she is lacking which is not something I can say for my family or the other families in the other stories. Individuals must learn values and the values that an individual learns are most likely ones that are chosen to teach to that individual by their family members. This is why each family has different values. The similarity that each of these four families has is that they all believe in being family orientated and close. They are all caring families that take care of each other such as Aunt Greta caring for her nephew because his mother passed away in the story “An Indian Story.” Each value that a family has creates expectations for each family member.

The next category I will be talking about is the fact that each family’s differences create different expectations that each family member has for each other. For example, in the story “Looking for Work” by Gary Soto, the little Mexican American boy who is looking for a job expects his family to be a “perfect family” as he sees on television. This is an expectation that not all families have because some already consider themselves to be a perfect family, while others believe they will never be able to come close to being a perfect family. However, I believe there is no such thing as a perfect family. I believe that every family has is differences and problems. On the other hand, what is a perfect family? We don’t have a definition for this so how could we categorize families into this group? The answer: we can’t. However, we can categorize families into other groups such as ethnicity, religion, values, etc. One major difference that I noticed throughout all the stories is that every family was a different ethnicity. There was a story about an Indian family, a Mexican family, and an American family. Because
each family was of a different ethnicity, they each have different cultures. This means they have different rituals or traditions.

The next category I will be talking about is the differences in rituals or traditions among different families. For example, in the story “An Indian Story” the family members create Indian names for each other. This is a tradition or ritual that was taken on by this family because of their ethnicity. A ritual or tradition can also be that each family eats food that is of ethnic background to them. In the story “Looking for Work” the Mexican family eats beans and tortillas for dinner, which is considered a Mexican food. A similarity that each family has is that the names of each individual have a connection to their ethnicity. In “An Indian Story” the family members had nicknames such as Little Girl Heart and Old Woman Walking while in “Looking For Work” there are names such as Frankie and Miss Marino.

In conclusion, these differences are the similarities that each family has. The biggest similarity that every family has in common is that it is different. That is an oxymoron but it is completely true. This makes the world beautiful and confusing at the same time.