

Lesson Plan 10: Writing Really Good Dialogue

Total Lesson Time

60 minutes

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, SWBAT:

1. Understand and identify the difference between real life and novel dialogue.
2. Write dialogue that moves a story forward and helps define characters.

Materials Needed

- Copies of the How To Write Really Good Dialogue worksheet, one for each student. This can also be found on page 66 from the Young Novelist Workbook.
- One extra Comic Strip Worksheet for each student. There will also be a partnering exercise in this lesson, so you will also need to hand out a set of two more for each pair after your students partner.
- Crayons, markers, and/or colored pencils

Lesson Plan 10: Writing *Really Good* Dialogue

Step One: Boring Dialogue

5 minutes

1. Hand out one copy of the How To Write Really Good Dialogue worksheet and an extra Comic Strip worksheet to each student.
2. Have your students turn to the Boring Dialogue Handout and have two volunteers read the two parts in the comic strip.
3. After they are done reading, have them fill in the Comic Strip worksheet with the most boring conversations they've had with a friend, family member, or pet in the last couple days.

Step Two: Introduce How to Write Really Good Dialogue

20 minutes

1. Ask, “What is dialogue anyway?” Create a definition as a class, then reveal another definition in case the class version is too wordy and you think students need something easy to remember.

Definition: Dialogue is what happens when two or more characters talk to one another.

2. Explain that a lot of the conversations or dialogue you have every day are pretty boring, and that dialogue in a novel has to be fun to read. Make two columns on the board: Everyday Dialogue and Novel Dialogue.

3. Have a few of your students read their boring comic strips. Say, “Of course, this kind of dialogue is *very* important in our everyday lives. If we didn’t say ‘hello’ to people and ask them how they are doing, we would lose a lot of friends, fast. *But* in a novel, this kind of real life dialogue ends up being boring.” Write the word BORING in big letters under the Everyday column.

4. Explain that dialogue in a novel needs to do one of two things: it needs to *move the story forward*, or it should *help someone who is reading your book get to know your characters better*. Write the two rules of dialogue on the board under the Novel column.

5. Read the dialogue examples in the worksheet as a class. (You can either read the dialogue in two different voices, or get students to volunteer to read each part.) After you read each example, discuss why the dialogue either moves a story forward or helps define characters. You may also ask what it means to move a story forward and why it is helpful for a reader to get to know your characters better through dialogue. Try to keep the discussion going for 5–10 minutes.

Step Three: Practice Writing Good Dialogue With a Partner

20 minutes

1. Have your student pair up and then hand out two more Comic Strip worksheets to each pair. Say, "Writing good dialogue in fiction is like writing a comic strip. A comic artist only has a limited amount of space before they run out of squares. If they spend too much time writing everyday dialogue, then all of a sudden the squares are used up, and the artist has drawn the most boring comic strip ever, just like the one you read and the one you wrote earlier. Let’s try doing the opposite. Let’s try creating some really good dialogue!"

2. Say, "Together, you and your partner will complete two comic strips. On the first one your job is to write dialogue that will move a story forward. I will give you the first sentence, then you and your partner will write from there." Write this sentence on the board: *What is that in the sky?!* (This will be the first line of dialogue for every pair, so have students write this line above the first character in the first box.) Working with their partners, have students complete one of the blank comic strips. Remind them that the dialogue should leave readers wondering what is going to happen next. Partners should switch off writing the dialogue for each of the cells in the blank comic strip for 5–10 minutes. Walk around the room and help any pair that seems stuck.

3. When students are done with the first comic strip say, "Now you are going to write dialogue that helps us get to know the characters better." Write this sentence on the board: *Why are you always wearing that fake moustache?* (Again, this will be the first line of dialogue for every pair, so have students write this line above the first character in the first box.) Working with their partners, have students complete the comic strip. Remind them that the dialogue should reveal something interesting about the characters. Partners should switch off writing the dialogue for each of the cells in the blank comic strip for 5–10 minutes.

4. Ask a few pairs to read one of their strips.

Step Four: Practice on their Own

15 minutes

Note: If you are writing a collaborative novel, hand out another Blank Comic Strip, one for each student pair. Divide the class into two: One half of the class partnerships should write a comic of dialogue between the main character and the supporting character that reveals something about the characters, the other half of the class partnerships should write a comic of dialogue between the main character and the villain that moves the story forward. When you are done, have each pair of students share what they wrote with the rest of the class. Each student can play the part of one of the characters in their comic.

1. Have your students turn to the Comic Strip worksheets at the end of the Writing Really Good Dialogue worksheet. Students will now write dialogue using characters from their own novels. One of their comics should have dialogue that moves the story forward; the other should reveal something about their characters. Make sure that at least one of their strips is an exchange between their main character and their villain!

2. If there is remaining time, or as homework, have students go back and color in their comic strips. They should include characters' clothes, facial expressions, anything a character might be holding in his or her hand. Students should also add some setting details behind the characters. (This will help students to think in terms of the whole—their characters, their settings, the dialogue, etc.)