Use Dialogue to Bring a Story to Life

1. Focus

Explain Using Dialogue to Bring a Story to Life

Say: Dialogue is how authors show that characters are speaking to each other. Writers use dialogue in a story for different reasons. Often the dialogue helps us learn about the characters and the message of the story. Also, dialogue helps move a story along. Today I’m going to show you how choosing specific and accurate words to use in dialogue can help bring a story to life.

Model How Writers Use Dialogue to Bring a Story to Life

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

“Where is Jamal?” Brooke asked as she and her friends walked home after school.

“Maybe he got in trouble and had to stay after school,” said Luke.

“Jamal is not like you, Luke,” said Jalissa. “He doesn’t get in trouble, even by accident. Maybe he was kidnapped by aliens!”

Modeling Text

As you read the passage aloud, ask students to listen for specific, accurate words in dialogue that help them learn about the characters and bring the story to life.

Say: I can learn a lot about the story and the characters just from this short section of dialogue. From what Brooke says, I know that Jamal usually walks home with her and her other friends. I learn more about Jamal when Jalissa says Jamal doesn’t get into trouble. Jalissa’s words tell me that Jamal is a pretty good kid. And when Jalissa says that Jamal is not like Luke, I know that Luke does get into trouble sometimes. Then Jalissa suggests Jamal may have been kidnapped by aliens. This tells me that Jalissa has a vivid imagination. The conversation between these kids is lively and natural sounding, and it brings the story to life for me. The author uses dialogue to describe each kid to me.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Dialogue in Writing

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

“Mia, it’s time for practice,” Lucy said.
“I’m not going,” Mia answered.

Practice Text

Read aloud the dialogue with students. Discuss how the dialogue is not only uninteresting, but it also doesn’t tell us much about the characters or the situation. Ask students what they think the dialogue could tell them, for example: whether the characters are adults or kids, friends or siblings; what kind of practice; why Mia isn’t going; whether Mia usually goes or often misses practice, etc. Ask students to work with a partner to develop specific and accurate dialogue to help readers understand the characters in the sentences. All pairs of students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class and explain the word choices they made.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain the word choices they made. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they revise their own realistic fiction stories.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned how using specific and accurate words in dialogue can help the reader understand the plot of the story and learn about the characters. It also makes a story interesting to read. Remember that characters in realistic fiction are like people you might meet in real life, so they should speak like real people.

Encourage students to think about dialogue as they draft or revise their realistic fiction stories during independent writing time. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud examples of dialogue from their realistic fiction stories.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Work one on one with beginning ELs to practice expressing dialogue as a conversation between the student and you. Record the conversation on chart paper and show students where you place the punctuation. Then have students reread the dialogue with you, taking their parts in the conversation.

Intermediate and Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers to complete the above activity as partners.

All Levels
If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: conversation/la conversación; describe/describir; dialogue/el diálogo.