Use Distinct Voices for Characters in Dialogue

1. Focus

Explain Using Distinct Voices for Characters in Dialogue

Say: When we write historical fiction stories, they usually include more than one character. To help my readers understand that each of our characters is unique, we want them to sound different from one another when they speak in dialogue. To do this, we can give each character his or her own vocabulary, sentence structure, and set of concerns to talk about. Today I’m going to show you how to use distinct voices for the characters in your historical fiction stories.

Model How Writers Use Distinct Voices for Characters in Dialogue

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

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Identify one aspect of voice in historical fiction as the use of distinct voices in dialogue.
• Practice making the voices of characters sound different from one another in dialogue.
• Discuss how to use different character voices in dialogue in their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lessons. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

Modeling Text

Read the examples aloud and ask students to listen for the words, sentence structures, and subject matter that distinguish each character.

After example 1. Say: In this paragraph, the author distinguishes Chang’s voice by having him repeat a word softly to himself. I remember that the author told us Chang doesn’t speak English very well, so it makes sense that he does not say a lot, and that he wants to clarify a difficult word such as nitroglycerin.

After example 2. Say: I can contrast Chang’s cautious voice and curiosity to the voice of Mr. Howden. Mr. Howden speaks in confident, sure sentences. He is almost overconfident, as was shown earlier in the story when he was so certain he could fix the nitroglycerin that had just exploded on someone. He usually uses command sentences or makes statements. He does not question his own knowledge and he orders people around. Through dialogue, I can tell he is a very different person from Chang and holds a very different position of power in the story. Let’s remember these examples as we think about how to use distinctive dialogue for our own historical fiction characters.
2. Rehearse

Practice Distinct Voices for Characters in Dialogue

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

“I think they will finish the railroad in a month,” Roger said.
“I think they will finish the railroad in a year,” Maria said.

Ask students to work with a partner to add vocabulary, varied sentence structure, and personalities to the practice text so that the voices of Roger and Maria sound different from each other. Tell students that they may change the existing sentences and that they may also add new sentences if they choose. If necessary, suggest personalities for the characters, such as having Roger be more forceful with his opinion and Maria more thoughtful about hers. Students should write down their sentences. They should be prepared to read them to the class and explain how they created a distinct voice for each character.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read their sentences aloud and explain how they created distinct voices for the characters in dialogue. Have students identify how they changed the practice text. Use opportunities in students’ examples to demonstrate aspects of character as it comes through in dialogue. Encourage discussion with the following questions:

- How did you create different voices for the two characters?
- What did you find most challenging about creating different character voices?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that in good story dialogue, the voices of the characters should not all sound the same. As you write your historical fiction stories, check for places where you can vary vocabulary, sentence structure, and subject matter to make the voice of each character sound individual and distinct.

Encourage students to look for places in their historical fiction stories where they can improve the text by using more distinct character voices. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to read aloud a section of their historical fiction stories in which they used distinct voices for characters through dialogue.

Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

Beginning ELs are not ready to work on this skill. While other students collaborate on the partner activity or write independently, meet one on one with students to support developmentally appropriate skills based on their independent writing and language level. For example, you may want to work with students’ recognition of when one character stops speaking in dialogue and another begins.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice. Model simple oral sentences. Say: He said, “YES!” and she said, “maybe.” Use the following sentence frames to help students add sentences for the two different characters in dialogue:

- He said ______.
- She said ______.

**All Levels**

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: dialogue/el diálogo; distinct/distinto(a); voice/la voz.