Choose Words That Bring Characters to Life

1. Focus

Explain Choosing Words That Bring Characters to Life

Say: Historical fiction authors write about real or imagined characters in an authentic historical setting. They must take into account the time and the setting in which the characters lived and then determine how their characters would act in different situations. They have to make their characters believable and interesting, so they choose words that help readers picture what the characters are like and what they are doing. Today I’m going to show you how to use words in your historical fiction stories that bring your characters to life and help your readers visualize the text.

Model Choosing Words That Bring Characters to Life

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen as you read aloud.

“I am able to read,” the Wife of Hudu-libbi said.

Belshunu stared at the woman in amazement. Few men could read, and fewer women. Belshunu himself could not read. A scribe and a court official supervised while he painstakingly copied the marks into the stone.

Modeling Text

Say: This example is from a story that takes place in ancient Egypt—a time very different from our own. Here, the writer tells about an exchange between a woman and a stone carver. When Belshunu learns that the Wife of Hudu-libbi can read, the writer says that he “stared at the woman in amazement.” Amazement is a great word choice here. It really helps me understand how Belshunu is feeling, and I can picture the look of complete surprise on his face. It emphasizes for me how strange it was in this time period for a woman to be able to read. Then the writer describes the way the illiterate Belshunu carved marks that he could not read into stone. The writer describes him painstakingly carving the symbols. The word painstakingly makes me visualize the stone carver slowly and carefully making each mark. The writer uses the word supervised to describe how the officials watched him work. Supervised creates more of a visual picture than the word watched. I can just see the officials looking over the stone carver’s shoulder as he makes each mark. The writer chose words that would bring the characters and their actions to life. The words help me better understand and appreciate the story.
2. Rehearse

**Practice Choosing Words to Bring Characters to Life**

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

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A woman walked into the shop. She was wearing gold jewelry.
The store clerk looked at her.
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**Practice Text**

Ask students to work with partners to rewrite the sentences using words that bring the characters and action to life. Partners should write down their sentences and be prepared to share and explain what they did to the class. Let students know that there is no right or wrong way to revise the sentences. Each pair of students may have very different ideas.

**Share Practice Sentences**

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences. Ask students to compare the different approaches they took and the words they used. Invite them to discuss which word choices seemed most effective in helping them visualize the characters and action, and why. Record examples of students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they revise their historical fiction stories.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We learned that historical fiction writers use words to add dimension to characters and their actions. Remember, a good historical fiction story portrays characters in an authentic historical setting. As you write your historical fiction stories, remember to use strong words to help bring your characters to life in a way that readers can see in their own minds.

Encourage students to think about their word choices as they draft and revise during independent writing time. During 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 a section from their stories that they have revised by using strong words to bring their characters to life.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Provide practice for beginning ELs in using words to describe things. Choose items from the classroom or clothes students are wearing. Ask students to describe what they see using words and gestures. Write their descriptions on chart paper and read them aloud with students.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.