Use One-Word Exchanges in Dialogue

1. Focus

Explain One-Word Exchanges in Dialogue

Say: We follow grammar and punctuation rules because they hold our sentences together, and they help us communicate with readers. If we made up our own rules, we wouldn’t be able to understand each other. Some rules we must follow all of the time. But others are not as rigid. For example, you may have learned never to use an incomplete sentence, or fragment, when you write. But there are times when it is okay to do this. Fiction writers, in particular, can be a little more flexible when they write. Quite often you will see one-word exchanges in dialogue. You may read something like this: “Phillip? Sure!” he said to himself. When you write dialogue, you want the characters to sound like real people. When we speak, we don’t always use complete sentences. Today I’m going to show you when it is acceptable to use one-word exchanges in dialogue.

Model Using One-Word Exchanges in Dialogue

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

1. “Workers! Workers!” Hong Li’s voice echoed through the trees.
2. “Nitroglycerin,” Chang repeated the name of the substance softly to himself.
3. “You.” He pointed at Wen Lin.

Modeling Text

Say: Here we have three examples of one-word exchanges in dialogue. In the first example, each one-word exchange is followed by an exclamation mark. Hong Li’s call to the workers is typical of the way we speak. How often have you called out for “Mom!” or “Dad!”? The second example shows Chang repeating one word to himself. He is talking to himself, mulling over the word nitroglycerin. When we talk to ourselves, we often don’t use complete sentences. And in the third example a character says, “You,” while pointing. The character could have used a complete sentence, for example, “I choose you,” but that would not sound as natural. The characters are in a tense situation, and the one-word dialogue reinforces that feeling. All of these one-word exchanges break a grammar rule but, in dialogue, sound natural. They are just like the way we talk to each other. I’m going to underline these words and label them “acceptable one-word exchanges.” Underline and label the identified words.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn when it is acceptable to break sentence structure rules in dialogue and use one-word exchanges.
- Practice using one-word exchanges in dialogue.
- Discuss how they can apply this strategy to 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-lesson.
2. Rehearse

Practice Writing One-Word Exchanges in Dialogue

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

“Hey, Nate, would you come here, please? I need help now!”

Ask students to work with a partner and revise the sentences to include one or two one-word exchanges that sound more like natural speech. (For example: “Hey! Nate!”) Pairs should write down their revised dialogue and be prepared to read it to the class and explain how using abbreviated exchanges breaks a sentence structure rule, but improves the dialogue.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their revised dialogue. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they draft or revise their historical fiction stories.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that sometimes it is acceptable to break the sentence structure rule that says we shouldn’t write sentence fragments. Using a one-word exchange in dialogue sounds natural, and sometimes, it is the best way to express a character’s meaning or feelings. But remember not to overdo it, or your writing will sound choppy.

Encourage students to keep this mini-lesson in mind as they develop dialogue in their stories. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of dialogue and other author’s craft elements using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite two or three students who incorporated one-word exchanges effectively in their dialogue to read aloud examples of the dialogue to the rest of the class.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
While the rest of the class works on the partner activity, work one on one with beginning ELs to practice expressing simple interjections orally. Using gestures to ensure comprehension, model some interjections for students. Say: Go! Stop! Sit! Wait! Ask students to take turns using interjections to tell you what to do.

Intermediate and Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.

All Levels
If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: fiction/la ficción, historical/histórico(a).