



## Dialogue

# Dialogue

This section will further extend the ideas developed in [Step 2: Plotting a Story](#).

In this step, we focus on the development of **writing dialogue**. The pack has been designed to work alongside the Dialogue web page. The resources can also act as standalone activities that can be adapted to other forms of writing in your school curriculum.

Dennis Kelly says that most important factor in creating good writing is **enjoyment**. In the following activities, students will explore different ways of giving their characters a 'voice' by setting up playful interchanges between their characters.

This process aims to help students become familiar with the creative writing process for the theatre: how to get into the minds and feelings of their characters and how they might express those thoughts and feelings to a live audience.

## Useful starting points:

### a) Scene Study

- Show the students a printed example of a scene from a theatre script. This may be the first time they have seen a play-script or they may have used one before.
- Discuss how is it laid out on the page. Is there anything that surprises them? What different bits are there? *e.g: Character names, dialogue, stage directions etc.* How do these different bits help you read the script if you were an actor?
- Discuss the differences between writing a play-script and a book. How do characters express themselves in a play-script? *e.g: Dialogue, soliloquies, songs, action etc.*
- Ask for volunteers to read the scene aloud, including any stage directions.
- Is there anything they noticed about the dialogue once it was spoken out loud? Do the characters speak differently from one another? *e.g. Does one of them use longer sentences? Another just a few words? Do any of them use more complex language?*

### b) Film Discussion

- Watch Dennis Kelly talk about Character Rhythms (*Part 1 of his film on Dialogue*). As he says, all characters have a spoken rhythm - as do all people. (*Refer to your previous activities: 'Facial Symphony' and 'Movie Trailer Soundtrack' where students explored the rhythm of the words they had personally chosen*)
- Explain that to write dialogue for their characters, they need to think about how it sounds when *spoken out loud* as well as how it's *written* as they are writing lines for actors to speak on a stage. Those words must sound believable and real to an audience.
- Discuss why people might have different rhythms when they speak. e.g: they may have an accent, they may express themselves in a certain way, they may be feeling differently to each other. (*Refer to your work on Character Back-Story. Are there things in their characters' backstory that affect how they speak?*)
- Explain that these next activities will provide an easy starting place to writing dialogue and to giving their characters their own unique 'voice'.

## Dialogue Resources

### 1. In the Hot Seat!

***A favourite rehearsal game for actors and writers to explore how characters might express themselves using their backstory. This exercise uses improvisation and gets writers to notice how real people structure their thoughts.***

#### What you will need:

- Chairs for your students
- Pencils and paper for notes

#### How it works:

- Divide students into groups of 3. Ensure they have their character backstories with them and chairs to sit on.

- Within their groups, ask them to choose ONE character to explore. The writer who invented this character will listen and take notes. The other 2 will conduct an interview with one person playing the character and the other asking the questions.
- Give the groups some time to study the character's back story, then set up a helpful interview scenario. *e.g. TV interview, job interview, police interview.*
- Explain that the interviewer can ask the character anything about their backstory or they can ask about other invented situations.
- The player being interviewed must answer 'in character'. This is not a test about getting the back story right, this is about answering the questions as 'if you were that person', using your imagination to provide detail on the spot - **in the Hot Seat!**
- During the interview, the writer can jot down anything they find useful or interesting they hear from their character: *e.g. unusual phrases, repeated words, use of pauses, funny images etc.*
- Now let the students swap roles so that they all get a chance to be the writer 'listening to their character'.
- Encourage the group to play with different situations. *e.g. A police interview might make a character feel guilty, worried or helpful. It may be interesting to hear how they express themselves when feeling this way. A TV interview might make your character nervous, chatty, funny, a big show off!*

## Reflection:

- Discuss with the group what useful things they noticed as writers. *e.g. Do people always speak in perfect sentences? Do they ramble a lot? Are they abrupt? Elaborate? Uncommunicative? Do they try and make us laugh? Did they lose their thread?*
- Are any of these details things they might use in writing lines or dialogue for their character?

## 2. What Would You Say?

***An activity that encourages students to consider ways in which different characters might react to a given event. This will also help students get into the minds of ALL the characters in their scene, not just the main character they have created.***

## What you will need:

- The 4 or 5-point scene plots from the work they did earlier.
- Several large blank speech bubbles for students to hold when they speak.
- 4 speech bubbles with pre-prepared responses inspired by characters from *Matilda the Musical* written on them (see Part A below - write the lines only, not the character names!)

## How it works: (this exercise is in 2 parts)

### Part A:

- Hand out the following character responses on speech bubbles to four volunteers:
  1. *'The vile, disgusting little earthworm is finally ready to pop. Maybe he'll pop more quickly and quietly if we lock him in the Chokey.'* (Miss Trunchbull)
  2. *'I don't believe a word of it! How could one small boy eat an entire chocolate cake? Mind you, I can't even look at chocolate. I have to watch my figure or I won't fit into my lycra tango dress.'* (Mrs Wormwood)
  3. *'Go Brucie! Go Brucie! You've done it! You've outwitted the Trunchbull. You're a legend Bruce.'* (Matilda)
  4. *'I've done it! My stomach hurts, but I've done it. I never thought I could do it.'* (Bruce)
- Call out the following plot point: **'Bruce Bogtrotter eats an entire chocolate cake.'**
- Ask your volunteers to read their speech bubbles in turn.
- Can the students guess which Matilda character could have said these lines?
- Discuss what clues were in each line that suggested which character was speaking them.

### Part B:

- Arrange students into groups of 5. Ask them to choose ONE scene to work on (if time allows, they will work through all 5 scenes).
- Ask the writer to give each member of the group a character. (If their scene has only two or three characters, the remaining students can help by making notes. If the scene has lots of characters, ask them to choose just four.)
- Allow the writer 2 minutes to describe the characters. They can distribute backstories and fact files if they wish.

- Now ask the writer to call out one event at a time. The others must think what their character would say to this event, considering how each reaction might be different: *e.g. What does their character do for a living Where are they from? How old are they? What is their status - how important do they think they are?*
- After a few moments thinking time, ask the ‘characters’ to write their responses on a speech bubble.
- When all the characters have responded to every plot point, invite each group to ‘perform’ their responses, starting with the writer calling out the plot points and the characters holding up their corresponding speech bubble.

## Reflection:

As a group, discuss the experience of this activity and consider the following questions:

- What did the audience guess about the different characters from their responses to the events?
- Were the writers surprised by how their characters reacted?
- How can a writer draw on the knowledge of their character so their responses seem unique and real to an audience?

## 3. Talking Pens!

***Develop a written conversation between two characters. Students experiment with producing realistic dialogue that reflects the diverse reactions of two characters.***

### What you need:

Large pieces of paper and pens

### How it works:

- Before you start, discuss Dennis Kelly’s advice in his film on Writing Dialogue (*part 2, Dialogue*):  
*“My name’s Terry and I’m a carpenter’ is not a sentence that makes you want to find out more but if you write a sentence where Terry says: ‘Oi, who’s nicked my tools?’ - it asks a question...”*

- Ask the students to think of a moment in their scene where two characters need to speak to each other.
- Give each student a piece of paper and tell them to write the names of the two characters at the top. Then, underneath that, ask them to write the first thing that needs to be said.

***For example (using the idea of Tristan the inventor's son):***

Tristan [Name of friend]

'I have created a robot that looks exactly like me.'

- Remind them that a good opening line may ask a question or provoke a reaction in the other character.
- Organise everyone into pairs (with their sheets of paper) and decide who will be A and B.
- Explain that they are going to have a silent dialogue with their partner, using A's piece of paper as a starting point. BUT the only thing that can talk are their pens!
- A will 'play' the character who 'spoke' in the first line they wrote. Make sure the As explain to the Bs who both characters are in their scene. The Bs will 'play' the other character and think about how they might respond.
- Give students a few minutes to create a conversation on the page between the two characters, with each person taking a turn to write a line of dialogue.
- After that, they switch to B's piece of paper and repeat.
- For example, a written conversation might look like this:

*A: I have created a robot that looks exactly like me but I need somewhere to store it and I don't want my dad to find out.*

*B: Well why are you looking at me? I don't like this.*

*A: You have so many brothers and sisters, your mum wouldn't notice another one in the house.*

*B: What's in it for me? I don't want to go in the Chokey if I get caught...*

And so on...

## Reflection:

As a group, discuss the following:

- Was there anything that surprised you about the way your partner responded to your lines?
- Was there anything that annoyed you about what your partner wrote?

- Did they react in the way you'd expect their character to react?
- Or would you have wanted them to say something different?
- Were there any good ideas that your partner had that you would like to use?

### Extension:

- Invite each pair to swap their pages of dialogue with another pair to read out loud.
- Explain that in the theatre, writers often ask actors to read out new scenes to hear how they sound 'off the page'. This can happen a long time before the final script is written and is an opportunity for the writer to hear how their characters sound at an early stage.
- Give each writer a couple of minutes to explain their characters to the 'reader pairs' before they read the dialogue to the rest of the group.

### Reflection:

- Discuss with the group how it felt to hear your lines read out loud.
- Did the new readers say them differently to how you expected?
- Did they make the dialogue work better or not as well?

These activities will have allowed students to enjoy a playful exploration of how relationships between characters are created through dialogue and interaction on stage.

Now it is time to refer back to their plan and start creating the dialogue that will tell the story of their five-minute scene.