

DIALOGUE

NCTE/IRA Standards:

Objective: To understand the use of dialogue and write meaningful dialogue for a screenplay or other literary form.

Procedure: Display and distribute the pages of the guided learning unit one at a time. The components include:

- An overview of dialogue and some keys to creating memorable dialogue
- A sample of dialogue from *Bandslam*

Allow the students a few minutes to skim each component before reading the text aloud. Reading the text aloud increases the likelihood that all students will be able to understand and participate. Pause appropriately to explain concepts contained in the instructional text, especially concepts that may be unfamiliar. Solicit comments from the students and ask questions to promote their thinking or evaluate their understanding. Elaborate on the instructional text according to the needs of the class.

When you review the sample dialogue from *Bandslam*, mention these formatting conventions to the students. Be sure they understand that this is how Hollywood screenplays are written. Even the typeface (Courier) is part of the format.

- The first line of words in all capital letters shows the specific setting.
- The next two lines describe the scene. All scenes are shown in regular type, start at the left margin, and run all the way across the page.
- The name of the character speaking the lines is in all capital letters centered on the page.
- The dialogue or lines that the character says are in regular type below the name. They are tabbed two inches from the left margin.
- Specific actions of a character are shown in parentheses, like (waving to his mom).
- When more than one character speaks the same words, the speakers are listed joined by a slash: OMAR/BUG/WILL.

Spend extra time on the “Keys to Creating Memorable Dialogue.” Encourage the students to discuss each key and clarify any points that the students might not understand. Writing dialogue is among the most important elements of screenwriting, and it is also enjoyable for students because every student can be successful. Your clarification and the interaction among the students will also help their understanding of what they read and their general writing skills.

Introductory Activity: As a group activity, have the students recall some memorable lines or sections of dialogue from movies they have seen. If the students have difficulty recalling dialogue, give them an opportunity to do an Internet search to find some memorable lines. Another option is to give the students a few days to watch a movie at home and write down some lines to be shared with the class.

The following section lists some famous lines from movies you can read out loud to the students. The students might not be familiar with some of the movies, so you should be prepared to describe them briefly. As an option, display the quotes and have students volunteer to read them out loud.

Arrange students in small groups of 3 or 4. (Alternatively, the entire class may work together.) Have each group choose two or more characters from a familiar movie and compose a new scene of original

dialogue for the characters. (Remind students that a scene is a segment of a screenplay in which the location does not change) Encourage the groups to use a modification of the writing process to compose the dialogue. They can take notes, compile the notes into a draft, and then revise the draft. One person in the group should be responsible for writing the draft and revision.

Ask the members of the group to polish the revision by checking for style and ensuring that the words of the characters are consistent with their personalities and roles. The process may take more than one session, so allow the groups the time they need to complete the activity. If possible, give the student responsible for writing access to a computer and encourage the student to use the format shown for the *Bandslam* dialogue. Be sure the names of the group members and that of the movie is included in a heading above the dialogue.

Display the completed pages of dialogues or print them out and distribute them to the groups. Allow the groups to read all the dialogues and comment on them.

MEMORABLE DIALOGUE

The Wizard of Oz

Dorothy: Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial

E.T.: E.T. phone home.

The Terminator

Terminator: I'll be back.

Forrest Gump

Forrest: Mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

Aslan: If the Witch knew the true meaning of sacrifice, she might have interpreted the deep magic differently. That when a willing victim who has committed no treachery, is killed in a traitor's stead, the stone table will crack, and even death itself would turn backwards.

Charlotte's Web

Homer Zuckerman: How could this have happened? A miracle, in a time when we don't see many miraculous things!

Holes

Mr. Sir: You girl scouts want to hear a story? Once upon a time there was a magical place that never rained... The end.

Twilight

Bella: How old are you?

Edward: Seventeen.

Bella: How long have you been seventeen?

Edward: A while.

The Simpsons

Homer Simpson: D'oh!

TEACHER REFERENCE PAGE

Extended Activity: As a whole class or small groups, have the students develop lines for major characters they have created. The students may use characters they created in the unit on characters or new characters they think of. If possible, have the students develop dialogue showing the interaction among two or more characters. If the students create dialogue for new characters, they should develop a brief profile for the new characters and provide some background for the scene.

Internet Search Suggestion: Have the students search for the best movie dialogue, quotes, funny quotes, or other categories of quotes.

Dialogue

The words that characters say to one another in a movie are called *dialogue*. The words of a particular character are sometimes called their “lines.” When characters speak great lines, the audience remembers them.

If dialogue is written correctly, it matches the role and personality of the character. That is another reason why it is so important to know your characters well. The better you know your characters, the more your dialogue will match the character.

Dialogue is written the way that people speak. That means it might not have perfect grammar, as most written things should. Even so, the dialogue should make sense to the audience.

Because dialogue is heard, not read, it can't be too long or complicated. If it is, the audience might get confused. The lines that characters say have to fit with the plot of the story.

The best screenwriters prepare the audience for important lines. They might use music or the words of other characters to prepare the audience. This build-up gets the attention of the audience so they don't miss the line. Nothing is more frustrating for someone watching a movie than missing an important line.

Not every word of dialogue in a movie is important. Even so, it has to be written well and sound like the character so the audience will find the character believable.

Here is an example of dialogue from the movie *Bandslam*. It takes place between Sam and Will outside their classroom. It is an interior shot because it is inside the school.

Keys to Creating Memorable Dialogue

- Imagine each character who is speaking when you write dialogue. This will help you write the way the character should speak. Each character should sound different from other characters.
- Remember the mood of the character when you write dialogue. The dialogue should match the mood of the character.
- Keep each section the dialogue short enough so the audience will be able to understand it.
- If a character must say a lot of dialogue at one time, have other characters speak briefly every once in a while. Having other characters speak helps the audience remember the long dialogue better.
- Write the way that people speak, not formally as you would for written text. Your characters should speak naturally, like your friends or other people you know.
- Say each line of dialogue out loud to be sure it sounds the way you want it to.
- Be sure the major characters have the most lines.
- When one character stops talking and another one starts, be sure the conversation makes sense to the audience.
- Write the dialogue so it helps the story move along. This is called *advancing the action*.
- When the scene and setting change, the dialogue will probably have to change.

Sample Dialogue from *Bandslam*

38 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE CLASSROOM - THE NEXT DAY 38
Kids pour out of class. Sam and Will bring up the rear.

SA5M

So I guess we should get together again.

WILL

Was that a question or a statement?

SA5M

Both.

WILL

Okay. Sure. We can go to my house...

SA5M

Do you have dust mites?

WILL

I...don't know?

SA5M

Better not risk it. Allergic.

WILL

Your house? Can you have friends over?

SA5M

Friends. Don't have those.