Learning Targets

- Analyze the narrative technique of dialogue in an autobiography.
- Write a narrative using direct and indirect dialogue.

Dialogue

Authors use a variety of techniques to create narratives that make their stories come alive on the page. Authors use dialogue to provide the reader with information about a character, to provide background information, and to advance the plot. You may have noticed that the previous narrative contained almost no dialogue, which served to emphasize the confusion and embarrassment, as well as the humor, of the situation.

Dialogue may be either direct or indirect. Indirect dialogue is a paraphrase of what is said by a character or narrator. This dialogue does not need quotation marks.

Example: When my mother began dropping hints that I would soon be going to school, I vowed never to go to school because it was a waste of time.

Direct dialogue is the exact words spoken by a person. This dialogue uses quotation marks and dialogue tags.

Example: “This time next fall, you will be in school,” hinted my mother. “Why would I go to school? You’ll never see me wasting my time at school!” I vowed.

Take a moment and think about a person you know who tells great stories. What is it about their storytelling that makes it so good? One thing that they probably do is change the way that they say things as they tell the story. With a partner, quickly generate a list of dialogue tags other than “said” that good storytellers use.

Preview

In this activity, you will read an excerpt from an autobiography to analyze the author’s use of dialogue and then use dialogue when writing your own narrative.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- As you read the excerpt for the elements of a narrative, also annotate the text, noting the impact of the dialogue and dialogue tags on the story and the characters.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mark Mathabane (1960–) was born in South Africa just outside Johannesburg. He spent his childhood in an unheated shack with no electricity and no running water. Mathabane and his family lived in fear of the police who enforced the law of apartheid—sometimes violently. In 1978, Mathabane secured a tennis scholarship to a college in South Carolina. He later graduated from Dowling College in New York. During his writing career, Mathabane has produced several works of nonfiction as well as three recent novels. *Kaffir Boy* is Mathabane’s story of his childhood living under apartheid.

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**Autobiography**

from *Kaffir Boy*

by Mark Mathabane

1 When my mother began dropping hints that I would soon be going to school, I vowed never to go because school was a waste of time. She laughed and said, “We’ll see. You don’t know what you’re talking about.” My philosophy on school was that of a gang of ten-eleven- and twelve-year-olds whom I so revered that their every word seemed that of an oracle.

2 These boys had long left their homes and were now living in various neighborhood junkyards, making it on their own. They slept in abandoned cars, smoked glue and benzene, ate pilchards and brown bread, sneaked into the white world to caddy and, if unsuccessful, came back to the township to steal beer and soda bottles from shebeens, or goods from the Indian traders on First Avenue. Their lifestyle was exciting, adventurous and full of surprises; and I was attracted to it. My mother told me that they were no-gooders, that they would amount to nothing, that I should not associate with them, but I paid no heed. What does she know? I used to tell myself. One thing she did not know was that the gang's way of life had captivated me wholly, particularly their philosophy on school: they hated it and considered an education a waste of time.

3 They, like myself, had grown up in an environment where the value of an education was never emphasized, where the first thing a child learned was not how to read and write and spell, but how to fight and steal and rebel; where the money to send children to school was grossly lacking, for survival was first priority. I kept my membership in the gang, knowing that for as long as I was under its influence, I would never go to school.

4 One day my mother woke me up at four in the morning.

5 “Are they here? I didn't hear any noises,” I asked in the usual way.

6 “No,” my mother said. “I want you to get into that washtub over there.”

7 “What!” I balked, upon hearing the word *washtub*. I feared taking baths like one feared the plague. Throughout seven years of hectic living the number of baths I had taken could be counted on one hand with several fingers missing. I simply had no natural inclination for water; cleanliness was a trait I still had to acquire. Besides, we had only one bathtub in the house, and it constantly sprung a leak.
“I said get into that tub!” My mother shook her finger in my face.

Reluctantly, I obeyed, yet wondered why all of a sudden I had to take a bath. My mother, armed with a scropbrush and a piece of Lifebouy soap, purged me of years and years of grime till I ached and bled. As I howled, feeling pain shoot through my limbs as the thistles of the brush encountered stubborn callouses, there was a loud knock at the door.

Instantly my mother leaped away from the tub and headed, on tiptoe, toward the bedroom. Fear seized me as I, too, thought of the police. I sat frozen in the bathtub, not knowing what to do.

“Open up, Mujaji [my mother’s maiden name],” Granny’s voice came shrilling through the door. “It’s me.”

My mother heaved a sigh of relief; her tense limbs relaxed. She turned and headed to the kitchen door, unlatched it and in came Granny and Aunt Bushy.

“You scared me half to death,” my mother said to Granny. “I had forgotten all about your coming.”

“Are you ready?” Granny asked my mother.

“Yes—just about,” my mother said, beckoning me to get out of the washtub.

She handed me a piece of cloth to dry myself. As I dried myself, questions raced through my mind: What’s going on? What’s Granny doing at our house this ungodly hour of the morning? And why did she ask my mother, “Are you ready?” While I stood debating, my mother went into the bedroom and came out with a stained white shirt and a pair of faded black shorts.

“Here,” she said, handing me the togs, “put these on.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Put it on I said!”

I put the shirt on; it was grossly loose-fitting. It reached all the way down to my ankles. Then I saw the reason why: it was my father’s shirt!

“But this is Papa’s shirt,” I complained. “It don’t fit me.”

“Put it on,” my mother insisted. “I’ll make it fit.”

“The pants don’t fit me either,” I said. “Whose are they anyway?”

“Put them on,” my mother said. “I’ll make them fit.”

Moments later I had the garments on; I looked ridiculous. My mother started working on the pants and shirt to make them fit. She folded the shirt in so many intricate ways and stashed it inside the pants, they too having been folded several times at the waist. She then chocked the pants at the waist with a piece of sisal rope to hold them up. She then lavishly smeared my face, arms and legs with a mixture of pig’s fat and Vaseline. “This will insulate you from the cold,” she said. My skin gleamed like the morning star and I felt as hot as the centre of the sun and smelled God knows like what. After embalming me, she headed to the bedroom.
“Where are we going, Gran’ma?” I said, hoping that she would tell me what my mother refused to tell me. I still had no idea I was about to be taken to school.

“Didn’t your mother tell you?” Granny said with a smile. “You’re going to start school.”

“What!” I gasped, leaping from the chair where I was sitting as if it were made of hot lead. “I am not going to school!” I blurted out and raced toward the kitchen door.

My mother had just reappeared from the bedroom and guessing what I was up to, she yelled, “Someone get the door!”

Aunt Bushy immediately barred the door. I turned and headed for the window. As I leaped for the windowsill, my mother lunged at me and brought me down. I tussled, “Let go of me! I don’t want to go to school! Let me go!” but my mother held fast onto me.

“It’s no use now,” she said, grinning triumphantly as she pinned me down. Turning her head in Granny’s direction, she shouted, “Granny! Get a rope quickly!”

Granny grabbed a piece of rope nearby and came to my mother’s aid. I bit and clawed every hand that grabbed me, and howled protestations against going to school; however, I was no match for the two determined matriarchs. In a jiffy they had me bound, hand and feet.

“What’s the matter with him?” Granny, bewildered, asked my mother. “Why did he suddenly turn into an imp when I told him you’re taking him to school?”

“You shouldn’t have told him that he’s being taken to school,” my mother said. “He doesn’t want to go there. That’s why I requested you come today, to help me take him there. Those boys in the streets have been a bad influence on him.”

As the two matriarchs hauled me through the door, they told Aunt Bushy not to go to school but stay behind and mind the house and the children.

**Second Read**

- Reread the autobiography to answer these text-dependent questions.
- Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

1. **Key Ideas and Details:** How does Mathabane hint that his life is about to change on the day in which this scene takes place? Name three events from the text and explain how you know they signal something unusual is going to happen.
2. **Key Ideas and Details:** What details from Mathabane’s life explain why he is so determined not to go to school?

3. **Craft and Structure:** Mathabane chooses to use mostly indirect dialogue in the beginning of the story and mostly direct dialogue at the end. What effect do his choices have on the pacing of the story? Why do you think he makes these choices?

4. **Craft and Structure:** Describe how the author uses active verbs to develop his characters in the part of the scene after the narrator is told he will be going to school.

5. **Craft and Structure:** The word *protestations* on page 125 means nearly the same as the simpler word *protests.* Why might the author have chosen to use a more formal and elaborate version of the word in this scene?
Working from the Text
6. Use this graphic organizer to record specific details from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Elements</th>
<th>Details from the Narrative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character(s)</td>
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<td>Point of View</td>
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<td>Sequence of Events</td>
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<td>Theme</td>
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Language and Writer’s Craft: Dialogue
Writers may begin a sentence with dialogue, or they may use a comma or a colon to introduce direct dialogue that comes later in a sentence. Commas are used to introduce shorter quotations, and colons are sometimes used for longer quotations.

Dialogue beginning a sentence:
“You scared me half to death,” my mother said to Granny. “I had forgotten all about your coming.”

Dialogue introduced using a comma:
And why did she ask my mother, “Are you ready?”

Dialogue introduced using a colon:
I stood up straight and proudly recited all that I knew: “White, yellow, orange, red, purple, blue, green.”

PRACTICE  Consider the following excerpt from Kaffir Boy:
As I dried myself, questions raced through my mind: What’s going on? What’s Granny doing at our house this ungodly hour of the morning?

Notice that a colon is used to introduce the narrator’s thoughts, but quotation marks are not used. Authors differ in their treatment of a narrator’s thoughts. This author chooses not to punctuate them as quoted words. Other authors might use italics or quotation marks to set these thoughts apart from the rest of the text. Add quotation marks to punctuate these quoted questions as direct quotes introduced by a colon.
7. Look back through the text you just read and find examples of direct and indirect dialogue. List and label them in the chart that follows. Practice the two methods of writing dialogue by paraphrasing the examples of direct dialogue and rewriting indirect dialogue as direct dialogue, being sure to punctuate it correctly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Practice Writing Dialogue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When my mother began dropping hints that I would soon be going to school, I vowed never to go to school because it was a waste of time.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. **Collaborative Discussion:** Return to the excerpt and review the dialogue between Mathabane and his mother. Discuss with your group the impact of the dialogue on the development of the characters and the narrative. How does the author use dialogue to create the relationship between mother and son? Support your thinking with details from the story that illustrate the culture of family.

**Narrative Writing Prompt**

Write a personal narrative about a memorable experience from your own childhood that illustrates one perspective or attitude from your culture. Consider the impact your family and culture had on your experience. Be sure to:

- Introduce the character(s) and setting for the narrative.
- Provide a well-structured sequence of events and a conclusion that reflects on the impact of the experience.
- Incorporate direct and indirect dialogue to aid in the development of your narrative, and punctuate dialogue correctly.
- Use precise words and phrases and sensory language.
Learning Targets
• Analyze the narrative techniques writers use to create a sense of pacing in a narrative.
• Apply pacing to my own writing.

Pacing
Narrative pacing is an important part of telling a good story. A writer controls the rhythm of a narrative with specific choices in sentence length, word choice, and details. For example, a series of short sentences can heighten suspense and increase the pace, while a series of long sentences may slow the pace.

Preview
In this activity, you will read an essay and analyze its pacing. In addition, you will write your own narrative using the techniques you have learned so far in this unit.

Setting a Purpose for Reading
• As you read the following essay, mark the text and write notes about where the pacing or rhythm of the narrative changes and how these changes in pacing affect you as a reader.
• Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
David Matthews is the author of the memoir Ace of Spades published in 2007 by Henry Holt and Co. He is the son of an African American father and a Jewish mother. In his memoir, Matthews tells of growing up racially mixed in Baltimore, Maryland during the 1970s and ‘80s. The following essay was adapted from his memoir and printed in The New York Times Magazine on January 21, 2007.

Essay

Pick One

by David Matthews
The New York Times

1 In 1977, when I was nine, my father and I moved away from the protected Maryland suburbs of Washington—and away from his latest wife, my latest stepmother—to my grandmother’s apartment in inner-city Baltimore. I had never seen so many houses connected to one another, block after block, nor so many people on streets, marble stoops and corners. Many of those people, I could not help noticing, were black. I had never seen so many black people in all my life.