

COOL DIALOG

A Writing Workshop c Pegi Deitz Shea

COOL Dialog is the only dialog worthy of your stories. In order for your dialog to be COOL, it must have these four elements:

C - Consistency to the character. The dialog must match your character's **RAPS: Relationship** with other characters he or she is speaking with, **Age, Personality, & Setting**.

O - Opinions and/or **Outpouring** of emotions. The content of the dialog must have meaning, must be specific.

O - Onward movement for the story. Dialog can foreshadow future events & inform other characters and readers.

L - Least number of words. Apply the **MAN** quiz: Can you use **Monologue**--silent thoughts--to share secrets with readers and to hide information and emotions from other characters? Can you show the information or emotion better with **Action** added or with action alone?
Can you skip meaningless dialog (ex. telephone greetings) and use **Narration** instead? Shoot for a balance of narration and dialog.

DIALOG PUNCTUATION BASICS:

1. Begin a new paragraph when introducing dialog or changing speakers.
2. Put quotation marks around the words spoken.
3. Place all punctuation inside the quotation marks.
4. Use "tags" to identify speakers. Make sure your tag has a "speech" verb (ex. said, whispered, hollered, asked).

COOL DIALOG WORKSHOP

Try the 4:2:1 process. First try the workshop in a small group format (4 kids), so the children can experience brainstorming and use dialog themselves to solve problems. After your class is comfortable with the skills in group format, try it in 2-person teams. Lastly, try individual assignments in which the children choose the characters themselves.

1. Separate the class into groups of four children.

2. Write one general story problem on the board. (Examples: A) Something valuable has broken. B) The main character is trying to do something for the first time. C) Two characters are lost.)

3. Assign each group a different set of two characters and a setting. Mix up the ages of the characters and dates & places. (Ex. one group may have a grandfather and an 8-year-old girl living in colonial America. Another group may have twin 10-year-old boys in Japan in the year 2100.) This is a great opportunity to connect with your social studies curriculum. Use a culture or time frame you're studying.

In the 4:2:1 process, two children in the group can "be" one character, and two can "be" the other. This allows the children to "get into" character and allow the characters to confront each other. When working in 2-person teams, the children each take a character and confront each other. In individual work, the child must create dialog for both characters.

4. Before beginning the stories, have the children do mini character sketches. What do each of the characters look like? Likes and dislikes? Strengths? Flaws? They can't write **COOL** dialog unless they know their characters.

5. Have kids use dialog to open the story and show readers the conflict. (ex. "Oh no! I can't believe I just broke the vase. Grandma's going to kill me!") Then they can proceed with the story, **balancing** narration with dialog.

6. After they have a story, it's **rewriting** time! Use the **COOL** formula as a revision checklist of dialog. Also consult my "ABCs of Revision."

COOL DIALOG SAMPLE CHARACTERS
"Something is Missing from the Office"

Mr. Peterson, 55, skinny, bald, school custodian

Mrs. Lorry, 45, short, glasses, school principal

Mickey, 9, troublemaker, 3rd grade

Mickey's Dad (Mr. Green), TV newsman

Laura, below average student, 3rd grade

Laura's Mom (Mrs. Weaver), waitress

Miss Rivers, wheelchair, 3rd grade teacher,

Mrs. Walker, gym teacher, athletic

Mr. Clay, 30, art teacher