



Step 4: Dialogue

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This website will give you an insight into the creative challenges faced by Dennis Kelly as writer and Tim Minchin as composer and lyricist when adapting Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* into a musical.

The National Writing Challenge is setting students a similar task, by asking them to create either a scene or song or a scene with a song in it for a new character who is introduced to us on the first day of term at Crunchem Hall.

The scene should contain no more than four speaking characters.

We have created a webpage for each of the steps that we feel are essential in creating a good scene or song, they are:

- Create a believable **Character**
- Plan a strong **Plot** - including an **Inspiration Gallery**
- Develop **Music and Lyrics**
- Write the **Dialogue**
- Editing what has been written and then **Rehearsing it**

To make the most of this resource, we suggest that you work through these pages in this order with your students.

This section will further extend the ideas developed in **Step 2: Plotting**. Dennis Kelly says enjoyment is the most important factor in writing, in creating good writing and in wanting to write. In the following exercises students will have the opportunity to explore playful interchanges between characters both through actions and in words.

This pack focuses on the development of writing dialogue it has been designed to work alongside the web page; the resources can also act as standalone activities that can be adapted to other forms of writing in your school curriculum.

Using the Dialogue Resources

1. Silent Chase Scene

A drama activity that explores how one character might react directly to another in a chase

Through drama, students will explore how characters might use objects in a setting to run, hide or defend themselves in a chase scene or conflict.

2. Whatever Would You Say?

An activity that encourages students to consider ways in which different characters might react to a given event

To help students to get into the minds of all the characters in their scene, not just the main character they have created.

3. Silent Speech / Talking Pens

Developing a written conversation between two characters

Students experiment with producing realistic dialogue that reflects the diverse reactions of two characters.

Writing Dialogue

Writing a play-script is very different to writing a story. The narrative is expressed through the dialogue between characters and through their actions on stage. Students need to think about how dialogue sounds as well as how it's written, making sure that when the lines are spoken aloud, they sound realistic. As Dennis says in his video on the Dialogue webpage, all characters have a spoken rhythm. The exercises below will give students an easy starting place to write dialogue from and without realising it, they will be writing their dialogue with 'relish'.

Silent Chase Scene

A drama activity that explores how one character might react directly to another in a chase

Purpose of activity:

Through drama, students explore how characters might use objects in a setting to run, hide or defend themselves in a chase scene or conflict.

What you will need:

- A hall or classroom with chairs and tables to one side
- Pencils and paper for planning

How it works:

Refer back to the Inspiration Gallery and choose a picture of a classroom. Ask students to look carefully at everything they can see in the picture.

Ask students to move into pairs and choose a number each, 1 or 2. Explain that 1 is Miss Trunchbull and 2 can either be a pupil or a member of staff in trouble with Miss Trunchbull.

They have to plan a slow-motion chase scene through the classroom in the picture.

Number 2 (who's playing a pupil or member of staff) must find a space in the room to start. Model for students how they must walk slowly through the chase as if shown in slow-motion in a film. *Number 2* calls and acts out something they will use in the classroom to outwit Miss Trunchbull in the chase. *Number 1* (Miss Trunchbull) must call out how they overcome this problem.

For example:

2 says:

'I throw a chair in her way.'

2 then slowly turns round and acts out throwing a chair in front of Trunchbull's feet.)

1 says:

'I lift it up and throw it in a hammer-swing.'

1 then acts out lifting up the chair, swinging it around her head and throwing it at 2.

2 says:

'I duck under the flying chair and hide under the teacher's desk.'

2 slowly acts out rolling under desk.

1 says:

'I lift the desk up in the air.'

1 acts out lifting the desk, and so on.

2 acts picking up a globe and throwing it.

When students first start acting out their chase around the room, you will probably notice that they find it hard to think of ideas on

the spot. After a few minutes, stop students and give them the chance to plan out the events that will happen in the chase by writing them down. By doing this, the drama activity will be far more exciting, because once students have had time to think through their ideas they will really enjoy anticipating each step of the chase. It also means that they can perform each step more quickly.

Through this activity, the students will begin to think like playwrights who use the setting, as well as the characters, to tell the story. Students need to learn how to use the stage environment to its best effect always looking for possibilities that will help to tell the story of their scene.

Whatever Would You Say

An activity that encourages students to consider ways in which different characters might react to a given event

Purpose of activity:

To help students to get into the minds of all the characters in their scene, not just the main character they have created.

What you will need:

- A hall or classroom with chairs and tables to one side
- A picture of a speech bubble (preferably laminated) for students to hold when they speak

How it works:

Arrange students into groups of four. They must each choose a number 1 to 4.

1s are Miss Trunchbull

2s are Mrs Wormwood

3s are Matilda

4s are Bruce Bogtrotter

Explain to students that you are going to call out one event at a time. Students have to think of what their character would say about this event, considering how each reaction might be different. To give students a head-start, give them some thinking and recording time before they join their group and call out their responses. While some students might not need this, others may freeze on the spot if they can't think of ideas quickly enough.

Choose a selection of events that will receive different reactions depending on the character.

For example:

- The school is snowed in and has to be closed
- Mrs Trunchbull's car won't start at the end of school
- Mrs Trunchbull's cake has been stolen
- Mrs Wormwood wins a dancing competition
- Bruce Bogtrotter eats an entire chocolate cake
- Matilda wins a writing competition

Read these out, and display them on your whiteboard. Alternatively, you might prefer to write a selection of events on cards for students to work through during the activity, instead of hearing them called out.

Give students time to prepare. When they are ready, ask them to join their groups. The teacher should call out an event and give students 40 seconds for as many characters to react as possible. Alternatively, you might consider writing a selection of events on cards for students to pick up and work through during the activity, instead of hearing them called out.

Students speak their character's reactions, one at a time. While 1 holds the speech-bubble, the others must be quiet and listen until it is passed to them. This will show students how diverse characters on stage can be, and will remind them to live each character as they write them.

For example:

Vent: *'Bruce Bogtrotter eats an entire chocolate cake.'*

1. **Miss Trunchbull:** *'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.'*

1 then passes the speech-bubble to 2.

2. **Mrs Wormwood:** *'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.'*

2 passes the speech-bubble to 3.

3. **Matilda:** *'Go Brucie! Go Brucie! You've done it! You've outwitted the Trunchbull. You're a legend Bruce.'*

3 passes the speech-bubble to 4.

4. Bruce: *'I've done it! My stomach hurts, but I've done it. I never thought I could do it.'*

This activity highlights how a believable scene must include believable characters. When they think about their reaction, students must draw on their knowledge of the characters, so what the audience is watching seems interesting and real.

Silent Speech / Talking Pens

Developing a written conversation between two characters

Purpose of activity:

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:

Ask students to think of a moment in their story idea where two characters need to speak to each other. Give them all 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.'

Explain to students that they are going to have a silent discussion with someone else in the room. The only thing that can talk is their pens.

Organise everyone into pairs. Each person has a piece of paper so ask the pairs to start with one of the pieces of paper. The owner of the paper will 'play' the character who 'spoke' in the first line they wrote. Ask the students to explain to their partner who the characters are - the partners will 'play' the other character and can now think about how they might respond.

Give students 90 seconds or so 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 the other student's piece of paper.

For example, a written conversation might look like this:

'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.'

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

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

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

And so on...

Then reflect on the activity as a whole group using these reflection questions:

Refecation

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?

These activities will have allowed students to enjoy a playful exploration of how relationships between characters are created through dialogue and action on stage. Now they must refer back to their plan, and perhaps add to it, to start creating the dialogue that will tell the story of their five-minute scene.