

TRAIT FOCUS: CONVENTIONS

Lesson Objective

Students write a passage of dialogue using correct grammar conventions.

Using Correct Punctuation with Dialogue

As early writers progress through the primary grades, they master more and more of the conventions of the English language. It is a step-by-step process, incorporating not only the different types of end punctuation but also the various ways to construct simple and complex sentences.

As students grow out of picture books into advanced chapter books, they will be exposed to complex passages of dialogue. Moreover, they will wish to utilize dialogue into their own writing. In order to ensure their clarity of work, early writers should be coached in the proper grammar conventions used in writing dialogue.

The novel *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo is an excellent mentor text with which to illustrate the writing trait of conventions with your students. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your discussion of the novel as a way of instructing your students on the use of dialogue in fiction.

Story Overview

When India Opal Buloni moves to Naomi, Florida with her preacher father, she experiences the all too common woes of being in a new place—no friends. But on one fateful trip to the grocery store, she brings home something special: a dog named Winn-Dixie.

Because of Winn-Dixie, Opal begins to open up to the people around her. She makes new friends and learns a lot about the town she now calls home. A classic of American literature, this novel will appeal to anyone who likes adventure, storytelling...and dogs.

He Said, She Said

1. As part of your ongoing *Because of Winn-Dixie* curriculum, choose a favorite chapter or passage from the text to focus on. The passage in question should have sufficient dialogue with which to support this lesson.
2. Reread the passage aloud in a theater format, casting individual students as the characters. Also include one student to read the part of the narrator. However, do not prompt them on when or how to read. Afterward, ask how the students knew it was their turn. What were their cues? What told them when something was a question or a statement?
3. Revisit the passage, pointing specifically to the portions of dialogue. How are these portions different from the narrative text? (They represent spoken words, rather than the narrator's voice.)
4. Review the conventions of dialogue use, highlighting examples in the passage. Dialogue is surrounded by quotation marks. It has speaker tags such as *he said* or *she asked*. If a tag follows a dialogue sentence that ends in a period, the period is changed to a comma. Final punctuation falls within the quotations marks.
5. Pair students up. Have them converse on a topic of your choice, such as what they had for breakfast or what their favorite movie is. Give them a minute or two to discuss.
6. Ask your students to each write the conversation out on paper. It doesn't matter if they recreate the exchange verbatim. It is important, however, that you coach them through the correct conventions usage and how to add speaker tags.
7. Now have them switch papers with their partners. Each pair should review the writing for conventions and help each other correct any mistakes to punctuation.