

## TRAIT FOCUS: VOICE

## Lesson Objective

Students write narrative paragraphs using different variations of voice.

## Teaching the Voice Trait

It is sometimes argued that the trait of voice cannot be effectively taught in writing instruction because it stems so much from the writer's own personality. The voice trait, however, is much more than that. Voice can be refined through details and word choices. It can be adapted according to the intended audience. The amount of confidence the writer has in the subject matter can also greatly affect the writing's voice.

One way to improve a student's understanding of voice is through listening exercises. Hearing the text read aloud adds an additional layer of meaning through vocal tone, expression, intonation, and inflection. The goal of effective writing instruction is to accomplish this same effect within the writer's own mind. They then become better able to identify the trademarks of voice solely from the written text.

The novel *Island of Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell is an excellent mentor text with a strong narrative voice. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your discussion of the novel as a way of instructing your students on developing voice in their writing.

## Story Overview

There is an island off the coast of California that resembles a fish warming itself in the sun. The tribe of Indians that reside there abandon their home when Russian explorers land. When the tribe departs, however, they leave young Karana behind.

Karana jumps ship to stay with her younger brother, who is killed a short time later. She is left alone for the next 18 years. During that time, however, Karana not only finds the strength within herself to survive, she also endeavors to create a happy life for herself.

## Do You Hear What I Hear?

1. Have your students write a short paragraph based on the following writing prompt: *Two friends are talking at the lockers between classes. The narrator watches as his friend opens her locker, unaware that a whole stack of books is about to fall out. What happens next?*
2. Once they are finished, ask your students to put their paragraphs aside for now. They will revisit them at the end of the lesson.
3. As part of your ongoing *Island of the Blue Dolphins* curriculum, choose a favorite passage of the text to focus on. Read the section aloud, embodying the character of Karana in your voice.
4. Next, reread the passage using a radically different tone and expression—one that's bored, one that's frightened, one that's overly excited, etc.
5. Do these variations fit the voice of the novel? Why not? Ask your students to point out words and phrases that "sound" like Karana. How do these clues, as opposed to the other variations, form Karana's voice?
6. Have your students rewrite their earlier paragraphs about the incident at the lockers. This time, they should work to capture different variations of voice. What if the narrator were bored? Or frightened? Or overly excited? What words and phrases can your writers include to embody these different voices?
7. Pair students up and have them read their paragraphs aloud to each other. Reading aloud is a good indicator of whether the writing effectively captured the voice or if more needs to be added or taken away.