

Lesson 1 | Powerful Dialogue Verbs

Explore the ways that changing one word can have a big effect for readers.

Objective

Students will analyze how descriptive verbs change the meaning of dialogue and help develop characters.

Standards

**Common Core ELA,
Grades 3–4**

- RL.1 Refer to text to make inferences
- W.3 Use dialogue to develop characters
- L.5 Analyze nuances among words

Time

45 minutes

Materials

- Poster
- Quotes resource sheet at scholastic.com/experiencinghistory
- Chart paper

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1 Model how the same dialogue can be said in different ways. For example, say “I don’t know” as a sigh, as a shout, and as a question. Invite students to share examples. Show how descriptive verbs after dialogue (instead of just “said”) tell the reader *how* the character spoke.

2 Show the poster and review the dialogue examples. Guide students to understand that strong dialogue verbs and adverbs give clues about characters’ emotions and how they react to events. Direct students to picture the first example in their heads (“*What are we doing?*” *Kit whispered*). Ask: *How would it have changed how you read that line or pictured the character if Kit had “shouted” (seems bolder) or “laughed” (doesn’t seem as worried)?* Encourage students to suggest other verbs or adverbs that would change how they read that line.

3 Explain that students will make inferences about characters in *Kit: Read All About It!* Display or distribute the following examples (see online resource sheet). Have students pair up to find the verbs and infer the character’s personality.

Uncle Hendrick [demanding]

- ◆ “What are *you* doing here?” he bellowed.
- ◆ “Take these shoes to be shined,” Uncle Hendrick commanded.
- ◆ “Yes!” barked Uncle Hendrick.



Mrs. Howard [nervous]

- ◆ “Oh dear!” fussed Mrs. Howard.
- ◆ “My land!” shrieked Mrs. Howard.

4 As a class, create an anchor chart of descriptive dialogue verbs and categorize them. Example: Joking (giggled, laughed, teased); Disappointed (sighed, wailed, cried). Students can also hunt for verbs to add from their independent reading. Point out that, as they can see in most books, it’s best to sprinkle descriptive verbs in when there’s something important to show, rather than replace every single “said.”

5 Review how to punctuate dialogue using the poster.

6 Direct students to write two versions of a short dialogue using different verbs that change the tone. Level down: Have students alter verbs in a scene from a book.

Say It With Feeling!

Show your characters' emotions by using descriptive verbs and adverbs after dialogue.



Instead of "said," try...

- ◆ "What are we doing?" Kit **whispered.** *→ nervous about the situation*
- ◆ "Oh dear," **fussed** Mrs. Howard.
- ◆ "Aunt Millie!" Dad **exclaimed.** *→ excited or surprised*
- ◆ "I'll get it!" she **called.**
- ◆ "Yes!" **barked** Uncle Hendrick.
- ◆ "I don't think so," **sighed** Kit.

Or add an adverb:

- ◆ "Ah, that's too bad," said Papá **sadly.**
- ◆ "Are you all right?" Ana asked **kindly.** *→ shows compassion*
- ◆ "No," she answered **seriously.**
- ◆ "But why?" asked Josefina **indignantly.** *→ feeling annoyed!*



Get to know Kit and Josefine with the American Girl Character historical fiction series!

These sentences are from the book *Kit: Read All About It!*

Directions: Find the verbs that describe the dialogue. Then, use the verbs to infer the character's personality.

Uncle Hendrick

- "What are *you* doing here?" he bellowed.
- "Take these shoes to be shined," Uncle Hendrick commanded.
- "Yes!" barked Uncle Hendrick.

Mrs. Howard

- "Oh dear!" fussed Mrs. Howard.
- "My land!" shrieked Mrs. Howard.