

# Analyzing Dialogue and Incidents in Stories and Drama

## CCLS

**RL.8.3:** Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

Theme: *Doers and Dreamers*

At some point, you’ve probably put a television show on mute. You could still see what was happening on the screen, but you couldn’t hear what the actors were saying. Yet understanding the **dialogue**, or the conversation between characters, is just as important as watching the events taking place on the screen. Similarly, analyzing the events and dialogue in a story or drama will deepen your understanding of the setting, characters, and plot.

**Study these scenes. What does the dialogue tell you about the characters and the situation?**



**Circle any details that give you important information about the characters and events.**

Use your observations about the scenes above to fill out the chart below.

Dialogue	What This Reveals About the Characters
<p>"It's taking me a long time to make this scarf."</p> <p>"Maybe you should ask the cat about that."</p>	
	How This Affects the Story
	<p>The man realizes that it's the cat, not his knitting, that is the problem!</p>

When you talk with people, you probably consider whether their words match their actions. When you read dialogue, look for connections between what characters say and what they do. These connections will give you important clues about the main characters and key events.



Read this scene from a play about a caveman who has been unfrozen in the twenty-first century.

Genre: Play

## The Ascent of Man by Daniel Gerrard

- 1 [Outside the Center for Advanced Science. In the parking lot, DR. OLIVIA QASIM takes the prehistoric man, TOR, to meet her fiancé, BRETT DIXON.]
- 2 BRETT: So, this is the famous caveman, eh?
- 3 OLIVIA: You know he's not a caveman, Brett. [speaking slowly and clearly] Tor, this is Brett. He is my friend.
- 4 [BRETT offers his hand, and TOR studies it for a moment before grasping it.]
- 5 BRETT: Hey, buddy! Nice to meet you. First time out of the lab?
- 6 TOR: Yes. O-liv-ya teach me your words. We find eat now, yes?

(continued)

**Explore how to answer this question:** "What does the dialogue reveal about Tor?"

In a play, information about characters is communicated primarily through dialogue. By paying attention to what Tor and the other characters say, you can gather information about his character.

**Read the dialogue in the chart below. How does each line of dialogue provide clues about Tor?**

Dialogue	What This Reveals about Tor
"So, this is the famous caveman, eh?"	
"You know he's not a caveman, Brett."	
"O-liv-ya teach me your words. We find eat now, yes?"	
"Hey, buddy . . . First time out of the lab?"	

**Share your completed chart with a partner. Then discuss what you learned about Tor from each line of dialogue.**



## Close Reading

Both dialogue and events can move a plot forward.

**Circle** an event in this scene that may lead to a larger problem.

## Hint

Which event most upsets Tor and changes his behavior?

Continue reading the scene from “The Ascent of Man.” Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

(continued from page 62)

- 7 BRETT: Ha! You’re priceless, Mr. Tor! Yes, absolutely, “find eat now.” [to OLIVIA] Madame, your carriage awaits! [He opens a car door with an exaggerated bow.]
- 8 TOR [pulling OLIVIA away from the car]: Stop! No you feed woman to this—animal!
- 9 OLIVIA: It’s all right, Tor! This is the car. Do you remember the car from the pictures?
- 10 TOR [nodding]: Yes. Tor—I know this. Car.
- 11 BRETT [gripping TOR’s arm]: You’ve got a lot to learn, Tor. Stay out of traffic for a while.
- 12 OLIVIA: Brett!

**Circle the correct answer.**

Which incident in the scene sets up a conflict between Tor and Brett?

- A Brett makes fun of the way Tor speaks.
- B Brett grabs Tor’s arm and gives him a warning.
- C Tor thinks Brett is trying to feed Olivia to an animal.
- D Olivia speaks harshly to Brett.



## Show Your Thinking

Look at the answer that you chose. Explain why you felt this incident could affect the plot of the story.

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With two classmates, act out the play. Then discuss what each character’s lines reveal about the characters, story, or action.





Read the story. Use the Study Buddy and Close Reading to guide your reading.

Genre: Science Fiction



As I read, I will pay attention to how the dialogue provides clues about the main character and what has happened to him.

## Close Reading

What odd statement does the Time Traveller make when he first sits down? **Circle** it. What questions does that statement raise in your mind?

**Underline** three lines of the Time Traveller's dialogue that reveal important information about the story he is going to tell.

## from *The Time Machine*

by H. G. Wells

*In this scene from The Time Machine, a group of men meet a scientist who claims to have travelled through time. The men feed the Time Traveller dinner in exchange for the story of his adventures.*

- 1 The Time Traveller came to the place reserved for him without a word. He smiled quietly, in his old way. 'Where's my mutton?' he said. 'What a treat it is to stick a fork into meat again!'
- 2 'Story!' cried the Editor.
- 3 '[Forget the s]tory . . .!' said the Time Traveller. 'I want something to eat.'
- 4 'One word,' said I. 'Have you been time travelling?'
- 5 'Yes,' said the Time Traveller, with his mouth full, nodding his head.
- 6 'I'd give a shilling a line for a verbatim note,' said the Editor. . . The Time Traveller devoted his attention to his dinner, and displayed the appetite of a tramp. . . . 'I suppose I must apologize,' he said. 'I was simply starving. I've had a most amazing time. . . . I will,' he went on, 'tell you the story of what has happened to me, if you like . . . I was in my laboratory at four o'clock, and since then . . . I've lived eight days . . . such days as no human being ever lived before! I'm nearly worn out, but I shan't sleep till I've told this thing over to you. Then I shall go to bed. But no interruptions! Is it agreed?'
- 7 'Agreed,' said the Editor, and the rest of us echoed 'Agreed.' And with that the Time Traveller began his story as I have set it forth. He sat back in his chair at first, and spoke like a weary man.



What does each of the lines of dialogue that you underlined reveal about the Traveller's experiences?

**Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.**

- 1 Which line of dialogue best shows how the Traveller feels about what has happened to him?
  - A "What a treat it is to stick a fork into meat again!"
  - B "I've lived . . . such days as no human has ever lived before."
  - C "'[Forget the s]tory . . . ! . . . I want something to eat.'"
  - D "I'm nearly worn out, but I shan't sleep until I've told this thing over to you."
- 2 What shows that the other men are eager to hear the Traveller's story?
  - A They refuse to let him finish his dinner.
  - B They agree to listen with no interruptions.
  - C They ask for proof that he has been time travelling.
  - D They agree to return after the Traveller has eaten and slept.
- 3 Look back at the Time Traveller's dialogue. Explain what it reveals about him and about what has happened to him. In your response, include at least one of the phrases he uses.

This image shows a single page from a notebook or ledger. It features ten evenly spaced, thin grey horizontal lines running across the width of the page. The background is a solid off-white color. There are no margins, text, or other markings present on the page.



Read the story and the play. Then answer the questions that follow.

## from *Don Quixote*

by Miguel de Cervantes

1 After Don Quixote and Sancho Panza had ridden for some distance, they came to a vast plain dotted with windmills.

2 “Fortune favors us, dear Sancho,” said Don Quixote, gesturing toward the plain. “She has deemed us worthy to battle and slay these thirty—no, these forty—monstrous giants. Sweeping so evil a breed from the face of the earth is a righteous service.”

3 Sancho peered across the plain. “What giants?”

4 “Those there!” answered his master. “With the long arms.”

5 “Your worship,” said Sancho, “what we see are not giants but windmills. What seem to be their arms are sails turned by the wind.”

6 “It is easy to see,” replied Don Quixote, “that you are not used to adventuring. Those are giants. And if you are afraid, go and hide while I engage them in fierce and unequal combat.”

7 So saying, Don Quixote gave the spur to his steed, heedless of Sancho’s cries that most certainly they were windmills and not giants he was going to attack. Don Quixote, however, was so certain they were giants that he neither heard the cries of Sancho, nor saw, near as he was, what they really were. “Fly not, cowards and vile beings, for a single knight attacks you!”

8 A slight breeze sprang up, and the great sails began to move. “You may have more arms than Briareus,<sup>1</sup>” exclaimed Don Quixote, “but you have to reckon with me.” And so saying, he charged and fell upon the first mill that stood in front of him. But as he drove in his lance, the wind whirled the sail with enough force to toss horse and rider across the plain. Sancho hurried to him.

9 “Bless me!” Sancho said. “Did I not say they were only windmills?”

10 “Hush, friend Sancho,” replied Don Quixote. “I think, and so ’tis true, that the magician who carried off my books has turned these giants into windmills to rob me of the glory of vanquishing them. But in the end his wicked arts will mean little against my good sword.”



<sup>1</sup> **Briareus:** from Greek myth; a giant who had 100 arms.



# from *The Comical History of Don Quixote*

by Thomas d'Urfey

## end of ACT I, SCENE I

- 1 DON QUIXOTE: See you that giant, Sancho? [*points offstage*]
- 2 SANCHO [*confused*]: Giant, sire?
- 3 DON QUIXOTE: That monstrous giant, with arms almost two leagues long! See how he swings 'em about, and fans himself to cool his head.
- 4 SANCHO: I see no giant, sire. I see a windmill, its sails turning.
- 5 DON QUIXOTE: Idiot! They may look like sails to you, but I know they are the arms of giants. Go and hide, if you are afraid. I will enter into cruel and unequal battle with the beasts. [*Exit*]
- 6 SANCHO: Are you blind? Your brains will be dashed out by the sails! [*Exit SANCHO . . . curtain falls*]

## beginning of ACT I, SCENE II

[*Curtain rises upon the interior of an inn. Two friends of DON QUIXOTE, NICHOLAS and PEREZ, sit at a table, picking at plates of uneaten food.*]

- 7 NICHOLAS: Those two mad fools have gone knight erranting.<sup>2</sup>
- 8 PEREZ: It troubles me that a man who had such good sense should be so strangely bewitched by the idea of knight errantry.
- 9 NICHOLAS: 'Tis indeed a strange infatuation.
- 10 PEREZ [*brightening*]: But I think I have used my time well. While you have been searching for the whimsical knight, his housekeeper and I have been burning his books.
- 11 NICHOLAS: I have no doubt that will help cure him. Those tales of knighthood have upended his sense—but look! Here comes our host.

[*Enter VINCENT, laughing*]

- 12 NICHOLAS: Innkeeper! What makes you so merry this morning?
- 13 VINCENT [*laughing*]: Oh, my ribs! Don Quixote, Don Quixote.
- 14 PEREZ: Why? What of him?
- 15 VINCENT: The mad fool has charged a windmill, swearing it was a giant! The sails spun him about like a rat in a wheel until, at last, Fortune let him keep the few brains he has left and tossed him into a fish pond. [*shaking with laughter*] Oh, I shall burst!

<sup>2</sup> **Erranting:** from old French; wandering in search of adventure





**1** How does the dialogue reveal that Sancho respects Don Quixote in the story?

- A** He tells him the “giants” are windmills.
- B** He refers to him as “your worship.”
- C** He tries to convince him not to fight.
- D** He hurries to him to see if he is hurt.

**Answer Form**

- 1 (A) (B) (C) (D)  
2 (A) (B) (C) (D)  
3 (A) (B) (C) (D)

**Number  
Correct**

**3**

**2** Read this line from the story.

“Fortune favors us, dear Sancho,” said Don Quixote, gesturing toward the plain. “She has deemed us worthy to battle and slay these thirty—no, these forty—monstrous giants. Sweeping so evil a breed from the face of the earth is a righteous service.”

How does seeing the windmills affect Don Quixote’s journey?

- A** He decides the windmills are a sign that he should find and destroy forty giants.
- B** He thinks he must visit the windmills to make his fortune.
- C** The sight motivates him to go out and rid the earth of evil.
- D** He thinks the windmills are giants that he is meant to do battle with.

**3** How do Don Quixote’s actions affect his friends Perez and Nicholas in the play?

- A** They worry about him and search for ways to help him regain his sanity.
- B** They think Don Quixote is a fool and encourage others to make fun of him.
- C** They decide Don Quixote is dangerous and plot how to capture him.
- D** They agree to ask for the Innkeeper’s advice about how to stop Don Quixote’s foolishness.

**4** Describe Sancho’s attitude toward Don Quixote in the story. Describe Vincent’s attitude toward Don Quixote in the play. Use **two** specific events or pieces of dialogue to support your response.

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**Self Check**

*Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 51.*