

Dialogue brings a story to life and develops the plot. It can also reveal character. The *register* can be formal, as used by newsreaders, or informal, as used with friends. Characters may vary the register in which they speak. One challenge faced by authors is to make dialogue realistic yet dramatically effective. You need to be able to comment on how this is done.

Getting you thinking

In this extract from *Holes* by Louis Sachar, the boys are doing hard labour in an outdoor prison in a desert. Their punishment is to dig a hole each day.

‘Well, how’d you like your first hole?’ asked Squid.

Stanley groaned, and the other boys laughed.

‘Well, the first hole’s the hardest,’ said Stanley.

‘No way,’ said X-Ray. ‘The second hole’s a lot harder. You’re hurting before you even get started. If you think you’re sore now, just wait and see how you feel tomorrow morning, right?’

‘That’s right,’ said Squid.

‘Plus, the fun’s gone,’ said X-Ray.

‘The fun?’ asked Stanley.

‘Don’t lie to me,’ said X-Ray. ‘I bet you always wanted to dig a big hole, right? Am I right?’

Stanley had never really thought about it before, but he knew better than to tell X-Ray he wasn’t right.

‘Every kid in the world wants to dig a great big hole,’ said X-Ray.

‘To China, right?’

‘Right,’ said Stanley.

‘See what I mean,’ said X-Ray. ‘That’s what I’m saying. But now the fun’s gone. And you still got to do it again, and again, and again.’

‘Camp Fun and Games,’ said Stanley.

Remember

Authors may use dialect or slang in the dialogue characters, especially when they are speaking informally. This can sometimes be difficult to understand.

Consider these questions:

- Who is the new boy?
- How do Squid and X-Ray get on?
- How formal or informal is their dialogue?
- What do X-Ray’s comments reveal about his character?
- What can you tell about Stanley’s character?