

Revealing Character Through Dialogue

Dialect is the particular use of language spoken in a certain place by a particular group of people. Conversational voice is the way people speak informally to each other. Authors use dialect and conversational voice to reveal character. In fiction, voice is the character's or the narrator's way of talking.

DIRECTIONS: The passage below is from Mark Twain's novel *Tom Sawyer*. Read the dialogue below. Then answer the questions.

TOM: "I can lick you!"

OTHER BOY: "I'd like to see you try it."

TOM: "Well, I can do it."

OTHER BOY: "No you can't, either."

TOM: "Yes I can."

OTHER BOY: "No you can't."

TOM: "I can."

OTHER BOY: "You can't."

TOM: "Can!"

OTHER BOY: "Can't!"

TOM: "What's your name?"

OTHER BOY: "'Tisn't any of your business, maybe."

TOM: "Well I 'low I'll make it my business."

OTHER BOY: "Well why don't you?"

TOM: "If you say much, I will."

OTHER BOY: "Much—much—much. There now."

TOM: "Oh, you think you're mighty smart, don't you? I could lick you with one hand tied behind me, if I wanted to."

OTHER BOY: "Well why don't you do it? You say you can do it."

TOM: "Well I will, if you fool with me."

OTHER BOY: "Oh yes—I've seen whole families in the same fix."

TOM: "Smarty! You think you're some, now, don't you? Oh, what a hat!"

OTHER BOY: "You can lump that hat if you don't like it. I dare you to knock it off—and anybody that'll take a dare will suck eggs."



Name _____ **Comparing Dialects and Registers**

QUESTIONS

1. What word does Tom use several times that the other boy doesn't use?

2. What does it mean in the context of the boys' conversation? Use a dictionary to help you.

3. How else does the way Tom talks differ from the way the other boy talks?

4. Based just on the dialogue, what adjectives would you use to describe TOM?

5. Based just on the dialogue, what adjectives would you use to describe OTHER BOY?

6. Read the description of one of the boys from the book below. Based on the passage of dialogue that you read, write which boy that fits the description. Then explain your answer, using evidence from the passage of dialogue.

(He) was well dressed, too—well dressed on a week-day. This was simply astounding. His cap was a dainty thing, his close-buttoned blue cloth roundabout was new and natty, and so were his pantaloons. He had shoes on—and it was only Friday. He even wore a necktie, a bright bit of ribbon. He had a citified air about him...
