

**9 Grammar Rainbow – Explaining ‘D’**

Dialogue. Children find dialogue really difficult. They mainly find it difficult because it comes so easily to them, and once they are applying their own lives to their writing, they are beginning to transpose all of that talk into their stories.

The problem is, they get so excited by it, and they tend to have so much talk to include. They want their writing to be authentic and reflect their real lives, but the dilemma is, actually, dialogue is really tricky, and less is more.

When working with children as they're trying to include speech in their writing, we need to teach children about the 3 'M's of dialogue. The first M is Move. Does this dialogue move the action on? Does it take the story forward? Does it help us as readers engage further with the story?

The second M is Make. Does the dialogue create some interest, some suspense or even a problem to solve?

And the final M is More. This More is More about the character. The dialogue reveals to us something else that the character is doing, or thinking, or internalising. This More really helps push the story forward. Children must resist having day-to-day conversations but as teachers we can support them with the three Ms of dialogue.

Dialogue is tricky for many reasons, firstly because children have so much to say. But more than that, dialogue comes with such a complicated rule system for punctuation – there is so much to think about when we lay out dialogue on a page.

Children have to think about new line, new speaker; they have to understand terms like inverted commas and how they are the more formal representation of terms like speech mark.

They have to understand how punctuation works within spoken aspects of writing. One of the nicest things I've seen in a classroom is where children have shown me a dialogue dance.

Now, I'm not very good at dancing, but they stood up and had some dance moves to help them remember how to use punctuation. It went something like this, but a little bit funkier: New line, inverted commas, capital letter, blah blah blah, full stop, inverted commas. It was great! And kids need help and hooks to help them with their dialogue and that's tricky in itself.

But once they've mastered punctuation, there's something else to contend with that is even more tricky, and that is the contracted form. Speech is rightly full of informalities: I ain't going to the shops, I can't come, I don't like it. And the nature of speech is taking two formal words, pushing them together, omitting some letters and including an apostrophe to show the missed letters.

Now, unfortunately there is not a set rule-system for the contracted form. What I'd like you to do now is take part in a little test. It'd be great if you've got a pen or a notepad.

Let's think about 'can not'. What would be the contracted form for 'can not'? Can you think of the rule for making that contracted form? Let's think of another one, 'will not'. What would be the contracted form for these two words coming together, and what would be the rule? And finally, think about 'am not'. What would be the contracted form for this part in speech?

And you will notice, if you've written down the answers, that actually the rules aren't set and the rules aren't always the same. Am not becomes ain't and changes quite significantly and the apostrophe goes between the 'n' and the 't'.

But something like 'will not' again also has a great amount of change... 'I won't be going to the party', but it doesn't have the same changes as 'ain't'. And children find this really difficult.

But to help you, I think we deal with it head on, and very explicitly we teach children the 75 contracted forms of the English language. We deal with them head on, we group them for similarity and we group them for difference, and this way children can take more control of dialogue in writing.