



▲ Students study dialogue in their favorite picture books.

Using Monologue and Dialogue

“Miss,” Marcus yells from behind, and the ball bangs off the rim.
I feel everyone’s eyes on me and want to crawl off the court.
“Go strong to the hoop,” says Nate.
“We gotta have those,” says Zo.
I know. I shouldn’t be out here if I miss a shot like that.

This excerpt from *Strong to the Hoop* by John Coy illustrates the effective use of both interior monologue and authentic dialogue, techniques writers use to provide insight into their characters and move the plot along. Our students often struggle to bring their characters to life and show their characters’ motivations; we’ve found that teaching interior monologue and authentic dialogue helps students create engaging characters and develop their plots without depending solely on narration.

Interior Monologue

Interior monologue is a window on characters’ thoughts. It allows us to hear what they’re thinking in their own words, which helps readers feel

connected to and care about the characters. In our classrooms, we address interior monologue during revision times of narrative writing cycles.

Sample Lesson on Interior Monologue

For our first lesson on interior monologue, we like to use *Strong to the Hoop*. John Coy immediately brings readers into the main character's world by opening a window into his thoughts.

✓ Introduction

Rosanne: As I've been reading your stories, I often wonder what the character is thinking. When I've mentioned this, the author can immediately tell me exactly how the character is feeling. I think that since most of you know your characters so well, you feel that the reader does too. But readers only know what we put on the paper, so you've got to let them "listen in" on what your characters are thinking during crucial parts of a story. This technique is called interior monologue.

✓ Focus for Listening

Rosanne: Today I will read *Strong to the Hoop* by John Coy. You all have typed versions of the story in front of you. While I'm reading, underline or highlight the parts where you notice interior monologue, where you can hear a character's thoughts.

Rosanne reads story.

✓ Discussion

Rosanne: So, what did you notice?

Jack: On the very first page James says he wishes he was bigger.

Rosanne: Right. And what did you learn about James from that?

Jack: Well, we learned that he really liked basketball and wanted to be bigger so he could play with his brother and his friends.

Rosanne: Good. Anyone else notice interior monologue?

Stephanie: Well, when he's playing there is a lot.

Tim: Yeah, like when he comments to himself about the other players. When he says he wants Marcus to shut up and play, he doesn't really say it. He just thinks it.

Rosanne: What did we learn about James from that?

Recommended READING

Books to Use:

I Know a Lady
by Patricia MacLachlan
Earrings
by Judith Viorst
Strong to the Hoop
by John Coy
The Ghost Eye Tree
by Bill Martin Jr.
The Memory Box
by Mary Bahr
Most "Alexander Books"
by Judith Viorst

Jessica: Well, that he wasn't going to take it from Marcus anymore. He seems like a very determined person.

Rosanne: I think so too. What do you think all the interior monologue added to the story?

Billy: Without it, the story would have been boring.

Jasmine: Yeah, it would just be like a retelling of a basketball game. You know—he dribbled, he shot, we scored, blah, blah, blah.

Tim: Like a sports commentary. I like it the way it is. You feel for James a lot more. I mean you really want him to beat Marcus.

✓ **Trying It Out**

Rosanne: Let's try adding interior monologue to our stories today. Choose a really important moment in your story and write some interior monologue. You may want to do it in a few spots. Let's brainstorm some possible places you might include interior monologue.

The class brainstormed the following chart.

Possible Places to Use Interior Monologue in Your Stories

When your character . . .

<i>first meets another character</i>	<i>has something important happen (happy, sad)</i>
<i>has to make a decision</i>	<i>is confused</i>
<i>is mad at another character</i>	

✓ **Share**

Cary read aloud what he added to his piece during share time.

"I think it would be more fun just to stay down here, it's not like there's nothing to do around this neighborhood," Kyle told them in a panicked tone.

"Kyle, let's just go," Tom said, sounding annoyed.

What should I do? Go with my friend and disobey my Mom, or listen to what my Mom said and not go with my friends? What are the chances of my Mom finding out that I went uptown? But what happens if she asks my friends what we did? They won't know not to tell her that we went uptown. If my Mom asks, I'll just quickly answer for them.

"All right, I'll come with you," Kyle said in half-satisfied fashion.

—by Cary, 5th grader

Cary used interior monologue to let his readers in on the conflict Kyle was feeling, adding depth to Cary's piece.