Using dialogue and monologue

What are these?

Dialogue: conversation; an exchange between characters or the exact words of a character spoken aloud, indicated though the use of quotation marks and paragraphing

Monologue: internal thoughts of a character indicated by the use of italics

Check out this example:

"We should think about this," I said.

"I've been thinking about it, Mom," he said. "And I really want to."

Don't go! I thought.

"Well, then you should do it," I said.

"Really, Mom? I can?"

Please don't!

"Absolutely."

- What is the effect of varying spoken conversation with thoughts about the conversation?
- How does the writer help the reader keep track of who is talking? Does every line need what's known as a dialogue tag — like "he said" and "she shouted" — after a character has spoken? What dialogue tags does this writer use? How does she help the reader understand what she's thinking versus what is being said?
- What do you learn about the son solely through what he says and how he says it? Imagine that this piece was told from the son's point of view instead, and we had access to his thoughts as he spoke. How might this piece change?

Narrative writing, like all writing, is about making choices.
How do you know when to use dialogue and when not to use it?

Think about the writing and the feedback you've been getting on your weekly assignments.

1. Are they really narratives or are you just journal writing?
2. Are there places where you could tell your story more effectively through dialogue? Why? What can dialogue do in your piece that narration alone might not?
3. Are there places where a conversation is best simply described, or where only a line or two is needed? Why? How can you make the dialogue you add have the most impact?

Dropping into the action

Let's experiment with this technique. Think about the first time you met someone who later became important to you. Then, write a sentence that drops us directly into a scene from that memory.

Writer Anjali Vaida does this in a story about selecting her wedding dress with her first line here:

Ten minutes after meeting my future mother-in-law, I was wearing only underwear and socks.

Now let's try it in the chat. Feel free to borrow the structure of Anjali Vaidya's first line if you like:

"_____[Amount of time] after meeting _____[person], I/we _____ [was/were doing something memorable or surprising]."

For example, "An hour after I met my uncle for the first time, I made plans to move in with him" or "Five minutes after meeting my girlfriend, I accidentally insulted her entire family."

Let's see some of these in the chat!

Finding a way to drop the reader into the action is the difference between...

    a. It was time for breakfast, so my mom called us both down and we began to eat.

       AND

    b. I was 6 when my brother John leaned across the kitchen table and casually whispered that he had killed Santa Claus.

between...

    a. It was my first day at camp, and I was excited to go.

       AND

    b. We were up to our necks in the gurgling swamp.

You'll note that the example is more "telling" and the second is more "showing" in each. And you'll also notice that when the writer makes choices about how to start, he/she is also making structural choices about the order of the narrative itself.

Here's a student sample:

"It was a strange time for everyone" starting her story, "I found myself locked in my house all day, everyday. Alone with my thoughts, away from all my friends. It was the type of thing you'd only imagine happening in movies and such, crazy we all got out of it really."

That was a little part of the story my grandma was telling us after dinner. Something about a disease outbreak, a "quarantine," I remember her saying. Apparently, back in 2020, when my grandma was my age (16 years old) this disease called COVID-19 spread throughout the entire world.