

Excellent Examples of Dialogue by Famous Authors

1. Douglas Adams

The author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series marries the fantastical with the prosaic (perfectly distilled in an extra-terrestrial named Ford Prefect) in his snappy, bemused style. Perhaps his knack for chat stems from the fact that he started out as a writer for radio dramas before converting his *Hitchhiker* episodes into novels.

From *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*:

'Drink up,' said Ford, 'you've got three pints to get through.'

'Three pints?'" said Arthur. 'At lunchtime?'

The man next to Ford grinned and nodded happily. Ford ignored him. He said, 'Time is an illusion. Lunchtime doubly so.'

'Very deep,' said Arthur, 'you should send that in to the Reader's Digest. They've got a page for people like you.'

'Drink up.'

2. Judy Blume

The young adult maven has spoken to the hearts of countless teens and tweens over the years, establishing a world that is both safe and risky, honest and entertaining. Much of her success is garnered through her unequivocal understanding of the workings of the teenage mind - and mouth.

From *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*:

Nancy spoke to me as if she were my mother. 'Margaret dear--you can't possibly miss Laura Danker. The big blonde with the big you know whats!'

'Oh, I noticed her right off,' I said. 'She's very pretty.'

'Pretty!' Nancy snorted. 'You be smart and stay away from her. She's got a bad reputation.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'My brother said she goes behind the A&P with him and Moose.'

'And,' Janie added, 'she's been wearing a bra since fourth grade and I bet she gets her period.'

3. Jeffrey Eugenides

Eugenides has written three highly successful novels, *The Virgin Suicides*, *Middlesex* and *The Marriage Plot*. The Greek Detroit native is long on poetic descriptions, but he is that rare novelist whose eloquence sounds natural in his characters' voices.

From *Middlesex*:

'Well, the way you pretend to be blind is you just, sort of, stumble around a lot. But the thing is, this blind man down in Bermuda, he never stumbles. He stands up really straight and he knows where everything is. And his ears are always focusing in on stuff.'

I turned my face away.

'See, you're mad!'

'I'm not.'

'You are.'

'I'm being blind,' I said. 'I'm looking at you with my ear.'

'Oh. That's good. Yeah, like that. That's really good.'

Without letting go of my hand, she leaned closer and I heard, felt, very softly, her hot breath in my ear. 'Hi, Tiresias,' she said, giggling. 'It's me. Antigone.'

4. Barbara Kingsolver

In addition to being a widely published novelist, Kingsolver is also a poet and essayist. Her dialogue is pointed and memorable, an absolute force of meaningful emotion.

From *The Poisonwood Bible*:

'With all due respect,' my father said, 'this is not the time or the place for that kind of business. Why don't you sit down now, and announce your plans after I've finished with the sermon? Church is not the place to vote anyone in or out of public office.'

'Church is the place for it,' said Tata Ndu. 'Ici, maintenant, we are making a vote for Jesus Christ in the office of personal God, Kilanga village.'

Father did not move for several seconds.

Tata Ndu looked at him quizzically. 'Forgive me, I wonder if I have paralyzed you?'

Father found his voice at last. 'You have not.'

5. Elmore Leonard

The crime novelist's dialogue is so catchy, so snappy, so utterly say-able, that his novels and short stories have been made into some of the talkiest films in Hollywood: *Get Shorty*, *Jackie Brown*, *3:10 to Yuma*, *Out of Sight* and the FX series *Justified*.

From *Out of Sight*:

'You sure have a lot of shit in here. What's all this stuff? Handcuffs, chains...What's this

can?'

'For your breath,' Karen said. 'You could use it. Squirt some in your mouth.'

'You devil, it's Mace, huh? What've you got here, a billy? Use it on poor unfortunate offenders...Where's your gun, your pistol?'

'In my bag, in the car.' She felt his hand slip from her arm to her hip and rest there and she said, 'You know you don't have a chance of making it. Guards are out here already, they'll stop the car.'

'They're off in the cane by now chasing Cubans.'

His tone quiet, unhurried, and it surprised her.

'I timed it to slip between the cracks, you might say. I was even gonna blow the whistle myself if I had to, send out the amber alert, get them running around in confusion for when I came out of the hole. Boy, it stunk in there.'

'I believe it,' Karen said. 'You've ruined a thirty-five-hundred-dollar suit my dad gave me.' She felt his hand move down her thigh, fingertips brushing her pantyhose, the way her skirt was pushed up.

'I bet you look great in it, too. Tell me why in the world you ever became a federal marshal, Jesus. My experience with marshals, they're all beefy guys, like your big-city dicks.'

'The idea of going after guys like you,' Karen said, 'appealed to me.'

6. Sinclair Lewis

Perhaps because Lewis was also a playwright, he shows a deft handle with dialogue in his many novels. His characters don't just talk - they sing.

From *Main Street*:

Didn't she remember--what was it?--Kennicott sitting beside her at Fort Snelling, urging, 'See how scared that baby is. Needs some woman like you.'

Magic had fluttered about her then--magic of sunset and cool air and the curiosity of lovers. She held out her hands as much to that sanctity as to the boy.

He edged into the room, doubtfully sucking his thumb.

'Hello,' she said. 'What's your name?'

'Hee, hee, hee!'

'You're quite right. I agree with you. Silly people like me always ask children their names.'

'Hee, hee, hee!'

'Come here and I'll tell you a story of--well, I don't know what it will be about, but it will have a slim heroine and a Prince Charming.'

7. Toni Morrison

Morrison is one of the great writers of our time. Her novels are rich and tangible, and never so much as through the vivid dialogue offered by her deeply textured characters.

From *Beloved*:

'Something funny 'bout that gal,' Paul D said, mostly to himself.

'Funny how?'

'Acts sick, sounds sick, but she don't look sick. Good skin, bright eyes and strong as a bull.'

'She's not strong. She can hardly walk without holding on to something.'

'That's what I mean. Can't walk, but I seen her pick up the rocker with one hand.'

'You didn't.'

'Don't tell me. Ask Denver. She was right there with her.'

8. Jean Rhys

The Dominican novelist turned *Jane Eyre* on her head with *Wide Sargasso Sea* and created an entirely original, stream-of-consciousness voice in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Her characters fly out of the page into fully realized dimension thanks to her strength of colloquy.

From *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

'Then why do you never come near me?' she said. 'Or kiss me, or talk to me. Why do you think I can bear it, what reason have you for treating me like that? Have you any reason?'

'Yes,' I said, 'I have a reason,' and added very softly, 'My God.'

'You are always calling on God,' she said. 'Do you believe in God?'

'Of course, of course I believe in the power and wisdom of my creator.'

She raised her eyebrows and the corners of her mouth turned down in a questioning mocking way. For a moment she looked very much like Amélie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place.

'And you,' I said. 'Do you believe in God?'

'It doesn't matter,' she answered calmly, 'what I believe or you believe, because we can do nothing about it, we are like these.' She flicked a dead moth off the table.

9. John Steinbeck

The prolific Nobel and Pulitzer-prize winning author created full, vibrant universes peopled with lasting characters. His dialogue is such that a reader can hear it as if spoken aloud; the words do not lie inert on the page.

From *Of Mice and Men*:

'I forgot,' Lennie said softly. 'I tried not to forget. Honest to God I did, George.'
'O.K.—O.K. I'll tell ya again. I ain't got nothing to do. Might jus' as well spen' all my time tell'n you things and then you forget 'em, and I tell you again.'

'Tried and tried,' said Lennie, 'but it didn't do no good. I remember about the rabbits, George.'

'The hell with the rabbits. That's all you ever can remember is them rabbits. O.K.! Now you listen and this time you got to remember so we don't get in no trouble. You remember settin' in that gutter on Howard street and watchin' that blackboard?'

Lennies's face broke into a delighted smile. 'Why sure, George, I remember that...but...what'd we do then? I remember some girls come by and you says...you say...'

'The hell with what I says. You remember about us goin' into Murray and Ready's, and they give us work cards and bus tickets?'

'Oh, sure, George, I remember that now.' His hands went quickly into his side coat pockets. He said gently, 'George...I ain't got mine. I musta lost it.' He looked down at the ground in despair.

'You never had none, you crazy bastard. I got both of 'em here. Think I'd let you carry your own work card?'

Lennie grinned with relief.

10. David Foster Wallace

Wallace was one of the most innovative writers of our time, influencing an entire generation of authors with his self-conscious, existential and post-ironic approach to writing. Wallace wrote dialogue like no other - he did everything his way, and his way was singular.

From *The Broom of the System*:

'Do you want to hear what I think?' says Mindy Metalman Lang.

'I am one enormous ear,' says Rick Vigorous.

'I think you're just tired, and tense, and understandably upset, and that's why you're not being fair, and making up these lies.'

'And who may I ask has the temerity to allege that I am making up lies,' says Rick Vigorous softly, looking up and away. His face is running with light.

Dialogue Tags Other Than “Said”:

acknowledged	asked	barked	
admitted	begged	bellowed	
agreed	bragged	complained	
answered	confessed	cried	
argued	demanded	denied	
giggled	hinted	hissed	
howled	interrupted	laughed	
lied	mumbled	muttered	
nagged	pleaded	promised	
questioned	remembered	replied	
requested	roared	sang	
screamed	screeched	shouted	
sighed	snarled	sobbed	
threatened	warned	whimpered	
whined	whispered	wondered	yelled

Lynne Golodner is the owner of boutique public relations firm Your People LLC (www.yourpppl.com), the author of eight books, and a daily blogger (www.lynnegolodner.com) who believes that storytelling is the key to all success.