

Comparing Varieties of English in Stories, Drama, and Poetry

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 10



Quick Review

Authors use different VARIETIES of English — regional dialects (Southern American, Appalachian), African American English (AAVE), British English, and historical or formal English — to make characters and settings feel real. No variety is better or worse than another; each is a complete, rule-governed way of speaking that signals WHO a character is and WHERE they are from.

PRACTICE

Read each line of dialogue or poetry. Choose the answer that BEST analyzes the variety of English the author uses and why.

1. "Y'all fixin' to head down to the creek 'fore supper?"

The author's word choice signals that the speaker most likely lives in —

- A. a Caribbean island.
- B. the rural southern United States.
- C. a large British city.
- D. a small town in New England.

2. "I reckon Auntie be knowin' 'bout that recipe long 'fore Mama did," Tasha said.

The author MOST LIKELY uses this dialogue to —

- A. show that Tasha and her family share a cultural and regional speech variety.
- B. suggest that Tasha is uneducated.
- C. make Tasha sound funny to the reader.
- D. show that Tasha is hiding something.

3. "Pop into the lift, love — the flat's on the third floor," Mrs. Whitcombe called.

Which detail BEST shows that this character speaks British English?

- A. She is friendly.
- B. She uses the address *love*.
- C. She mentions a third floor.
- D. She uses the words *lift* and *flat*.



4. Read this stage direction and line:

JEB (squinting at the horizon): "That there storm's gonna be a doozy, I'm a-tellin' ya."

The playwright uses *that there*, *gonna*, and *a-tellin'* MOST LIKELY to —

- A. mock the character.
- B. show that Jeb is from a rural region with its own speech variety.
- C. show that Jeb is angry.
- D. confuse the audience.

5. In a poem set in 1850s America, a character says: "*Pray thee, sit a spell by the hearth, friend.*"

The poet uses *pray thee* MOST LIKELY to —

- A. make the speech feel old-fashioned and fitting for the time period.
- B. show the character is praying.
- C. indicate the character is angry.
- D. show that the character speaks British English today.

6. "*Mira, hijita, the soup is almost ready,*" Abuela said as she stirred the pot.

The author's choice to keep the Spanish words MOST LIKELY shows —

- A. that Abuela cannot speak English.
- B. that the author wants to confuse readers who don't speak Spanish.
- C. that the family blends two languages — a real feature of bilingual American English.
- D. that Abuela is whispering.

7. Compare these two lines spoken by the same character in different scenes:

1) "*It would be my pleasure to accept your invitation, Headmaster.*"

2) "*Yo, Marcus, you comin' to the cookout or what?*"

The author MOST LIKELY uses both varieties to show that —

- A. the character is rude in the first scene and polite in the second.
- B. the character adjusts speech to fit the audience and setting.
- C. the character is two different people.
- D. the character cannot decide how to speak.

8. Which line of dialogue MOST CLEARLY uses regional variety to show a New England fishing village?

- A. "Howdy, partner — meet ya at the saloon."
- B. "Bonjour, mes amis, the bread is fresh."
- C. "Y'all best be leavin' 'fore the storm."
- D. "Wicked rough seas comin' in from the bay, ayuh."



9. "Reckon we oughta head on home before it gets dark," Grandpa said softly. What does the author's use of *reckon* and *oughta* add to the story?
- A. It makes Grandpa sound like a stranger.
 - B. It establishes Grandpa's regional roots and gives him an authentic voice.
 - C. It signals that Grandpa is angry.
 - D. It shows that Grandpa cannot speak Standard English.
10. When you compare a character who speaks Standard American English in school with the same character speaking AAVE at home, the BEST conclusion is —
- A. one variety is correct and the other is wrong.
 - B. the character has trouble speaking.
 - C. both varieties are full, rule-governed systems used in different settings.
 - D. the author should pick one variety and stick with it.



Answer Keys

- 1 A B C D
- 2 A B C D
- 3 A B C D
- 4 A B C D
- 5 A B C D

- 6 A B C D
- 7 A B C D
- 8 A B C D
- 9 A B C D
- 10 A B C D

Explanations

1. B	<i>Y'all</i> (you all) and <i>fixin' to</i> (about to) are signature features of Southern American English . A — Caribbean English uses different markers (e.g., <i>vex</i> , <i>likkle</i>); C — British English would use <i>going to</i> and <i>tea</i> instead of <i>supper</i> ; D — New England English would not use <i>y'all</i> or <i>fixin'</i> .
2. A	A — features like <i>be knowin'</i> (habitual <i>be</i>) are part of African American English (AAVE) , a complete grammar that authors use to honor a character's culture and roots. B is a harmful misreading — dialects are not signs of intelligence. C trivializes the speech. D adds a plot detail the line does not support.
3. D	D — <i>lift</i> (American: elevator) and <i>flat</i> (American: apartment) are classic British English vocabulary swaps. A is not about variety. B — <i>love</i> as an address is common in Britain but also in some American regions. C is shared by both varieties.
4. B	B — these features (<i>that there</i> for emphasis, <i>a-</i> prefix on verbs, <i>gonna</i>) are markers of Appalachian / rural American English . The playwright uses them to set the place and the character's roots, not to mock (A), to show anger (C), or to confuse (D).
5. A	A — <i>pray thee</i> and <i>sit a spell</i> are archaic English forms; the poet uses them to root the poem in its 1850s setting. B confuses <i>pray thee</i> (= please) with religious prayer. C reads anger that isn't there. D mistakes archaic English for modern British English.
6. C	C — using both languages in one sentence (code-switching) is a real, rule-governed feature of bilingual speech communities. A is wrong — most of the line IS in English. B reads bad intent into a respectful choice. D is unsupported.
7. B	B — many real speakers shift varieties depending on WHO they are with and WHERE — formal English with the headmaster, informal English with a friend. This is called code-switching and is a sign of skilled communication. A reverses formal/informal. C is impossible. D misjudges a normal social skill.
8. D	D — <i>wicked</i> as an intensifier (=very) and <i>ayuh</i> (=yes) are well-known features of Maine / New England English . A sounds like Western frontier dialogue. B is French. C is Southern American.
9. B	B — small dialect features make a character feel like a real person from a real place. They help readers HEAR the voice. A — they make him familiar to readers from that region, not strange. C reads anger that isn't there. D is the harmful myth that dialect = inability with Standard English.
10. C	C — every variety of English (Standard, AAVE, Southern, British, etc.) is a complete language system with its own rules. Skilled speakers use the right variety for the setting. A is the false ranking the standard explicitly warns against. B confuses fluency with variety. D would erase the character's authentic voice.



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