A drama is a story written to be acted for an audience. The story is told by the characters, whose speech is called “dialogue.”

Morning Traffic
by Christopher De Paola
illustrated by Frank Morrison
KAREN: All right, David, there is tuna in the pantry for lunch.
DAVID: Where’s Dad?
KAREN: Getting ready for work. And there are leftovers in the refrigerator for dinner. I hate leaving you alone on teacher workdays.
DAVID: Mom, I’ll be fine.
KAREN: Your Uncle Gil is coming over to watch you.
DAVID: Mom, I don’t need a babysitter.
KAREN: Well, you’re getting one. Your father and I won’t be back from the concert until late.
DAVID: I can’t believe you got Dad to go watch some guy sing.
KAREN: It’s our anniversary. Do you know what I went through to get these tickets? I spent . . .
KAREN [simultaneously]: DAVID [simultaneously]:
. . . four horrendous hours . . . four horrendous hours
in line, in the rain . . . in line, in the rain . . .
KAREN: . . . to hear Juan Carlos Manuel, the Peruvian tenor.
DAVID: He’s just a singer.
KAREN: He’s the voice of the century! These tickets sold out in two hours. (pause) Why are you all dressed up?
DAVID: No reason.
KAREN [yelling off]: Gabriel, I’ll see you tonight, honey! At the theater! Seven-thirty!
GABE [offstage]: Right! Looking forward to it!
KAREN: Your father’s a good liar.
(yelling off) You’ve got your ticket?
GABE [off, yelling back]: Oh, yes!
KAREN: Love you. ‘Bye.
DAVID: Can’t a kid dress up? Can’t a kid want to look nice in case he runs into someone he knows?
GABE: You’re eleven years old. Who are you running into?
DAVID: I invited a friend over today. But it’s not a big deal.
GABE: It’s not a big deal?
DAVID: I don’t think it’s a big deal.
GABE: And yet you’re all dressed up.
DAVID: Dad, you’re making it sound like a big deal.
(GIL bursts in the front door with a cell phone to his ear. He wanders around the living room, trying to get reception. At one point he leans out the window.)
GIL: No, no. Yes! No, wait, I’ve got two bars! Can you hear me? No, wait, it’s down to one bar. Hello?
GABE: Gil, you’re here. Good. You can help me.
DAVID: Uncle Gil, tell Dad he needs to get to work.
GIL: I’ve got my own problems. My agent is calling me about a job—a new acting job, and you know I haven’t had anything since that antacid commercial. Your living room is the only place I can get a connection.
DAVID: I have a guest coming over.
GABE: I can’t find my ticket to the concert tonight.
GIL: To see the Chilean?
DAVID: (simultaneously): Peruvian tenor.

GABE: (simultaneously): Peruvian tenor.

GIL: Really?

DAVID: That’s what Mom said.

GIL: Do you know that she went through . . .

DAVID: (simultaneously): . . . four horrendous hours in line in the rain. We know.

GABE: (simultaneously): . . . four horrendous hours in line in the rain.

GIL: . . . I was going to say “a lot.” She went through a lot to get those tickets. Who’s playing chess?

DAVID: I am.

GABE: You don’t know how to play chess.

DAVID: I joined the chess club.

GABE: Isn’t not knowing how to play going to put you at a disadvantage?

DAVID: That’s why I’m reading this book.

GIL: You can’t learn the art of chess from a book.

GABE: Your uncle knows how to play.

DAVID: Really? Any advice, Uncle Gil?

GIL: Chess, David, is like an evil queen. With her bishops, her rooks—always needing willing pawns to sacrifice their lives for her.

DAVID: Which one’s a rook?

GIL: The one that looks like a little castle. Yes, I played chess. But it was I that was played like a pawn, it was I.

GABE: Your uncle was a chess prodigy.

GIL: I was. But the game robbed me of my childhood . . .

GABE: It wasn’t quite that dramatic.

GIL: Mom and Dad let you play baseball! I could’ve played baseball too, if I hadn’t been allergic to grass!

DAVID: It’s all right. I’m a quick study. How hard can chess be?

GIL: That’s how it all starts. The confidence. Then that first taste of victory. Before you know it, you’re sitting alone in the lunchroom, staring into your cottage cheese, wondering where all your so-called friends went . . .

(GIL’s cell phone rings.)

GABE: Would someone please help me locate this ticket?

GIL: Hello . . . ? Can you hear me? I’ve got half a bar! (to DAVID) Get on my shoulders.

DAVID: What?

GIL: Climb on my shoulders. See if there’s better reception up high.

(DAVID reluctantly gets on GIL’s shoulders. GIL hands DAVID the phone.)

GIL: (yelling up toward phone) Can you hear me now!

DAVID: Nothing. No bars.

(The doorbell rings.)

GABE: Can someone get that? I’m busy.

GIL: I’ve got it.
(GIL, with DAVID on his shoulders, opens the door. JOANNA stands in the doorway.)

JOANNA: Hey, David.

DAVID: Hi, Joanna.

JOANNA: Are we still playing chess today?

DAVID: Absolutely. Ah, this is my Uncle Gil, and that’s my dad. . . .

GIL: Gabe, why don’t you ask Joanna if she wants some juice or something?

GABE: Sure. Joanna, come on. . . .

[JOANNA follows GABE into the kitchen. In the living room GIL lets DAVID off of his shoulders.]

GIL: You didn’t tell me your friend was a girl!

DAVID: She’s cute, isn’t she? I really want to impress her, Uncle Gil. I think I like her.

GIL: I’m going to help you. Listen carefully. A chessboard has eight rows numbered 1 through 8, and eight columns labeled A through H, just like a graph. Make sense?

DAVID: No.

GIL: Do you know which way the pieces move?

DAVID: It’s like checkers, right? Don’t worry, Uncle Gil. I’ll bet you she’s not even that good.

[JOANNA returns from the kitchen with a juice.]
GABE: Sorry. Here it is! Got it! (Pulls out a small piece of paper.) Oh, it’s only a gum wrapper. I’ll check the bedroom again.

(GABE exits. DAVID pulls GIL aside.)

DAVID: Uncle Gil, I appreciate the effort, but . . .

GIL: Move the pawn—the little one in the front, fifth from the left—move it two squares forward.

(DAVID and JOANNA resume their game. DAVID makes the move. JOANNA makes her second move. It’s DAVID’s turn again. He puts his hand on a piece. GIL grunts disapprovingly. DAVID switches his hand to another piece. GIL grunts again. The doorbell rings.)

GIL: Saved by the bell! David, why don’t you get that?

DAVID: Excuse me a minute, Joanna. Sorry.

(DAVID opens the door. A FLOWER GUY holds a large arrangement of flowers.)

FLOWER GUY: Hi! I’ve got a delivery for apartment 2-L.

GIL: Right in here. Thanks.

(GABE pokes his head out from the bedroom.)

GABE: Who’s that?

GIL: Delivery guy.

FLOWER GUY: I’ve got a name, you know. Somebody has to sign for these.

GABE: Want to make some extra bucks? Help me find a lost concert ticket?

FLOWER GUY: Sure thing, I got time.

(FLLOWER GUY helps rummage through the apartment.)

GIL: (to JOANNA) I believe these are for you. Pretty flowers for a pretty girl, is what David said.

JOANNA: Oh, they’re beautiful!

DAVID: Let’s keep playing. It’s my move.

GIL: I’ll put these flowers on the table here.

(GIL purposely puts the flowers on the chessboard. JOANNA and DAVID cannot see each other over the large bouquet. GIL’s phone rings and the doorbell rings.)

GIL: Hello? Flower Guy, would you get the door?

FLOWER GUY: I have a name, you know. And someone needs to sign for the flowers.

DAVID: I’ll get the door. Sorry, Joanna.

GIL: Can you hear me? I can’t . . .

(DAVID answers the door. ALISON WOODS stands there, with CHRISTINE and ARTHUR WOODS in tow. ARTHUR holds a large model airplane. CHRISTINE holds a remote control.)

ALISON: Hi. You didn’t, by any chance, get a delivery of flowers by mistake, did you? I saw the truck out front, but . . .

CHRISTINE: Hey, David, want to go play at the park?
DAVID: Now's not a good time, Christine.

ARTHUR: We just got this new remote-control airplane—check it out!

CHRISTINE: Listen to this . . .

(CHRISTINE pushes a button on the remote. The airplane's motor starts. It makes an extremely loud, whirring sound.)

CHRISTINE: . . . nice, huh?

GIL: Who's that?

ALISON: What did I say about playing with that thing indoors!

ARTHUR: Aw, Mom!

DAVID: (to JOANNA) It's Mrs. Woods from across the hall, and Christine and Arthur.

GABE: Alison! Great! Can you help us look for a lost ticket?

GIL: Hello...? How about now...? can you hear me now?

ALISON: Sure. Are those my flowers?

GIL: I don't think so. Hey, Flower Guy, catch! (Tosses cell phone to FLOWER GUY.) Any reception over there?

FLOWER GUY: Hold on! I've got a—no, forget it. (Tosses cell back to GIL.) Seriously, will anybody sign for these flowers?

GABE: (to ARTHUR and CHRISTINE) Guys, we're looking for a small piece of paper—a concert ticket. . . .

GIL: Alison, how about you? (Tosses cell to ALISON.) Anything?

ALISON: Nope. (Tosses cell back to GIL) Are you sure these aren't my flowers?

GIL: Can anybody really be sure of anything?

GABE: Found it! Nope, dry-cleaning receipt.

FLOWER GUY (exasperated) : You guys have anything to eat here?
(He looks around the kitchen and finds David’s box of cereal. FLOWER GUY begins to poke through the refrigerator and cupboards.)

JOANNA: Let’s just try to keep playing. It’s still your turn. . . .

(DAVID picks up the flowers and looks around for a place to put them. ALISON takes them and reads the tag attached. DAVID and JOANNA try to resume their game. GIL begins to circle the table, still trying for a signal.)

GIL: Wait, I think—yes, yes.

ALISON: Yes, these are mine. They were supposed to come to me in 2-I, see?

(FLOWER GUY pours out a bowl of cereal, rummages in a drawer for a spoon.)

ARTHUR: David, trust me. You’re going to want to see this thing fly.

CHRISTINE: It’s pretty cool.

(GIL stands on the coffee table, practically on the chessboard.)

GIL: Yes! I can hear you! Finally!

(DAVID stands up, takes GIL’s cell phone and tosses it out the window. Everyone stops. Even the model plane sputters to a halt. Silence.)

GIL (quite calmly): Yikes.

DAVID: Can’t you all see we’re trying to play chess here! This was my one chance to talk to Joanna. She’s in the chess club. And even though I don’t know how to play chess, looking dumb was worth the chance to say hello. That’s all I wanted. And all of you really messed that up for me today.

(Pause. Everyone apologizes to DAVID and JOANNA.)

JOANNA: David, I’m really glad you wanted to say hello.

(KAREN enters).
KAREN: Would you believe I forgot—What’s going on here?

[FLOWER GUY, holding bowl and spoon, looks in refrigerator for milk.]

GIL: Just a little gathering.

DAVID: Mom, Dad’s got something he needs to tell you.

[FLOWER GUY, holding cereal, pulls out the empty milk carton. It has a piece of paper stuck to the bottom.]

FLOWER GUY (disappointed): Who would put an empty carton of milk back in the refrigerator?

GABE: Honey, I have some bad news...

FLOWER GUY: There’s something stuck to the bottom of the carton.

GABE: It’s about tonight...

FLOWER GUY (holding up the missing ticket): Hey, is this the—

GIL: (Grabs ticket from FLOWER GUY.) Yes! The Peruvian tenor sings again!

GIL puts the ticket in GABE’s hand.

KAREN: You scared me. I thought you were going to say you lost the ticket. You’ll never know what I went through to get these tickets.

[DAVID, GIL, and GABE give each other a quick glance.]

(BLACKOUT)
Think Critically

1. In the play, the mom really wanted to attend the performance of a Peruvian tenor. Name a person or group whose performance you would like to attend, and explain why.  

2. The playwright sometimes has the characters say the same line at the same time. Why do you think he does that?  

3. How do you think the ticket ended up on the bottom of the milk carton?  

4. How can you summarize the plot of the play?  

5. Look Back and Write  What does it usually mean to be stuck in “morning traffic”? Other than on the roads, where was there morning traffic in the play? Before responding, reread pages 456–458 and 464–468. Also note the title and illustration on the opening page. Give specific examples to support your answers.