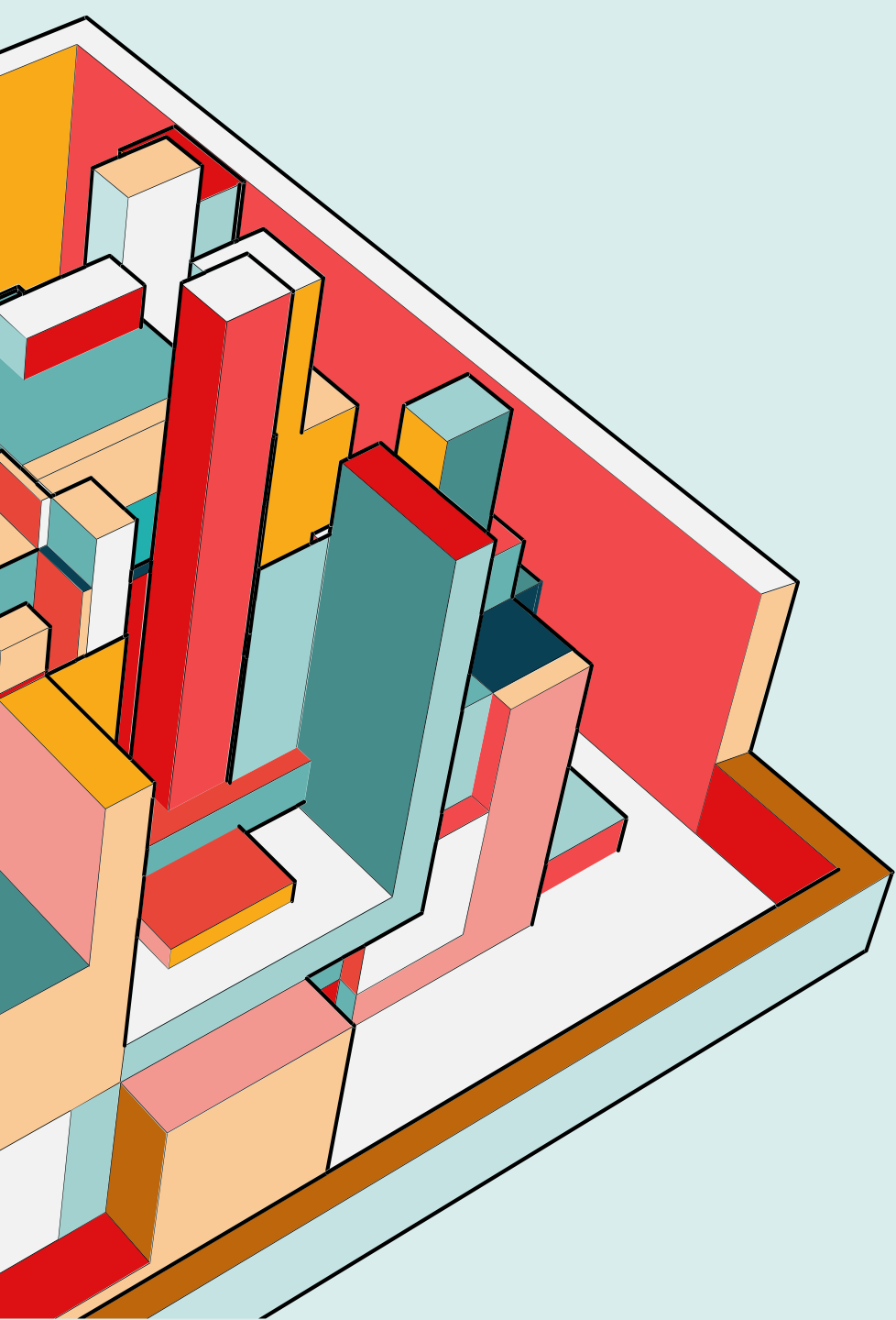




**DEVILISH DIALOGUES
FOR ARIZONA MYSTERY
WRITERS**

9/13/25

D.R. RANSELL



GETTING STARTED:

Besides delivering information, what can dialogue do for your text?

What factors can make dialogue particularly effective?

What might get in the way?

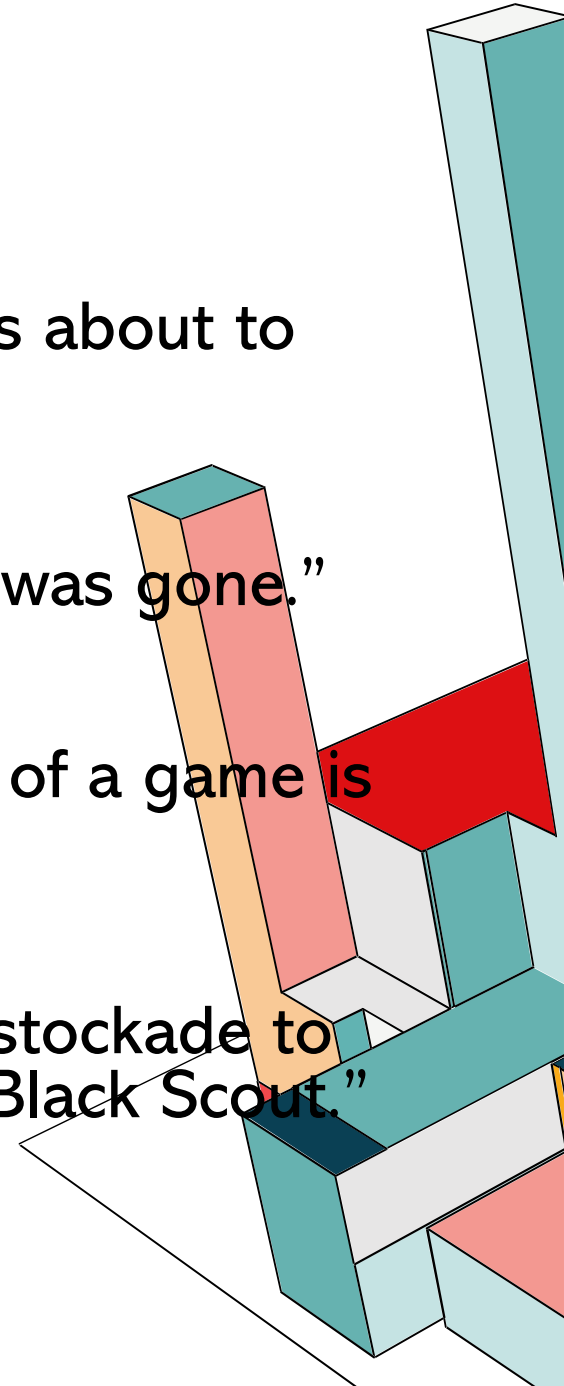
- AN EXAMPLE:

- I addressed the letter to Dorset and put it in my pocket. As I was about to start, the kid comes up to me and says:

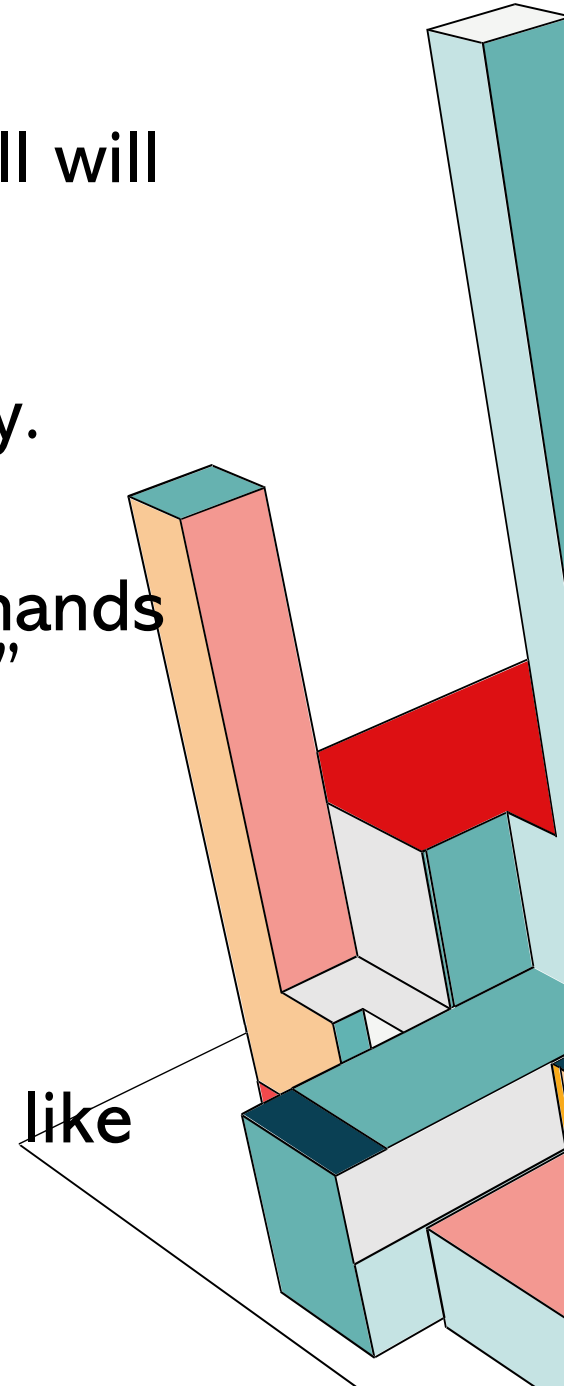
- “Aw, Snake-eye, you said I could play the Black Scout while you was gone.”

- “Play it, of course,” says I. “Mr. Bill will play with you. What kind of a game is it?”

- “I’m the Black Scout,” says Red Chief, “and I have to ride to the stockade to warn the settlers that the enemies are coming. I want to be the Black Scout.”



- “All right,” says I. “It sounds harmless to me. I guess Mr. Bill will help you foil the pesky troublemakers.”
- “What am I to do?” asks Bill, looking at the kid suspiciously.
- “You are the hoss,” says Black Scout. “Get down on your hands and knees. How can I ride to the stockade without a hoss?”
- “You’d better keep him interested,” said I, “till we get the scheme going. Loosen up.”
- Bill gets down on his all fours, and a look comes in his eye like a rabbit’s when you catch it in a trap.



“How far is it to the stockade, kid?” he asks, in a husky manner of voice.

“Ninety miles,” says the Black Scout. “And you have to hump yourself to get there on time. Whoa, now!”

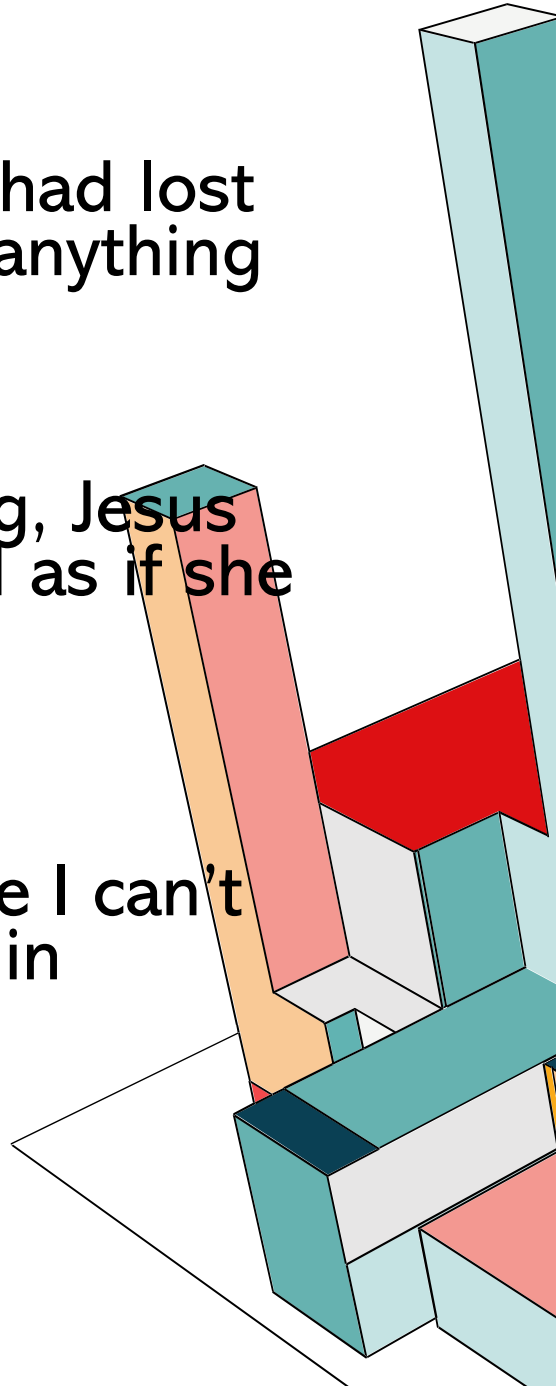
The Black Scout jumps on Bill’s back and digs his heels in his side.

“For heaven’s sake,” says Bill, “hurry back, Sam, as soon as you can. I wish we hadn’t made the ransom more than a thousand.”

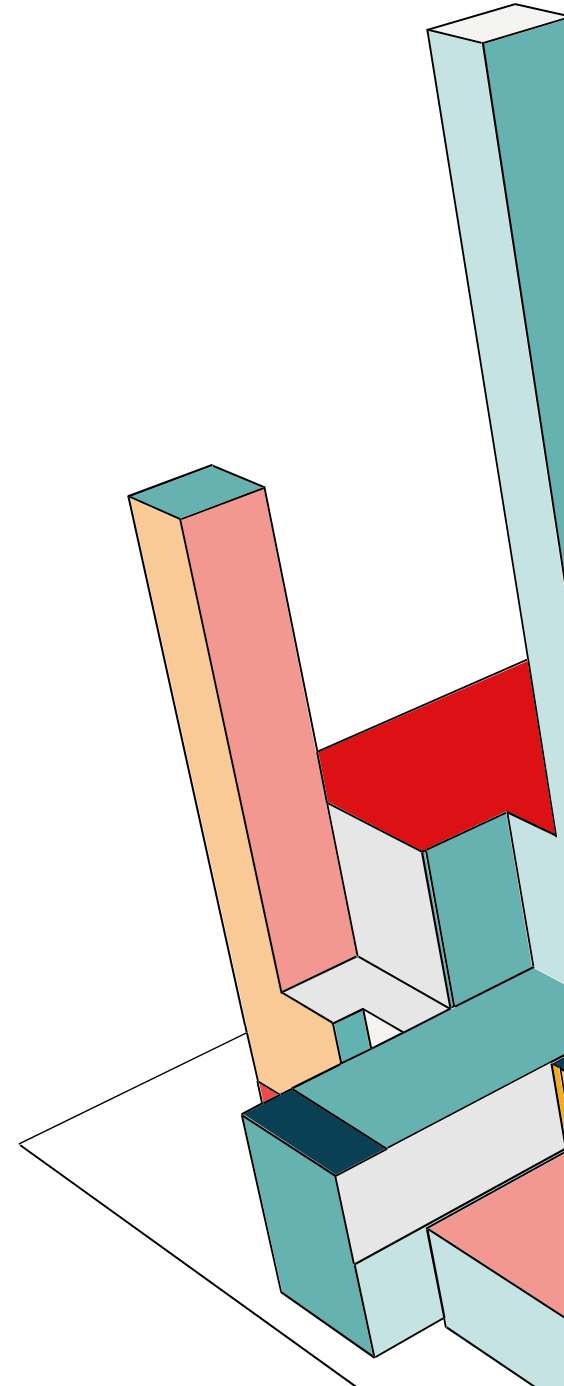


ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

- Alone with The Misfit, the grandmother found that she had lost her voice. She opened her mouth several times before anything came out.
- Finally she found herself saying, “Jesus, Jesus,” meaning, Jesus will help you, but the way she was saying it, it sounded as if she might be cursing.
- “Yes’m,” The Misfit said as if he agreed. “Jesus thrown everything off balance.... I call myself the Misfit because I can’t make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment.”



- There was a piercing scream from the woods, followed closely by a pistol report. “Does it seem right to you, lady, that one is punished a heap and another ain’t punished at all?”
- “You’ve got good blood! I know you wouldn’t shoot a lady! I know you come from good people! I’ll give you all the money I’ve got!”
- “Lady,” The Misfit said, looking beyond her far into the woods, “there never was a body that give the undertaker a tip.”



WHAT WAS THE WORK OF THOSE DIALOGUES?

WHAT ARE SOME FACTORS THAT MADE THEM SUCCESSFUL?



BEFORE WE START....

Share your dialogue with a partner. Together, read it out loud.

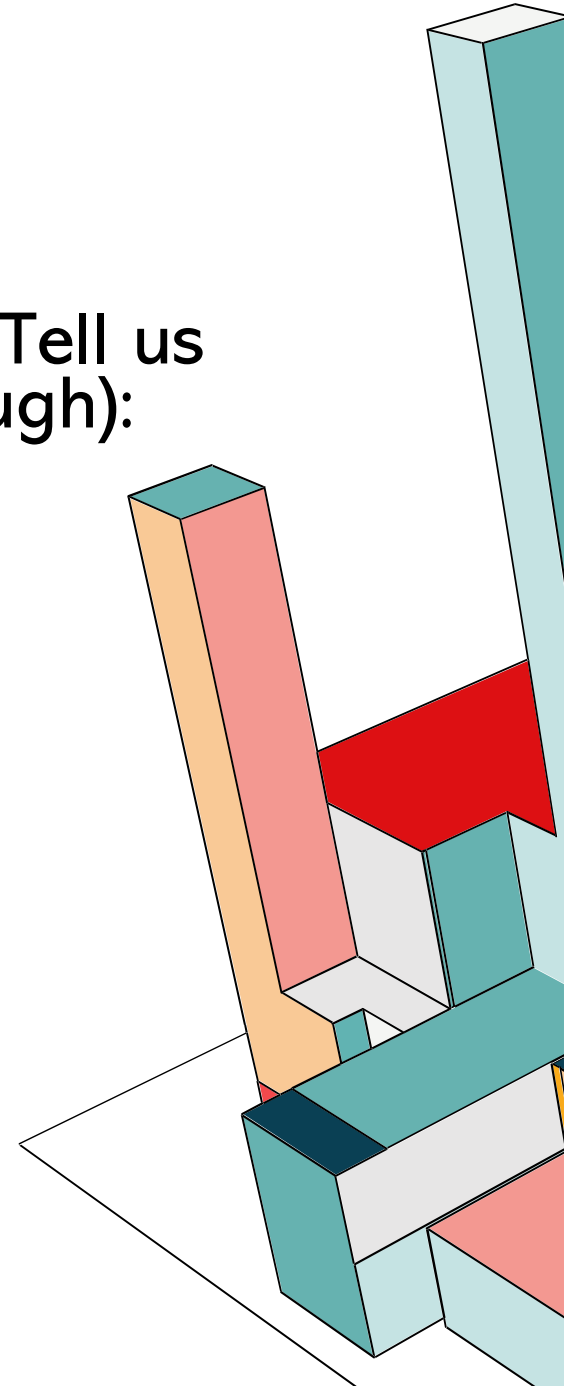
Or, if you don't have a dialogue with you, write a short one now.

**In order to
have a murder
of crows, there
must be
probable caws.**



NOW, THE FUN PART!

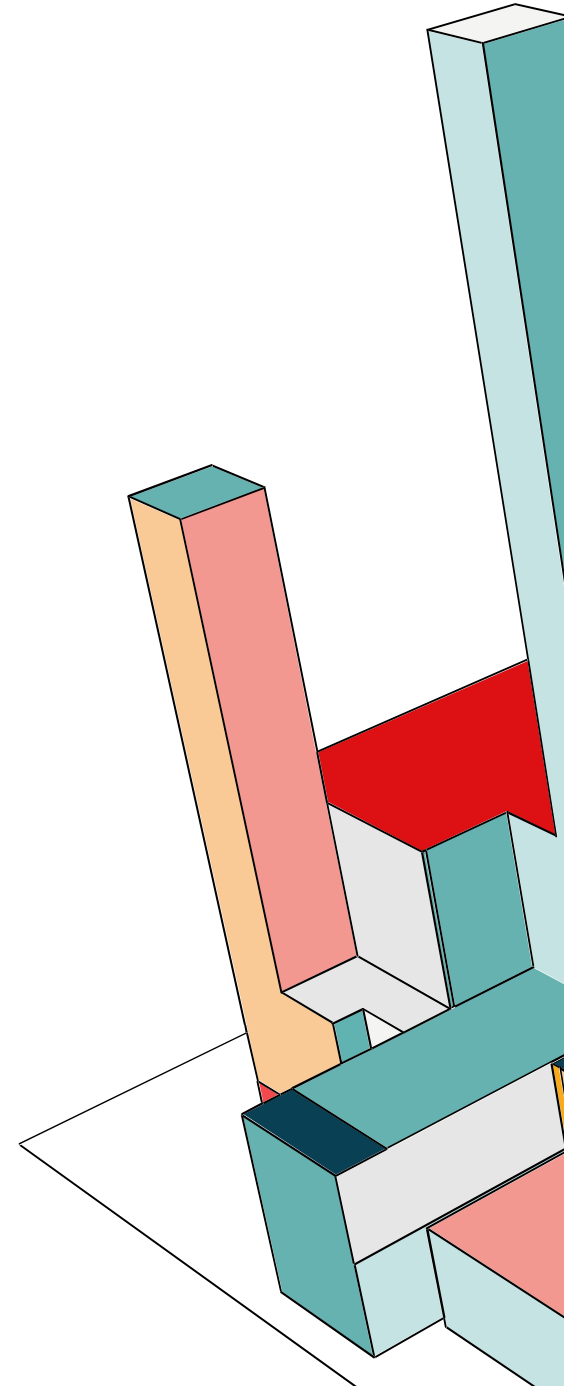
- Let's dig in....
- If applicable, and if you haven't already, set the scene. Tell us where your speakers are (1-2 sentences might be enough):
- Consider:
 - U.S. or foreign, peaceful or hostile
 - inside or outside, day or night
 - country or city, luxurious or barebone
 - small room or large auditorium
 - fall, winter, spring, or summer
 - hot or cold, pleasant or miserable



ADDITIONAL DETAILS

Consider:

- Objects (furniture, utensils, handheld, hidden)
- Weather (changes, obstacles)
- Appearance (physical attributes, hairstyle)
- Clothing (also footwear, makeup, accessories)
- Other people in the environment
- Other movement: birds, cats, dogs, wind
- Sensory details, especially smells and sounds



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

What precedes this section?

What is this passage's biggest job?

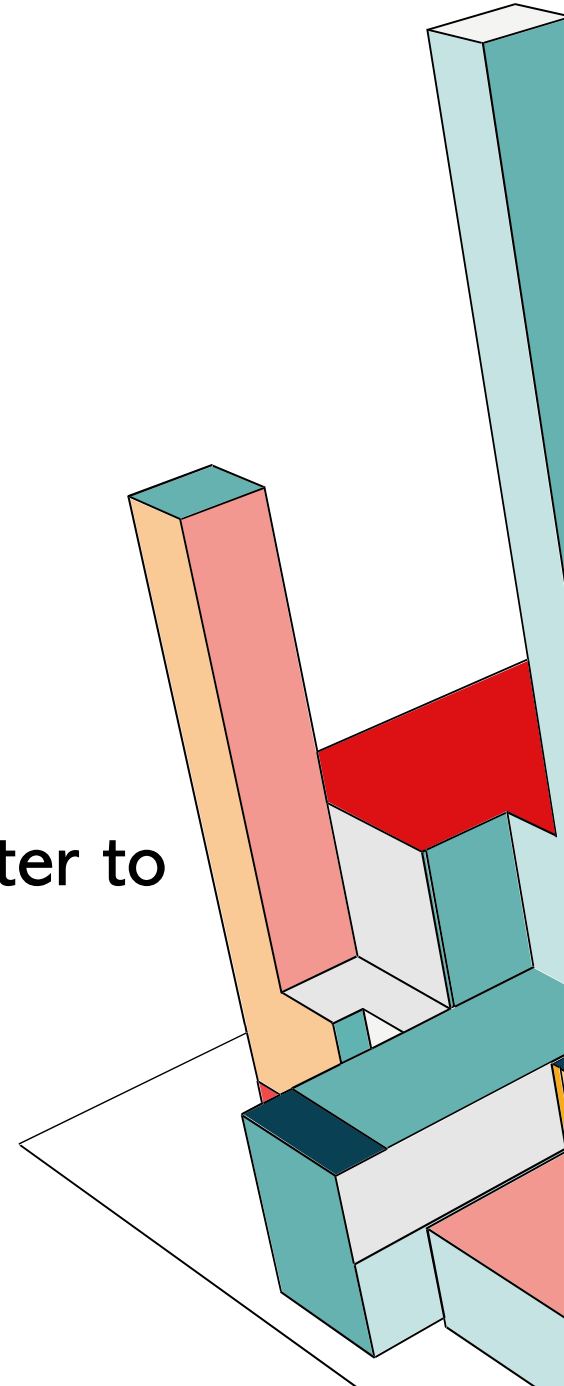
What will have changed by the end?

What questions does it leave the reader?

What questions does it leave you?

Does it need to be longer to give a better setup or shorter to give a bigger punch?

What's the next scene?



MORE QUESTIONS



What are your speakers' biggest problems?

What are their desires?

What secrets do they have?



What do they secretly want to say?

What do they secretly want to hide?

What one thing (question, comment, action, reveal) could ruin everything for them?



NITTY-GRITTY QUESTIONS PART 1

- What are the characteristics of each speaker on a normal basis? (mean, angry, sympathetic, smart, not-so-smart, etc.)
- What characteristics shine through in this passage?
- What makes the speakers different from one another—and hence, how should they SOUND different from one another?
- Try rereading all the way through concentrating on the words of just one speaker, then reread for the other(s). Consider vocabulary, tone, diction, number of words. What might you change?

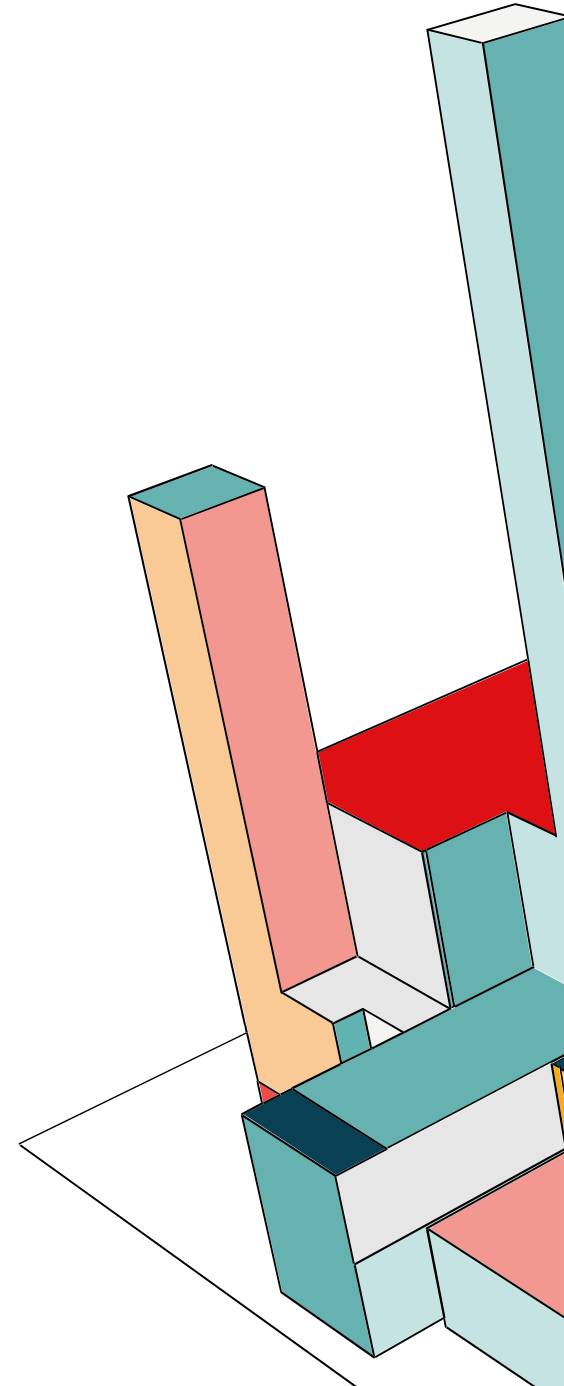


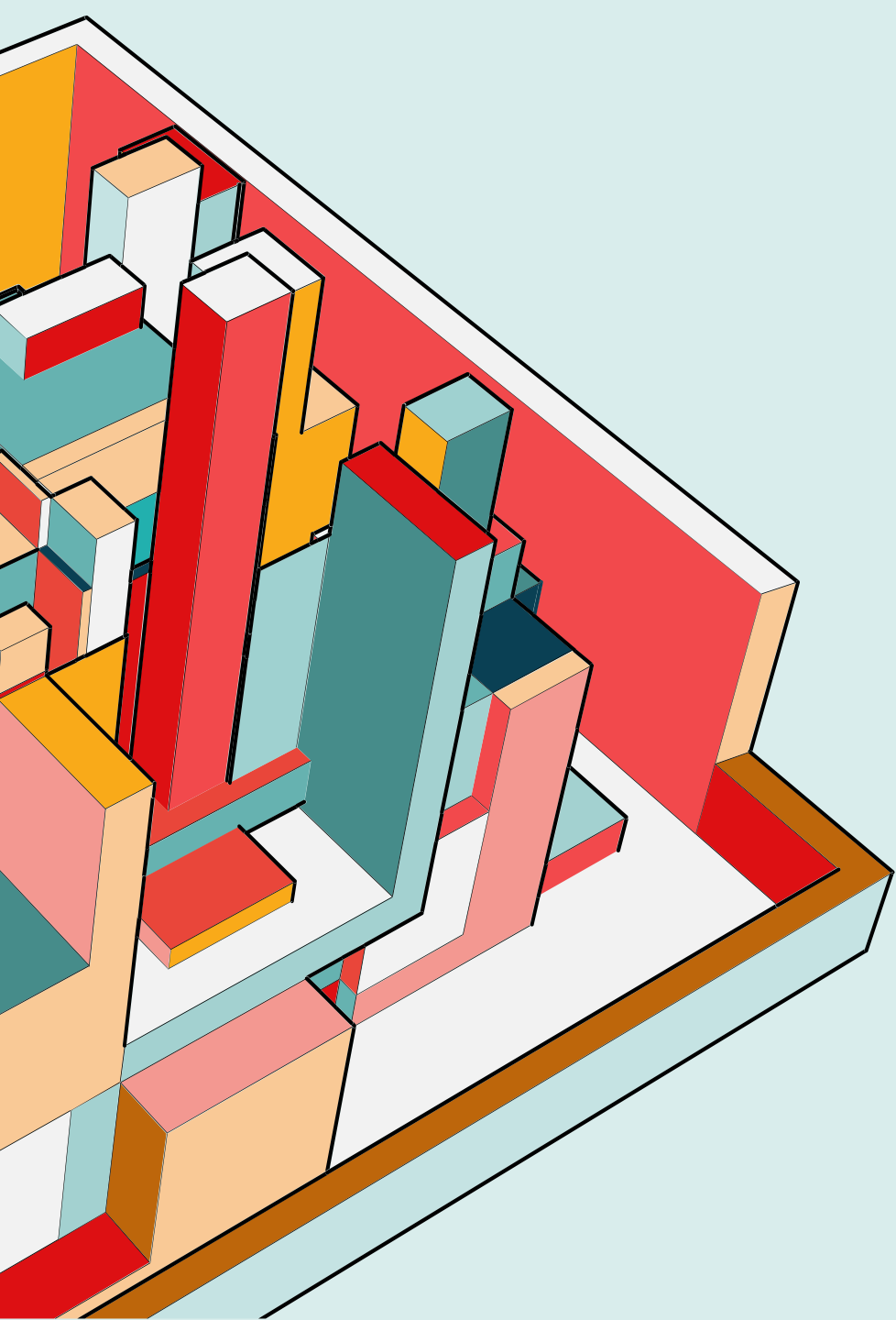
NITTY-GRITTY QUESTIONS PART 2

1. What's the tone of the whole section? (suspenseful, happy, doubtful, etc.) How could you enhance it? Or, should it have more than one tone?
2. What's the rhythm of the section? How could you use rhythm to make the words resonate even more?
3. How can you construct your text such that the dialogue ends with a powerful punch—or, tapers down to nothing? (Usually, conversations either build up or slide down rather than roller-coaster in between. Or maybe yours should!)

SUPREME QUESTIONS

- Is it clear that each of your speakers wants something different from this interaction? (If possible, they should be at cross-purposes.)
- How can the characters be even trickier, slicker, cleverer, more interesting, or more annoying?
- Finally, reread your whole section. What else might you change?





LET'S HEAR THESE BEAUTIES!

Please share your revised dialogue with a partner. Together, read your dialogues out loud.

Then share them with the whole room!

FUTURE CHALLENGE

Consider your overall use of dialogue. What might you do to enhance your work? You might not need to apply the above questions to every text, but by thinking through a few options, your dialogues will do more work, please more readers, and, logically, sell more books!



THANKS FOR COMING! 😊

**BUT NOW, GET BACK TO
WRITING MORE DIALOGUES....**

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