

Lesson Plan: Interesting Introductions

Share ways to write engaging story introductions.

Grades: 3 to 5

Duration: One to two writing periods

Objectives

- To make students aware of multiple ways to start a story
- To engage students in revising their writing

Materials

- JPGs of story beginnings to show during lesson
- Handout of story beginnings to give after lesson
- Students' story drafts to revise

Summary

The teacher will list attention-getting ways to start stories and then show examples from popular novels. Students will revise their own writing with new beginnings and have the option to share their work.



Introduction

Take a couple of minutes to 1) prompt students about the importance of story beginnings being *interesting* and 2) to say that you'll share interesting types of beginnings that they can try. Here's a sample script:

"Today we'll look at how to write interesting story beginnings. Why do we want our story beginnings to be interesting?" (Discuss briefly.)

"An interesting beginning is sometimes called a **hook** because it hooks the reader's attention. Today we'll look at some styles of hooks from popular books. Think about how you might revise one of your stories with a new beginning."

"You don't need to take notes; I'll give you notes later."

Lesson

Briefly describe each type of beginning. List each type of hook as you name it.

"**Action.** We can start stories with action, writing what a *character* is doing. Action can catch readers' attention and make them curious about what will happen next."

You might add that *bold* actions naturally catch our attention, as we know from so-called action films... but we don't need a car chase to have action at the start of a story. Small actions can make a reader curious too.

"Another type of hook is **character**. You can describe a character for an interesting beginning. People are naturally curious about other people."

"Third, you could describe the **setting** or where a story takes place. Describing the setting can be an effective hook because sometimes we read books to escape... to travel in our minds."

"So we have **action** and **describing the character** or the **setting**. Now I'll give you one more way to start a story: **dialogue**. Dialogue is conversation. You might like to start a story with your characters talking to each other."

"OK, I've listed four general ways to start a story. Now let's look at some books! I'll read a beginning. Think about which style it fits."



Show book introductions and read them aloud:

"What sort of beginning do we have here?"

1)

It was a dark and stormy night.

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle

After students identify this example as **setting**, you could comment that the dark and stormy night foreshadows the darkness in the story ahead: The main character needs to rescue her father from the Black Thing on a dark planet.

"Here's another example of setting. It comes from *Black Beauty*. This book is written from the perspective of a horse."

2)

Chapter 1: My Early Home

The first place that I can well remember was a large pleasant meadow with a pond of clear water in it. Some shady trees leaned over it, and rushes and water-lilies grew at the deep end. Over the hedge on one side we looked into a plowed field, and on the other we looked over a gate at our master's house, which stood by the roadside; at the top of the meadow was a grove of fir trees, and at the bottom a running brook overhung by a steep bank.

Black Beauty by Anna Sewell

"So, those are examples of describing the setting to start a story. Now let's look at another strategy."



3)

HERE WE GO AGAIN. We were all standing in line waiting for breakfast when one of the caseworkers came in and tap-tap-tapped down the line.

Uh-oh, this meant bad news. Either they'd found a foster home for somebody or somebody was about to get paddled.

All the kids watched the woman as she moved along the line, her high-heeled shoes sounding like little firecrackers going off on the wooden floor.

Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis

"What style of beginning is this?"

"This beginning shows **action**; the author gives a vivid description of the caseworker's behavior. The tap-tap-tap helps build suspense about what's next."

Students might also realize that the general **setting** is revealed and that the main **character** is introduced as an orphan.

"Now let's read for another sort of beginning..."

4)

When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle, everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen. It was true, too. She had a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression.

The Secret Garden by Francis Hodgson Burnett

"Of course, this is an example of describing a **character** to start a story. You could write about the main character or somebody who's important in their life."



"So far we've looked at setting, action, and describing a character. The last style we'll look at today is **dialogue**."

5)

"Where's Papa going with that axe?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

Charlotte's Web by E. B. White

"This is a great example of **dialogue** because it gets readers curious. Where IS Papa going with that axe?"

"Here's another example of dialogue starting a story. This is from *Little Women*:

6)

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

"We've got Father and Mother, and each other," said Beth contentedly from her corner.

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott

"This example also starts to introduce the main characters. What do we learn from this short conversation?" (The girls are sisters. They consider themselves poor. Beth seems optimistic.)

An introduction can accomplish a lot!



Transition to Writing

Distribute notes and have students write. You could say:

"Today we've seen four interesting ways to start a story. Now I'm giving you a handout with the same four types and examples."

"For the rest of class, try revising your own work. Choose a writing piece and use one of the four styles to change the beginning."

Share Work

At the end of class, or at the beginning of the next class, give students a chance to share their old and new beginnings.

- Have the class identify which styles were used in the revisions.
- Ask students whether they'll keep one introduction or the other, or if they'll keep revising.