

Don't Lose Your Reader: Story Beginnings

Common Core Standard(s): CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3A

Materials Needed: The Barnes and Noble Best YA Lines Sheet (included below), A First Lines Planner for each student (included below), and a blank paper and pencil or chromebook/laptop for each student.

Objective: Students will be able to craft a great first line and opening paragraph for their story.

Lesson Plan

1. Watch Tiffany Rosenhan's class title 'How to Lose a Reader in 10 Lines.' Have students take notes on the things that stand out to them as they watch. At the end have students share some of their insights.
2. Tell students they are going to focus on crafting a great first chapter over the next day or two. That begins by recognizing great beginnings and dissecting them to see why they work. Project or share the Barnes and Noble best First Lines in YA. Split students into partners or groups and assign each group one of the story beginnings. Have them read the beginning and discuss what makes it work using the suggestions Tiffany gave in her class. Also have them talk about the questions they have as they read it. Once they've had a chance to talk, have groups share out what they thought.
3. Now tell them they are going to have a chance to write their own first line and paragraph, but first they need to know some details of their story. Hand out or share the 'First Lines Planner' with the students. In order to write a good first line they need to know some basic things. Have them brainstorm and fill out the top of the sheet.
4. Once they've solidified some story details, have them try writing an opening line and continuing it into a paragraph. A good rule of thumb is to reference the ending or reference the want or reference their fear of something that will turn out to be their main conflict in those opening lines. Another option is to throw the character into the action mid-story. A final option is to have some back and forth dialogue between two characters that leaves a question in the reader's mind. Tell them just to go for it. They can revise it later, but they can't revise it if they have nothing written.
5. Finish by having some of the students share their opening lines/paragraphs.



Barnes and Noble Great First Lines in YA

"They say that just before you die your whole life flashes before your eyes, but that's not how it happened for me." – [Before I Fall](#), by Lauren Oliver

"I had just come to accept that my life would be ordinary when extraordinary things began to happen." – [Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children](#), by Ransom Riggs

"Blue Sargent had forgotten how many times she'd been told that she would kill her true love." – [The Raven Boys](#), by Maggie Stiefvater

"They say death aims only once and never misses, but I doubt Ty Yorkshire thought it would strike with a scrubbing brush." – [Under a Painted Sky](#), by Stacey Lee

"The rain poured down on London so hard that it seemed that it was dancing spray, every raindrop contending with its fellows for supremacy in the air and waiting to splash down." – [Dodger](#), by Terry Pratchett

"We went to the moon to have fun, but the moon turned out to completely suck." – [Feed](#), by M.T. Anderson

"I'm a senior at Cesar Chavez High in San Francisco's sunny Mission district, and that makes me one of the most surveilled people in the world." – [Little Brother](#), by Cory Doctorow

"Looking back, none of this would have happened if I'd brought lip gloss the night of the Homecoming Dance." – [Rebel Belle](#), by Rachel Hawkins

"The best day of my life happened when I was five and almost died at Disney World. I'm sixteen now, so you can imagine that's left me with quite a few days of major suckage." – [Going Bovine](#), by Libba Bray

"The way I figure it, everyone gets a miracle. Like, I will probably never be struck by lightning, or win a Nobel Prize, or become the dictator of a small nation in the Pacific Islands, or contract terminal ear cancer or spontaneously combust. But if you consider all the unlikely things together, at least one of them will probably happen to each of us." – [Paper Towns](#), by John Green

"It doesn't start here. You'd think it would: two terrified girls in the middle of nowhere, cowering together, eyes bulging at the gun in his hand. But it doesn't start here. It starts the first time I almost die." – [Far From You](#), by Tess Sharpe



First Line and Paragraph Planner Sheet

Who is your main character?

How do they talk? What is their personality like?

What does the main character want before their story starts?

What will be the big hurdle the main character has to overcome in the course of the story?

How will the story end?

Write Your Opening Line and Paragraph Here:



**Advanced Application Activity or Ongoing Writing Project*

Applying Skills:

Using the lines that they created in the above worksheet and applying the advice and techniques learned today, have the students start the first chapter of a book they would like to write someday.

It can be a new work or redo the first chapter of a work in progress with better opening lines.

Peer Review: Either break into small groups or have all the students hand in their chapters and anonymously read the opening lines of each paper. (or you can select a number of students to read their opening lines.)

Ask the class, or groups, to comment on the lines read and give helpful feedback on the effectiveness of the chosen lines, which starters were most captivating and made you want to read more and perhaps some honest feedback or suggestions to improve their openings.

Revising Skills:

When the papers are returned students have the opportunity of fine tuning the skill of taking feedback and applying it to revision and rewrite of their manuscript.

They are well on their way to submitting for the FIRST CHAPTER CONTEST.

Encourage students to continue working on their writing on weekends, holiday breaks and over the summer and to submit to be published in the TEEN AUTHOR BOOT CAMP First Chapter Contest.

<https://www.teenauthorbootcamp.com/contests>

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[Teen Author Boot Camp™](#) in March & [Tween Author Boot Camp™](#) in October are great writing conferences to attend in person or online to meet favorite authors and to be a part of a writing community that will help students hone their writing skills and successfully pursue careers in writing.

