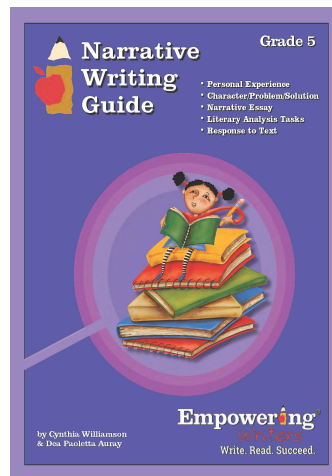




# Grade 5 Narrative Writing Guide

Student Pages for Print or Projection

## SECTION 2: Beginnings



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Name \_\_\_\_\_

## STARTING OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT!

One way to make your writing more interesting and entertaining is by starting off with an irresistible, attention grabbing beginning! Here are some techniques authors use to begin their stories:

1. **AN ACTION** - *Put your main character in your setting doing something interesting and relevant to the story.*

**Ask: What would you do?**

**ex.** Rosie dug her fingers into the cold, wet sand and told herself that today would definitely be her lucky day.

2. **DIALOGUE** - *Have your main character say something.*

**Ask: What might you say or exclaim?**

**ex.** “Summer school? You’ve got to be kidding!” I shouted.

3. **A THOUGHT OR QUESTION** - *Show the main character’s thoughts, or raise a story question.*

**Ask: What would you wonder or worry?**

**ex.** I wondered what it would be like to do something heroic.

4. **A SOUND** - *Grab the reader’s attention through the use of a sound.*

**Ask: What might you hear?**

**ex.** Ker-plunk! Jose belly-flopped into the pool.

**Beginning Tips** - Begin your story as close to the main event as possible. For example, if it’s a story about finding a lost dog, don’t begin two weeks earlier when the pet is safe at home. Instead, begin with your main character in frantic pursuit of the animal. If you’re writing about a camping trip, don’t begin by waking up, packing your gear and driving to the location — begin at the site! Get right into the action so that you don’t lose your reader! Also, since it is very difficult to weave many characters throughout your story, a good strategy is to have your main character start off alone.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (1)**

Read this opening sentence from Grizzly by Gary Paulsen:

*A low snarl filled the room.*

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the technique that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below.

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**CHALLENGE:** Now it's your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Gary Paulsen used above. Look in your school or classroom library. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number and the author's name.

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\* Grizzly by Gary Paulsen, Yearling Publishing, 1997

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (2)**

Read this opening sentence from The Fire Pony by Rodman Philbrick:

*“We’ll just keep moving,” Joe Dilly says to me. “Pick up a job here and there. Anybody looks at us cross-eyed, we hit the road. You with me on this, little brother?”*

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the technique that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening line, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below:

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**CHALLENGE:** Now it’s your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Rodman Philbrick used above. Look in your school or classroom library. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number and the author’s name.

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\* The Fire Pony by Rodman Philbrick, Scholastic, Reprint 2009

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (3)**

Read this opening sentence from Every Living Thing - Stray by Cynthia Rylant:

*In January, a puppy wandered onto the property of Mr. Amos Lacey and his wife, Mamie, and their daughter, Doris. The puppy had been abandoned, and it made its way down the road toward Lacey’s small house, its ears tucked, its tail between its legs, shivering.*

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the following technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- **An Action**
- **Dialogue**
- **Thoughts, Questions**
- **A Sound**

After reading this opening, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below.

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**CHALLENGE:** Now it’s your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Cynthia Rylant used above. Look in your school or classroom library. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number and the author’s name.

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\* Every Living Thing by Cynthia Rylant, Atheneum Books, 1998

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**ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (4)**

Read this opening sentence from White Star: A Dog on the Titanic by Marty Crisp:

*Dogs? There really are dogs on the Titanic.*

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the following technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below.

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**CHALLENGE:** Now it's your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Marty Crisp used above. Look in your school or classroom library. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number and the author's name.

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*\* White Star: A Dog on the Titanic by Marty Crisp, Scholastic, Reprint 2006*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (5)**

Read this opening sentence from The Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson:

*Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, baripity, baripity, baripity, baripity — Good. His dad had the pick-up going.*

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the following technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below.

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**CHALLENGE:** Now it's your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Katherine Paterson used above. Look in your school or classroom library. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number and the author's name.

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\* The Bridge to Terabithia by Katherin Paterson, HarperCollins, 1987

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**ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! - MAKE-IT-YOUR-OWN**

Now it's your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses one of the strategies for an entertaining beginning. Look in your school or classroom library. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number and the author's name.

Read this opening sentence from \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_:  
Title Author

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Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the following technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

**REVISING STORY BEGINNINGS: CAMPING OUT!**

**REMEMBER:** Attention grabbing beginnings often use one of the following techniques:

- ACTION: What would you do?
- DIALOGUE or EXCLAMATION: What would you say?
- A THOUGHT/QUESTION: What are you wondering/worrying?
- A SOUND: What would you hear?

Read this story beginning. It is not very interesting. The reader may not be entertained enough to want to read on. Revise this story beginning so that it is interesting and entertaining. Use one of the four techniques listed above. (Do not write the whole story —just the beginning.). Then compare the before and after version. Which would you rather read?

**One summer night, I decided to sleep outside in my tent.**

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### REVISING STORY BEGINNINGS: THE NEW KID!

**REMEMBER:** Attention grabbing beginnings often use one of the following techniques:

- ACTION: What would you do?
- DIALOGUE or EXCLAMATION: What would you say?
- A THOUGHT/QUESTION: What are you wondering/worrying?
- A SOUND: What would you hear?

Read this story beginning. It is not very interesting. The reader may not be entertained enough to want to read on. Revise this story beginning so that it is interesting and entertaining. Use one of the four techniques listed above. (Do not write the whole story—just the beginning.). Then compare the before and after version. Which would you rather read?

**I was sitting alone on the school bus.**

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## BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (1) - BEGINNINGS

Read this story **beginning**. It is BORING!

**I really wanted to join the marching band.**

**Revise** this story **beginning**. Use one of the following techniques to make this beginning ENTERTAINING!

- **Action** - Ask: what might the character do to show that she/he wants to join the marching band?
- **Dialogue or an Exclamation** - Ask: What might the character say or exclaim about his/her desire to join the marching band?
- **Thoughts, Questions** - Ask: What might the character think, wonder or worry about?
- **A Sound** - Ask: What might the character hear to spark her/his interest in joining the marching band?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (2) - BEGINNINGS

Read this story **beginning**. It is BORING!

**It was a really hot day.**

**Revise** this story **beginning**. Use one of the following techniques to make this beginning ENTERTAINING!

- **Action** - Ask: what might the character do to show that she/he is hot?
- **Dialogue or an Exclamation** - Ask: What might the character say or exclaim about the sweltering weather?
- **Thoughts, Questions** - Ask: What might the character think, wonder or worry about?
- **A Sound** - Ask: What might the character hear on this hot day?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Footprints

My friend Evan was known for his wild imagination. Tall tales of suspense and sorcery seemed to be swirling around in his head 24/7. As a result, he was never boring and that was one of the things I liked best about him. I only wished others could see the greatness of Evan’s wild imagination, but few did and I was his only friend.

He and I were building a fort in the woods behind my house on a Saturday morning in January. We cleared vegetation from the ground and pounded old boards onto thick tree trunks to make walls. As we worked, Evan chattered away about the warm summer nights we’d spend sleeping in the fort. Describing the haunting calls of owls and the bright, flickering lights of fireflies, he made the experience sound somehow spooky and serene at the same time.

We worked steadily and made good progress. Back and forth, we ran along the path that led from the woods to my garage, retrieving the tools we needed and nails of all sizes. By the end of the day, dozens of pairs of our footprints were scattered along the length of the snow-dusted path.

We were just about to get started making a sturdy roof for our fort when my mom called us in. It was that time of the year when daylight disappeared by late afternoon and we hadn’t even noticed that it was almost dark. Bummer. There was so much more we wanted to accomplish.

I had to go to a family gathering the next day, but Evan said he wanted to continue working on the fort, even if he had to do so by himself. My parents had no problem with him coming over and working in the woods while we were gone, so our plan was all set: Evan would work on the roof the next day.

It was Monday morning before I saw Evan again. The instant I sat down beside him on the school bus, he burst out with a fantastic story.

“So I walking around the woods yesterday, gathering wood for our roof and I saw what had to be the biggest footprint in the world — and I am not kidding. It was as

(continued)

long as a refrigerator is tall, and almost as wide with five toes and even the littlest one was the size of a hotdog. It had to be a Big Foot!”

He was breathless with excitement, but unlucky enough to be sitting right in front of Martin Macabe, a 7th grader with a mean-spirited sense of humor.

“It had to be a Big Foot,” Martin repeated, mimicking Evan’s enthusiastic tone. “A Big Foot with toes the size of this school bus. Run for your life!” His friend guffawed.

Evan looked confused. He turned and confronted them. “That’s not what I said.”

Martin and his friend just laughed again. “There’s no such thing as a Big Foot, kid.”

“There could be,” Evan said, turning red with anger. “Tell them, Troy.”

Oh, no. The last thing in the world I wanted to do was defend what had to be a figment of Evan’s hyperactive imagination to these guys. I wasn’t afraid of Martin, but I’d always tried to steer clear of him just to be on the safe side. I looked at Evan’s outraged face and knew that was no longer an option.

“Knock it off,” I said. “Anything’s possible. I know it’s unlikely, but there could be a Big Foot lurking in the woods around here.” The two older boys laughed and, for the rest of the week, taunted both Evan and me every chance they got. By Friday afternoon, I was feeling annoyed with Evan for making us the target of teasing.

I changed my mind the next morning when I walked through a sprinkling of newly fallen snow to our fort in the woods and saw a footprint — not just any footprint but the biggest footprint I’d ever seen. It was, just as Evan had described it, “as long as a refrigerator is tall, and almost as wide with five toes and even the littlest one was the size of a hotdog.” By the time my friend arrived, hammer in hand, the snow had melted away and the footprint disappeared forever.

I never learned the truth about that gargantuan footprint, but my friend is still convinced that a Big Foot lives in the woods behind my house. When I think back on the experience I feel really proud of myself for being loyal to Evan. I’m going to take a lesson from him and always keep my mind open to the many wonderful mysteries of the world. From Evan, I learned just about anything really is possible!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: BEGINNINGS

You've read the story Footprints. Write an essay identifying the techniques the author uses to create an entertaining beginning and explain why this is important for the reader. Explain what you learn about the main character's motivation and conflict. Provide evidence from the text to support your ideas.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Is this a narrative or informational assignment?

Your teacher will walk you through the following STEPS:

1. Read, annotate, analyze, and summarize the story.
2. Fill in the following:
  - Who is the main **point of view character**? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is the **setting**? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is the main character's **motivation**? (What does she/he **want**?) \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is the **conflict**? (Who or what stands in the way of the main character's motivation?) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Fill in the summarizing framework that outlines the **plot**.

*This story is about* \_\_\_\_\_ .

*The problem /adventure experience* \_\_\_\_\_ .

*The problem was solved, experience or adventure concluded when* \_\_\_\_\_ .

- What is the **theme**? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Consider the questions in the assignment, below:
    - What techniques does the author use to create an entertaining beginning?
    - Why is this important to the reader?
    - What do you learn about the main character's motivation for the story?
    - What do you learn about the conflict the main character faces?
  4. Your teacher will MODEL this process with you. You may use the sentence starters to help you cite examples in the source text.

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**Sentence Starters for Literary Analysis:**

- The reader discovers that\_\_\_\_\_.
- In the beginning of the story, the author \_\_\_\_\_.
- We see that\_\_\_\_\_.
- The author reveals\_\_\_\_\_.
- (Character’s name) influenced the story by\_\_.
- In this story\_\_\_\_\_.
- The reader understands this when\_\_\_\_\_.
- In the story, evidence suggests that\_\_\_\_\_.
- It isn’t long before we discover\_\_\_\_\_.
- Through the text we learn that\_\_\_\_\_.
- In paragraph \_\_\_\_\_ we see that \_\_\_\_\_.
- We know this because \_\_\_\_\_.
- We see this when\_\_\_\_\_.





Name \_\_\_\_\_

### NARRATIVE EXTENSION TASK: BEGINNINGS

You've read the story Footprints that begins in the early winter when Troy and Evan are building a fort in the woods. Fast-forward several months. The boys have completed their fort and are preparing to sleep out in it for the first time. Write an entertaining beginning for this new story that clearly shows how Troy feels about this new adventure.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Based on Troy's experience in Footprints, how do you think he feels about being in the woods at night with his friend Evan, who has a wild imagination?

**REMEMBER:** Here are the techniques you might use. Then, use the productive questions to help generate your beginning. Use one or more of these techniques in your entertaining beginning.

**Action** - Ask: *what would Troy do?*

**Dialogue/Exclamation** - Ask: *what might Troy say or exclaim?*

**A thought or question** - Ask: *what would Troy wonder or worry?*

**A sound** - Ask: *what might Troy hear?*

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