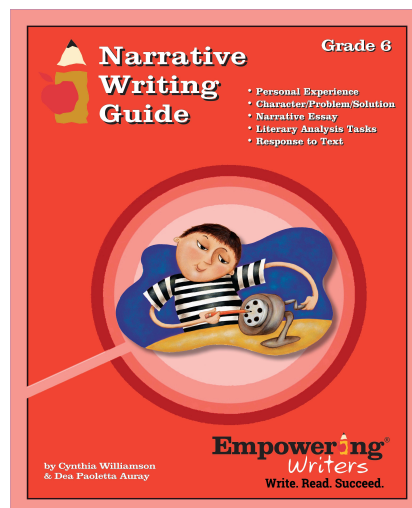




Grade 6 Narrative Writing Guide

Student Pages for Print or Projection

SECTION 2: Beginnings



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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. Jack tightened his grip on the line as something, deep beneath the surface, tugged frantically.

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

Ask: What might you say or exclaim?

ex. “Wow!” I shouted, “This is unbelievable.”

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 if I reeled in this catch, would it be big enough to win the competition?

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

Ask: What might you hear?

ex. Ker-plunk! The fish slapped the surface of the water as it fought against the line.

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 Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George:

Miyax pushed back the hood on her sealskin parka and looked at the Arctic sun.

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:

CHALLENGE: Now it's your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Jean Craighead George 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.

* Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George, HarperCollins, 2016

Name _____

ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (2)

Read this opening sentence from Spy School by Stuart Gibbs:

“Hello, Ben,” said the man in my living room. “My name is Alexander Hale, I work for the CIA.”

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.

CHALLENGE: Now it's your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Stuart Gibbs 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.

* Spy School by Stuart Gibbs, Simon & Schuster, Reprint 2018

Name _____

ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (3)

Read this opening sentence from Joshua’s Song by Joan Hiatt Harlow:
“*The sound of creaking wagon wheels and clinking bottles broke through Joshua’s dreams.*”

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.

CHALLENGE: Now it’s your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Joan Hiatt Harlow 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.

* Joshua’s Song by Joan Hiatt Harlow, Margaret K. McElderry Books, Reprint 2003

Name _____

ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (4)

Read this opening sentence from Twilight by Stephanie Meyer:

I'd never given much thought to how I would die – though I'd had reason enough in the last few months – but even if I had, I would not have imagined it like this.

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.

CHALLENGE: Now it's your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Stephanie Meyer 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.

* Twilight by Stephanie Meyer, Little, Brown Books, 2006

Name _____

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

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.

Name _____

REVISING STORY BEGINNINGS: MARATHON

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 trained hard for the marathon.

Name _____

REVISING STORY BEGINNINGS: THE PARADE

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?

The story is about the time I marched in a parade.

Name _____

REVISION ACTIVITY (1) - BEGINNINGS

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

Every summer, I go to visit my grandparents.

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

- **Action** - Ask: what might you do at your grandparents' house?
- **Dialogue or an Exclamation** - Ask: What might you (or your grandparents) say when you arrive at your grandparents' house?
- **Thoughts, Questions** - Ask: What might you wonder or worry about while visiting your grandparents?
- **A Sound** - Ask: What distinctive sounds might you hear at your grandparents' house?

Revision:

Name _____

REVISION ACTIVITY (2) - BEGINNINGS

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

A storm was predicted for tomorrow.

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

- **Action** - Ask: what might you do to prepare for the storm?
- **Dialogue or an Exclamation** - Ask: What might you say when you learn that a storm is on its way?
- **Thoughts, Questions** - Ask: What might you wonder or worry about when you hear about the storm?
- **A Sound** - Ask: What distinctive sounds might you hear related to the coming storm?

Revision:

Name _____

The Sand Castle Crusher

Da-da-daa-duh-da-da-duh-da-daaaaaaa. My brother made the sound of a bugle call and shouted “charge” as he raced across the hot sand and took a flying leap. He landed directly on the sand castle of a little kid.

“The sand castle crusher strikes again,” he yelled as he ran down the beach hooting with laughter and searching for another elaborate construction of shells, sand and stones to destroy. The little kid looked stunned and ready to cry!

Dozens of times, I’d told my twin to knock off this kind of behavior, but his response was always the same: “What’s the big deal, Jill? It’s just a sand castle and they can rebuild it in a minute.”

Sad to say, my brother Jeff was a bully. As a result, he’d made many enemies. I knew that beneath his swaggering exterior, he did have a soft heart, but you had to really get to know him before this fact was evident. He embarrassed me regularly; he infuriated me often. But I loved him and didn’t want to see him get into trouble. As I helped the little kid restore her sand castle, I racked my brain trying to figure out some way to help him change his brutish ways. Of course, the little kid had a suggestion, but I don’t want to repeat it.

I was still drawing a blank that night as I watched a movie that took place a long time ago. When I woke up, I had an idea.

It was late morning when I arrived at the beach hauling a wagon filled with shovels, buckets and sand castle molds. I also brought along a loud whistle. Becky, my best friend, was already there and she was in on the plan. She’d already walked the length of the beach inviting every kid she saw along the way to join her in building the biggest, most elaborate sand castle of all time.

“Okay, here’s the story,” I told them all. “Our kingdom has been under siege from a diabolical enemy and we are the bold knights of the days of yore. We must protect our castle. Somebody, keep a lookout for our arch-nemesis, who calls himself ‘the sand castle crusher.’ If you see him, blow this whistle. That will be our signal to stand up, join hands and surround the castle so that the sand castle crusher can’t get close enough to cause any destruction.”

Everybody seemed to agree that my plan was a good one. We chose a boy to be the lookout and construction of our fabulous fortress began. In the blink of an eye, there

were at least 20 kids, between the ages of four and 14, working together and having a wonderful time. I was constructing a tall turret in one corner of the castle. Others were digging tunnels and bridges. Samantha, the little girl who'd had the unpleasant encounter with the sand castle crusher just yesterday, was making a pathway to the entrance of the castle with smooth stones she'd collected. Our castle was full of intricate details and getting bigger by the minute.

Suddenly the shrill blast of the whistle rang out. We all froze. Sure enough, just down the beach was the sand castle crusher and he was running toward us at top speed.

"Everybody on your feet!" I shouted.

Moments later, all of us had formed a tight circle around the castle. The sand castle crusher stopped in his tracks when he saw us and a confused look came over his face.

"Go away, enemy of the kingdom," someone shouted.

I almost felt sorry for Jeff. There he stood, utterly helplessly with his mouth agape in astonishment. Without a word, he turned and walked away.

Work commenced on the castle and we were all feeling proud of what we'd created. It was at least 6 feet in diameter by now with walls reinforced by colorful scallop shells and winding staircases that led to steep lookout towers. Just a few yards down the beach, I saw Jeff splashing around in the water by himself and casting curious glances in our direction. I knew just by looking at him that my twin had learned his lesson.

Twenty minutes later, he once again approached our castle. The whistle blasted and we all stood up like the boldest of knights to protect our masterpiece. "I just wanted to see if you, maybe, would let me dig you a moat," Jeff stammered, sounding almost shy. Samantha stuck her tongue out at him, but another boy said, "Sure. Just promise, no funny business."

Eagerly, Jeff made that promise and began digging a deep moat around the castle. At the end of the day, a photographer from the local newspaper came and took a picture of all of us and our magnificent castle. For the rest of the summer, the sand castle crusher was nowhere to be seen on our beach. It seemed, a soft-hearted guy named Jeff had taken his place.

So here's my advice to any kid who's being bullied: Just remember that the good kids almost always outnumber the bad — and if you all stick together, the bullies don't have a chance!

Name _____

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: BEGINNINGS

You've read the story The Sand Castle Crusher. 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 is the conflict?
- 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 task:
- What techniques does the author use to create an entertaining beginning?
- Why is this important for 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.

Sentence Starters for Literary Analysis:

- The technique(s) the author used_____.
- The author also used_____.
- This compelling beginning included_____.
- To begin, the author used_____.
- By using these techniques _____.
- The reader discovers that_____.
- The author reveals_____.
- (Character's name) was motivated by_____.
- _____contributed to the story conflict.
- The conflict was that_____.
- In this story_____.
- The reader understands this when_____.
- As the story unfolds we learn that_____.
- In the story, evidence suggests that_____.
- It isn't long before we discover_____.
- We know this because _____.
- We see this when_____.

Name _____

NARRATIVE EXTENSION TASK: BEGINNINGS

You've read the story The Sand Castle Crusher in which a group of children band together against a bully. Write an entertaining beginning to a story written from Jeff's point-of-view that helps us understand how he became "the sand castle crusher."

THINK ABOUT IT: Do you know anybody like Jeff? How about Jill? What do we know about Jeff? How do you think he might act think or feel?

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 Jeff do?*

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

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

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