

Lesson 3: The Beginning - starting a story



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How to start your story

This is the difficult bit! No-one likes looking at a blank page or screen. It's so hard to know how to start. Everyone always says a story needs a really good eye-catching beginning – but of course that makes you go all self-conscious and unable to think of even one simple sentence.

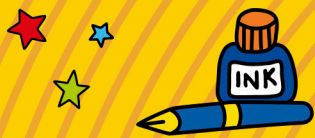
My tip would be to pretend you've got the most amazing piece of news and you're dashing into school to tell your best friend all about it, and you just have to seize hold of them and give them the whole story straight away, making it as amusing and astonishing as possible so that you keep their full attention. I don't think you need several paragraphs of description and explanation before you get started on the story. Jump straight in. And do you know what I mean by Show not Tell? Okay, two ways to start a story:

NUMBER ONE: George walked along the road with his mother. He was feeling fed up and miserable. He wanted a bar of chocolate but his mother said no. George was cross.

OR: George trudged along the road, scuffing the toes of his trainers. Miss Horrible Hawkins had been moaning about his spelling and handwriting again. And Wayne the Pain had snatched George's lunch-time crisps and his Whizzo Wonder Bar. 'I'm starving. Can I have a chocolate Whizzo, Mum?' asked George. 'No, of course not. You've already had one today,' said Mum. George sighed and stuck his bottom lip out.

The first version is fine, but we're being told it all. It's a bit dull. I think the second version is better. It brings it all alive.





WARM-UP TASK: CLASSROOM ADVENTURE!

It's time to ask pupils to start building stories! First of all, push all of the tables and chairs to the perimeter for the classroom – giving everyone space to move around. Transform each table into a different 'station' or 'checkpoint'. On each checkpoint, put a single, coloured sheet of paper, a 'feeling card' with an emotion written on it, and a different classroom object (e.g. a rubber, a ruler, a whiteboard pen, an exercise book). To make it even more immersive, perhaps play some music to create a distinct atmosphere.

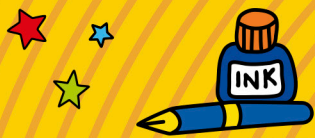
Ask pupils to walk around the room and make creative connections between (even the most mundane) objects, colours and feelings. Do they spark any interesting ideas for how to start a story? When children sit down, give them 10–15 minutes to note down their ideas. They could even be challenged to create a character for their story, based on their own experiences during their task, or their observations of another classmate!

CREATIVE ACTIVITY: ANALYSING THE OPENING OF 'MY MUM TRACY BEAKER'

Jacqueline's Top Tip for starting a story is to pretend you've got the most amazing piece of news and you're dashing into school to tell your best friend all about it, and you just have to seize hold of them and give them the whole story straight away, making it as amusing and astonishing as possible so that you keep their full attention! Let's see how Jacqueline herself starts her own stories...

We're about to read the beginning of *'My Mum Tracy Beaker'* by Jacqueline Wilson. Before reading, have a discussion about what you associate with the word 'mum' or 'mother'. What sort of person do you picture? You might use an image (e.g. opposite) to help formulate your ideas.





Jacqueline Wilson

Top Tips for Creative Writing



Read the very first paragraph of ***My Mum Tracy Beaker*** by Jacqueline Wilson:



HAVE YOU HEARD of my mum Tracy Beaker? You'll know her if you live in Marlborough Tower. The whole of the Duke Estate knows my mum. Everyone knows her – in the shops and down the market, in the library and the fried chicken place and the chippy and at my school.



★ Answer the comprehension questions below in pairs:

1. Why has Jacqueline Wilson chosen to write the first sentence as a question? Why is it effective?
2. What can you infer about Tracy Beaker's mum from the opening of the book?
3. How can you tell that Tracy Beaker's mum might be unconventional?
4. Why do you think Jacqueline Wilson has chosen to mention the 'fried chicken place and the chippy'?

★ Think of a character that you might be able to make unconventional, strange or surprising. Choose from the list below:

- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Nurse
- ☐ Brother/sister
- ☐ Firefighter
- ☐ Lawyer

★ Note down as many ideas as possible for how you might make your character surprising or unconventional.

★ Using Jacqueline Wilson's opening as inspiration, write your own opening for your unconventional character!

