

# Writing Workshop Mini-Lesson: Writing a Strong Lead

**Warm Up:** Write down this quote in your notebook.

"You can't wait for a paragraph in or a page in or even a line in to gain the reader's attention. You've got to grab them by the lapels in the first paragraph, and by the end of the first page if you don't throw them across the room, you'll lose them."

-Blanche McCrary Boyd in Shoptalk

What does it mean? How will it affect your writing?

Finding the right **lead**<sup>1</sup> to fit your writing takes time and attention. Some pieces of writing start slow and quiet; others startle the reader to attention with an odd fact or disturbing detail. The amount of work you put into the opening of your work can have an impact on the entire piece.

Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8

<sup>1</sup> A lead is the first sentence of a piece of writing.

## Why should I spend time working on my lead?

The lead can make or break your writing.

When it works, the reader becomes a sympathetic and friendly audience, willing to listen to what you have to say.

When it doesn't the reader may stop and never go beyond the opening paragraph.

**Writers use different kinds of leads,  
selecting the right one for the purpose at  
hand.**

**Today I want to share several different  
kinds of leads.**

**Categories of LEADS:**



Posing a question



Arresting sentence

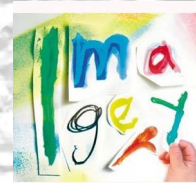


Astonishing fact



Spoken words (quote)

Setting the mood with imagery



## Posing a Question

**Use a question to force the reader to think about the subject and relate your story to him or herself.**

"Have you ever imagined what it would be like to play in the NBA? To glide down the court, matching strides with the greatest basketball players in the world? To hear the roar of the crowd as you throw down a dunk, or swat an opponent's shot into the bleachers?

It's every kid's dream.

And for the fortunate few who make in to the NBA, it's a dream come true."

-Joseph Layden and James Preller, NBA Game Day



## Arresting Sentence



**This type of lead incorporates some sort of shock value. It immediately grabs the reader's interest.**

**"They murdered him."  
-Robert Cormier, The Chocolate War**

## Astonishing Fact



Lead into your story with a fact. It should be interesting and somewhat astonishing.

"Try to imagine a star so big that it would fill all of the solar system within the orbit of Earth, which is 93 million miles of the Sun. A star so turbulent that its eruptions would spread a cloud of gases spanning four light-years, the distance from the Sun to the rarest star. A star so powerful that it glows with the energy of 10 million suns, making it the brightest ever observed in our galaxy, the Milky Way."

-John Noble Wilford, "At the Core of the Milky Way, the Brightest Star Ever Seen"



## Spoken Words

Lead into your story with a quote, whether it's something that one of your characters is saying or it's a famous saying.

"Your father has met with an accident."

-Avi, the Barn



## Setting the Mood

Paint a picture using sensory language. Sensory language is writing that appeals to the five senses. (Touch, taste, smell, hearing, sight)

"A thin crescent moon, high in the sky, shed faint white light over Dimwood Forest. Stars glowed. Breezes full of ripe summer fragrance floated over nearby meadow and hill. Dimwood itself, veiled in darkness lay utterly still."

-Avi, Poppy



