

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

Narrative Writing Assignment

Engaging Openings

Here are some suggestions for beginning your narrative:

1. Start with a focusing quote. Be sure to explain how the quote connects to your personal narrative.
2. Contradict an accepted truth or present a problem or controversy.
3. Narrate some events that create suspense, thus making the reader want to read on.
4. Use interesting and unusual details.
5. Use an analogy or anecdote. Find a situation that is analogous or parallel to the one you are writing.
6. Refer to a common condition with which your audience can identify.
7. Start with dialogue.
8. Make a confession.
9. Use a focusing event that you will continue to refer to throughout your narrative.
10. Ask a rhetorical question. Your narrative will provide the answer to the question.

Avoid the following kinds of openings:

The Creaky, Mechanical Opener

“The purpose of this narrative is...”

The Grandiose Opener

“All through the ages mankind has sought to...”

The Cliché Opener

“In today’s modern world...”

“Once upon a time...”

The Dramatic Soap Opera Opener

“Thump...thump...there was a noise on the front porch...”

Identifying Engaging Openings

For each example, identify the technique(s) that the author used to try to write an engaging opening (refer to the front page). Do you think the opening is effective? Why or why not?

The time had come! I had to face the reality that the relaxing days of summer were over. High school had begun and the back-to-school jitters were there along with the freshmen worries.

Technique: _____
Effective? Why or why not? _____

The most horrific part of the first few weeks of school was seeing nice, exuberant, friendly teachers turn into savage, wild beasts from the jungle. This all happened as the innocence of “this is the first day of school, you are on easy street, free parking, go directly to GO, collect \$200, get out of jail free card” wore off. And boy, did it wear off fast!

Technique: _____
Effective? Why or why not? _____

Have you ever taken a trip on which you had such a wonderful time you thought it could never happen again? A trip so great that you thought it was too good to be true? Well, I did. Five years ago, my family and I went to Maine for the first time. I recall asking myself if a week in a small New England village could possibly be worth the long eight hour drive. I can't say that the answer came to me as soon as we reached our destination, but after the first couple of days I had made up my mind.

Technique: _____
Effective? Why or why not? _____

Alfred Hitchcock stated that “to deny something is only admitting your fear toward it.” This quote can be related to many real life situations. We are intimidated by elements of life that we have not yet tackled. Intimidation promotes fear and fear can arise in many places, especially high school. I was constantly introduced to fearful situations in high school during my first days there. The sense of paranoia or fear was my introduction to the hallways.

Technique: _____
Effective? Why or why not? _____

“Do you have sixth period lunch?” I questioned for about the hundredth time that day.
“Nope,” everyone seemed to reply, “sorry.”

I was beginning to get the feeling I was going to be the only person in the entire building eating sixth period lunch. I was really frightened at the thought of eating alone, especially at a table full of strangers. I timidly made my way down the stupid steps that were too shallow even for third graders and past all the commotion in the hall to the cafeteria. I was able to block out the awful drone in the halls because my mind was too preoccupied with worry. Once I reached the cafeteria, the colony of butterflies in my belly gave birth to baby butterflies; I think a few butterflies even had quintuplets. I did not feel much like eating with all those butterflies flapping around.

Technique: _____

Effective? Why or why not? _____

My grandfather and I had many memorable times together; however, when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 1999, it was the countless hours we spent talking that I will never forget. During the months of his illness I learned so many things about my grandfather. Our conversations covered all subject areas, but I especially enjoyed hearing stories about his Air Force days. Our discussions helped my grandfather bear the hardships of his illness and gave me lasting memories and stories I will cherish forever.

Technique: _____

Effective? Why or why not? _____

As I saw the hollow, volcanic crater called Diamond Head out the plane’s window, I knew that the twelve-hour flight was almost over. Earlier today, I was on the other side of the U.S. mainland. Now we were about to land on a tiny island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. To make it to the airport in time to catch our plane, my family and I had to wake up at 4:00 a.m. We had a layover in Chicago because the flight was too long from Philadelphia to Hawaii. After two movies, many CDs, magazines and a lot of junk food, we had arrived at the Hawaiian Islands. After landing in Honolulu, we took another island hopper plane to Maui, our final destination.

Technique: _____

Effective? Why or why not? _____

I must confess that I thought I was prepared for the war—that dreaded first day of high school. Pencils, paper, and other battle supplies in abundance, I felt that I couldn’t possibly be taken by surprise. I even knew by heart the stories told by veterans, former freshmen themselves. The drills many of us endured on the asphalt field practicing for marching band in front of the South Building had prepared us to be shunned by sophomores and screamed at by exasperated teachers. Dreading our first day in combat, we awaited it, even so, with an enthusiasm that bordered on joy.

Technique: _____
Effective? Why or why not? _____

One summer, along about 1904, my father rented a camp on a lake in Maine and took us all there for the month of August. We all got ringworm from some kittens and had to rub Pond's Extract on our arms and legs night and morning, and my father rolled over in a canoe with all of his clothes on; but outside of that the vacation was a success and from then on none of us ever thought there was any place in the world like that lake in Maine. We returned summer after summer—always on August 1 for one month.

Technique: _____
Effective? Why or why not? _____

The last inch of space was filled, yet people continued to wedge themselves along the walls of the store. Uncle Willie had turned the radio up to its last notch so that youngsters on the porch wouldn't miss a word. Women sat on kitchen stools, dining room chairs, and upturned wooden boxes. Small children and babies perched on every lap available and men leaned on the shelves or on each other.

The apprehensive mood was shot through with shafts of gaiety, as a black sky is streaked with lightening.

Technique: _____
Effective? Why or why not? _____

Dangerous, scary, determined, fun and outrageous. These are all terms that describe my expedition when I was lost in Ocean City, New Jersey. We can all relate to a time when we were excited, nervous, or scared, but my experience helped teach me a very valuable lesson.

Technique: _____
Effective? Why or why not? _____
