

Revising Leads

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Background

After reading rough drafts of her students' personal narratives, Lindsay determined that a mini-lesson on leads would benefit the entire class. She created a handout containing examples of excellent introductions from children's literature.

Instruction and Activities

Lindsay begins the lesson by leading her students in a discussion about what makes a lead effective. After the discussion, Lindsay distributes the handout of introductions. She reads the first few introductions aloud to the students, then stops and asks them what they notice about the leads — what they like or don't like, and what they found particularly effective. Lindsay repeats this activity with three or four leads at a time until she has finished reading all the introductions.

In groups of four or five, the students discuss the leads and select the three they like the best. A representative from each group reports their choices and reasoning to the whole class.

At the close of the whole-class discussion, Lindsay asks the students to write three new leads for their personal narratives. The students may model their leads on the ones from the handout or on leads from books they select themselves.

After providing time for the students to work on their new leads, Lindsay brings the class back together and asks students to share their new leads and compare them to the original ones.

Sample Leads

Louis the Fish

By Arthur Yorinks, Richard Egielski (Illustrator)

“One day last spring, Louis, a butcher, turned into a fish. Silvery scales. Big lips. A tail. A salmon.”

The Relatives Came

By Cynthia Rylant, Stephen Gammell (Illustrator)

“It was in the summer of the year when the relatives came. They came from Virginia. They left when their grapes were nearly purple enough to pick, but not quite.”

James and the Giant Peach

By Roald Dahl

“Until he was four years old, James Henry Trotter had had a happy life. He lived peacefully with his mother and father in a beautiful house beside the sea. There were always plenty of other children for him to play with, and there was the sandy beach for him to run about on, and the ocean to paddle in. It was the perfect life for a small boy.

“Then, one day, James’s mother and father went to London to do some shopping, and there a terrible thing happened. Both of them suddenly got eaten up (in full daylight, mind you, and on a crowded street) by an enormous angry rhinoceros which had escaped from the London Zoo.”

Miss Maggie

By Cynthia Rylant, Thomas Di Grazia (Illustrator)

“If you are a child who is never told the truth, you begin to make up your own. After my father left and no one mentioned his name again, I simply made things up about him.”

The Bat-Poet

By Randall Jarrell, Maurice Sendak (Illustrator)

“Once upon a time there was a bat — a little light brown bat, the color of coffee with cream in it. He looked like a furry mouse with wings.”

The Iron Giant

By Ted Hughes, Andrew Davidson (Illustrator)

“The Iron Giant came to the top of the cliff. How far had he walked? Nobody knows. Where had he come from? Nobody knows. How was he made? Nobody knows.”

Shrek!

By William Steig

“His mother was ugly and his father was ugly, but Shrek was uglier than the two of them put together.”

Tar Beach

By Faith Ringgold

“I will always remember when the stars fell down around me and lifted me up above the George Washington Bridge.”

Midnight for Charlie Bone (The Children of the Red King, Book 1)

By Jenny Nimmo

“On Thursday afternoon, just after tea, Charlie Bone saw smoke. He happened to be looking out his window when a dark cloud lifted above the autumn trees. The wind blew it south and it moved through the sky like a great, floating whale.”

Project Mulberry

By Linda Sue Park

“Patrick and I became friends because of a vegetable.”

Chasing Vermeer

By Blue Balliett, Brett Helquist (Illustrator)

“On a warm October night in Chicago, three deliveries were made in the same neighborhood. A plump tangerine moon had just risen over Lake Michigan. The doorbell had been rung at each place, and an envelope left propped outside.”