Draft a Strong Beginning

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Learn specific techniques they can use to draft a strong beginning in a science fiction story.
- Practice applying the techniques to science fiction.
- Discuss how to apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed
- Chart paper and markers
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation
If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and the Strong Beginnings in Fiction chart onto chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Drafting Strong Beginnings

Say: I lose interest if a story doesn’t grab me right away. So as a writer, I think about how to get my readers interested in the story right at the beginning. Today I’ll show you different ways to write a good beginning for your science fiction story.

Model Drafting Strong Beginnings

Display the sample text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Say: Listen as I read aloud the beginning of a draft for the science fiction story “Earth Is All the Home We Have.”

New Year’s Day, 3012: Five Days to Departure

My name is Jim Smith, and my family is one of the Pioneers in Space families. People all over the world know why we have to go. I’m going to record my thoughts for the next five days. My English teacher thinks it will help me prepare for leaving.

“Jim,” she told me, “I know you’ve got mixed emotions about leaving. Keeping a journal will help you deal with these feelings.”

Modeling Text


Reread the subhead. Say: This writer grabs my interest right away. She gives the date, which is about a thousand years into the future, and this makes me wonder what this futuristic world is like. Also, she introduces something that’s going to happen. She writes that there are five days to departure. I want to know who’s departing, where they’re going, and why.

Reread sentences 1–4. Say: I learn that Jim’s family is one of the Pioneers in Space families. What is that group? And why do people all over the world know they have to go? By just giving me little bits of information, this writer is raising questions in my mind and making me want to read on to find out more.

Reread sentences 4 and 5. Say: The writer tells me Jim has mixed feelings. I wonder why. Will his family be gone for good? Is he worried about the place he’s going to? The writer has planted these questions in my mind, so of course I need to read on to find the answers.
Display the chart below on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources (start with just the headings and first column completed). Work with students to summarize the techniques this writer used to create her strong beginning, as you complete the second column together (you’ll complete the third column later in the lesson).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways to Create a Strong Beginning</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Why Is This Strong?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide an interesting setting</td>
<td>The year 3012</td>
<td>Readers are curious about life in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hint that something is about to happen</td>
<td>5 days to departure</td>
<td>Readers want to know why characters are departing and where they’re going.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce a problem</td>
<td>Jim and his family have to go</td>
<td>Creates questions in the readers’ minds: Why do they have to go? Have they done something wrong? Is something happening to the home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make the reader identify/sympathize with main characters</td>
<td>Jim has mixed feelings</td>
<td>Readers wonder why Jim has mixed feelings and begin to care about him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Strong Beginnings in Fiction Chart

### 3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned that having a strong beginning is a good way to get your reader interested in reading the rest of your story. As you draft your science fiction story, think about how to write a beginning that grab’s the reader’s interest.

Encourage students who are at the drafting stage to focus on developing a strong beginning to their stories during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

### 4. Share

Bring students together. Invite two or three students who have developed strong story beginnings to share them with the class.

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### Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

Invite beginning ELs to draw a picture of where their science fiction story takes place. Then encourage them to tell you about the beginning of the story in whatever language they can.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers as they complete the “Practice Thinking About Strong Beginnings” partner activity.

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**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: fiction/la ficción; interesting/interesante; science/la ciencia.

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