



The Hook: openings that grab the reader

A 40-minute lesson for Grades 6 to 11, built around the Muzayrah Short Story Prize

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain why some opening lines make a reader want to continue
- use three techniques for a strong opening: a strange detail, a strong voice, starting mid-action
- draft and improve the first lines of their own competition story

STARTER

5 min

Play Hook or Flop (Play zone on the Muzayrah website) on the board. Read each opening aloud; students vote with a thumbs up or down before you reveal the verdict.

TEACH

10 min

Share the article *How to write a first line that hooks* (Toolkit). Model the five openings that work and the three to avoid. Ask: what question does each good opening make the reader ask?

PRACTISE

15 min

In pairs, roll Story Dice (Play zone) or use the dice cards below. Each student writes three different first lines for a story using the dice: one strange detail, one strong voice, one mid-action.

SHARE

5 min

Pairs swap lines and choose the strongest. Three volunteers read theirs; the class says which technique each one uses.

PLENARY

5 min

Exit ticket: rewrite this flat opening so it hooks: "It was a normal day and I woke up for school."

Homework and next steps

Students plan a full story with the Story planner (Toolkit → Writer's desk), then use the Self-edit checker on their draft. When entries open, each student submits their own story through the website. The 2026 prize is free to enter.

Differentiation

Support: give sentence starters ("The last thing I expected to find was..."). Stretch: write an opening that is also a clue to the ending, and explain the link.

Links to the judging criteria

This lesson builds idea and originality and voice and impact on the reader, two of the five criteria Muzayrah judges use (25 and 15 points).



Story dice cards

Cut out and shuffle. Each pair picks six cards and must use all six in their opening lines.

a key	the moon	a train	a phone
a map	an old clock	a cat	a storm
a castle	a letter	a mask	a compass
a wave	a torch	a present	footprints
a mirror	a locked door	a camera	an old tree
a violin	a suitcase	a candle	a ticket