

Classic Novel Opening Studies 1 – Charlotte's Webb

"Where's Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast. "Out to the hog house," replied Mrs. Arable. "Some pigs were born last night."

"I don't see why he needs an ax," continued Fern, who was only eight. "Well," said her mother, "one of the pigs is a runt. It's very small and weak, and it will never amount to anything. So your father has decided to do away with it."

"Do away with it?" shrieked Fern. "You mean kill it? Just because it's smaller than the others?"

- 1) In this text, we have a third-person, all-knowing, all seeing narrator. What do we mean by this?
- 2) Using this opening, how does the writer create the impression that the reader immediately senses they are in the presence of something bigger than expected?
- 3) Fern's mother responds to her evasively. What does this word mean?
- 4) What evidence suggests that Fern is of an inquisitive mind?
- 5) The idea of killing a new-born piglet with an axe is hard to take, especially for a young reader. How does this stark opening encourage the reader to want to read on?



Writing Task

Rewrite this short passage as narrative rather than dialogue. Can you achieve the same effect?

Classic Novel Opening Studies 2 – Stig Of The Dump

IF you went too near the edge of the chalk-pit the ground would give way. Barney had been told this often enough. Everybody had told him. His grandmother, every time he came to stay with her. His sister, every time she wasn't telling him something else. Barney had a feeling, somewhere in his middle, that it was probably true about the ground giving way. But still, there was a difference between being told and seeing it happen. And today was one of those grey days when there was nothing to do, nothing to play, and nowhere to go. Except to the chalk-pit. The dump.

- 1) What does the writer mean when he tells us Barney had a feeling 'somewhere in his middle'?
- 2) According to the text, why do most people fear the chalk-pit?
- 3) In the real world we have to think about risk and measuring whether the level of risk is too great. Why does Barney consider taking the risk of going to the chalk-pit?
- 4) What other famous children's novels begin with the concept of boredom as a catalyst for adventure?
- 5) 'Barney is a solitary little boy, given to wandering off by himself'. How far do you agree with this statement?



Writing Task

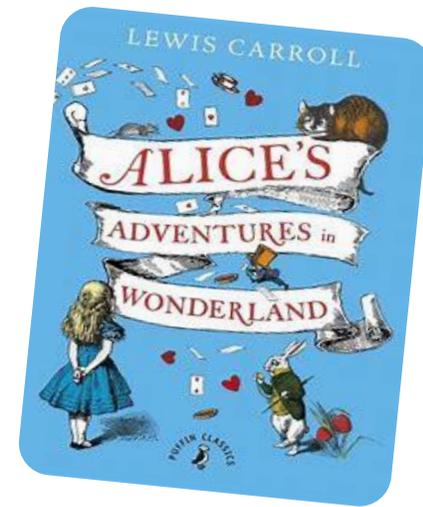
Write your own opening like this one by selecting your own forbidden place and inquisitive character.

Classic Novel Opening Studies 3 – Alice in Wonderland

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice 'without pictures or conversation?'

So she was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

- 1) What do Alice's book preferences suggest about her personality?
- 2) 'Alice believes that the world is orderly and stable, and she has an insatiable curiosity about her surroundings'. How far do you agree with this statement based on this opening extract?
- 3) What one word tells us where this opening scene is set? What must be nearby?
- 4) Although not direct, what evidence in this extract suggests that Alice comes from an upper-middle-class family?
- 5) The grammatical structures and punctuation give the text a certain level of energy. Do you agree? Explain.

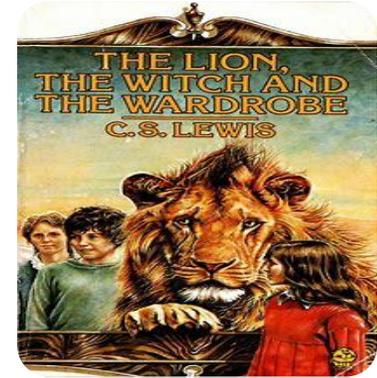


Writing Task

Rewrite this extract by keeping the same ideas however alter the grammar and vocabulary and use the same punctuation.

Classic Novel Opening Studies 4 – The Lion, the witch and the wardrobe.

ONCE there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy. This story is about something that happened to them when they were sent away from London during the war because of the air-raids. They were sent to the house of an old Professor who lived in the heart of the country, ten miles from the nearest railway station and two miles from the nearest post office. He had no wife and he lived in a very large house with a housekeeper called Mrs Macready and three servants. (Their names were Ivy, Margaret and Betty, but they do not come into the story much.) He himself was a very old man with shaggy white hair which grew over most of his face as well as on his head, and they liked him almost at once; but on the first evening when he came out to meet them at the front door he was so odd-looking that Lucy (who was the youngest) was a little afraid of him, and Edmund (who was the next youngest) wanted to laugh and had to keep on pretending he was blowing his nose to hide it.



- 1) How do we know that the children's new home is in an isolated location?
- 2) How does the writer present the professor as an eccentric character?
- 3) Why was Edmund pretending to blow his nose?
- 4) What is interesting about the how the narrator is telling the story to the reader?
- 5) Describe the mixture of initial emotions that the children have towards the professor.