Entertaining Beginnings

At the beginning of the year, we often review how to write entertaining beginnings. Students understand that the beginning of a story is just like a first impression. If the beginning is boring, then the reader is more apt to put the story down instead of reading on. Teachers tend to emphasize that the purpose of an entertaining beginning is to introduce the main character, the story setting, and the purpose for the story action.

Here are some typical beginnings that we say might make the reader not interested in reading the story:

One sunny day...
One rainy afternoon...
One dark night •
This is my story about...
Hi, my name is...
I woke up, ate breakfast, and got dressed. Then I ...

In grade 5, we tend to focus on the four techniques below when teaching Entertaining Beginning:

ACTION: Put the main character into the story by using some action. For instance, if the story is about meeting a giant in the woods the beginning might be: I slowly walked along the wooded trail looking for my way back home. My feet shuffled through the dry leaves as I realized I might just be lost.

DIALOGUE: Put the main character into the setting saying something: “Hello out there!” I shouted. I was trying to find my way home after a hike in the woods and I was lost.

THOUGHT/QUESTION: Put the main character in a situation where he/she is sharing a thought or a question: “What was that noise?” I wondered as I crept through the dense underbrush trying desperately to find my way home. I was lost and alone, very alone.

SOUND: Begin the narrative with an interesting sound that may capture the reader’s attention. Snap! Crunch! Went the leaves and twigs as I circled the same tree for the third time. I was looking for the trail to take me home and I was hopelessly lost.
Read the student samples below to see some great examples of entertaining beginnings. These beginnings use a variety of strategies to establish character, setting, and purpose while drawing the reader in immediately, compelling them to read on!

“Anna!!” My name was yelled in a very excited tone. But despite the gleeful vibe I chose to ignore the rude yelling. I was in the middle of a very vital etching. “Annnnaaa!!” My brother Nathan screamed again, as he had been doing for the past three minutes. I continued to refuse to respond to such awful screeching. Then the room fell into a deep silence. My pencil wasn’t even squeaking like it had been. The awkward quiet went on for what seemed like forever. Then a loud, booming, ear-splitting noise broke the silence. “BOOM, BANG, CRASH, SMACK!” I sprinted as fast as my legs could carry me halfway up the stairs, only to find my brother sitting on the landing, flat on his butt. He had apparently gone flying down the stairs trying to deliver an urgent message. “Dad... said... that... were going... somewhere... and... he wants... you and... me... to get... into... the... car.” Nathan was panting so hard, a stranger might have mistaken him for an out-of-breath puppy. “Okay Nathan.” I said as I peeled him off the sticky, white tile. We then both staggered to the car. Me from my excitement and confusion and my brother from his injured butt.

An Unexpected Encounter!

“CRASH!” went the sound of the pounding, yet small waves as we walked toward the small, crowded beach of Hanauma Bay, Hawaii. Seagulls hollered and squawked in the air, waiting for some careless child to toss them a bite of their sandwich. My family and I trekked along the small hills of sand, My sister and I anxious to get in the ocean and go snorkeling! Finally, I spotted the perfect spot to lay down our blankets. I quickly dumped my towel and lunch on the sand, then grabbed my snorkel and sprinted toward the water. Hopefully my mom wouldn’t remember sun- "Not sooooo fast!" I yielded at the sound of my mother’s voice, disappointed that she had caught me eagerly running off. "Sunscreen Time!!"