**Back to the Beginning**

**Supports Common Core Standards for English Language Arts:**

* **Grade 6**: Writing: 3a. Write narratives in which they engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view, and organize a sequence of events or experiences; 3b. Write narratives in which they develop narrative elements (e.g., setting, event sequence, characters) using relevant sensory details; 4. Produce writing in which the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; 10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
* **Grade 7**: Writing: 3a. Write narratives in which they engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view, and purposefully organize a sequence of events or experiences; 3b. Write narratives in which they develop narrative elements (e.g., setting, conflict, complex characters) with relevant and specific sensory details; 4 Produce writing in which the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; 10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
* **Grade 8**: Writing: 3a. Write narratives in which they engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view, and purposefully organize a progression of events or experiences; 3b. Write narratives in which they develop narrative elements (e.g., setting, plot, event sequence, complex characters) with well-chosen, relevant, and specific sensory details; 4. Produce writing in which the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; 10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, SWBAT:

1. Understand and identify the four places where a story can begin and how each influences the development of plot in a story.
2. Create multiple beginnings for their group novels.
3. Begin the extended-writing phase of their noveling projects by creating appropriate beginnings for their own novels.

**Materials Needed**

* Rollercoaster visual for Student X either drawn on the board like it is drawn in the workbook, or on a transparency using a [blank "Plot Rollercoaster."](http://ywp.nanowrimo.org/files/ywp/ywp_10_ms_plot_rollercoaster.pdf)
* "Beginnings" visual aid; explained in Step Two.
* Students’ filled-in copies of the worksheet from Lesson 2: "What Makes a Novel a Novel?"
* One clean copy of the ["Back to the Beginning" worksheet](http://ywp.nanowrimo.org/files/ywp/ywp_10_ms_back_to_beginning.pdf) per student. This can also be found on page 56 in the Young Novelist Workbook.
* Prizes.

**Lesson Plan: Beginnings**

**Step One: A Day in the Life of…**

*10 minutes*

1. Once all students are seated, ask a student (Student X) to come up to the front of the class and tell the story of his/her day so far. Tell that student and the class that we are all going to pretend that Student X’s goal throughout the day has been to make it to this class to learn about novel writing. Ask if he or she can think of some sort of an antagonist from his/her day, and maybe some supporting characters. Even if they have to make it up, make sure their day has an inciting incident and a climax! *Note: If you know this would take a long time for your students, make up a funny story about your own day.*

2. Now refer the "Plot Rollercoaster" visual on the board/transparency and mark Student X’s or your own day’s events in the appropriate places. The class should tell you where to put things.

3. Say, “Notice how in remembering your own day you sometimes jump around? You don’t always start at the beginning. Real life has this funny thing about it where you always try to start from the beginning, but when you tell a story you can start wherever you want!”

4. Review/Preview: Say, "We are *so close* to starting our novels now that we've learned how." Ask students what they have learned so far. After students respond, say that today we will learn how to start our novels and get this show on the road.

**Step Two: Where Does It Begin?**

*25 minutes*

1. Explain the four kinds of beginnings using a poster/transparency with the definitions of each kind of beginning paraphrased from the worksheet on it. Choose the language you feel your students would grasp best.

Example of what to say:

“First, stories can start at the set-up, before anything has happened. Stories like this often begin with some phrase like 'once upon a time,’ or ‘long ago,’ or a description of the protagonist going about his/her/its normal life.

When a story starts at the inciting incident, we first meet the protagonist experiencing that event that sets the ball rolling for the story. Then the author will go back and describe what led up to the incident.

This is also the pattern for the story starting with the climax, falling action, or resolution. We call those kinds of beginnings *in media res*, meaning ‘in the middle of things’ in Latin. When you start here, you throw a whole lot of information at the reader as though they were familiar with the story, then you jump backwards in time to explain. Think of movies that start when the villain’s sword is raised over the hero’s head and then the scene cuts to a time when the hero was at his desk and it says ‘three years earlier’ at the bottom of the screen.

The final way you can start a novel is at the end. This is tricky, since you can’t give all the details away. You can tell the reader how things end up, but leave enough mystery for them to keep reading."

2. Have each student look back at his or her notes on the worksheet from Lesson 2: "What Makes a Novel a Novel?" to recall the beginning of their favorite novel. Have volunteers identify which type of beginning their author used and how this “set up” the plot for the rest of the book. If possible, try to find examples of each type of beginning; if no one has an example of one of the less-common types, such as starting at the end, ask them to think of other novels or even movies they have seen that started this way.

3. Finally, say, “Now let’s try to start the story of Student X’s day from different parts of the plot.” Announce that you are going to play a very short game called "Where Does it Begin?” Split the room into noveling groups or new groups if students need a change. Choose one person from each team to come up and silently pick a folded piece of paper out of the bag/hat/box that you are holding. Tell them not to open it until they are back with their teams. On those pieces of paper will be “set-up,” “inciting incident,” “*in media res*,” or “the end.” Teams must quietly write the first line or two of the novel of Student X’s day according to their piece of paper. They will only have 5 minutes to write. The teacher should walk around the room and offer guidance while students are writing. Afterward, each team can read their first lines.

**Teams earn**:

* One point for writing the correct kind of beginning.
* One for another team guessing their beginning correctly.
* And one for guessing another team’s beginning correctly.

The team with the most points after every team has read will earn a small prize. When time is up, congratulate everyone.

**Step Three: Group Noveling or Individual Noveling**

*15 minutes*

1. If you teach this lesson before November 1, break students up into noveling groups for one last time. Pass out one "Beginnings" worksheet per group and ask them to write all four kinds of beginnings together. Encourage groups to discuss how each type of beginning might impact the way the rest of the novel would have to be written. (If they choose to start the novel *in media res*, for example, they would have to decide whether to proceed chronologically to the climax next or to flash back to the start of the story before moving on to the climax.). Walk around the room and provide some inspiration where it is needed.

2. If this is November 1, have students take out their workbooks or hand copies of the "Beginnings" worksheet to each student, and have them silently write their first lines. Advise them to experiment on the worksheet with multiple kinds of beginnings and choose the one that works best. If students tell you they know exactly how they want to start, congratulate them and send them off into the land of noveling. Walk around the room to help, but try not to get too involved. Help students to make words come faster, not necessarily to find better words. They have a lofty goal to reach, after all! Always remind students that, unlike the messes they make at home, they shouldn’t even think about cleaning up their messy writing for a whole month.

**Step Four: Read Aloud!**

*10 minutes*

1. If students have been group noveling, have each group share the beginning they liked the best and how this beginning would set up the plot of their group’s novel. Homework in this case would be completing the worksheet for their own novels, so hand out worksheets to your students before they leave.

2. If students have just been writing their own novels, quietly announce that students who want to read their first lines, or want inspiration from a fellow student may quietly move to Side X of the room. Those who are on a roll may keep going. On the reading aloud side of the room, have some students read. Ask students who seem stumped to discuss their problems and invite other students to make suggestions. Make sure to whisper in order to respect the diligence of the students who are still writing.

**Homework**

Homework in this case is to write, write, write.