

ENGLISH · Y6

# Narrative Opening — Year 6

WAGOLL: What A Good One Looks Like

## The Model Text — 'The Letter'

Rain hammered against the window like impatient fingers. Outside, the city was a blur of grey and silver, and inside Maya's bedroom, the only sound was the rasp of paper as she turned the envelope over for the hundredth time. It had arrived that morning, dropped through the letterbox without fanfare, addressed to her in handwriting she didn't recognise. No stamp. No return address. Just her name — Maya Chen — written in looping black ink that looked almost old-fashioned. 'Are you going to open it or just stare at it?' her brother asked from the doorway. He was eating an apple, the way he always did when he was bored. 'I don't know yet,' Maya said. She didn't look up. The truth was, she had a feeling about the letter. Not a good feeling. Not a bad feeling either. Just a sense — the kind you get when you're walking down a familiar street and you suddenly realise something has changed, but you can't quite say what. She slid her finger under the seal.

## Notated features

What makes this a strong Y6 narrative opening?

- PATHETIC FALLACY: 'Rain hammered... impatient fingers' — weather mirrors mood
- PERSONIFICATION: 'impatient fingers' — gives rain human qualities
- SENSORY DETAIL: 'rasp of paper' — auditory detail draws reader in
- SHOW DON'T TELL: 'turned the envelope over for the hundredth time' shows nervousness without saying so
- VARIED SENTENCE OPENERS: 'Rain hammered...' / 'Outside, the city...' / 'It had arrived...'



- FRAGMENTED SENTENCES for emphasis: 'No stamp. No return address.'
- NATURAL DIALOGUE: gives information, reveals brother's character
- DIRECT CHARACTERISATION: 'the way he always did when he was bored' — efficient
- INTERIORITY: 'The truth was, she had a feeling...' — lets reader into protagonist's head
- CLIFFHANGER: 'She slid her finger under the seal.' — reader wants to know what's inside
- SIMILE: 'rain hammered... like impatient fingers'

## Sophisticated techniques to try

- 1 Pathetic fallacy**  
Using weather or setting to mirror a character's mood. Storms = anger, sunshine = happiness.
- 2 Show don't tell**  
Reveal feelings through actions or details, not direct statement. NOT 'she was nervous' — INSTEAD 'her hands trembled'.
- 3 Sensory detail**  
Use sounds, smells, touch — not just sight.
- 4 Sentence variety**  
Mix long sentences (atmosphere) with short ones (emphasis).
- 5 Cliffhanger**  
End a section with the reader wanting to know what happens next.
- 6 Interiority**  
Showing what the character is thinking or feeling, not just doing.

## Writing prompt

Write the opening of your own narrative. Choose ONE situation: a character receives a mysterious gift, a character notices something different about their usual journey to school, or a character finds themselves alone in an unexpected place. Use at least three techniques from the model: a piece of pathetic fallacy or weather description, a moment of show-don't-tell, a piece of



natural dialogue, and a cliffhanger ending. Aim for around 200-250 words for the opening only.

