

# LEADS

A lead is the beginning of your story. A good lead will make your reader want more. A good lead will also leave your reader with questions that they must have answered.

What questions come to mind as you read the following leads?

- "I was six years old when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength." *Rules of the Game* by Amy Tan
- "You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning." *Bright Lights Big City* by Jay McInerney
- "You must not tell anyone," my mom said, "what I am about to tell you." *The Woman Warrior* Maxine Hong Kingston

Some examples of effective leads:

- "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice."  
*One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez
- "It's a funny thing about mothers and fathers. Even when their own child is the most disgusting little blister that you could ever imagine, they still think he or she is wonderful."  
*Matilda* by Roald Dahl

"When you really listen you hear questions." – Barry Lane

# Other Types of Leads

**Big Potato Leads:** Jump into the middle of your story and leave the reader wanting more.

And suddenly everything stops.

-Runa by Alison James

Every so often that dead dog dreams me up again.

-Dog Heaven by Stephanie Vaughn

**Snapshot Leads:** Create a picture in the reader's mind.

Abraham Lincoln wasn't the sort of person who could lose himself in a crowd. After all, he stood 6 foot 4 inches tall, and to top it off he wore a high silk hat. His height was mostly in his long bony legs, and when he sat in a chair he seemed no taller than anyone else. It was only when he stood up that he towered about other men.

-Lincoln: a photobiography by Russell Freedman

The doorman of the Kilmarnock was six foot two. He wore a pale blue uniform, and white gloves made his hands look enormous. He opened the door of the yellow taxi as gently as an old maid stroking a cat.

-Smart Alec Kill by Raymond Chandler

My father came home from work on weeknights long after we had eaten our supper and gotten into our pajamas. The six of us watched from the living room while he sat at the kitchen table to have his supper. My mother sat down his dinner before him, steam rising from the plate she kept warm over a pot of boiling water. Loading his fork with his knife, he bent to his dinner, not looking up from his plate until he had pushed it away from him empty.

-Daley's Girls by Catherine Brady

**Talking Leads:** Maybe you want to start with a line or two of dialogue.

"Where is he?"

Barney hopped from one foot to the other as he clambered down from the train, peering through the white-faced crowds flooding eagerly to the St. Austel ticket barrier. "Oh, I can't see him. Is he there?"

-*Over the Sea, Under Stone* by Susan Cooper

"Where is Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

-*Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White

**Thinking Leads:** Start with a thought inside a character or you.

Mother taught me to be polite to dragons. Particularly polite, I mean; she taught me to be ordinarily polite to everyone. Well, it makes sense. With all the enchanted princess and disguised wizards and transformed kings and so on wandering around, you never know whom you might be talking to. But dragons are a special case.

-*Talking to Dragons* by Patricia C. Wrede

As a boy, I never knew where my mother was from—where she was born, who her parents were.

-*The Color of Water* by James McBride

Up until I turned twelve years old the kind of friends I had were what you'd expect. They were my own age more or less. Most of them were born here in Serenity along with me. And all of us went to the same school together.

-*Onion John* by Joseph Krumgold

**Misleading Leads:** Set up expectations, and then surprise the reader.

I would like to die peacefully in my sleep like my grandfather, not terrified and screaming like the other people in the car.

-*Prairie Home Companion* by Garrison Keillor

Until Columbus reached the New World the people he called "Indians lived in peace and harmony with one another.

Not so.

-*Not So!* By Paul Boller Jr.

**Set-up Leads:** Set up the action for the whole story in a few sentences.

This blind man, an old friend of my wife's, he was on his way to spend the night.... I wasn't enthusiastic about his visit. He was no one I knew. And his being blind bothered me. My idea of blindness came from the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed. Sometimes they were led by seeing-eye dogs. A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to.

-*Cathedral* by Raymond Carver

In the early days of America when men wore ruffles on their shirts and buckles on their shoes, when they rode horseback and swore allegiance to the King of England, there lived in Boston a man who cared for none of these things. His name was Samuel Adams. His clothes were shabby and plain, he refused to get on a horse, and he hated the King of England.

-*Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams?* By Jean Fritz

This is not a book about my life or yours. It does not hold the secret to success or salvation. It won't strengthen your self-esteem. I don't think it will get me on Oprah.

-*I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional* by Wendy Kaminer

- Startling Fact:
  - My cat will never be the same since I put Ora-jel in her mouth.
- Description:
  - Blood oozed from the deep gash above my eyebrow and slowly dripped onto my pale yellow shirt.
- Dialogue:
  - "Watch this?" my brother yelled as he popped a wheelie in front of our house on his new bike.  
"Mom told you not to do that again," I yelled, but it was too late.
- Personal Opinion:
  - The worst birthday of my life happened the same day I cut my head on the toilet seat.
- Action:
  - Sliding into my seat as the bell was ringing, I heard the crash of the TV cart behind me and wanted to throw up.
- A Surprising Statistic:
  - I have probably TP'ed over 100 houses in my lifetime, and will never TP another.
- Outrageous Statement:
  - Someday, I'm going to marry Justin Timberlake.