



FIRST SENTENCES

Every story has to start somewhere. The first sentence of a book sets the tone for the rest of the story and gives the reader a clue about where the story will go next. But first sentences are brimming with promises and possibilities. In the hands of a different author, the same first sentence might lead to a completely different story!

Will your story be serious or silly? Funny or frightening? Merry or melancholy? Try writing your own story with just the information you see here: the book title (& author), a description of the book, and the first sentence. How is your story similar to the one the author told? How is it different?

You can also play the First Sentences game with a group of friends (or even a group of total strangers)! The more people you have playing, the funnier your stories will probably get, so grab twenty or thirty of your closest friends!

1. Sit in a circle, so you can all see each other.
2. Pick someone to go first (the Story Starter). This could be the youngest member of your group, or the one whose birthday is coming up next, or the one whose first name sounds closest to the author's name.
3. The Story Starter reads the book title, author's name, and the paragraph about the book to the group. Then, they read first sentence aloud to the whole group, and add a sentence of their own to continue the story.
4. The next player adds a new sentence, and so on around the circle until you have a complete story.

Read Local Challenge sponsored by:

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

MD/DE/WV

Maryland/Delaware/West Virginia with Washington D.C. & Virginia

PICTURE BOOK CHALLENGE

The Princess and the Frogs

AUTHOR: Veronica Bartles

Princess Cassandra desperately wants a pet frog. Unfortunately, she loves them so much that she can't help kissing them goodnight. Before long, poor Princess Cassandra has a castle full of princes...but princes aren't pets!

- Princess Cassandra should have been the happiest princess in the world.

Eat Your Math Homework: Recipes for Hungry Minds

AUTHOR: Ann McCallum

Put on your thinking cap-- and apron. Here is a unique set of yummy recipes and fun math facts that will tempt your taste buds and make you hungry for more!

- It's after school. It's a beautiful day, but you're stuck inside with a bulging backpack.

Hands Around the Library: Protecting Egypt's Treasured Books

AUTHOR: Karen Leggett Abouraya

Hands Around the Library is the invigorating and heartwarming story of a powerful moment during the Arab Spring in Egypt 2011 - and a story about the immense importance of libraries. Kirkus' starred review noted, "Freedom and libraries: an essential combination ... Extensive and accessible backmatter... A stunning visual recreation of a recent historical event."

- Once upon a time, not a long time ago, many people in Egypt were sad and sometimes angry, because they were not free to speak, or vote as they wished, or gather in groups.

Dragons Rule, Princesses Drool

AUTHOR: Courtney Pippin-Mathur

Dragon has just met the two most dangerous creatures to have ever entered his kingdom—princesses!—in this charming picture book about an unexpected friendship.

- Once there was a Dragon!

Vampirina Ballerina

AUTHOR: Ann Marie Pace

Having learned from experience, Vampirina gives advice to young dancers.

- If you are going to be a ballerina, you have to do more than wear a tutu and dream about dancing.

One Leaf, Two Leaves, Count with Me!

AUTHOR: John Micklos Jr.

This playful counting book shares the colorful highlights of the four seasons in bouncy rhymes and charming illustrations as little ones learn to count the leaves growing on a beautiful tree in the spring and falling off during autumn. There's a world of activity to spy in and around the tree as the wild creatures, and one little boy, celebrate the cycles of nature. The rhythmic text and bold illustrations make learning to count easy, with corresponding numerals reinforcing the learning fun.

- One leaf, two leaves on the tree. Three leaves, four leaves, count with me.

A Morning With Grandpa

AUTHOR: Sylvia Liu

Mei Mei and her grandpa (Gong Gong) spend the morning in the garden. Mei Mei is a bit too hyper for Gong Gong's tai chi moves, and he is a bit too inflexible for her yoga positions. Can they keep up with each other?

- Mei Mei watched Grandpa dance slowly among the flowers in the garden. He moved like a giant bird stalking through a marsh. His arms swayed like reeds in the wind.

Paris Hop!

AUTHOR: Margie Blumberg

On a visit to Paris, France, for just one day, Grandma Goldie is eager to show her granddaughter, Aimee, how the city sparkles in the sun from the top of the Eiffel Tower. But the other joys of "Paree" create delightful detours along the way. Will this peppy pair make it to the tower before sunset?

- Today's the day we see "Paree" from the tippity-top of the tower.

Peep and Egg: I'm Not Taking a Bath

AUTHOR: Laura Gehl

Peep thinks Egg needs to take a bath after playing in the mud. But Egg is NOT taking a bath. Not in the river, not in the duck pond, and definitely not in the dog's water bowl—too slobbery! Does Peep have any tricks up her feathers to help change Egg's mind?

- "Egg, were you playing with the pigs?" Peep asked.

Passing the Music Down

AUTHOR: Sarah Sullivan

A warmhearted ode to an American musical tradition and to generational ties, told in lyrical free verse with atmospheric illustrations. A young boy travels to the hills of Appalachia to meet the old-time fiddle player whose music he has admired, and so sparks a friendship that will forge a bond between generations. This touching, lyrical story, inspired by the lives of renowned fiddlers Melvin Wine and Jake Krack, includes an author's note and suggested resources for learning about the musicians and the music they love.

- Come August, with corn strutting high in the fields and tomatoes plumping out on the vine, folks get to talking about tuning up and heading over twisty mountain roads to hear fiddle players and banjo pickers make music under the stars.

Coyote Moon

AUTHOR: Maria Gianferrari

A howl in the night. A watchful eye in the darkness. A flutter of movement among the trees. Coyotes. In the dark of the night, a mother coyote stalks prey to feed her hungry pups. POUNCE! Perhaps Coyote's family won't go hungry today.

- Moon rises as Coyote wakes in her den, a hollowed out pine in a cemetery.

Finding Christmas

AUTHOR: Lezlie Evans

Hare, Mouse, and Squirrel are busy trimming the tree and decorating their little burrow on Christmas Eve. There's just one last thing to do -- Mouse must find a gift for Hare! What Mouse finds buried in the snow helps the three friends to understand the holiday in a new way. A sweet story about friendship and how giving to others is a gift all unto itself.

- The Little Burrow was nearly ready for Christmas.

Fort-Building Time

AUTHOR: Megan Wagner Lloyd

Grab your blankets and pillows! From the creators of *Finding Wild*, a new picture book that follows the changing of the seasons and is as cozy as a fort.

- Winter is a snowball-throwing, scarf-wrapping, sled-pulling, ice-sliding time.

Goliath, Hero of the Great Baltimore Fire

AUTHOR: Claudia Friddell

In 1904 hundreds of firemen, policemen, soldiers, and citizens battled the Great Baltimore Fire for three days. Goliath, a heroic fire horse assigned to Engine Company 15, is massive in size and mighty in heart and steadfastness. When the fire alarm sounds, Goliath races his team to the blaze where his lifesaving actions will lead him into the pages of history.

- "On a cold February morning in 1904, a restless fire horse stomped and snorted in his Baltimore, Maryland stall."

Fire Bird

AUTHOR: Amy S. Hansen

Chip-Chip-Che-Way-O! This is the song of the endangered Kirtland's Warbler. The birds live in the jack pine forests of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ontario, Canada. Every fall, they fly 1,500 miles to the Bahamas. Every spring, they come back. Their forests need fire to renew so they can nest. How can they survive? (non-fiction picture book)

- chip-chip-che-way-o This is the song of the Kirtland's Warbler

Loon Chase

AUTHOR: Jean Heilprin Diehl (also J.H. Diehl)

When a boy and his mother take their dog Miles on a peaceful canoe ride, they find themselves frantically racing to save a mother loon and her family. Join them and watch the surprising outcome of Miles' encounter with the loons. Then witness the boy's moment of wonder when he meets the loon.

- Early one summer morning, before breakfast, Mom and I paddled to Big Island to pick blueberries.

Wild Colt

AUTHOR: Lois Szymanski

See, hear, smell and learn about all that a wild Chincoteague Pony foal experiences growing up in a wetlands environment on Assateague Island. Then, search and find some of the wildlife critters who share his unique habitat.

- Still and warm - Quiet night - Whooshing, sliding - Sudden bright

RACE!

AUTHOR: Sue Fliess

All the cars are lining up for the race, but one car is smaller than the rest. As it squeezes in between all of them, the cars rev their engines . . . and they're off! Down mountains and by waterfalls, through tunnels and past landslides, the cars race through places that somehow look oddly familiar. . . .

- Race cars! Line up! Who will take the Winner's Cup?

I'm Going To Outer Space!

AUTHOR: Timothy Young

It's almost time for bed, but Luis is staring out the window at the starry sky. Any minute now, he's expecting a space ship to pick him up and whisk him to outer space. While he waits, he imagines the strange creatures he'll encounter. Will he find a robot friend? Will he get to fly through space with a rocket-pack? Will he meet . . . aliens? Get lost in outer space as you pore over pages filled with dozens and dozens of robots and aliens (some new and some that might be familiar).

- I'm going to outer space!

Fantastic Flowers

AUTHOR: Susan Stockdale

Fantastic Flowers brings to life 17 dazzling flowers from around the world with colors and shapes that resemble other things, from dancing ballerinas to kissing lips to wild baboons. Back matter includes an identification guide and photographs of the actual flowers to show that they are, indeed, real!

- Flowers in shapes that surprise and delight

Queen of the Hanukkah Dosas

AUTHOR: Pamela Ehrenberg

A multi-cultural family (Mom's Indian; Dad's Jewish) incorporates traditional Indian food into their Hanukkah celebration: instead of latkes, this family celebrates Hanukkah with tasty Indian dosas. To her brother's chagrin, little Sadie won't stop climbing on everything both at home and at the Indian grocery store, even while preparing the dosas. As the family puts the finishing touches on their holiday preparations, they accidentally get locked out of the house. Sadie and her climbing skills just may be exactly what is needed to save the day.

- It wasn't that I didn't want my little sister, Sadie, to help us make dosas for Hanukkah.

Middle Grade Challenge

*Our Story Begins: Your Favorite Authors and Illustrators
Share Fun, Inspiring, and Occasionally Ridiculous Things
They Wrote and Drew as Kids*

AUTHOR: Elissa Brent Weissman

From award-winning author Elissa Brent Weissman comes a collection of quirky, smart, and vulnerable childhood works by 26 of today's foremost children's authors and illustrators—revealing young talent, the storytellers they would one day become, and the creativity they inspire today. Contributors include Kwame Alexander, R. J. Palacio, Linda Sue Park, and Chris Grabenstein.

- Our story begins with a box in a basement.

The Wolf Hour

AUTHOR: Sara Lewis Holmes

A girl. A wolf. A red cape. And . . . pigs? In the vein of *A Tale Dark and Grimm*, this gorgeously written, endlessly surprising retelling explores the stories and wildness that define us.

- Once upon a time there was a Wolf.

*Explore the Cosmos Like Neil deGrasse Tyson: A Space
Science Journey*

AUTHOR: CAP Saucier

Catch the thrill of the cosmos and space science through the life of Neil deGrasse Tyson—the popular astrophysicist, science communicator, and host of FOX-TV's *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*. In language neither too simple nor overly technical, author CAP Saucier interweaves up-to-date information about the universe and the science of astrophysics with a biographical portrait of the famous astrophysicist. Quotes from Tyson appear throughout each chapter, personalizing the science.

- "Hello, police? I'd like to report a burglar on the roof of the apartment building next to mine."

All That's Missing

AUTHOR: Sarah Sullivan

Armed with only a name and a town, a boy goes in search of a lost relative. Unfailingly honest and infused with a dash of magical realism, as well as a crime caper, Sarah Sullivan's evocative debut novel delves into a family mystery and unearths universal truths about home, trust, friendship, and family.

- Arlo was sitting in math class, thinking about the note Mrs. Gretzky had pressed into his hand five days ago, the one Arlo had opened at home and read through three times just to make sure it was as bad as he thought, the one he was going to have to forge his grandfather's signature on before he could return it to school.

Dear Opl

AUTHOR: Shelley Sackier

Armed with only a name and a town, a boy goes in search of a lost relative. Unfailingly honest and infused with a dash of magical realism, as well as a crime caper, Sarah Sullivan's evocative debut novel delves into a family mystery and unearths universal truths about home, trust, friendship, and family.

There are three things Opl never expected to do during the eighth grade.

1. Start a vendetta against celebrity chef Alfie Adam, the "Nude Food Dude"
2. Take yoga classes with her grandpa
3. Become a famous blogger

But after a year of shrinking down her personality to compensate for the fact that her body's getting bigger, Opl thinks it's about time to start speaking up again. What she doesn't expect is that everyone actually starts to listen...

- The dark enveloped me, squishing my lungs.

The Ninja Librarians: Sword in the Stacks

AUTHOR: Jen Swann Downey

To keep reading and writing from being stolen by the tyrannical time-traveling Foundation, Lybrariad apprentices Dorrie, Marcus and Ebba will have to burglarize Aristotle, gather information among the suffragists and anti-suffragists of 1912 London, and risk their lives to wrest a powerful weapon out of the Foundation's hands – all while upholding the Lybrariad's first principle: Protecting all writing, whether appreciated or despised. If they fail, the written word will only be the first thing to disappear from their world.

- Twelve-year-old Dorris Barnes was on pins and needles. And thumbtacks.

One Shadow on the Wall

AUTHOR: Leah Henderson

In contemporary Senegal, newly orphaned Mor Fall must decide between doing what is right and what is easy to keep a promise he made to his dying father. Laced with magical realism, *One Shadow on the Wall* is a story about love and loss, family and friendship, and creating your own future—even if it's hard to do.

- "Yaay, is that you?" Mor whispered, unsure.

Ethan, Suspended

AUTHOR: Pamela Ehrenberg

After getting suspended from school, Ethan Oppenheimer is uprooted from his comfortable suburban life in Pennsylvania and sent to live in Washington, D.C., with grandparents he hardly knows. At Parker Junior High, he stands out as the only white student. Along the way he learns a lot about prejudice and acceptance — and about himself and his changing family situation.

- "Ethan? Ethan!"

The Last Fifth Grade of Emerson Elementary

AUTHOR: Laura Shovan

Laura Shovan's engaging, big-hearted debut is a time capsule of one class's poems during a transformative school year. Families change and new friendships form as these terrific kids grow up and move on in this award-winning novel-in-verse about finding your voice and making sure others hear it.

- Yo, Notebook.

The Friendship Experiment

AUTHOR: Erin Teagan

Madeline Little is Harriet the Spy with a lab notebook in this debut novel full of heart, humor, and a dash of science.

- "Look, Madeline." Brook holds up a pair of weird scissors. "For your nose hairs," she says, about three times louder than necessary.

George Washington's Spies

AUTHOR: Claudia Friddell

During the Revolutionary War, General George Washington (AKA “Agent 711”) was the leader of a ring of spies called the Culper Ring. Those sneaky heroes risked their lives using secret names, codes, invisible ink, and more to spy on the British and pass along information to help win the American Revolution! This Totally True Adventures series book, ideal for supporting the Common Core State Standards is a thrilling read—made even better because it really happened!

- On a chilly fall morning in 1753, twenty-one-year-old George Washington heads into the wilderness on his first mission as a soldier.

George Washington and the Magic Hat

AUTHOR: Deborah Kalb

Adventure, history, and the drama of school life intertwine in this engrossing tale of a fifth-grade boy struggling to find his place after his best friend abandons him. Find out what happens when Sam’s class takes a trip to Mount Vernon, where he accidentally buys a bossy three-cornered hat that sweeps him off to the eighteenth century and a warm friendship with George and Martha Washington. As Sam travels back and forth between his present-day life and incredible adventures with George Washington, he learns about history, himself, and the nature of friendship and families.

- Sam had no idea when that particular Thursday morning began that a few hours later he would end up back in the eighteenth century almost trampled by George Washington and his horse.

To the Copper County

AUTHOR: Barbara Camey-Coston

Set in 1886, *To the Copper Country* is the story of eleven-year-old Mihaela’s journey from a poor farm in Croatia to the Copper Country of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Her father has been working in the copper mines there to send home much needed money and he has contracted an eye disease the local doctors can’t cure. After Mihaela loses the herbs meant to cure her father, she learns her journey won’t be temporary, and she must face the hard adjustment of separation from a place she loved to a new land with unfamiliar challenges.

- Mihaela's heart raced faster than the train rumbling along the tracks.

What's Up in the Gobi Desert

AUTHOR: Ginjer L Clarke

With an extreme climate and drastic weather changes, the Gobi Desert can be harsh. Not many people live there, but there are plenty of animals. Now you can explore the expanse of the desert with photographs, cool facts, and a foldout map to guide your adventure!

- Ah-roo! Do you hear that?

Bronze Dragon Codex

AUTHOR: Amie Rose Rotruck (aka R. D. Henham)

Witness to the kidnapping of her younger siblings' eggs, young bronze dragon Simle has good reason to think that all humans are evil. Tatelyn, whose brother was killed by a dragon who was supposed to be good, also has good reason to distrust even metallic dragons. But when thrown together on a mission to recover their magical powers, Tatelyn and Simle realize that they have more in common than they ever imagined.

- Simle never was sure what woke her that day.

YOUNG ADULT CHALLENGE

How to Disappear

AUTHOR: Sharon Huss Roat

When Vicky Decker's social anxiety becomes unbearable, she invents an adventurous alter ego by Photoshopping herself into other people's pictures under the screen name Vicurious. Instantly, she begins to get followers, and soon, Vicky has made a whole new life for herself without ever leaving her bedroom. But the more followers she amasses online, the clearer it becomes that there are a lot of people out there who feel like her—#alone and #ignored in real life.

- Standing by my locker, I can already feel the sweat circles forming on my T-shirt.

Em & Em

AUTHOR: Linda Budzinski

Ember O'Malley has been relocated from the Jersey Shore to a small town in the Midwest through Witness Protection. She has a new name, a new look, and a brand-sparkling new reputation ... and she's falling for a boy who loves her for who he thinks she is. Em is living a lie, and it's only a matter of time before her secrets catch up with her; will she let the mistakes of her past define and destroy her, or can she reinvent herself from the outside in?

- Ember pulled the photo from her portfolio and held it beneath the lamp on her nightstand.

It Started With Goodbye

AUTHOR: Christina June

Inspired by Cinderella, 16yo Tatum finds herself on house arrest for the summer when she was in the wrong place at the wrong time. To make it more bearable, she starts her own graphic design business, which leads to some unexpected clients, including a flirty cellist and someone close to her with a big secret.

- “Tatum, they have your license plate on camera. This is as good as it's going to get.”

Post-High School Reality

AUTHOR: Meg Eden

When Buffy first hears a voice called “the text parser,” she thinks it’s her nerdy brain’s way of coping with college stress. When the voice begins to tell her how to live her life, Buffy finds herself stuck in the middle of a never-ending video game built off her greatest nightmares.

- You are in a psychiatrist’s office.

Invisible Fault Lines

AUTHOR: Kristen-Paige Madonia

Tired of living in limbo, Callie decides to investigate her father’s disappearance. Maybe there was an accident at the construction site that he oversaw? Maybe he doesn’t remember who he is and is lost wandering somewhere? But after seeing a familiar face in a photo from the Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, she wonders if the answer is something else entirely. From the author of Fingerprints of You, whom Judy Blume calls “a remarkable young novelist,” comes a “beautiful, atmospheric, and compelling” (Deb Caletti) novel that explores how one teen rebuilds her life after everything seems lost.

- My father disappeared on a Tuesday that should’ve been like any Tuesday, but eventually became the Tuesday my father disappeared.

Operation Oleander

AUTHOR: Valerie O Patterson

Jess and her middle school friends establish Operation Oleander to collect supplies for an orphanage in Afghanistan where two of their parents are deployed, but hone disaster strikes, Jess must find way to go on.

- Whiteness explodes behind my eyeballs, and my eyes shoot open.

Forget Tomorrow

AUTHOR: Pintip Dunn

In a world where memories can be sent back in time, seventeen-year-old Callie Stone has been eagerly awaiting her vision. She thinks it will answer all of her questions. Instead, it shows her the unthinkable: her not-so-distant future self killing her little sister.

- "The next leaf that falls will be red," my six-year-old sister Jessa announces.

Brotherhood

AUTHOR: A.B. Westrick

Brotherhood is the story of a fourteen year-old white boy who befriends a young black teacher shortly after joining the newly formed Ku Klux Klan, then comes to question the racial prejudices he has been taught. In this unflinching view of the bitter animosity that stemmed from economic and social upheaval in the South during the period of Reconstruction, it's clear that the Civil War has ended, but the conflict isn't over.

- The first sound Shad heard was the squawk of a chicken.

The Freemason's Daughter

AUTHOR: Shelley Sackier

Jenna MacDuff is tired of being thrown out of back windows to escape English dragoons eager to fasten a noose around her Scottish neck. More than that, she's weary of hiding the fact that she's smart, a dangerous thing for any female in 1714 England. But she's done both these things all her sixteen years, while her clan risks their lives traveling the countryside, quietly drumming up support and arms for the exiled king James Stuart's secret plan to retake the British throne.

- Jenna woke to the sound of toppling chairs and a dish clattering to the jagged flagstones.

Twelve Steps

AUTHOR: Veronica Bartles

When her crush asks her to fix him up with her perfect older sister, sixteen-year-old Andi decides it's time to step out of the shadows. She creates a twelve-step program for second-class siblings to help her steal the spotlight, and the guy, from her sister, Laina. But the prince may not be as charming as he seems, her sister might not be quite so perfect, and maybe the spotlight is big enough to share.

- There should be a support group for kids with perfect siblings.

Sword and Verse

AUTHOR: Kathy MacMillan

An epic YA fantasy set in a land where reading and writing is the gift of the gods and is reserved for the nobility only. The main character is Raisa, who was enslaved at age six, but gets a chance to learn the language of the gods when she becomes a royal Tutor. And she soon finds herself torn between an illicit romance with the prince and the demands of the Resistance movement who want her to use her position to help her people.

- I never knew Tyasha ke Demit, but her execution started everything.

The Enchanted Dagger (Book I of the Chronicles of Lifthrasir)

AUTHOR: Vonnie Winslow Crist

In "The Enchanted Dagger" (Compton Crook Award Finalist, Maryland Writers Association Book Award Winner), Beck of Queen's Weather keeps his promise to his grandmother, and journeys across a world steeped in magic. While traveling the roads and waterways of Dobran and beyond, he discovers a family heirloom and joins forces with warriors, thieves, changelings, ravens, a giant, and a dragon. He and his companions battle ogrehunches, goblins, Skullsouls and other loathsome creatures as they become entangled in the developing confrontation between good and evil.

- Nana's Goat, Tansy, usually misbehaved when Beck and his grandmother went into Queen's Weather on market day.

Bewitching Hannah

AUTHOR: Leigh Goff

Sixteen-year-old Hannah Fitzgerald has always known she is descended from a troubled legacy of dark magic. When an ancient prophecy reveals the rise of a young, powerful Chesapeake witch and the impending death of another, Hannah realizes she can no longer afford to suppress the magic that has taken away so much. She seeks out the frighteningly scarred, yet mysterious W who is destined to change her life, but even he cannot prepare her for the danger that lies ahead.

- I didn't know if fate could be altered, but I hoped for the possibility.

Inspired

AUTHOR: Penelope Aaron

Life for teenage triplet, Cheyenne will never be the same. Not only does she have to learn to live with the newfound intrusive ability to see the memories of others, but someone is sending harassing messages and watching her. Will she learn how to use her gift in time to prevent the stalker from carrying out the deadly threats?

- Everything was different now.

Of Better Blood

AUTHOR: Susan Moger

In the US of 1922, people judged to be "unfit" are labeled and singled out for sterilization. At an idyllic summer camp for "unfit" orphans, Rowan Collier, a polio survivor, discovers a terrifying experiment is underway. Will she survive long enough to stop it?

- Four times a day I drop the baby.

Falling for Hamlet

AUTHOR: Michelle Ray

After the sudden and suspicious death of his father, the king, Prince Hamlet spirals dangerously toward madness, and Ophelia finds herself torn, with no one to turn to. All Ophelia wants is to live a normal life. But when you date a prince, you have to play your part. Ophelia rides out this crazy roller coaster life, and lives to tell her story.

- "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Oh, thank you!" Zara shouts as she feigns surprise at the audience's outpouring of affection and its standing ovation.