

Questions to Leads Activity

from Corbett Harrison, NNWP

Step #1: Tell your story to three other people, using no more than six sentences.

My Six-Sentence Story Example

Memory of an influential teacher

Mr. Borilla was my fourth grade teacher, and my oldest brother had had him before me, so I knew he had the reputation of having quite a temper. I had to silence my need to be class clown in fourth grade because I was afraid of unleashing the temper I'd heard about. One day, during quiet writing time, I started to laugh at some funny ideas I was putting in my response to his writing prompt of the day. He yanked my paper from my desk. I thought I was in trouble, but instead he went to the front of the room and read my writing aloud. The whole class laughed, and so did he, and I realized there are better ways to be funny than the stupid class-clown stuff I'd been doing in third grade.

Step #2: The three people who listen to the story need to come up with one, interesting question about your story from your brief telling of it.

I use the worksheet on the next page for people to record their questions.

Story teller's name:

Storyteller's teacher's name:

A question I have about the story:

Story teller's name:

Storyteller's teacher's name:

A question I have about the story:

Story teller's name:

Storyteller's teacher's name:

A question I have about the story:

Step #3: The story-teller records the three questions he/she has received but does not answer them. Here are three questions I received about my six-sentence story:

1. Have you met anyone since with the same type of temper?
2. What were you writing about?
3. Was the paper you were writing one school-ruled paper or the paper with the really big lines?

Step #4: The story-teller uses the questions to write three different leads for the story. I tell the participants, "Pretend a voice in your head has asked the question. Let the first sentence of your story answer the voice." Here are three possible leads I came up with, inspired by the three questions above:

1. Since fourth grade, I've met other people with tempers that flared unpredictably, but Mr. Borilla's temper was the only one that inspired me to become a teacher.
2. The topic I was assigned to write about that October day was Christopher Columbus.
3. I was in fourth grade that year. The paper with the really fat lines was no longer an option. We had to write small.

Step #5: The story-teller shares the three story leads with the group that asked them. The group is asked to think about which lead might make the best introduction.

Step #6: Each participant shares their best lead aloud to the whole group.

Step #7: We talk about ways to use this technique in a classroom full of students to help them write better leads with different types of writing, not just memoirs.