

## WRITING GREAT BEGINNINGS

1. Great beginnings need exactly what great stories as a whole need:
  - Character
  - Conflict
  - Motion/Narrative Arc (the story)
2. These characteristics are inter-related: conflicted characters are interesting. Characters with conflict are going somewhere. Here's an example of a great opening sentence. It comes from Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir Woman Warrior, published in 1976:

"You must not tell anyone," my mother said, "what I am about to tell you. In China, your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped in the family well."

- How do these sentences hook you? This story begins with a secret, and secrets are always tantalizing. Plus, the nature of the secret is highly dramatic, and human drama captures our attention as readers, too.
  - Why did her aunt kill herself, and why does the family say it as if she had never been born? Who is this family, anyway?
  - Another way to hook a reader is by asking a question:
  - "What was the first time like for you?"
3. Write a three sentence beginning for one slice of your memoir, whichever essay/story you want to develop further.
    - Step One: Write a sentence that hooks the reader into wanting to read more.
    - Step Two: Write the next sentence that will come after that first sentence. Make sure this one also leaves the reader wanting to read more.
    - Step 3: Write one more sentence after that.
    - Step 4: Reread your sentences and ask yourself if these sentence create a good beginning: character, conflict, narrative arc.
  4. If you are having trouble getting started, do not worry. That is normal. But it is important to try these skills on what you have already written if you are stuck starting from scratch.