‘It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not.’

*City of Glass*, by Paul Auster

* **Why is the ‘wrong number’ a significant detail?**
* **What does the description ‘dead of night’ connote?**

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‘124 was spiteful.’

*Beloved*, by Toni Morrison

* **Who or what is 124?**
* **What is the effect of the sentence being so short?**

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‘Where now? Who now? When now?’

*The Unnamable*, by Samuel Beckett

* **What is the effect of the questions?**

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‘All this happened, more or less.’

*Slaughterhouse Five*, by Kurt Vonnegut

* **What part of the sentence makes us question the reliability of the narrator?**
* **Does it matter if we can’t trust the narrator?**

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‘You better not never tell nobody but God.’

*The Colour Purple*, by Alice Walker

* **How do we know that a threat is being made?**
* **What sort of mood is conveyed?**

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‘The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.’

*The Go-Between*, by L. P. Hartley

* **How can the past be a ‘foreign country’?**
* **What is the effect of the semi-colon?**

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‘If I am out of my mind, it’s all right with me, thought Moses Herzog.’

*Herzog*, by Saul Bellow

* **Does the protagonist believe he’s ‘out of his mind’?**
* **Does he appear to be concerned about defying conventions?**

‘The snow in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation.’

*The Secret History*, by Donna Tartt

* **What is the most likely genre of the novel?**
* **What sort of tone characterises the opening?**

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‘Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space.’

*Cat’s Eye*, by Margaret Attwood

* **How can be a line?**
* **How can it be a dimension?**

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‘Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?’

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, by Mohsin Hamid

* **What impression do you get of the speaker?**

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‘Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested.’

*The Trial*, by Franz Kafka

* **What does ‘slandered’ mean?**
* **Why is the word ‘truly’ important?**

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| **1** | Create a sense of mystery by **establishing a strange situation or reporting an unexpected event**. It’s often best to withhold key bits of information, just like in *The Trial*. |
| **2** | **Use a short sentence** at the beginning of your narrative to convey a sense of drama or to present a statement as undeniably true, just like in *Beloved*. |
| **3** | Challenge the reader to make inferences about the narrative to follow by **using a striking metaphor**, just like in *The Go-Between*. Similes, of course, work just as well. |
| **4** | **Ask a question or a series of questions** to help place the reader in the mind of your main character, just like in *The Unnamable*. The answers to your question or questions can unfold as the narrative develops. |
| **5** | Open your narrative with a **bold statement** that immediately identifies your main character as someone who is rebellious or strong-willed, just like in *Herzog*. |
| **6** | **Establish your narrator as someone who might be unreliable** to keep the reader guessing, just like in *Slaughterhouse Five*. |
| **7** | **Begin your narrative in the middle or the night** where typically mundane actions (like a phone ringing) can be made to seem sinister or unsettling, like in *City of Glass*. |