

# GREAT OPENING LINES - PART I



If you love reading books, I'm sure you have a few favorite opening lines memorized. And you probably recognize other favorites on sight. How would you like to test your knowledge by reading and scoring your answers to the lines below?

I'll start off with a few easy ones. Give yourself one point each for guessing the author, and another point for the title. (Answers at the bottom—don't peek!)

1. "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit."

2. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

Are you feeling warmed up? Let's move on to more difficult ones, with helpful clues:

3. "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Clue: Tragic Russians and their trains.

4. "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." Clue: Ghosts and a city of mirrors.

5. "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." Clue: Didn't this already take place in . . . when was it?

6. "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom." Clue: A haunted house.

7. "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin." Clue: Giant cockroach. Enough said.

8. "My mother is standing in front of the bathroom mirror smelling polished and ready; like Jean Naté, Dippity Do and the waxy sweetness of lipstick. Her white, handgun-shaped blow-dryer is lying on top of the wicker clothes hamper, ticking as it cools. She stands back and smooths her hands down the front of her swirling, psychedelic Pucci dress, biting the inside of her cheek. 'Damn it,' she says, 'something isn't right.'" Clue: Lived with mother's therapist.

9. "We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold." Clue: What happens here. . . .

10. "He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish." Clue: Old man, skiff, Gulf Stream . . . that should be enough.

You can score double points for the title and author of each of these tricky opening lines:

11. "Mother died today. Or yesterday maybe. I don't know." Clue: Existential crime drama set in Algeria.

12. "It was the day my grandmother exploded." Clue: Death, sex, faith, cars, Scotland, and drink (from the author himself).

Time to add up your points. Score yourself if you like:

0-5 Student—Stop by your library to pick up some classics.

6-10 Teacher's Aide—Time to read the ones not read in school?  
10-15 Graduate—Now is a great time to reread your favorites.  
15-20 Bookworm—You would hold your own in a duel of famous first lines.  
20+ Professor—You're a literary marvel.

Answers:

1. The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien
2. A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens
3. Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy
4. One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
5. 1984 by George Orwell
6. Beloved by Toni Morrison
7. Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka
8. Running With Scissors: A Memoir by Augusten Burroughs
9. Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas by Hunter S. Thompson
10. Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway
11. The Stranger by Albert Camus
12. The Crow Road by Iain Banks

Did you enjoy this quiz? Stop by the Library and let us know you took the quiz and pick up a treat! Look for Part II in the column in a couple of weeks.

And be on the lookout for great opening lines in your own reading!

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