

Classic First Lines from Novels

1. All children, except one, grow up.
--J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan
2. There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.
—C. S. Lewis, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader
3. It began the usual way in the bathroom of the Lassimo Hotel.
—Jennifer Egan, A Visit from the Goon Squad
4. I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm.
—Octavia Butler, Kindred
5. They say that just before you die your whole life flashes before your eyes, but that's not how it happened for me.
--by Lauren Oliver, Before I Fall
6. I had just come to accept that my life would be ordinary when extraordinary things began to happen.
—Ransom Riggs, Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children
7. They say death aims only once and never misses, but I doubt Ty Yorkshire thought it would strike with a scrubbing brush.
--Stacey Lee, Under a Painted Sky
8. "We went to the moon to have fun, but the moon turned out to completely suck. --M.T. Anderson, Feed
9. "The rain poured down on London so hard that it seemed that it was dancing spray, every raindrop contending with its fellows for supremacy in the air and waiting to splash down. --Terry Pratchett, Dodger
10. One summer night I fell asleep, hoping the world would be different when I woke.
--Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe
11. "Looking back, none of this would have happened if I'd brought lip gloss the night of the Homecoming Dance.
--Rachel Hawkins, Rebel Belle
12. The best day of my life happened when I was five and almost died at Disney World. I'm sixteen now, so you can imagine that's left me with quite a few days of major suckage.
--Libba Bray, Going Bovine
13. One minute the teacher was talking about the Civil War. And the next minute he was gone. --Michael Grant, Gone
14. All I did was ask a stupid question.
—A.S. King, Everybody Sees the Antsby
15. The early summer sky was the color of cat vomit.
—Scott Westerfeld, Uglies
16. Trouble cruised into Tupelo Landing at exactly seven minutes past noon on Wednesday, the third of June, flashing a gold badge and driving a Chevy Impala the color of dirt.
--Sheila Turnage, Three Times Lucky
17. The end of the world started when a pegasus landed on the hood of my car.
—Rick Riordan, The Last Olympian
18. At school they say I'm wired bad, or wired mad, or wired sad, or wired glad, depending on my mood and what teacher has ended up with me.
--Jack Gantos, Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key
19. The magician's underwear has just been found in a cardboard suitcase floating in a stagnant pond on the outskirts of Miami.
—Tom Robbins, Another Roadside Attraction
20. Your father picks you up from prison in a stolen Dodge Neon, with an 8-ball of coke in the glove compartment and a hooker named Mandy in the back seat. —Dennis Lehane, "Until Gwen"
21. We wanted more.
—Justin Torres, We the Animal

22. 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.
—Paul Auster, City of Glass
23. Not everybody knows how I killed old Phillip Mathers, smashing his jaw in with my spade; but first it is better to speak of my friendship with John Divney because it was he who first knocked old Mathers down by giving him a great blow in the neck with a special bicycle-pump which he manufactured himself out of a hollow iron bar.
—Flann O'Brien, The Third Policeman
24. Unlike the typical bluesy earthy folksy denim-overalls noble-in-the-face-of-cracker-racism aw shucks Pulitzer-Prize-winning protagonist mojo magic black man, I am not the seventh son of the seventh son of the seventh son.
—Paul Beatty, The White Boy Shuffle
25. Nobody died that year.
—Renata Adler, Speedboat
26. The cage was finished.
—Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon"
27. The war in Zagreb began over a pack of cigarettes.
—Sara Nović, Girl at War
28. He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it—was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters.
—Virginia Woolf, Orlando
29. Lydia is dead. But they don't know this yet.
— by Celeste Ng, Everything I Never Told You
30. Call me Ishmael.
—Herman Melville, Moby-Dick
31. It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.
—Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice
32. A screaming comes across the sky.
—Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow
33. Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.
—Gabriel Garcia Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude
34. Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.
—Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina
35. It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.
—George Orwell, 1984
36. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.
—Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities
37. I am an invisible man.
—Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man
38. You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain't no matter.
—Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
39. If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.
—J. D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye
40. This is the saddest story I have ever heard. —Ford Madox Ford, The Good Soldier

41. It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents, except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the house-tops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness.
—Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, Paul Clifford
42. Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting.
—William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury
43. 124 was spiteful.
—Toni Morrison, Beloved
44. Mother died today.
—Albert Camus, The Stranger
45. Every summer Lin Kong returned to Goose Village to divorce his wife, Shuyu.
—Ha Jin, Waiting
46. The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.
—William Gibson, Neuromancer
47. I am a sick man . . . I am a spiteful man.
—Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Notes from Underground
48. All this happened, more or less.
—Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse-Five
49. They shoot the white girl first.
—Toni Morrison, Paradise
50. The moment one learns English, complications set in.
—Felipe Alfau, Chromos
51. Dr. Weiss, at forty, knew that her life had been ruined by literature.
—Anita Brookner, The Debut
52. I had the story, bit by bit, from various people, and, as generally happens in such cases, each time it was a different story.
—Edith Wharton, Ethan Frome
53. Ages ago, Alex, Allen and Alva arrived at Antibes, and Alva allowing all, allowing anyone, against Alex's admonition, against Allen's angry assertion: another African amusement . . . anyhow, as all argued, an awesome African army assembled and arduously advanced against an African anthill, assiduously annihilating ant after ant, and afterward, Alex astonishingly accuses Albert as also accepting Africa's antipodal ant annexation.
—Walter Abish, Alphabetical Africa
54. 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.
—Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea
55. It was the day my grandmother exploded.
—Iain M. Banks, The Crow Road
56. We started dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall.
—Louise Erdrich, Tracks
57. It was a pleasure to burn.
—Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451
58. In the beginning, sometimes I left messages in the street.
—David Markson, Wittgenstein's Mistress
59. Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. —George Eliot, Middlemarch
60. It was love at first sight.
—Joseph Heller, Catch-22
61. Once upon a time, there was a woman who discovered she had turned into the wrong person. —Anne Tyler, Back When We Were Grownups

62. In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.
—F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby
63. You better not never tell nobody but God.
—Alice Walker, The Color Purple
64. Most really pretty girls have pretty ugly feet, and so does Mindy Metalman, Lenore notices, all of a sudden.
—David Foster Wallace, The Broom of the System
65. If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me, thought Moses Herzog.
—Saul Bellow, Herzog
66. Granted: I am an inmate of a mental hospital; my keeper is watching me, he never lets me out of his sight; there's a peephole in the door, and my keeper's eye is the shade of brown that can never see through a blue-eyed type like me.
—Gunter Grass, The Tin Drum
67. When Dick Gibson was a little boy he was not Dick Gibson.
—Stanley Elkin, The Dick Gibson Show
68. "Take my camel, dear," said my Aunt Dot, as she climbed down from this animal on her return from High Mass.
—Rose Macaulay, The Towers of Trebizond
69. He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull.
—Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim
70. The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.
—L. P. Hartley, The Go-Between
71. On my naming day when I come 12 I gone front spear and kilt a wyld boar he parbly ben the las wyld pig on the Bundel Downs any how there hadnt ben none for a long time befor him nor I aint looking to see none agen.
—Russell Hoban, Riddley Walker
72. Justice?—You get justice in the next world, in this world you have the law.
—William Gaddis, A Frolic of His Own
73. Vaughan died yesterday in his last car-crash.
—J. G. Ballard, Crash
74. I write this sitting in the kitchen sink.
—Dodie Smith, I Capture the Castle(1948)
75. I, Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus This-that-and-the-other (for I shall not trouble you yet with all my titles) who was once, and not so long ago either, known to my friends and relatives and associates as "Claudius the Idiot," or "That Claudius," or "Claudius the Stammerer," or "Clau-Clau-Claudius" or at best as "Poor Uncle Claudius," am now about to write this strange history of my life; starting from my earliest childhood and continuing year by year until I reach the fateful point of change where, some eight years ago, at the age of fifty-one, I suddenly found myself caught in what I may call the "golden predicament" from which I have never since become disentangled.
—Robert Graves, I, Claudius (1934)
76. Psychics can see the color of time it's blue.
—Ronald Sukenick, Blown Away
77. In the town, there were two mutes and they were always together.
—Carson McCullers, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter
78. Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space.
—Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye
79. He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it—was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters. —Virginia Woolf, Orlando
80. High, high above the North Pole, on the first day of 1969, two professors of English Literature approached each other at a combined velocity of 1200 miles per hour.
—David Lodge, Changing Places

81. The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting.
—Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage
82. Late in the winter of my seventeenth year, my mother decided I was depressed, presumably because I rarely left the house, spent quite a lot of time in bed, read the same book over and over, ate infrequently, and devoted quite a bit of my abundant free time to thinking about death.
— John Greene, The Fault in Our Stars
83. Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.
—J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone
84. There is no lake at Camp Green Lake.
--Louis Sachar, Holes
85. I was seventeen years old when I saw my first dead body
.--John Corey Whaley, Where Things Come Back
86. The monster showed up just after midnight.
--Patrick Ness, A Monster Calls
87. True! – nervous – very, very nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? —Edgar Allan Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart”
88. Behind every man now alive stand thirty ghosts, for that is the ratio by which the dead outnumber the living.
—Arthur C. Clarke, 2001: A Space Odyssey