What are the characteristics of a good novel opening?

- grabs the attention of the reader
- sets the scene
- introduces characters
- sets the plot in motion

Read the following novel opening from *Holes* by Louis Sachar

2
PART ONE
YOU ARE ENTERING CAMP GREEN LAKE
1

There is no lake at Camp Green Lake. There once was a very large lake here, the largest lake in Texas. That was over a hundred years ago. Now it is just a dry, flat wasteland. There used to be a town of Green Lake as well. The town shriveled and dried up along with the lake, and the people who lived there. During the summer the daytime temperature hovers around ninety-five degrees in the shade — if you can find any shade. There's not much shade in a big dry lake. The only trees are two old oaks on the eastern edge of the "lake." A hammock is stretched between the two trees, and a log cabin stands behind that. The campers are forbidden to lie in the hammock. It belongs to the Warden. The Warden owns the shade. Out on the lake, rattlesnakes and scorpions find shade under rocks and in the holes dug by the campers. Here's a good rule to remember about rattlesnakes and scorpions: If you don't bother them, they won't bother you. Usually. Being bitten by a scorpion or even a rattlesnake is not the worst thing that can happen to you. You won't die. Usually. Sometimes a camper will try to be bitten by a scorpion, or even a small rattlesnake. Then he will get to spend a day or two recovering in his tent, instead of having to dig a hole out on the lake. But you don't want to be bitten by a yellow-spotted lizard. That's the worst thing that can happen to you. You will die a slow and painful death. Always. If you get bitten by a yellow-spotted lizard, you might as well go into the shade of the oak trees and lie in the hammock. There is nothing anyone can do to you anymore.

2

The reader is probably asking: Why would anyone go to Camp Green Lake? Most campers weren't given a choice. Camp Green Lake is a camp for bad boys. If you take a bad boy and make him dig a hole every day in the hot sun, it will turn him into a good boy. That was what some people thought. Stanley Yelnats was given a choice. The judge said, "You may go to jail, or you may go to Camp Green Lake." Stanley was from a poor family. He had never been to camp before.
Questions for understanding

(a) Where is Camp Green Lake?

(b) How long is it since the lake dried up?

(c) What happened to the people who lived in the town of Green Lake?

(d) What choice was Stanley given?

(e) From what kind of family does Stanley come?

Questions for analysis

Remember! POINT - QUOTE - EXPLAIN

1. In this opening scene, how does the writer attempt to catch our attention?

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2. Sachar writes in very short sentences and very short paragraphs. Do you like this style of writing? Refer to the text in support of your answer.

TASK: WRITE YOUR OWN STORY OPENING

Write the opening of a short story entitled ‘Change’.

or

Write the opening of a short story that begins with the sentence: ‘My mother eyed me with suspicion’.

or

Write the opening of a short story inspired by the following image: