

INSIDE SCOOP:

Analyze Openings as an Agent, Bookseller, and Reader then Problem Solve as a Writer

Presented by Robin Perini and Claire Cavanaugh

I. INTRODUCTION

- a. You don't have three pages--you have one sentence, or maybe three paragraphs to hook the reader.
 - i. What an agent looks for:

 - ii. What a bookseller looks for:

 - iii. What a reader looks for:

- b. What NOT to do
 - i. Red Flags
 - ii. Be professional
- c. Methods
 - i. Title
 - ii. Blurb
 - iii. First Line
 - iv. First Page → Second Page → Third Page

II. ELEMENTS OF A GREAT OPENING (Use as many as possible)

- a. Set your tone and maintain it.
- b. Introduce your theme early, and explore it on different levels throughout the book
- c. Create a question in the reader's mind
- d. Intensity
- e. Characters
 - i. Readers must fall in love with OR want to be your character.
 1. Emotional bonding with the first character they meet (Imprinting)
 - a. How to handle imprinting if the first character introduced is not the hero or heroine.
 - ii. Let the reader know who to root for/against immediately
 - iii. Who, what, where, when and how must be introduced immediately
 - iv. Character goal must be introduced immediately
- f. Compelling Situation
- g. MOTIVATE, MOTIVATE, MOTIVATE
- h. Make it concise: what does your reader REALLY need to know?
- i. If your characters don't care, why should we?

III. ACTIVATE YOUR WRITING

- a. Use powerful, picturing-forming and image-making words
- b. Evoke emotions with your word choices
- c. Excuse me, your research is showing....
- d. Interpreting scenes through the genre and the viewpoint characters' emotions
- e. Deep Point of View – critical to active and emotional writing

IV. SET UP CONFLICT

- a. Bickering is NOT conflict
- b. Conflict must reside WITHIN the character
- c. Conflict is a struggle between deeply held belief systems
- d. Balance out internal, external and relationship conflicts
- e. The heroine's goal is NOT to get married
- f. Introduce new story questions before answering the other ones

V. SAMPLE OPENINGS

- a. Dialogue Only – Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card

Title: *ENDER'S GAME*

"I've watched through his eyes, I've listened through his ears, and I tell you he's the one. Or at least as close as we're going to get."

"That's what you said about the brother."

"The brother tested out impossible. For other reasons. Nothing to do with his ability."

"Same with the sister. And there are doubts about him. He's too malleable. Too willing to submerge himself in someone else's will."

"Not if the other person is his enemy."

"So what do we do? Surround him with enemies all the time?"

"If we have to."

"I thought you said you liked the kid."

"If the buggers get him, they'll make me look like his favorite uncle."

"All right. We're saving the world, after all. Take him."

- b. Internal Dialogue – Dance With the Devil by Sherrilyn Kenyon

Title: *DANCE WITH THE DEVIL*, New Orleans, The Day After Mardi Gras

Zarek leaned back in his seat as the helicopter took off. He was going home to Alaska.

No doubt he would die there.

If Artemis didn't kill him, he was sure Dionysus would. The god of wine and excess had been most explicit in his displeasure over Zarek's betrayal and in what he intended to do to Zarek as punishment.

For Sunshine Runningwolf's happiness, Zarek had crossed a god who was sure to make him suffer even worse horrors than those in his human past.

Not that he cared. There wasn't much in life or death that Zarek had ever cared about.

- c. First Person Narrative – Odd Thomas by Dean Koontz

Title: *ODD THOMAS*

My name is Odd Thomas, though in this age when fame is the altar at which most people worship, I am not sure why you should care who I am or that I exist.

I am not a celebrity. I am not the child of a celebrity. I have never been married to, never been abused by, and never provided a kidney for transplanted into any celebrity. Furthermore, I have no desire to be a celebrity.

In fact I am such a nonentity by the standards of our culture that People magazine not only will never feature a piece about me but might also reject my attempts to subscribe to their publication on the grounds that the black-hole gravity of my noncelebrity is powerful enough to suck their entire enterprise into oblivion.

- d. First Person Internal Dialogue – Hissy Fit by Mary Kay Andrews

Title: *HISSY FIT*

If it had not been for my fiancée's alcoholic cousin Mookie I feel quite sure that my daddy would still be a member in good standing at the Oconee Hills Country Club. But Mookie can't drink hard liquor. She can drink beer and wine all day and all night and not bat an eyelash, but give her a mai-tai or, God forbid, a margarita, and you are asking for trouble.

It was my rehearsal dinner, which the Jernigans were hosting, and I was the bride-to-be, so I don't believe I should have been the one responsible for keeping a grown woman and mother of two away from the margarita machine, even if she was one of the bridesmaids.

- e. Third Person Internal Dialogue – Naked In Death by J.D. Robb

Title: *NAKED IN DEATH*

She woke in the dark. Through the slats on the window shades, the first murky hint of dawn slipped, slanting shadowy bars over the bed. It was like waking in a cell.

For a moment, she simply lay there, shuddering, imprisoned, while the dream faded. After ten years on the force, Eve still had dreams.

Six hours before, she'd killed a man, had watched death creep into his eyes. It wasn't the first time she'd exercised maximum force, or dreamed. She'd learned to accept the action and the consequences.

But it was the child that haunted her. The child she hadn't been in time to save. The child whose screams had echoed in the dreams with her own.

- f. Omniscient – Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West by Gregory Maguire

Title: *WICKED: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE WICKED WITCH OF THE WEST*, On the Yellow Brick Road

A mile above Oz, the Witch balanced on the wind's forward edge, as if she were a green fleck of the land itself, flung up and sent wheeling away by the turbulent air. White and purple summer thunderheads mounded around her.

Below, the Yellow Brick Road looped back on itself, like a relaxed noose. Though winter storms and the crowbars of agitators had torn up the road, still it led, relentlessly, to the Emerald City. The Witch could see the companions trudging along, maneuvering around the buckled sections, skirting trenches, skipping when the way was clear. They seemed oblivious of their fate. But it was not up to the Witch to enlighten them.

g. First Person – Silent in the Grave by Deanna Raybourn

Title: *SILENT IN THE GRAVE*, London 1886, Other sins only speak; murder shrieks out.—John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi

To say that I met Nicholas Brisbane over my husband's dead body is not entirely accurate. Edward, it should be noted, was still twitching upon the floor.

I stared at him, not quite taking in the fact that he had just collapsed at my feet. He lay, curled like a question mark, his evening suit ink-black against the white marble of the floor. He was writhing, his fingers knotted.

I leaned as close to him as my corset would permit.

"Edward, we have guests. Do get up. If this is some sort of silly prank—"

"He is not jesting, my lady. He is convulsing."

VI. SAMPLE ACTIVATION OF AN OPENING

a. **VERSION 1 (The Thinking it Through On Paper Draft)**

DARK GUARDIAN, Kent County, England, 1816

Damn Richard St. James to hell. He'd slaughtered them--he'd slaughtered them all.

Jaw clenched with fury, Jonathan Price urged the horse he'd commandeered at the last posting stop forward. His hands and cloak were soaked with blood. He had to get home. He could only pray he wasn't too late.

The sky billowed with black clouds, and little light illuminated the old Roman road he raced down. His heart pounded, and agony ripped through his chest.

He'd witnessed carnage during the war. Waterloo had been a bloodbath, but Anne should never have witnessed the massacre she'd seen tonight. Until a few hours ago, his fiancée had known nothing of the brutality of man.

St. James had changed her--forever. The bastard.

Anne's family--murdered in cold blood. All of them, down to her young sister barely out of the crib.

Jonathan's stomach wretched at the memory of the Cavanaugh's laid out in front of their home like some gruesome message, their throats torn open as if an animal had feasted. But even that hadn't shredded his heart like Anne's mewling cries as he'd cradled her in his arms. He just prayed her family in York would be able to heal her mind, even if her heart were forever broken.

b. **VERSION 2 (Honing in on More Important Details)**

DARK GUARDIAN, Kent County, England, 1816

Damn Richard St. James to hell.

He'd slaughtered them. He'd slaughtered them all save one.

A mist of night smoldered the burning remains of the Price family home, and Jonathan blinked through the soot streaking the land that had once been the family's pride and joy. He breathed in, willing the nausea churning his stomach to not desecrate this place. They deserved better.

Jaw clenched, he forced himself to stare into their sightless eyes one by one. His father, his mother, his young sister. Lined up in a row, their bodies were darkened with ash, the only color, the red seeping from their shredded throats.

But that wasn't the worst of it. St. James hadn't just killed them--he'd tortured and humiliated them. Jonathan couldn't bear the thought of what the bastard had done. His young brother, Edward, by happenstance still at Eton, would never know, Jonathan vowed.

With care, he covered his young sister's bare body, and concealed his mother's naked torso with her decimated gown. As for Jonathan's father, St. James had emasculated him, the blood soaking his pants.

Deep fury, like Jonathan had never imagined, even on the bloodiest Waterloo battlefield, skewered his gut like a thousand splinters of glass.

c. **VERSION 3 (Active Writing Utilizing Deep Point of View)**

DARK GUARDIAN, Kent County, England, 1816

Jonathan Price hurled himself through the fiery hallway, clutching his sister's limp body close to his heart. "Don't give up, Elizabeth." His desperate plea was swallowed by the hellish roar of the inferno crackling around him. Blistering heat seared his hands and face. Black roiling smoke scorched his lungs.

Maddened with grief, he kicked the flaming debris from the doorway and burst into the rainy night. He staggered across the muddy yard, and coughing and hacking, fell to his knees before laying his sister on the sodden grass.

The fire illuminated the vicious wound on her neck, and then her sightless eyes.

Dear God, what manner of beast had done this? Torn the very skin from her throat, killed her with no mercy?

He whirled toward Price Manor. The blaze erupted from every window and door, scarlet serpents of flame devouring all in their path, engulfing everything.

Where was the rest of his family? The servants, the butler, even the scullery maid? Had they escaped or had the beast killed them, too?

"Please." He raced back toward the house, only to be grabbed and flung to the cobblestones. Dazed and gasping for air, Jonathan peered up at the cloaked shape looming over him.

"You cannot save anyone, you fool. They're all dead. Your family, and Lady Anne's as well."

VII. ANALYZE SUBMISSIONS (Choose 2-3 of those submitted)

VIII. CONCLUSION

- a. Wrap up common strengths and weakness among submissions
- b. Q & A

SUBMISSION ANALYSIS TEMPLATE**TITLE:** _____**LOGLINE:** _____**FIRST LINE:** _____**OPENING PARAGRAPHS:** _____

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