



Beginning Stories

All of the extracts below are the beginnings of famous autobiographical novels.

From *The Go Between* by L.P. Hartley

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

When I came upon the dairy it was lying at the bottom of a rather battered red cardboard collar-box, in which as a small boy I kept my Eton collars. Someone, probably my mother, had filled it with treasures dating from those days. There were two dry, empty sea-urchins; two rusty magnets, a large one and a small one, which had almost lost their magnetism; some negatives rolled up in a tight coil; some stumps of sealing wax; a small combination lock with three rows of letters; a twist of very fine whipcord, and one or two ambiguous objects, pieces of things, of which the use was not at once apparent: I could not even tell what they had belonged to.

From *Cider With Rosie* by Laurie Lee

I was set down from the carrier's cart at the age of three; and there with a sense of bewilderment and terror my life in the village began. The June grass, amongst which I stood, was taller than I, and I wept. I had never been so close to grass before. It towered above me and all around me, each blade tattooed with tiger-skins of sunlight. It was knife-edged, dark, and a wicked green, thick as a forest and alive with grasshoppers that chirped and chattered and leapt through the air like monkeys.

From *Catcher In The Rye* by J.D. Salinger

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. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have a fit if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all – I'm not saying that – but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas before I got pretty run down and had to come out here and take it easy.

From *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor

"Little man, would you come on? You keep it up and you're gonna make us late."

My youngest brother paid no attention to me. Grasping more firmly his newspaper-wrapped notebook and his tin-can lunch of cornbread and oil sausages, he continued to concentrate on the dusty road. He lagged several feet behind my other brothers, Stacey and Christopher-John, and me, attempting to keep the rusty Mississippi dust from swelling with each step and drifting back upon his shiny black shoes and the cuffs of his corduroy pants by lifting each foot high before setting it gently down again.

TASK

Ask students to copy and complete this table:

	Extract A	Extract B	Extract C	Extract D
Impact of first sentence				
Interest value of content				
Use of powerful language				
Use of different sentence structures				
Success of writer in making reader want to carry on				
Overall effect				

Grade the features of the autobiographical writing you have looked at, from 1 – 5 (1 = poor, 5 = excellent). Be prepared to discuss and justify your reasons!

AND

Discuss each beginning in **PAIRS** and note down your ideas in your workbooks:

1. Which of the beginnings make you want to read on the most? Say why.
2. Look at your favourite beginning again. What do you find out about the story and the people in it?

Look at:

- What the narrator is like.
 - What the other characters are like.
 - Where the stories take place.
3. Now look at the other beginnings and choose one that you think is very different from the others. Try to explain in what ways it is different.
 4. Write the next **TWO** sentences to your favourite beginning.

Discuss responses with class