

## We're Off! Lesson on Beginnings

The faster the play gets out of the starting gate, the better. There's an immediate rush, a sudden jolt to the senses a play can achieve by starting with a bang. What can deliver the bang? It could be an image. An onstage murder. A dance. A rapid entrance. A joke. Anything theatrical that arrests the eye and ear and connects the audience immediately to the action that is taking place and the story that is about to be told. It is always connected both to the back-story of the play (the inciting incident) and the major dramatic question and action of the play (the point of attack).

Look at the opening of *Six Degrees of Separation* by John Guare. (page 103)

The key point to remember is that the "we're off!" method is designed to provide the background for the major activities of the play, the inciting incident, and to lead toward the characters' major conflict and pursuit, the point of attack.

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### Journal

1. Decide when the *action* to your story starts. Write down the first action of the play. Consider this first action. Is this the point of attack? Or is this action the inciting incident to the point of attack. Or is it a lesser action? The way to tell is this: The most dramatically exciting action is the one that comes at the point of attack.
2. What does your audience need to know in the first few minutes of your play (about your characters, about what has happened before the start of the play, about the setting)? Write a *presentational* scene that delivers exposition at the beginning of the play. Put the key exposition in a monologue. Choose a character in your story who has a strong need to tell someone – either the audience or an unseen character – the exposition.
3. Now write the same exposition in *representational* dialogue. Use code words/phrases/references to suggest the important information about your characters, time and setting in a natural manner.
4. Write the first scene of the play in the "we're off!" method. Find the dramatic, theatrical moment in the early part of your story that will grab the audience's attention in the first seconds of the play. Will it entice the audience? Will it confuse them? Will it make them lean forwards and want to learn more? Will you have to go back and fill in some blanks, a la *Six Degrees of Separation*? Choose presentational or representational dialogue and write it in this way.