**Lead-In Practice Activity**

A quote without a good lead-in can leave a reader feeling like he’s been dropped in the woods without a map. The quote without its context (background to the quote) has little power because the reader doesn’t fully understand its meaning. The lead-in is the solution for this confusion. It anchors the quote in the reader’s mind so that he/she can see the bigger picture of how the quote supports the essay’s thesis.

A good lead-in will:

* Summarize what was happening in the story at the time of the quote.
* Be long enough to truly give the reader all necessary background (this might mean three-four-five sentences). Assume the reader is not familiar with the story.
* Use quality word choice so that the writing sounds sophisticated.
* If the quote contains dialogue, the lead-in will summarize one character’s side of the conversation so that the quote makes sense.

**Task #1:** Look at the chart below. In the left-hand column, you will see two examples of a lead-in for the same quote. Identify the reasons why the better one is superior.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Lead-Ins** | **Quote** |
| **Weak:** Holden lies to Mrs. Morrow when they’re on the train to New York: | “’Well, a bunch of us wanted old Ernie to be president of the class. I mean he was the unanimous choice. I mean he was the only boy that could really handle the job…’”(57). |
| **Better:**  When Holden is on the train back to New York, he encounters Mrs. Morrow, the mother of Ernest, a classmate Holden dislikes. Holden lies to Mrs. Morrow, indicating that her son is a popular boy, when in actuality he is not. He tells her: |

**Besides it being longer, why is the second one better? Explain.**

**Task #2:** Look at the quote and weak lead-in below. With a partner, improve it, using the checklist above and the example in the chart as your model.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Lead-Ins** | **Quote** |
| **Weak:** Holden and Stradlater get in a fight: | “Anyway, the next thing I knew, I was on the goddam floor and he was sitting on my chest, with his face all red. That is, he had his goddam *knees* on my chest and he weighed about a ton” (43). |
| **Better:** |

**Task #3:** In your quiz, look over your lead-ins and the lead-ins in your partner’s journal. Choose one from your quiz and one from your partners quiz and work together to edit and strengthen them.