

# Opening Lines from Contemporary American Literature

"My dear fellow clergymen: while confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities 'unwise and untimely.'"  
From "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King, Jr.

"I am not a scholar of English or literature." From "Mother Tongue" by Amy Tan

"First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carried letters from a girl named Martha, a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey." From "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien

"The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism." From *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams

"At the time of these events Parris was in his middle forties." From "The Crucible" by Arthur Miller

"The names at first are those of animals and of birds, of objects that have one definition in the eye, another in the hand, of forms and features on the rim of the world, or of sounds that carry on the bright wind and in the void." From *The Names: A Memoir* by N. Scott Momaday

"I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon." From "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker

"A hermit crab lives in my house." From "High Tide in Tucson" by Barbara Kingsolver

"The morning before Easter Sunday, June Kapshaw was wading down the clogged main street of oil boomtown Williston, North Dakota, killing time before the noon bus arrived that would take her home." From *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich

"Come on now, boy, it's seven thirty!" from *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry