

Ways to Create a Memorable Opening: Using the Autobiography of Frederick Douglas as an Example

Open with an attention grabber. Sometimes, especially if the topic of your paper is somewhat dry or technical, opening with something catchy can help.

Consider these options:

1. an intriguing example (for example, the mistress who initially teaches Douglass but then ceases her instruction as she learns more about slavery)
2. a provocative quotation, (Douglass writes that "education and slavery were incompatible with each other")
3. a puzzling scenario, (Frederick Douglass says of slaves that "[N]othing has been left undone to cripple their intellects, darken their minds, debase their moral nature, obliterate all traces of their relationship to mankind; and yet how wonderfully they have sustained the mighty load of a most frightful bondage, under which they have been groaning for centuries!" Douglass clearly asserts that slave owners went to great lengths to destroy the mental capacities of slaves, but yet his own life story proves that these efforts could be unsuccessful.)
4. a vivid and perhaps unexpected anecdote (Learning about slavery in the American history course at Frederick Douglass High School, students studied the work slaves did, the impact of slavery on their families, and the rules that governed their lives. We didn't discuss education, however, until one student, Mary, raised her hand and asked, "But when did they go to school?" That modern high school students could not conceive of an American childhood devoid of formal education speaks volumes about the centrality of education to American youth today, and also suggests the meanings of the deprivation of education to past generations."
5. a thought-provoking question (Given all of the freedoms that were denied enslaved individuals in the American South, why does Frederick Douglass focus his attentions so squarely on education and literacy?)