

Title: Enter Stage Left: How to Make a First Impression Without Ruining Everything

Synopsis:

In this episode of *Alchemy*, Tim and LeeAnna dive into the strange, glorious, and sometimes catastrophic moment when one human meets another. Whether it's a casual encounter at a coffee shop, a forced networking event, or the first five seconds of an epic love/hate relationship, the "first meeting" is one of fiction's most powerful tools. The hosts unpack how to make character introductions sing (and not yawn), explore why even background characters deserve their moment in the spotlight, and—because it's *Alchemy*—get wonderfully sidetracked by disappearing socks, jean jackets, and the psychological burden of brunch.

Writers, readers, and anyone who's ever tried to make a good first impression will find something to laugh at—and something to think about

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Discussion Questions

Use these questions to spark conversation and reflection in the classroom:

- Why are first impressions such rich territory for writers? How does fiction both reflect and distort how we meet people in real life?
- Tim argues that we often make first impressions without even realizing it. Can you think of a moment in your life where you unintentionally "introduced" yourself? How might a writer use that in fiction?
- LeeAnna talks about how people often misread her at first—how do stereotypes and quick judgments shape our experience of new characters (and people)?
- Think about a moment when you met someone and it changed your life. How would you write that moment as a scene? What would you include—or leave out?

Writer's Prompts

Creative exercises to help students apply the themes of the topic:

- **Prompt 1:** Social Situations and Social Damage. Your main character meets someone for the first time. Maybe it's at a bar. A social event where the food is weird and the music is worse. Maybe they're stuck next to each other on a flight and one of them is silently praying the other has noise-canceling headphones. Does your MC try to make conversation and get ghosted in real-time? Is the other person charming but clearly networking them like a

LinkedIn bot? Or do they hit it off, with just a hint of “Is this too good to be true?” Write the interaction. Make it subtle, human, and unexpected

- **Prompt 2:** The Background Character Who Isn't. Write the entrance of a character who's not important—or at least, not yet. The barista, the neighbor, the person next in line at the DMV. Give them a moment. One that matters. You don't need to write the rest of their story, but hint at the role they could play if the spotlight ever swung their way. And please: avoid every cliché.
- **Prompt 3:** You're Not What I Expected. Two characters meet. One has formed an idea of the other before the meeting. Maybe they've Googled them. Maybe they've read their book. Maybe they've just been warned. Now, reality collides with expectation. Is it better? Worse? Weirder? Write the moment where expectation cracks.
- **Prompt 4:** Don't Say Hello. Your character is meeting someone for the first time—but they don't speak. Not yet. No name exchange. No polite small talk. Just glances, movements, gestures, context. Maybe it's intense. Maybe it's funny. Maybe it's unsettling. Write that first impression without dialogue.
- **Prompt 5:** The Outfit That Ruined Everything, Set your scene around a character walking into a room completely overdressed or wildly underdressed for the situation. Think: tux at a beach BBQ. Crocs at a funeral. How does that entrance affect what follows? What do others think? How does the character try to recover?
- **Prompt 6:** First Contact (Alien Edition). Your human character is the first to meet an alien being. But this isn't sci-fi horror—this is an awkward meet-cute, or an uncomfortable coffee run, or a job interview gone wrong. What assumptions get made? Who messes it up first? Be weird. Be subtle. Don't make it Independence Day.
- **Prompt 7:** The Character Who Won't Leave. Your character meets someone they thought was minor—then that character keeps reappearing. Write their third or fourth meeting, when it's no longer coincidence. Is it fate? A stalker? A future best friend? Use their original entrance to build meaning into their return.

Class Activities

These activities will help expand on the themes of the episode:

- **Group Discussion:** “The First Five Seconds.” Have each student describe the first five seconds of a recent fictional character's introduction. What worked? What didn't? Did you want to keep reading?
- **Debate:** Is Networking a Lie? Tim thinks networking is awful. LeeAnna sees some value. Debate! Is “networking” just manipulation with business cards? Or is it a genuine form of connection?
- **Design Exercise:** Entrance Matters. Split into pairs and design the entrance scene for a brand-new character. Choose their setting, mood, and what they're doing. One student writes the visual impression; the other writes a single line of dialogue. Read aloud.

- **Collaborative Alien Story-Building:** This is *Alchemy*, so it can't be all serious. In groups of 3-4, design a story in which a secondary alien character makes a surprise entrance—and ends up changing the fate of the main plot. Bonus points for unusual introductions (example: crashing a wedding in disguise).

Closing note from the Podcasters, Tim & LeeAnna

First impressions are weird. Sometimes they're charming. Sometimes they're cringey. And sometimes—just sometimes—they're the beginning of something that changes everything.

In this episode, we celebrated the power of that chaotic, accidental magic. Because whether you're writing a novel, meeting someone new, or losing a sock to the void—how you enter the story matters.

So here's to bold entrances, overlooked characters, and the creative beauty of just showing up. Awkward hellos and all!