



Suspense toolkit

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To create suspense to build tension, scare the reader and keep the reader wanting to find out what will happen you might want to:

N/R	Y1/2 As in N/R plus:	Y3/4 As in Y1/2 plus:	Y5/6 As in Y3/4 plus:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put the main character into a scary setting – <i>forest, old bridge, empty house</i> • make the main character hear or see something • describe the threat • make the main character escape! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • isolate your character/s <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ in darkness/cold ○ in a derelict setting • use scary sound effects, e.g. <i>something hissed</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ or show a glimpse, e.g. <i>a hand appeared ...</i> • show your character's reaction, e.g. <i>she shivered</i> • use exclamations to show impact • use dramatic connectives to introduce suspense and drama – <i>at that moment, suddenly, unfortunately</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • let the threat get closer and closer • show the character's feelings by reactions, e.g. <i>she froze</i> • include short punchy sentences for drama • use rhetorical questions to make the reader worried – <i>Who had turned out the light?</i> • use empty words to hide the threat – <i>something, somebody, it, a silhouette</i> • select powerful verbs – <i>crept, grabbed, smothered</i> • use dramatic connectives – <i>in an instant, without warning, out of the blue</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hide the threat; • use an abandoned setting or lull the reader with a cosy setting • personify the setting to make it sound dangerous – use the weather and/or time of day to create atmosphere • make your character hear, see, touch, smell or sense something ominous • surprise the reader with the unexpected • suggest something is about to happen • reveal the character's thoughts, e.g. <i>She wondered if she would ever escape the darkness.</i> • slow the action by using sentences of three and drop in clauses.

Useful ideas for teaching suspense – always co-construct the toolkit with the class

Model all aspects of the toolkit and display word banks, sentences and ideas on prompt cards, washing lines or learning walls

N/R	Y1/2 As in N/R plus:	Y3/4 As in Y1/2 plus:	Y5/6 As in Y3/4 plus:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect, display and use images of scary settings, e.g. <i>castle, bridge, forest, lake, old house</i> • Raid picture books & fairy tales for scary settings and notice descriptions • Use pictures and photos of scary places and describe these • Imagine a story happening with a scary moment • Compose simple descriptive captions and sentences • Dramatise and imagine being in a scary setting, showing reactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read stories with suspense – innovate on sentences • Dramatise stories where main character hears or sees something scary • Show main character’s reactions • Collect words to describe a character’s reaction and use in sentences, e.g. <i>froze, hid, ducked down, trembled, shivered</i> • Rehearse sentences using dramatic connectives to introduce a sound effect or glimpse, e.g. <i>At that moment, she heard ... / At that moment, she saw</i> • Show images of scary places and list what might happen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect language banks for scary settings, ominous weather, cold and darkness – sort by mood • Raid novels for scary scenes, descriptive passages and write ‘in the style of’ • Compare suspense sections and analyse effect created • Use drama to recreate suspense, mime how a character reacts and hot seat • Use ‘in a dark, dark house’ to build suspense • Collect verbs, dramatic connectives, empty words, descriptive phrases to use when building suspense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From novels, collect and compare different suspense paragraphs and innovate • Use film clips to discuss how to manipulate the reader; write short suspense scenes • Use drama to create a suspense scene • Use sound effects, music and voices to create suspense • Hot seat characters from drama and a novel to explore feelings and thoughts at moments of suspense – turn into writing • Gather word banks for suspense using the senses • Rehearse suspense sentences using sentences of three to build tension and drop in clauses; contrast with rhetorical questions and short sentences