



Toolkit Focus: Suspense

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

EYFS	Year 1 & Year 2	Year 3 & Year 4	Year 5 & Year 6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the main character hear or see something, e.g. <i>Red Riding Hood saw huge, sharp teeth. The wolf growled.</i> • Explain why something is a problem/scary, e.g. <i>The wolf was very hungry.</i> • Use action verbs, e.g. <i>run, grab, grip, chase, etc.</i> • <i>Make your main character escape</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - Put the main character in a dark setting e.g. <i>the lights flickered on and off, the clouds surrounded the last shards of moonlight.</i> • Use a sound effect to hear the problem e.g. <i>there was a growl, footsteps were coming.</i> • Put the character/characters in a lonely place e.g. <i>The door slammed behind her, she was trapped. Or: She wandered too far from the group...</i> • Use adverbial openers which signal that there is a problem, e.g. <i>Unluckily..., Suddenly..., Unfortunately..., At that moment</i> • Use exclamations for impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the threat get closer and closer. • Use sound effects to create atmosphere e.g. <i>The window creaked open, a whisper crept through the wind, there was a distant rustle of leaves, a branch snapped nearby.</i> • Use 'empty words' to introduce a problem, e.g. <i>Glowing eyes peered at him. Something was behind him. A Silhouette. It was waiting.</i> • Use Rhetorical questions, e.g. <i>who had turned out the lights? Had it seen her? Would the light ever return?</i> • Use a greater range of dramatic adverbial openers which signal that there is a problem, e.g. <i>Without warning..., All of a sudden..., Just then..., Out of nowhere..., In an instant..., Out of the blue...</i> • Use the character's reaction to the situation, e.g. <i>his palms started to sweat, his heart raced.</i> • Use short sentences for impact and to quicken pace, e.g. <i>They ran. She froze. Silence.</i> • Select powerful verbs, e.g. <i>crept, grabbed, smothered etc.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hide the threat, but use a small detail to create a glimpse of the threat, e.g. <i>Something darted behind a tree.</i> • Create a false sense of security and then introduce an element of unease, e.g. <i>Hannah leant on the trunk of the tree and took in her surroundings. What was that in the distance?</i> • Use a cliff hanger to hook the reader, e.g. <i>Cliff hanger steps:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1. <i>Create a sense of safety/relief,</i> ○ 2. <i>Show a slight concern/worry,</i> ○ 3. <i>Create a false sense of security,</i> ○ 4. <i>Create the cliff hanger/danger in the last line.</i> • Use carefully selected verbs to build tension, e.g. <i>edged, grabbed, scabbled, whispered, brushed against, hissed.</i> • Use a more sophisticated range of character reactions to the problem, e.g. <i>His pupils dilated, her lips went dry, the room started to spin, making Kat dizzy.</i> • Vary sentence lengths and types for effect, e.g. <i>longer sentences to add detail, short sentences to quicken the pace. Sentences of 3 and drop in clauses to slow the action.</i> • Make your characters hear, see, touch, smell or sense something ominous. • Reveal the character's thoughts, e.g. <i>She wondered if she would ever escape the darkness.</i>



Toolkit Focus: Suspense

Useful teaching ideas:

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



TalkforWriting

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 and action 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 and pace • 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 or action using the senses or action verbs • Rehearse suspense sentences using sentences of three to build tension and drop in clauses; contrast with rhetorical questions and short sentences for drama