



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