

Suspense Toolkit – Progression Document

Purpose: to create suspense to build tension, scare the reader and keep them wanting to find out what will happen.			
Reception	Year 1 and 2 As in Reception plus:	Year 3 and 4 As in Year 1 and 2 plus:	Year 5 and 6 As in Year 3 and 4 plus:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put the main character into a scary setting – <i>forest, old bridge, empty house.</i> • Describe the threat. • Make the main character escape. • Practise speaking a sentence that ends in one adverb – <i>He ran away quickly.</i> <p>See also Description toolkit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put the main character in a scary or derelict setting. • Isolate your character(s) in the darkness or cold. • Make the main character hear or see something – <i>he saw two orange eyes in the bushes.</i> • Use scary sound effects (<i>something hissed</i>) or show a glimpse (<i>a hand appeared...</i>). • Show your character’s reaction – <i>she shivered.</i> • Include short punchy sentences for drama – <i>It was here. Help!</i> • Use exclamations for impact – <i>What a fool she was!</i> • Use dramatic adverbials to introduce suspense and drama – <i>at that moment, ... Suddenly, ... Unfortunately, ...</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use empty words to hide the threat – <i>something, somebody, it, a silhouette/ shadow.</i> • Let the threat get closer and closer. • Show the character’s feelings through their actions – <i>She froze.</i> • Discuss the use of ellipses. • Intensify the situation through repetition – <i>Deeper and deeper she walked into the forest. The sound came closer, and closer... and closer.</i> • Use rhetorical questions to make the reader worried – <i>Who had turned out the light? What was that sound?</i> • Select verbs that connect to the emotion of the main character (<i>crept, tiptoed, trembled</i>) or the threat (<i>grabbed, smothered, slashed, slithered</i>). • Use dramatic adverbials to inject pace and drama – <i>in an instant... Without warning, ... Out of the blue, ...</i> • End with a cliffhanger. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an abandoned setting or lull the reader with a cosy setting. • Personify the setting to make it sound dangerous – use the weather or time of day to create atmosphere – <i>The icy wind clawed at his skin.</i> • Make your character see, hear, touch, smell or sense something ominous – <i>It was there; he knew it. It had found him. Something touched his shoulder in the darkness.</i> • Suggest something is about to happen – <i>The world fell silent. Even the birds stopped singing. The temperature dropped about 10 degrees.</i> • Reveal the character’s thoughts – <i>She wondered if she would ever escape the darkness.</i> • Slow the action by using sentences of three and dropped in clauses – <i>Something was stalking him, watching his every move, waiting for him to make a mistake.</i> • Discuss what would happen if the reader knew the danger but the character did not.

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

Reception	Year 1 and 2 As in Reception plus:	Year 3 and 4 As in Year 1 and 2 plus:	Year 5 and 6 As in Year 3 and 4 plus:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect display and use images of scary settings, e.g. castle, bridge, forest, lake, old house. • Raid picture books and fairy tale's foe 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. • Explore how a main character might react through drama. • Collect words to describe a character's reaction and use in sentences, <i>e.g. froze, hid, ducked down, trembled, shivered.</i> • Rehearse sentences using dramatic connectives to introduce a sound effect or glimpse, <i>e.g. At that moment, she saw/ heard.</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 discuss through hotseating. • Use 'in a dark, dark house' to practise building 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.