

Suspense toolkit © Pie Corbett 2024



Always ask, "What mood am I trying to create?" – then you can select words that fit.

To create suspense that builds tension, scares the reader and keeps them wanting to find out what will happen, you might want to:

Nursery/Reception	Y1/2: as in N/R+	Y3/4: as in Y1/2+	Y5/6: as in Y3/4+
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to the Description Toolkit and select aspects that apply to suspense e.g. Talk about what images and objects look like using adjectives (describing words): <i>sharp, pointy teeth</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put the main character into a scary or derelict setting: <i>the forest, an old bridge, an empty house</i> Isolate your character/s in the darkness/cold: <i>Billy stepped forward into the dark forest. Lucy shivered in the icy air.</i> Make the main character hear or see something (senses): <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 that your character feels nervous or scared through carefully chosen verbs: <i>crept, tiptoed, trembled, froze</i> Create tension through short, punchy sentences: <i>It was here.</i> Introduce pace and drama through dramatic openers (fronted adverbials): <i>At that moment, ... Suddenly, ... Unfortunately, ...</i> Shock the reader with short exclamations: <i>What a fool she was!</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the weather and/or time of day to create atmosphere: <i>All night, thunder growled overhead.</i> Use empty words to hide the threat through pronouns: <i>something, somebody, it</i> or through ambiguous nouns: <i>a silhouette, a vague shape</i> Intensify the danger of the threat through their movements using suggestive verbs: <i>skulked, smothered, slithered, grabbed</i> Let the threat get closer and closer Show the character's feelings through their immediate reactions (emotive verbs): <i>She froze. He gasped.</i> Make the reader worried through rhetorical questions: <i>Who had turned out the light? What was it?</i> Inject pace and drama through a wider range of dramatic openers (fronted adverbials): e.g. <i>Without warning, ... Out of the blue, ... In an instant, ...</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lull the reader with a cosy setting 'Show not tell' how the main character is feeling through their linked actions: <i>Sam peered up the street and hoped the bus would not be too long.</i> Make the setting sound dangerous through personification: <i>The icy wind clawed at his skin.</i> Make your character hear, see, touch, smell or sense something ominous: <i>It was there; he knew it. He felt its presence. It had found him.</i> Intensify the situation through repetition: <i>Deeper and deeper she walked into the forest.</i> Suggest something is about to happen: <i>The world fell silent ...</i> Reveal the character's thoughts: <i>Luna wondered if she would ever escape.</i> Slow the action down by using sentences of three and drop in clauses: <i>Something was stalking him, watching his every move, waiting for him to make a mistake.</i>