

Writing Suspense and Mystery Texts

Vanishing Lane

twinkl

What Is Suspense?



Authors attempt to build suspense in stories to try to have a particular effect on their readers.

What feelings does suspense give a reader?
Talk about this with a partner.

When reading stories that include suspense and mystery, readers can feel:

- scared or frightened;
- worried or anxious;
- excited or thrilled;
- goosebumps or shivers;
- concerned as to what might happen next;
- keen to read on!

Discuss it

Compare it





How to Create Suspense



Here is a short piece of suspense writing. Read through it and think about what makes you feel suspenseful and tense whilst reading it.

She arrived at the door and everything went cold. Her skin tightened. Her eyes were wide. Her palms were sweaty. **Above** her head, the trees stood like dark giants of impending doom looming over her with many reaching arms. A loud rustling broke the silence and a smell like damp wood filled her nostrils. She lifted her hand to knock on the door, but before she could touch it, it creaked open.

Identify three features which give this piece of text suspense and mystery.

Think about it

Compare it

Some of the features are:

- simile and metaphor;
- the use of ellipsis;
- short, snappy sentences;
- using sentences that appeal to the senses.



How Do the Features Help Build Suspense



Think about each of the features and why they help create suspense, mystery and tension. Then, compare your thoughts.

- **simile and metaphor**
- **use of ellipsis**
- **short, snappy sentences**
- **using sentences that appeal to the senses**

Similes and metaphors add further description, which helps the reader to paint a detailed picture in their mind.

Ellipsis shows a long pause, which can be used as a cliffhanger so the reader wonders 'what happens next?' It also shows pauses in the middle of action to create a sense of hesitation about the outcome. If you were writing about a TV talent show result, you would use ... a lot!

Short sentences are read quickly, one after the other so that the pace of the story quickens. It almost makes the reader feel like they are panicking or breathing more quickly.

Using the senses gives a more detailed point of view of a situation. It brings the reader into the story by feeding their imagination.



How Do the Professionals Do It?



Professional writers create suspense in much the same way as we have discussed.

Click on the link below to see an interview with author, Malorie Blackman, about how she creates suspense in her mystery stories.

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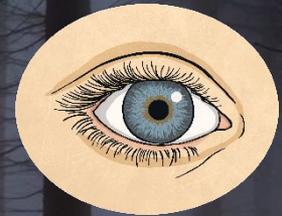
Watch it



Use Your Senses



Look at this picture and think about all of your five senses as well as what you would be thinking. Make notes for each.



Sense it

back

Metaphors and Similes

next

Look at this picture again and write down some metaphor and simile ideas.



Putting It Together



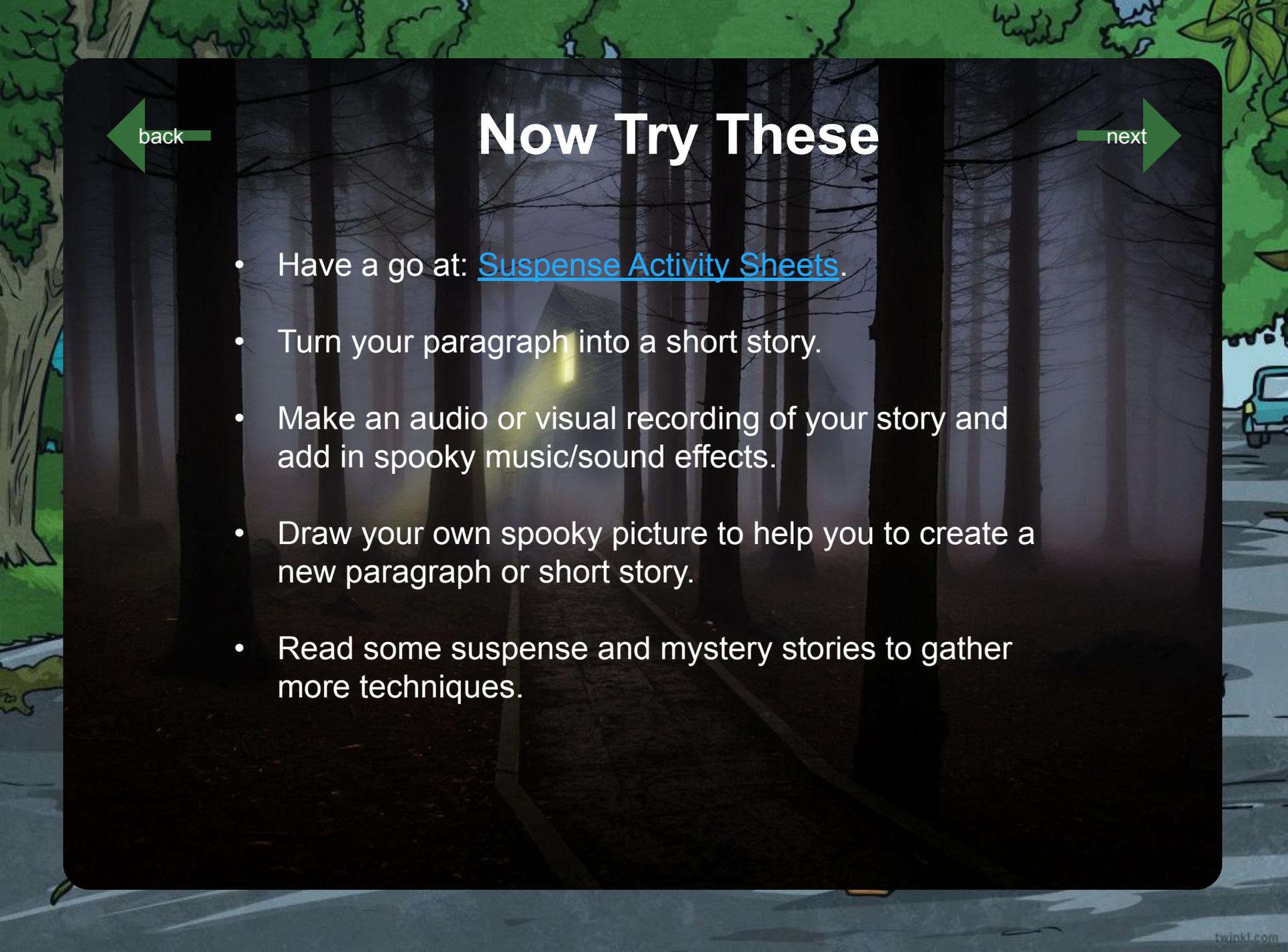
Now, using your sense notes and your list of metaphors and similes, write a paragraph full of suspense and tension. Try to include all of the four main features of suspense texts.

Main Features:

- simile and metaphor;
- use of ellipsis;
- short, snappy sentences;
- using sentences that appeal to the senses.

Remember it

Hide it



back

Now Try These

next

- Have a go at: [Suspense Activity Sheets](#).
- Turn your paragraph into a short story.
- Make an audio or visual recording of your story and add in spooky music/sound effects.
- Draw your own spooky picture to help you to create a new paragraph or short story.
- Read some suspense and mystery stories to gather more techniques.



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