

The Curse of Cogston House

Building Tension and Suspense



twinkl

What Is Tension?

Tension is something that writers use to create a problem in their stories.

Tension means feeling worry, fear, nerves or pressure. You can also create **tension** between characters if they argue.



What Is Suspense?

Suspense is something used in stories to make them mysterious or scary.

Suspense means waiting for something to happen or being uncertain about what will happen.



Tension and Suspense

Here is an extract from 'The Curse of Cogston House'. Most of the tension and all of the suspense has been removed from the story.

*Alice couldn't move and she was **scared**. Then, **a man** started to **walk** down the stairs towards her.*

This isn't very scary because we know exactly who is coming down the stairs straight away. The descriptions are not detailed, so although we know that Alice is scared, we don't feel scared with her.

Building Tension and Suspense

Now, read the real extract from 'The Curse of Cogston House'.

Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor which faded into more murky gloom. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...

Something was moving.

Alice watched numbly. Her heart was in her mouth and her breath came in sharp, rattling gasps.

Descending the stairs one careful, agonising, creaking step at a time, a hunched silhouette shuffled out from the darkness...

How did the extract make you feel?

Building Tension and Suspense

Now, read the real extract from 'The Curse of Cogston House'.

Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor which faded into more murky gloom. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...

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Building Suspense

Even at the end of the extract, the reader **still** doesn't know who is coming down the stairs. Why not?

Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor which faded into more murky gloom. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...

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Keeping some things hidden makes the reader want to keep on reading to find out more!

Building Suspense

Beyond here are the answers to your feature finding! Scroll carefully so that you don't see the answers too quickly!

Building Suspense

Even though not much is happening to Alice, there is a lot of descriptive detail about the surroundings. All of this writing means that the reader can clearly picture what Alice is experiencing and they have to wait a long time before they find out what happens to her.

*Nothing moved. Cogston House was as **silent as the grave**. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this **endless quiet**. Alice's eyes searched through the **darkness**, scouring the corridor which **faded into more murky gloom**. She could make out the **hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase**. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...*

Something was moving.

Alice watched numbly. Her heart was in her mouth and her breath came in sharp, rattling gasps.

Descending the stairs one careful, agonising, creaking step at a time, a hunched silhouette shuffled out from the darkness...

Building Suspense

The text uses some short, sharp sentences to shock the reader. In these short sentences, giving the reader no details at all is scary—a bit like being in the dark.

Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor which faded into more murky gloom. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...

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Building Suspense

Adding extra information (subordinate and relative clauses) to sentences can also make the reader wait even longer.

Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor which faded into more murky gloom. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...

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Building Suspense

There is a special piece of **punctuation** used when creating suspense.

Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor which faded into more murky gloom. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...

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Three dots together is called an **ellipsis**. **Ellipses** show that something is coming next (like a drumroll), or sometimes that the end of the sentence is missing.

Building Tension

Instead of writing 'Alice was scared', the author has shown us what Alice's body is doing. How do you know that she is scared?

*Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor which faded into more murky gloom. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through **the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face**, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but **turned her to stone...***

Something was moving.

*Alice watched **numbly**. Her heart was in her mouth and her breath came in sharp, rattling gasps.*

Descending the stairs one careful, agonising, creaking step at a time, a hunched silhouette shuffled out from the darkness...

Building Tension

To build tension and suspense, descriptions should appeal to the reader's senses. Can you find sights, sounds and feelings in the text?

*Nothing moved. Cogston House was as **silent** as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this **endless quiet**. Alice's eyes searched through the **darkness**, scouring the corridor which faded into more **murky gloom**. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the **tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face**, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...*

Something was moving.

*Alice watched **numbly**. Her heart was in her mouth and **her breath came in sharp, rattling gasps**.*

*Descending the stairs one careful, agonising, **creaking** step at a time, a **hunched silhouette** shuffled out from the darkness...*

Building Tension

Instead of writing 'walked', exciting synonyms are used to show the reader exactly how the man was moving. Can you find the description? Why is it scary?

Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor which faded into more murky gloom. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the enormous winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...

Something was moving.

Alice watched numbly. Her heart was in her mouth and her breath came in sharp, rattling gasps.

*Descending the stairs one careful, agonising, creaking step at a time, a hunched silhouette **shuffled** out from the darkness...*

Building Tension

The describing words in this extract are interesting and imaginative. Why do you think it is important to describe events in detail?

*Nothing moved. Cogston House was as silent as the grave. Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately calling her name was being alone in this endless quiet. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, **scouring** the corridor which faded into more **murky gloom**. She could make out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it, the **enormous** winding staircase. As she looked, blinking through the tears which had begun to stream **hopelessly** down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but turned her to stone...*

Something was moving.

*Alice watched numbly. Her heart was in her mouth and her breath came in sharp, **rattling** gasps.*

*Descending the stairs one **careful, agonising, creaking** step at a time, a **hunched** silhouette **shuffled** out from the darkness...*

Building Tension

The author also uses imagery. **Imagery** means any description which works to conjure up an **image** in the reader's mind.

*Nothing moved. Cogston House was **as silent as the grave.** Perhaps the only thing worse than hearing her best friend desperately shout for help was the silence. Alice's eyes searched through the darkness, scouring the corridor out the hallway right in front of her, the door opposite, and beyond it. She was crying through the tears which had begun to stream hopelessly down her face, she was met with a sight at the top of the staircase which all but **turned her to stone...***

This is a **simile**. It is comparing the silence of the house to somewhere else that is silent.

Something was moving.

Alice watched numbly. Her heart was in her mouth and her breath...

This is a **metaphor**. The reader knows that Alice isn't really turned to stone but it shows that she was too afraid to move.

Descending the stairs one careful, agonising, creaking step at a time, a hunched silhouette shuffled out from the darkness...

Building Tension

Onomatopoeia also helps to immerse the reader in your story. Try saying these words and make them sound like the noise they describe.

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*Descending the stairs one careful, agonising, **creaking** step at a time, a hunched silhouette **shuffled** out from the darkness...*

Building Tension and Suspense

Can you remember all of the features of writing with tension and suspense?

- Detailed descriptions of the surroundings
- Clues to tantalise the reader (*a hunched silhouette*)
- Short, shocking sentences
- Subordinate and relative clauses to make the reader wait even longer
- Ellipses (...)
- Physical reactions from the character (*her heart was in her mouth*)
- Appealing to the reader's senses
- Exciting synonyms (*shuffled*)
- Similes and metaphors
- Onomatopoeia

