

# TEEN READ MONTH • 2012

## Lesson #3

# IT CAME FROM THE LIBRARY!



## LESSON THREE: THE POWER AND PLEASURE OF SUSPENSE

*“The suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.” — Oscar Wilde*

### THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT

No mystery, thriller, or tale of horror can be successful without artfully employing one of the most powerful literary devices: SUSPENSE. Shocks, gross-outs, and surprises have their place—who doesn't like the sudden, didn't-see-that-coming twist—but suspense offers so much more. *Oxford Dictionaries Online* defines *suspense* as “a state or feeling of excited or anxious uncertainty about what may happen.” And, as revealed in the famous Oscar Wilde quote, that uncertain anxiety you're feeling while reading a story or watching a film often has another quality: it's *pleasurable*.

### THE ELEMENTS OF SUSPENSE

Suspense is an important ingredient of any story according to writer Anne Marble in her essay *Foreshadowing and Suspense* ([www.writing-world.com/romance/suspense.shtml](http://www.writing-world.com/romance/suspense.shtml)).

Contributor “rachelanderson” on Quizlet offers five elements that are typical in thrillers and horror stories (<http://quizlet.com/7047676/elements-of-suspense-flash-cards>):

- **Ticking Clock:** a dramatic element that involves a time limit to increase suspense.
- **Huge Consequences:** decisions made by the characters that result in life or death situations.
- **Disabled Protagonist:** the protagonist is handicapped either mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually.
- **Isolation:** character(s) separated within a small group or as an individual.
- **Unknown Enemy:** the protagonist is unaware of individuals or other elements that are obstacles.

One other important element of suspense is **Audience Knowledge**, where the book reader or movie watcher is given information that is not shared with the protagonist. Movie director and master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock shared an example that goes something like this: A bomb going off is simply a 15-second surprise, but if the audience knows the bomb is there prior to its detonation, and the protagonists do not, that can deliver 15 minutes of suspense.

*Pick a novel or story of suspense that you enjoyed. Identify how the author used elements of suspense in the work. Was the author more successful using some elements than others?*

*Now think of a favorite movie of suspense. How were the elements used in the film? What do you think are the differences between conveying suspense in a book as opposed to in a movie?*

### THE SOUNDS OF SUSPENSE

In radio's early years, radio plays excited audiences with stories of danger and terror. You can listen to early twentieth century radio shows online at [www.mysteryshows.com](http://www.mysteryshows.com). With a group of friends, listen to one of the radio shows and then discuss the story you've heard.

- What do you know about the characters?
- From whose viewpoint is the story being told?
- Who is the hero?
- Is the hero likable, capable, and/or reliable?
- Who is the villain?
- Does the villain have any weaknesses?
- Can you relate to the villain's motivation?
- What are the obstacles that the hero must overcome to succeed?
- What was the most suspenseful part for you?
- Talk about the play's dialogue: does it include slang from that time period? What are some of the differences between the way people spoke then and how they speak now?
- Was the music dramatic or overly dramatic?
- What about the background noises—were they believable?



VISIT [NIE.NEWSOK.COM](http://NIE.NEWSOK.COM) FOR GUIDANCE ON MAKING YOUR OWN RADIO DRAMA. PLUS, FIND BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUNG ADULT MYSTERIES, AND A LINK TO A SOLVE-IT-YOURSELF MINI-MYSTERY!

Newspapers for this educational program provided by:



Oklahoma Department of Libraries

