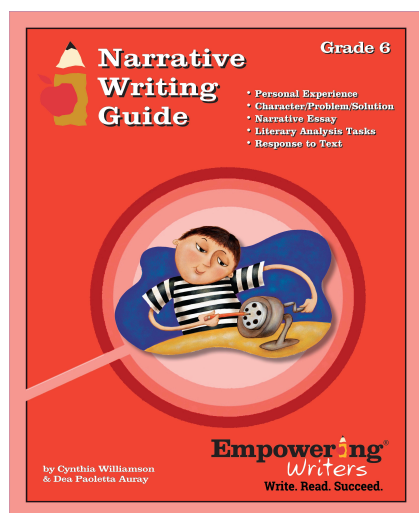




Grade 6 Narrative Writing Guide

Student Pages for Print or Projection

SECTION 4: Suspense



www.empoweringwriters.com
1-866-285-3516

Name _____

FIND THE SUSPENSE!

Authors can build suspense by raising story questions to make you wonder or worry. They can use word referents in order to hint at rather than name a revelation. Read each suspenseful segment. Underline the story questions in red.
Underline the use of word referents in blue.

1. Ben walked on unwilling legs toward the entrance of the brick fortress. The last place in the world he wanted to be was here. Shrill alarms shrieked from within the dreary structure. Despairing faces looked out at him from between the heavy metal bars in the windows. Ben didn't want to think about how unfair it was that his father was locked up in this heavily guarded building.
2. No, it wasn't my imagination. There actually was a mysterious beast staring out at me from the overgrown thicket of shrubs and grasses in my backyard. It had large, round eyes that seemed to emit a golden glow. Was it a bobcat? Could it be a fox or a small coyote? Was it hurt? Lost and frightened? Should I try to capture it, or just let it be?
3. It was opening night! From behind the heavy red velvet curtain, I peeked out at the audience. I spotted my mother sitting proudly in the front row. But where was my father? Hadn't he promised me he'd be there for my performance? I looked at my watch. Ten of seven. Okay, there was still time. Would he come rushing in at the last minute? Probably.
4. I'd only swum a few strokes when I felt something slimy wind its way around my leg. It stung! Suddenly, I noticed that I was surrounded by a writhing throng of tentacled terrors. I'd been warned about these marine menaces just yesterday.

Name _____

WORD REFERENCES (1)

Imagine that the author wants to build suspense before revealing a story critical element. One way to do this is by using word referents instead of immediately naming the character or object. Using word referents makes the reader wonder exactly what kind of character or object will be revealed. See how many different ways you can refer to each story critical character or object.

Ex. Story critical character: Owl

Adjective

feathered
wide-eyed
nighttime
winged

Noun

flyer
predator
stalker
hunter

Now, it's your turn:

Story critical character: **Zookeeper**

Adjective

Noun

Story critical object: **Backpack**

Adjective

Noun

Name _____

WORD REFERENCES (2)

Imagine that the author wants to build suspense before revealing a story critical character, or object. One way to do this is by using word referents instead of immediately naming the character or object. Using word referents makes the reader wonder exactly what kind of character or object will be revealed. See how many different ways you can refer to each story critical setting or object.

Story critical character: **Vampire**

Adjective

Noun

Story critical character: **A magician**

Adjective

Noun

Story critical object: **A lantern**

Adjective

Noun

Name _____

RED FLAG WORDS AND PHRASES

Authors use red flag words and phrases most commonly at the beginnings of paragraphs. They build suspense by grabbing the reader's attention and alerting the reader that something important is about to happen. Look at the list of red flag words and phrases below. Then, read the suspenseful segment. Using a caret (^), write in the red flag word or phrase of your choice in the sentence and use the proofreaders symbol to indicate that this is where a paragraph break belongs.

RED FLAG WORDS AND PHRASES

Suddenly	Just then	All of a sudden
A moment later	In the blink of an eye	Without warning
The next thing he knew	Instantly	To his surprise
(Add your own)		

Liam stepped into his tent and unrolled his sleeping bag. This was going to be great — a night alone in the wilderness. He knew he could do it! The sun set and a sliver of a silver moon rose in the sky. An owl started hooting in the darkness. Liam thought about the sharp talons and powerful beaks of these feathered carnivores. He was not scared — at least that's what he told himself. He heard something scurrying just outside his tent. What was that? He told himself that it was probably just a harmless little squirrel, but he couldn't help thinking it could just as likely be a raccoon, and weren't they known to carry rabies? He tried to erase the thought from his mind, but it was hard to feel entirely safe all alone in a flimsy little tent. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath of crisp, pine-scented air. Doing so made him feel much calmer and he began drifting off to sleep. The pounding of hooves on the hard earth jolted him wide awake. It was probably a deer, running to escape the jaws of a hungry bobcat or coyote. Of course, it might also be a moose and he'd heard stories about how aggressive those huge antlered critters could be — and what about that hungry bobcat or coyote? "Better not risk it," he told himself, bolting out of the tent and racing down the hill to his house, where he found the porch lights blazing and front door unlocked. "Welcome home," his mom said, handing him a cup of cocoa.

Name _____

THE MAGIC OF THREE

One way that authors build suspense is by using “the Magic of Three.” Read the suspenseful segment below:

- Underline *red flag words* or phrases in RED.
- Number and underline each *hint* in regular PENCIL.
- Underline the *main character’s* reactions to each hint in BLUE.
- Circle the *revelation*.

I’d been nervous about my first flight, but so far it hadn’t been bad at all. Takeoff had been quick and easy. Now, we were steadily cruising just above the clouds. The flight attendant handed out little bags of pretzels and served us drinks. The movie was about to begin.

Suddenly, the pilot’s voice filled the crowded cabin. “All passengers and flight attendants, please return to your seats and buckle your safety belts. The girl in the seat in front of me seemed really anxious. She asked her mother, “Are we going to crash?” Her mother said, “Of course not, Molly.”

Without warning, our plane hit a bump, then another and another. The girl up ahead screamed. It felt like we were inside a rapidly bouncing ball. Several tense seconds ticked by. I tightened my seatbelt, crossed my fingers and looked out the window but all I could see was the stark whiteness of clouds.

All of a sudden, the plane was flying smoothly again and the calm voice of the pilot came over the loudspeaker: “Sorry about that, folks. We hit a touch of turbulence. Nothing to worry about.” I felt a rush of relief and then I started wondering — what exactly was turbulence anyway? So I looked it up on my tablet and learned that it was just a pocket of rough air in the sky, most often caused by wind gusts. More importantly, I learned that in the whole history of aviation there was not a single case of turbulence leading to a plane crash. I shared the good news with the girl in the seat in front of me and that’s how I met my best friend, Molly.

Name _____

BUILDING SUSPENSE (1)

REMEMBER: • One of the best ways to hold the reader's interest is to add 3 or 4 suspenseful sentences building up to the main event.

- Raise story questions, use word referents, or the “Magic of Three.”

Read the revelation at the bottom of the page. Then, on the lines above the revelation, put the main character (Tony) in the setting (the ballpark) and write at least 3 or 4 suspense building sentences that **lead up to** the revelation! Have fun with this! ENTERTAIN! Stretch it out! Make the reader DYING to know what's next!

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Going...going...gone! Tony's home run soared out of the ballpark.

REMEMBER: • One of the best ways to hold the reader’s interest is to add 3 or 4 suspenseful sentences building up to the main event.

- Raise story questions, use word referents, or the “Magic of Three.”

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Name _____

BUILDING SUSPENSE - MAKE-IT-YOUR-OWN

REMEMBER: • One of the best ways to hold the reader's interest is to add 3 or 4 suspenseful sentences building up to the main event.

- Raise story questions, use word referents, or the “Magic of Three.”

First, write the revelation at the bottom of the page. Then, on the lines above the revelation, put the main character in the setting and write at least 3 or 4 suspense building sentences that **lead up to** the revelation! Have fun with this! ENTERTAIN! Stretch it out! Make the reader DYING to know what's next!

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

(Write your own revelation here)

Name _____

REVISION ACTIVITY (1) - SUSPENSE

Read this sentence. It gives away an exciting part of the story way too soon!

There is no suspense to catch the reader's attention! It is BORING!

The baby chicks had hatched!

Revise this by writing **suspenseful** sentences! Do not give it away too soon! Make the reader dying to find out. Tease the reader! You may use story questions, word referents, or the magic of three.

Revision:

Name _____

REVISION ACTIVITY (2) - SUSPENSE

Read this sentence. It gives away an exciting part of the story way too soon!

There is no suspense to catch the reader's attention! It is BORING!

My grandfather stepped out of the old pick-up truck.

Revise this by writing suspenseful sentences! Do not give it away too soon! Make the reader dying to find out. Tease the reader! You may use story questions, word referents, or the magic of three.

Revision:

Name _____

The First Storm of the Season

It was all over the news: the first hurricane of the season was headed our way! When I was a little kid, I found extreme weather like this exciting. From the safety of my family's cozy cottage, I remember peeking out from behind closed storm shutters to watch as howling winds sent palm fronds cartwheeling down slick, wet streets. I was unafraid but mesmerized by the awesome power of nature. That was before the super storm struck last fall. Now I knew the damage hurricanes could do.

It was at this time last year that Hurricane Manuela roared onto our tropical island. It tore the roof off our house and uprooted trees. Flood waters had damaged my school beyond repair and it had closed. My parents and I were living with my aunt, uncle and cousins while they rebuilt our cottage. Just a few days ago, we'd all been feeling hopeful — repairs on our home were almost completed and the school was ready to open again. But now another storm was on its way, capable of undoing all our hard work.

My home and my family history was on this tropical island in the southern Atlantic. I was proud to be a native of this beautiful place where powerful storms were a fact of life and we'd worked together to rebuild our communities for generations. But the storms seemed to be getting more powerful and I'd overheard my aunt and uncle talking about moving to a safer place. I wondered if my parents were pondering the same notion. It was definitely possible and the last thing in the world I wanted, but what could I do? It didn't seem fair that my whole future depended on a whim of the weather. I crossed my fingers that the storm would spare us.

"We'll prepare as best we can," said my uncle, with a heavy sigh. "And then, well, we'll just have to wait and see."

Dad, my uncle and I put sandbags around the foundation of the house to make it harder for flood waters to seep inside. We taped the windows and nailed the storm shutters closed. Since we would almost surely lose power, we stockpiled batteries for our flashlights as well as canned foods. I filled every bucket and bottle I could find with fresh water.

The hurricane was predicted to reach the island within an hour. We all crowded together in front of the TV to track its progress. The wind began to whistle and wheeze. I could hear waves crashing onto the nearby beach. My dad tried to lighten

(continued)

the mood by telling us about the antics of my uncle and he when they were boys my age. I listened politely, but I'd heard all of these stories before. So had my cousins.

Suddenly, there was a sharp crack of thunder and the skies released a drenching rain. The winds intensified. We heard something heavy crash into the side of our small, sturdy cottage. Later, we learned it was the trunk of a tree that had been completely uprooted in a neighbor's yard.

A moment later, the lights flickered and then went out completely. The TV screen faded to black and the ceiling fan ceased spinning. We'd lost electricity. With the storm shutters closed, the whole cottage was pitch black and the air was heavy with humidity. The next thing I knew, silence had settled over the landscape. The wind stopped howling and the rain slowed to a trickle.

"It's not over yet, Diego" my dad warned, before I could get my hopes up. It was the "eye" of the storm, a sea of calm in the turbulent core of a hurricane. We went outside and surveyed the damage. It was all good news. Shingles had been torn from the sides of my aunt and uncle's cottage but they could easily be replaced. Their garden would need to be replanted — another easy fix. Just down the flooded road, we could see that our recently rebuilt house and our new school were still standing. Others, however, were not so lucky.

The storm raged on throughout the night, but our family's good fortune continued. We pitched in to help our neighbors and rebuild our community. Of course, we knew it was only the first storm of the season and that another is probably just around the corner.

But we'll cope with it when it comes — taking assistance from our neighbors when we need it and lending a helping hand when we can. That's our way of life here on the tropical island that will always be my home.

Name _____

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: SUSPENSE

You've read the story The First Storm of the Season. The motivation of the main character and the conflict he faces adds to the story tension. Write an essay to explain how the author builds suspense throughout the story. Explain how this enhances the story. Provide evidence from the text to support your ideas.

THINK ABOUT IT: Is this a narrative or informational assignment?

Your teacher will walk you through the following STEPS:

1. Read, annotate, analyze, and summarize the story.
2. Fill in the following:
 - Who is the main **point of view character**? _____
 - What is the **setting**? _____
 - What is the main character's **motivation**? (What does she/he **want**?) _____

 - What is the **conflict**? (Who or what stands in the way of the main character's motivation?) _____
 - Fill in the summarizing framework that outlines the **plot**.

This story is about _____.

The problem /adventure experience _____.

The problem was solved, experience or adventure concluded when _____.

- What is the **theme**? _____
3. Consider the task:
 - What does the main character want?
 - What is standing in his way?
 - How does the author build suspense?
 - Why is this important to the story?
 4. Your teacher will **MODEL** this process with you. You may use the sentence starters to help you cite examples in the source text.

SENTENCE STARTERS:

- The author used suspense when ____.
- The reader wonders ____.
- Suspense enhances the story ____.
- This keeps our attention because ____.
- We read ____.
- This use of suspense ____.
- This makes the reader imagine ____.
- This is evidenced by ____.

Name _____

NARRATIVE EXTENSION TASK: SUSPENSE

You've read the story The First Storm of the Season. Use the Magic of Three, story questions and/or word referents to write a suspenseful segment about the aftermath of the storm.

THINK AND DISCUSS: Why do authors build suspense? How does suspense enhance a story?

RED FLAG WORDS AND PHRASES

Suddenly

All of a sudden

Just then

Without warning

In the blink of an eye

Out of nowhere

A moment later

Next thing they knew

The school that had recently been rebuilt was burning.

Revelation