

# **Alfred Hitchcock Elements of Suspense Unit**

Miguel Gonzales

Santa Maria High School

Grade Level: 9-10

Subject Area: English Literature

Project Summary: This project entails the elements of short stories and suspense. The master of suspenseful short stories could arguably be Alfred Hitchcock. In this unit, students are exposed to Hitchcock's elements of suspense as well as short stories that were produced on film by his TV series, Alfred Hitchcock presents. Students will be able to read and write suspenseful short stories.

Introduction:

*Project Description:* This project is done during the short story unit of our curriculum calendar. The students are given various worksheets that entail the different facets of a short story. After the students understand the fundamentals of a short story, they then learn about suspense in a story. Typically, suspense stories cover dramatic and horror films. These students are able to relate to the teacher the various horror and dramatic films that they enjoy watching. This usually captures the interest of the students. I explain to them that during this unit, we are going to read and study only suspenseful and horror short stories. The first lesson that is taught is the meaning of suspense. The students then learn what techniques are used to implement suspense in a short story. At this point, I introduce them to Alfred Hitchcock. Most students have never heard of him, which makes the lesson more intriguing. We read several articles that show Hitchcock's definition of suspense and the techniques he uses to achieve suspense. After we read the packet, "Elements of Suspense from Alfred Hitchcock", I show students a short clip of his classic movie Psycho from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). The students watch the famous shower scene twice; the first time to watch and the second time to analyze the effects and elements of suspense that are used in the clip. Afterwards, we read several short suspenseful stories. Most of the short stories read in class have been redone on film by Hitchcock's TV series, Alfred Hitchcock Presents. The students are able to watch the episode in class after they finish reading the short story. All of the episodes are played on [www.hulu.com](http://www.hulu.com). Students enjoy being able to watch what they read. This also helps the audiovisual learners.

*Educational Value:* The students are educated about the various aspects of a short story. They also become familiar with Alfred Hitchcock and the elements of suspense in a story. Students come to realize that it is the suspense that makes the reader cringe and not the blood and violence.

## Lesson Plans:

### **Lesson 1**

*Objective:* to have students recognize and understand the elements of short stories (literature) and suspense. Students will analyze the different facets that make a suspenseful story.

*Materials:* Worksheet on elements of literature, elements of suspense from Alfred Hitchcock, Internet, LCD Projector, and class textbooks.

*Intro:* Pass out *elements of literature* worksheet. Show the students that the definitions of the worksheet are in their textbooks.

*Independent Time:* Give students about 15 minutes to look up the vocabulary words in their textbooks. Make sure they also do the paragraph writing part of the worksheet.

*Guided Practice:* As a class, review all of the vocabulary words from the elements of literature worksheet. Afterwards, have students write down the word suspense. Ask students what they think suspense means. Later, define the word as a class. Ask the students what the elements of suspense are. Write down the different components of suspense.

*Literary Activity:* Introduce Alfred Hitchcock to the class. Give a brief history and pass out the packet of Elements of Suspense by Alfred Hitchcock. Read the packet as a class and review the highlighted elements. Afterwards, show a clip of Psycho. Ask the class to identify the elements of suspense in the movie clip.

*Reading Activity:* After showing the movie clip, have students read the story A Man With A Problem. Afterwards, show the TV episode of the story from the series Alfred Hitchcock Presents: A Man With A Problem.

### **Lesson 2**

*Objective:* To read the story The Right Kind of House and identify the elements of suspense. The students will also participate in a literary writing activity.

*Intro.:* Have students read the story, The Right Kind of House by Henry Slesar. Remind students that after the reading they will watch the TV episode from Alfred Hitchcock Presents.

*Writing Activity:* After reading and analyzing the story as a class, have students answer the questions on the last page of the packet. Next, have students re-write the ending of the story. Read the edited endings out loud in class.

*Media:* Have students watch the TV episode. After, have them compare and contrast the TV show and the written story. Ask what modern actors they would have play the roles if they were to remake the TV episode today.

### **Lesson 3**

*Objective:* To help students write their own suspenseful story using the elements of literature and techniques learned from Alfred Hitchcock.

*Intro.:* Have students help you make a list of all of the short suspenseful stories read in class. There should be around 10 stories. After making the list, have students write down the different components of suspense of each story. Have a discussion about each one.

*Independent:* Pass out the template of “how to write a scary story”. Have students answer the questions on the template. Afterwards, have students start writing a rough draft of their short suspenseful story. *Modification (if applicable):* Remind the students that this is not only an assignment, but also a contest. The best short story will win a prize. The top two winners will also have their stories submitted to mystery magazine, sponsored by the Alfred Hitchcock franchise.

### **Student Impact:**

Students learn the elements of a story, the elements of suspense, and how to write a suspenseful story. Students also learn about Alfred Hitchcock and his techniques to achieve suspense. Students are exposed to different styles of writing, plot strategies, and character development. Such recognition is part of the CAHSEE exam and state standards.

### **Assessment:**

There are various tools that are used to measure the impact of student learning. One is student participation. If the students are enthused and participate in the class discussion, they are engaged. Another tool is short quizzes. After some of the short stories, quizzes

are given to check for understanding. In addition, study guide worksheets and writing activities compliment most of the stories.

Standards:

Reading 3.3 – Analyze interactions between main and subordinate characters in a literary text and explain the way those interactions affect the plot.

Reading 3.6 – Analyze and trace an author’s development of time and sequence, including the use of complex literary devices.

Writing Application 2.2 – Response to literature

Writing Application 2.1 – Narrative

Materials/Budget:

*Some of the equipment used for this project:*

Computer/Internet – youtube.com, hulu.com, themysteryplace.com

DVD Collection and Books – Alfred Hitchcock’s Supernatural Tales of Terror and Suspense (Book; 1 copy); Alfred Hitchcock Presents Stories not for the Nervous (Book; 1 copy); Alfred Hitchcock’s Tales for Late Night (1 copy; Book); Alfred Hitchcock Presents: Seasons 1-4 (DVD); Alfred Hitchcock Masterpiece Collection of Movies (DVD).

## Elements of a Story

**Part 1**-- Use the back of your textbook (the blue literary terms section) to define the following terms.

1. Plot-
2. Setting-
3. Theme-
4. Conflict-
  - a. internal-
  - b. external-
5. Protagonist-
6. Antagonist-
7. Climax-
8. Resolution-
9. Moral-
10. Point-of-View-
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> person-
  - b. 3<sup>rd</sup> person-
  - c. limited-
  - d. omniscient-

### **Part 2-**

In a paragraph on the back, write about a movie that you have seen recently. Name the protagonist, antagonist, and main conflict. What type of conflict would you say it is? Think of a theme that fits this movie, and then end with a possible moral for the story.



# ELEMENTS OF SUSPENSE

---

On Why Hitchcock Still Can Make You Sit on the Edge of Your Seat

**Written by group 8:**

Jens Frederiksen, Jakob Thunbo Pedersen  
Maja Haastrup, Hanne Carden  
Morten Søndergaard and Simon Larsen  
Date: December 13, 2003

**Aalborg University, Esbjerg – Copenhagen**

5th semester  
Film Informatics, Medialogy  
Supervisor: Marina Graca  
Word count: 2.498

# 1. What is Suspense?

---

Suspense is today such an incorporated element of movies that it for many seems second hand, but what elements are needed to create a good suspense scene? It is easy to spot a non-working suspense scene, but what are the key elements that make a good scene become a masterpiece?

It is impossible to talk about suspense without mentioning Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980). He was the master of the technique. Although Hitchcock was not the first to use suspense in movies he had in the “golden era” of his career (from the mid 50s to the late 60s) developed a template for implementing suspense that worked so well that it is still revered as the best examples of the use of suspense. (Sinyard, 1994, p. 147)



Image 1: The Master of Suspense; Alfred Hitchcock.

In Hitchcock's own words: “There is a clear difference between *surprise* and *suspense* [...]. We are sitting here and having an innocent conversation. Let us assume that there is a bomb under this table between us. [...] suddenly there is a loud boom and the bomb goes off. The audience is *surprised*, but before this surprise they have only seen a very ordinary scene without any significance. Let us instead look at *suspense* scene. The bomb is under the table and the audience is aware of this

because they have seen the anarchist plant it there. They also know that the bomb will go off at one o'clock, and up on the wall is a clock showing that the time is now quarter to one [...]. In the first scene we have given the audience 15 seconds of surprise [...] but in the last scene we have given them fifteen minutes of suspense." (Truffaut 1973, p. 52-53)<sup>1</sup>. The whole scene rests on this difference in knowledge and the audience's fear on behalf of the unknowing characters.

In short: Suspense is a dramaturgy technique that plays of the difference in knowledge between the audience and the characters on the screen. (Schmidt, 1995, p. 143) It often revolves around subjects like; will the hero reach the right place and save the heroine before it is too late? Will the bomb expert defuse the bomb before it goes off? Will the detective see the sinister figure waiting in the alley? (Schepeleern, 1995, p. 495)

---

<sup>1</sup> A free translation from the Danish text.

## 2. Classic Suspense Scenes

---

Many of the so-called *classic* suspense films were made by Hitchcock in the period spanning from the early 40s to the mid 60s including films such as “Shadow of a Doubt” (1943), “Spellbound” (1945), “Rope” (1948), “Dial M for Murder” (1954), “Rear Window” (1954), “North by Northwest” (1959), “Psycho” (1960), “The Birds” (1963) and “Marnie” (1964).

The focus of this essay lies on the films “Rear Window”, “Psycho” and “The Birds”, as these films excel in their extensive use of the suspense techniques. Throughout our examination and describes of the three films we will describe how classic suspense is used and how it works.

### 2.1. Rear Window

“Rear Window” from 1954 contains some of Hitchcock’s most easily recognizable suspense elements.

It is the story of the newspaper photographer Jeff (James Stewart) who has broken his leg. Confined to a wheelchair he spends the hot summer days and nights spying on his neighbors. He is spending so much time looking out the windows that he by chance sees that the man across the courtyard, Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr), allegedly kills his wife. But how does he prove it? Stella (Thelma Ritter), his nurse, and his beautiful girlfriend Lisa (Grace Kelly) reluctantly agree to help him with the investigation.

#### 2.1.1. Searching for Evidence

In one of the scenes<sup>2</sup> they lure Mr. Thorwald out of the apartment with a prank phone call, and Lisa and Stella goes down into the courtyard digging up the rose bed in search of the evidence. They find nothing and, much against their plans, Lisa enters Thorwald’s apartment by the fire escape and immediately starts to search there for evidence.

Stella rushed back to Jeff’s apartment. Jeff starts to get anxious right away. This was not what he planned and Thorwald could return every minute. Stella suggests that they call to Thorwald’s apartment when they see him return, and hopefully giving Lisa time enough to get out.

---

<sup>2</sup> Approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes into the film.

But “Miss Lonelyheart”, in the apartment below Thorwald’s seems to be determined to commit suicide. Jeff and Stella’s attention instead shifts to her and they decided to call up the police and tell them of Miss Lonelyheart’s tragic attempt to end her own life. While on the phone with the police Jeff and Stella all too late realize that Thorwald is returning and he is already outside his apartment. There is no time to warn Lisa. She is on her own.

### 2.1.2. The Tension Builds Up

One trick that Hitchcock implemented with great success in “Rear Window” was to have the camera confined within Jeff’s apartment. The camera has, so to speak, also broken its legs and is unable to leave Jeff’s side. This proves to be one of the key elements in the scene described above. Jeff is sitting across the courtyard and so are we, the viewer.



Image 2: James Stewart looking out over the courtyard as Grace Kelly tries to reason with him.

All through the scene the framing of the images is getting closer and closer. In the beginning where there is little danger we see Jeff in a total shot and Lisa and Stella in an equally large framing. When Thorwald is returning the framing has slowly tighten more and more on both Lisa and Jeff. In the shot where Thorwald surprises Lisa, Jeff is shown in very tight close-up, and slightly from below frog perspective shot to intensify the feeling of horror he must feel seeing the love of his life in a

brawl with a presume murderer. And there is absolutely nothing he can do about it. These close-ups make the atmosphere more and more intensive.

It is one of Hitchcock's trademark techniques. Making the audience relive the agony and pain of the characters portrayed on screen. And as soon as the police arrives the frame is much wider again, and we can relax. The danger is over.

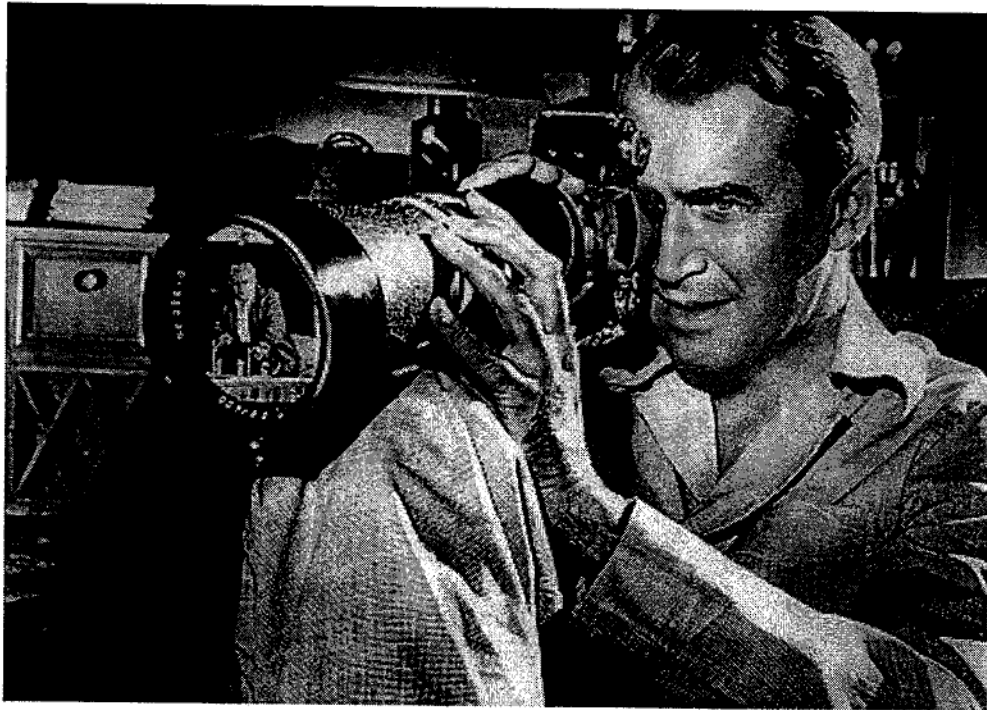


Image 3: James Stewart as the Peeping Tom in Rear Window and Raymond Burr (reflected in the camera lens) as the presumed murderer.

### 2.1.3. A Pure Film

Hitchcock tried to make what he called a “pure film” with “Rear Window” (Sinyard, 1994, p. 84) by using montage editing<sup>3</sup>. James Stewart shows his great acting talent by downplaying his horror. His facial expression is hardly changing throughout the scene, but everyone in the audience feels the horror because of the crosscutting between close-ups of his face and the brawl at Thorwald's apartment. The images express little by themselves but edited together they form a powerful synergy (Truffaut, 1973, p. 163).

<sup>3</sup> The Russian film director Sergei M. Eisenstein (1898-1948) is generally recognized as the inventor of the montage editing technique Hitchcock here is talking about and it is therefore often referred to as Russian montage (Schepele, 1995, p. 350).

The pace of the editing also becomes much faster as the scene progresses. First we see Jeff surveying the two women as they dig through the flowerbed. The cuts between the courtyard and Jeff's apartment are flowing at a relative slow pace. But as the tension intensifies the crosscutting becomes quicker and quicker, and again abruptly slows down when the police arrives.

## 2.2. Psycho

The story of Psycho is well known and revolves around Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) who in a moment of poor judgment decides to steal money from her work. She is running scared and drives out of town and checks into Bates Motel. The decision proves to be fatal, because only about 45 minutes into the film, Marion is killed and the leading character in the film shifts from her to Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) and his struggle with his long dead mother.

### 2.2.1. The Strange Behavior of Norman Bates



Image 4: Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) and Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) talks as she arrives at Bates Motel.

The suspense build-up to the fatal shower scene starts very early with the dinner scene in Norman's parlor behind his office. Marion does not sense it, but there is not doubt in the audience's mind that there is something very wrong with Norman. It is unclear what the problem is, but the dialogue with its eerie silences and strange subjects give evidence that Norman have not talked with anyone except his mother for a long time.

### 2.2.2. Taking a Shower

Marion starts her almost ritual cleaning, and the only sound we hear is the sound of the running water. The door opens and a dark figure comes in. The shower curtain is ripped away and the dark figure is holding a knife and starts stabbing Marion. Bernard Herrmann's music enters with screaming violins that is almost deafening. The speed of the editing also erupts in a frantic pace. None of the cuts is more than a second long, and the brutality of the ongoing slaughter is intensified.



Image 5: Janet Leigh in the famous shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho".

You never actually see the knife cut Marion but still it is revered as one of the most brutal murder scenes ever (Truffaut, 1973, p. 209). Hitchcock clearly plays of the audience's imagination; both in term of the sheer shock of seen Marion killed but also because of the different elements (the music, the framing and the editing) combined intensify the shock (Sinyard, 1994, p. 113).

The slow death of Marion is also reflected in the editing. Her life is slowly fading as the blood runs down the drain, and now there are only a few cuts between the shots. The camera is slowly moving away from the close-up of Marion's eye, underlining the vanishing signs of life.

## 2.3. The Birds

In 1963 Hitchcock made "The Birds" which again underlined his ability to incorporate suspense in movies. But whereas "Psycho" involved a very interpersonal struggle, "The Birds" is much more a "mankind-versus-nature" film (Sinyard, 1994, p. 116). The birds in the quite coastal town of

Bodega Bay have run amok for no apparent reason, and Mitch Brenner (Rod Taylor) and his new love interest Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) is caught in the middle of the mayhem.

### 2.3.1. The Birds are Coming

On request of the very worried grandmother Lydia Brenner (Jessica Tandy) Melanie agrees to pick up the children from school<sup>4</sup>. At the school she sits outside waiting for the class to end. Little does she know that the birds are gathering behind her on the school's playground.

First we see Melanie sitting down in a total shot establishing the scene showing that she is indeed sitting just next to the school. The framing of Melanie cuts to a medium shot and crosscutting between her and the climbing frame in the background. As the scene progresses and more birds are gathering on the climbing frame the crosscutting becomes faster and the framing of Melanie goes into a close-up of her face.

The framing of the climbing frame with the birds remains in a medium shot. There is no need to exaggerate the danger with the framing (Schmidt, 1995, p. 144). You, as the audience, already know, from previous scenes, what the birds are capable of.



Image 6: The Birds are coming as Melanie is sitting unaware waiting outside the school.

Melanie looks up once in a while, but does not see the birds flying in, and it makes the tension so much higher. When Melanie finally realizes that the birds are behind her, her facial expression is not much changed and she does not say a sound. It would also become too overdramatic if she did (Schmidt, 1995, p. 144). When the children realize the horror the shot goes to a wide shot, as the

<sup>4</sup> The scene starts approximately 1 hour and 9 minutes into the film.

rage of the birds is unleashed. The wide shot also underlines the helplessness of Melanie and the children. There is nowhere to hide.



**Image 7: Tippi Hedren and the children running from the onslaught of the birds in the film bearing their name.**

## 3. Comparing the Structure

---

The structure of the three scenes analyzed herein follows a very similar path. They all have more or less the same build-up; the same kind of editing, the same gap of knowledge between audience and the characters, and more or less the same camera angles.

### 3.1. The Elements

These elements are only the most fundamental, but combined they can take a normal scene and make it into a much more audience participant scene.

#### 3.1.1. Always let the audience know more than the characters on the screen

This is the most important of all the elements required to create a believable suspense scene. In the case of the scene from "Rear Window" the audience knows just as much as James Stewart does. He on the other hand knows more than Grace Kelly. The audience and Stewart are one and the same. The audience is personified in Stewart's role and vice versa.

In "Psycho" you only have a very short warning before Anthony Perkins comes and slaughters Janet Leigh in the shower, but the suspense was built up in the many scenes before. You could not help but to think that there was something wrong with Norman Bates.

Comparing the three different scenes analyzed, "The Birds" have the longest build up. You know for ages that the birds are starting to gather at the school. It is a very long and unpleasant scene, because of the difference in knowledge between audience and characters.

#### 3.1.2. The editing must flow with the action

This is true for all the scenes analyzed. The more intense the action is on the screen the faster and more frantic the editing has to be. Likewise the pace should slow down, as the scene is resolved, giving the audience time to breath and relax and take in the action that has just occurred.

### **3.1.3. The framing of the shots**

As with the editing, all the scenes follow the same principles considering the framing. There is a big difference between using total, medium and close-up shots. With the right editing making the framing closer and closer, the almost claustrophobic feeling of the close-up becomes very apparent.

### **3.1.4. Make the audience have compassion for the characters on the screen**

It is a fundamental flaw in trying to create suspense in a film, if there is no compassion of the characters from the audience (Hitchcock, 1995, p. 114). No matter what they have done you have to make them likable, be that a peeping tom, a thief, a murderer or the like. Otherwise the audience will not sit in agonizing worry, but instead just wait for the enviable fate of the unlikable characters.

## **3.2. Epilogue**

Hitchcock's entire body of films, not only the ones analyzed herein, have proven themselves so well crafted in terms of building a believable suspense, that even though the movies were made almost 50 years ago they prove that Hitchcock can still make you sit on the edge of your seat shouting "Look behind you!".

Written by:

---

Hanne Carden  
Student #: 20023185

---

Maja Haastrup  
Student #: 20023292

---

Morten Søndergaard  
Student #: 20023295

---

Jakob Thunbo Pedersen  
Student #: 20020048

---

Jens Frederiksen  
Student #: 20023283

---

Simon Larsen  
Student #: 20030039

## MAN WITH A PROBLEM

Donald Honig

OFFICIALLY NOTED

With dull curiosity he watched the crowds gathering far below on the sidewalk. They had become a sea of bobbing upturned faces. It was rapidly increasing in size, swelling out into the street. The hurrying newcomers moved with insect-like briskness, drawn into the rest as if by magnetic tides. The traffic was beginning to back up with a cacophony of agitated horn sounds. It all looked very tiny and mysterious and incredible from twenty-six stories up. The sounds that reached him were faint, but the excitement in them unmistakable.

He was paying little heed to the startled, gasping faces that kept popping in and out of the window to gape or plead. First it had been a bellhop, staring with a disapproving look, crinkling his nose; then an elevator operator who in a hard gravelly voice had demanded to know what this was all about.

He looked at the elevator operator's face. "What do you think it is all about?" he asked calmly.

"You gonna jump?" the man asked, intrigued.

"Go away," the man on the ledge said irascibly and looked down at the streets. The traffic was still flowing quietly, undisturbed; he had not been noticed yet.

"You won't walk away from a jump like that," the elevator man growled as his head ducked in.

A moment later, the head of the assistant manager poked through the window, the curtains flying around his distinguished, clean-shaven, rather indignant face.

"I beg your pardon," the assistant manager said.

The man waved him away.

"You're contemplating a very foolish thing," the assistant manager said, smug and comfortable in what he knew was unassailable logic.

The manager finally appeared, a fat red face that first looked down and then looked over at the man standing on the ledge, contemplating him for a moment.

"What are you doing out there?" the manager asked.

"I'm going to jump."

"Who are you? What's your name?"

"Carl Adams. And the reason why I'm doing this does not concern you."

"Think what you're doing, man," the manager said, his double chin trembling as he spoke, the strain of leaning forward out the window turning his face even redder.

"I've thought about it. Now go away and leave me alone."

The ledge was narrow, about eighteen inches in width. He stood between two windows, but there was no chance of reaching him from either of the windows. His back was against the wall, the bright sun falling full upon him. He had left his jacket inside. His white shirt was open at the throat and he quite resembled a figure prepared for execution.

Successive heads kept poking through the window. They spoke quietly to him, addressing him as Mr. Adams. Some spoke to him condescendingly, as though they had already convinced themselves he was a paranoid. They identified themselves as a physician, various hotel officials, a clergyman.

"Why not come in and talk it over?" the clergyman asked gently.

"There's nothing left to say," Adams said.

"Do you want me to come out and guide you back through the window?"

"If you or anyone else steps out," Adams said tersely, "so help me I'll jump."

"Can't you tell us your problem?"

"No."

"How can we help you then?"

"You can't. Go away."

For a while no one came to the window. And then a policeman's head popped out, looking at him for a moment, rather cynically.

"Hey, fella," the policeman said.

Adams looked at him, studying his face. "What do you want?" he asked.

"They called me up from downstairs. Said there's a guy up here threatening to take a dive. You're not really going to jump, are you?"

"Yes."

"What do you want to do that for?"

"It's my nature to do spectacular things."

"Hey, you got a sense of humor," the policeman said. He pushed his cap back on his head, sitting out on the window sill. "I like that. Want a cigarette?"

"No," Adams said.

The policeman shook a cigarette loose from his pack and lighted it. He inhaled deeply, expelling the smoke out into the sunshine where the wind snapped it up. "It's sure a pretty day, you know?"

"A good day to die," Adams said, looking at him.

"You're pretty morbid, fella. You got a family?"

"No. Do you?"

"I've got a wife."

"Well I have no one."

"That's too bad."

"Yes," Adams said. It wasn't so long ago that I did have a family, he thought. Only yesterday in fact. He had left the house in the morning to go to work and Karen had said good-by to him at the door (not kissed him, like she used to do; theirs was a kissless marriage now, but she was still his wife, he still loved only her, then and forever, would never give her the divorce, remained firm about that even though she said she would leave him eventually). And then he had come home at six o'clock and there was no wife any more, no love, nothing, only the empty bottle of sleeping pills and the note and the silent apartment . . . and Karen's body lying on the couch.

She had left the note on his pillow. It was written neatly, thoughtfully, explaining. Steve had told her he could not go away with her. Steve had deceived her. (It was that open, that blunt and brusque; she could mention Steve like that and he would know—as he had known for months now. Once he had even seen them together in a

neighborhood cabaret. There had been nothing surreptitious about it on her part. She told him that their marriage was over, spoke freely of Steve to him.)

He had gone out that night and walked the streets until after midnight, come back to the house and gone to sleep. He awoke that morning knowing immediately that his mind had been made up, that he was going to do this which he was now planning. He walked to this part of town and checked into the hotel, asking for a room near the top. He knew that what would happen after that would happen automatically, as a matter of course.

The streets were black with gaping, motionless, curious people now. The police had forced the throngs back, creating a great clearing directly below, should he decide to jump. He could see the firemen standing with their canvas life-net that looked like a round black pancake, a red circle painted in the center, but he knew that that could do nothing for a body hurtling twenty-six floors. There was no way his would-be rescuers could get at him. The fire ladders did not reach that high. A cornice protruding directly above him from the roof precluded any rescue attempts from that quarter.

"This is useless, senseless," a man was saying to him, his head leaning out of the window.

"You might think so," Adams said.

"Look, I'm a doctor," the man said earnestly. "I can help you."

"In which ward?"

"No wards, Mr. Adams. I promise you."

"It's too late now."

"If you jump then it will be too late. Now there's still time."

"You'd better go and attend to somebody who needs you, doctor. I don't need you."

The doctor disappeared. Adams stared critically down at the crowds. Already he had the strange, singular feeling of apartness, the nearness of death having established the gulf between him and other men. He was different now, apart and alone. All those people down there waiting, waiting. They'll see something all right, he thought. And those men in the room, he could hear them jabbering, plotting, scheming, figuring ways of seducing his mind, probably making frantic phone calls to experts on the subject of suicide.

He looked around, a face was out the window, staring at him. It was the clergyman again, a round, concerned, sincere face.

"Is there anything we can do for you?" the clergyman asked.

"No," he said.

"Do you want to come in now?"

"You're wasting your time, father."

"I'm not wasting my time."

"Yes you are. I'm not coming in."

"Do you want us to leave you alone to think?"

"Do as you please."

The clergyman's head disappeared. He was alone again. He watched the clock, a soft amusement in his eyes now. The height did not bother him any longer, or he had when he had first stepped out onto the ledge. He felt close to the buildings that soared around him.

He wondered what intricate methods of rescue they were planning. Ropes, ladders, nets, dangling chairs. They would have to be very careful, he knew, because they were never quite certain what his state of mind was.

The policeman reappeared. Adams knew he would. He had been more responsive to him than any of the others and so the policeman would try again.

"You know, Adams," the officer said, sitting out on the window sill again, casually, "in a way you're doing me a favor."

"How's that?"

"Well, normally I'd be down there directing traffic. But because of you I'm up here taking it easy."

"Is that so?"

"That's so."

"You might just as well be up here. That traffic isn't moving anyway."

The policeman laughed. "That's right," he said. "Those people down there," he said with a gesture, "are expecting you to jump. They're looking forward to it."

Adams looked at him. "Looking forward to it?"

"Sure. They've made up their minds that you're going to jump and they want to see it. You going to disappoint them?"

Adams looked down, his eyes sweeping over the blocks and blocks of clustered people.

"You can't hear them up here," the policeman said, "but they're yelling for you to jump."

"Are they?"

"Uh-huh. They feel you owe them that for making them stand around here all afternoon."

"They're like a pack of hungry wolves," Adams said.

"That's right. Why give up your life just so they can have a thrill?" The policeman watched Adams' face, thought he detected a flicker of uncertainty. "Come on in," he said in a low, cajoling voice. "The hell with all those people."

"Maybe you're right," Adams said.

"Sure."

Adams wavered, his back coming away from the wall for a moment, then he fell back, covering his eyes for a second.

"What's the matter?" the policeman asked.

"I guess I'm a bit dizzy. Maybe you'd better give me a hand."

The policeman looked across the street, there were news photographers on the roof there, their cameras poised. It would make quite a picture for the morning papers.

"All right," the policeman said. "Hold on."

The crowd sent up a roar of thrill and terror when they saw the policeman climb out of the window and stand on the ledge, a few feet from the immobile man in the white shirt. They watched him edge along, carefully extending his hand.

Adams reached his hand toward the policeman's.

"I knew you would come up eventually," Adams said. "That's why I chose this place."

"What?" the policeman said, trying to maintain his balance on the narrow ledge.

"My name isn't Adams, Steve. Karen was my wife. Do you know that last night she . . ."

The terror spread over the policeman's face as he tried to draw back, but his hand was locked in the other's, and then there was a sudden lunge and sickening thrust and twist and as he began to topple softly out into space, toward the rising roar from the crowd, the last conscious thing he felt was the firm, hard hand gripping his like a vise.

Several episodes of "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" were based on Henry Slesar's stories. If the show is rerun in your area, watch for the episode based on the story below.

Do you like mystery stories? When you watch a mystery unfolding in a movie or a TV show, do you try to solve it? In the mystery story that follows, Mr. Waterbury wants very much to buy a particular house. As you read, ask yourself why he wants the house so much—and why the owner has set the price so high.

## The Right Kind of House

Henry Slesar

The automobile that was stopping in front of Aaron Hacker's real estate office had a New York license plate. Aaron didn't need to see the white rectangle to know that its owner was new to the elm-shaded streets of Ivy Corners. It was a red convertible; there was nothing else like it in town.

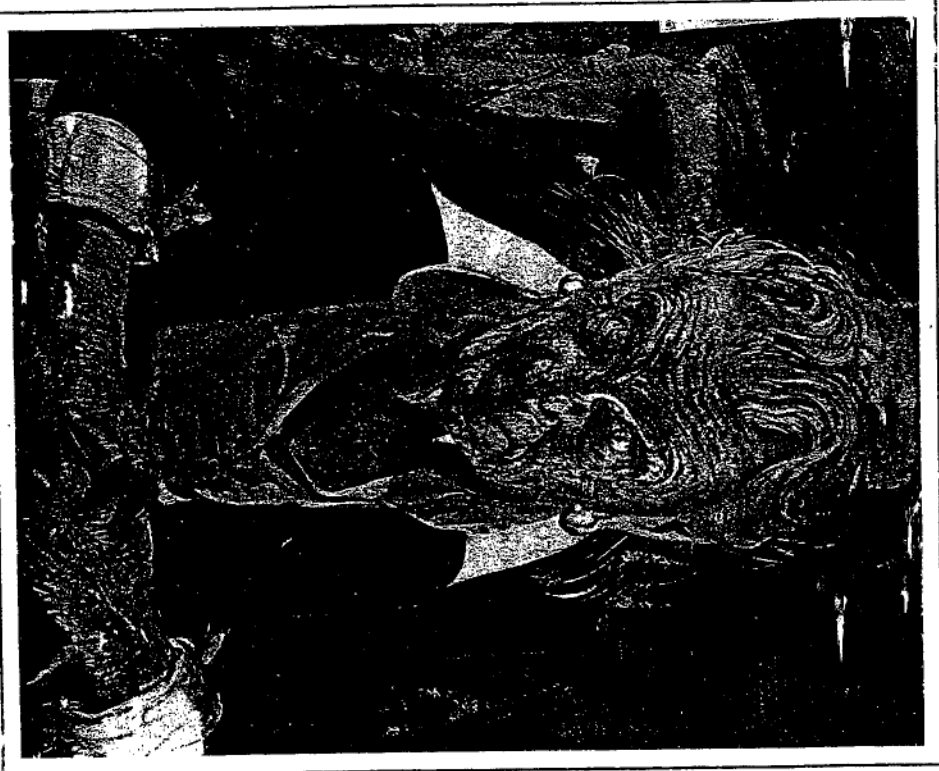
The man got out of the car.

"Sally," Hacker said to the bored young lady at the only other desk. There was a paperbound book propped in her typewriter, and she was chewing something dreamily.

"Yes, Mr. Hacker?"

"Seems to be a customer. Think we oughta look busy?" He put the question mildly.

"Sure, Mr. Hacker!" She smiled brightly, removed the book, and slipped a blank sheet of paper into the machine. "What shall I type?"



Jerome Wilkin, *Elvina Alderman*, 1986, oil on canvas  
Collection of Georgia and Nathan Kramer, White Plains, New York

"Anything, anything!" Aaron scowled.

It looked like a customer, all right. The man was heading straight for the glass door, and there was a folded newspaper in his right hand. Aaron described him later as heavy-set. Actually, he was fat. He wore a colorless suit of lightweight material, and the perspiration had soaked clean through the fabric to leave large, damp circles around his arms. He might have been fifty, but he had all his hair, and it was dark and curly. The skin of his face was flushed<sup>1</sup> and hot, but the narrow eyes remained clear and frosty-cold.

He came through the doorway, glanced toward the rattling sound of the office typewriter, and then nodded at Aaron.

"Mr. Hacker?"

"Yes, sir," Aaron smiled. "What can I do for you?" The fat man waved the newspaper. "I looked you up in the real estate section."

"Yep. Take an ad every week. I use the *Times*, too, now and then. Lot of city people interested in a town like ours. Mr.—"

"Waterbury," the man said. He plucked a white cloth out of his pocket and mopped his face. "Hot today."

"Unusually hot," Aaron answered. "Doesn't often get so hot in our town. Mean temperature's around seventy-eight in the summer. We got the lake, you know. Isn't that right, Sally?" The girl was too absorbed to hear him. "Well. Won't you sit down, Mr. Waterbury?"

"Thank you." The fat man took the proffered chair, and sighed. "I've been driving around. Thought

I'd look the place over before I came here. Nice little town."

"Yes, we like it. Cigar?" He opened a box on his desk.

"No, thank you. I really don't have much time, Mr. Hacker. Suppose we get right down to business."

"Suits me, Mr. Waterbury." He looked toward the clacking noise and frowned. "*Sally*!"

"Yes, Mr. Hacker?"

"Cut out the darn racket."

"Yes, Mr. Hacker." She put her hands in her lap, and stared at the meaningless jumble of letters she had drummed on the paper.

"Now, then," Aaron said. "Was there any place in particular you were interested in, Mr. Waterbury?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. There was a house at the edge of town, across the way from an old building. Don't know what kind of building—deserted."

"Ice-house,"<sup>3</sup> Aaron said. "Was it a house with pillars?"

"Yes. That's the place. Do you have it listed? I thought I saw a 'for sale' sign, but I wasn't sure."

Aaron shook his head, and chuckled dryly. "Yep, we got it listed all right." He flipped over a loose-leaf book, and pointed to a typewritten sheet. "You won't be interested for long."

"Why not?"

He turned the book around. "Read it for yourself." The fat man did so.

AUTHENTIC COLONIAL. 8 rooms, two baths, automatic oil furnace, large porches, trees and shrubbery. Near shopping, schools. \$175,000.

<sup>1</sup>flushed: red

<sup>3</sup>ice-house: warehouse where ice was stored in the days

"Still interested?"

The man stirred uncomfortably. "Why not? Something wrong with it?"

"Well," Aaron scratched his temple. "If you really like this town, Mr. Waterbury—I mean, if you really want to settle here, I got any number of places that'd suit you better."

"Now, just a minute!" The fat man looked indignant. "What do you call this? I'm asking you about this colonial house. You want to sell it, or don't you?"

"Do I?" Aaron chuckled. "Mister, I've had that property on my hands for five years. There's nothing I'd rather collect a commission<sup>5</sup> on only my luck just ain't that good."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you won't buy. That's what I mean. I keep the listing on my books just for the sake of old Sadie Grimes. Otherwise, I wouldn't waste the space. Believe me."

"I don't get you."

"Then let me explain." He took out a cigar, but just to roll it in his fingers. "Old Mrs. Grimes put her place up for sale five years ago, when her son died. She gave me the job of selling it. I didn't want the job—no, sir. I told her that to her face. The old place just ain't worth the kind of money she's asking. I mean, heck! The old place ain't even worth *fifty thousand!*"

The fat man swallowed. "Fifty? And she wants one-seventy-five?"

"That's right. Don't ask me why. It's a real old house. Oh, I don't mean one of those solid-as-a-rock

old houses. I mean *old*. Never been de-termed.<sup>5</sup> Some of the beams will be going in the next couple of years. Basement's full of water half the time. Upper floor leans to the right about nine inches. And the grounds are a mess."

"Then why does she ask so much?"

Aaron shrugged. "Don't ask me. Sentiment, maybe. Been in her family since the Revolution, something like that."

The fat man studied the floor. "That's too bad," he said. "Too bad!" He looked up at Aaron, and smiled sheepishly. "And I kinda liked the place. It was—I don't know how to explain it—the *right* kind of house."

"I know what you mean. It's a friendly old place. A good buy at fifty thousand. But one-seventy-five?" He laughed. "I think I know Sadie's reasoning, though. You see, she doesn't have much money. Her son was supporting her, doing well in the city. Then he died, and she knew that it was sensible to sell. But she couldn't bring herself to part with the old place. So she put a price tag so big that *nobody* would come near it. That eased her conscience." He shook his head sadly. "It's a strange world, ain't it?"

"Yes," Waterbury said distantly.

Then he stood up. "Tell you what, Mr. Hacker. Suppose I drive out to see Mrs. Grimes? Suppose I talk to her about it, get her to change her price."

"You're fooling yourself, Mr. Waterbury, I've been trying for five years."

"Who knows? Maybe if somebody *else* tried—" Aaron Hacker spread his palms. "Who knows, it's right. It's a strange world, Mr. Waterbury. If you're

<sup>5</sup>commission. *from*

<sup>5</sup>de-termed: had the termites (wood-eating insects)

willing to go to the trouble, I'll be only too happy to lend a hand."

"Good. Then I'll leave now."

"Fine! You just let me ring Sadie Grimes. I'll tell her you're on your way."

Waterbury drove slowly through the quiet streets. The shade trees that lined the avenues cast peaceful dappled shadows on the hood of the convertible. The powerful motor beneath it operated in whispers, so he could hear the fitful chirpings of the birds overhead.

He reached the home of Sadie Grimes without once passing another moving vehicle. He parked his car beside the rotted picket fence that faced the house like a row of disorderly sentries.

The lawn was a jungle of weeds and crabgrass, and the columns that rose from the front porch were entwined with creepers.<sup>7</sup>

There was a hand knocker on the door. He pumped it twice.

The woman who responded was short and plump. Her white hair was vaguely purple in spots, and the lines in her face descended downward toward her small, stubborn chin. She wore a heavy wool cardigan,<sup>8</sup> despite the heat.

"You must be Mr. Waterbury," she said. "Aaron Hacker said you were coming."

"Yes." The fat man smiled. "How do you do, Mrs. Grimes?"

"Well as I can expect. I suppose you want to come in?"

"Awfully hot out here." He chuckled.

"Mm. Well, come in then. I've put some lemonade in the ice-box. Only don't expect me to bargain with you, Mr. Waterbury. I'm not that kind of person."

"Of course not," the man said winningly, and followed her inside.

It was dark and cool. The window shades were opaque,<sup>9</sup> and they had been drawn. They entered a square parlor with heavy, baroque<sup>10</sup> furniture shoved unimaginatively against every wall. The only color in the room was in the faded hues<sup>11</sup> of the tasseled rug that lay in the center of the bare floor.

The old woman headed straight for a rocker, and sat motionless, her wrinkled hands folded sternly.

"Well?" she said. "If you have anything to say, Mr. Waterbury, I suggest you say it."

The fat man cleared his throat. "Mrs. Grimes, I've just spoken with your real estate agent—"

"I know all that," she snapped. "Aaron's a fool. All the more for letting you come here with the notion of changing my mind. I'm too old for changing my mind, Mr. Waterbury."

"Er—well, I don't know if that was my intention, Mrs. Grimes. I thought we'd just—talk a little."

She leaned back, and the rocker groaned. "Talk's free. Say what you like."

"Yes." He mopped his face again, and shoved the handkerchief only halfway back into his pocket. "Well, let me put it this way, Mrs. Grimes. I'm a businessman—a bachelor. I've worked for a long time, and I've

<sup>6</sup>dappled: covered with dark patches  
<sup>7</sup>creepers: vines

<sup>9</sup>opaque: blocking out all light  
<sup>10</sup>baroque: ornately carved

made a fair amount of money. Now I'm ready to retire—preferably, somewhere quiet. I like Ivy Corners. I passed through here some years back, on my way to—er, Albany. I thought, one day, I might like to settle here.”

“So?”

“So, when I drove through your town today, and saw this house—I was enthused. It just seemed—right for me.”

“I like it too, Mr. Waterbury. That's why I'm asking a fair price for it.”

Waterbury blinked. “Fair price? You'll have to admit, Mrs. Grimes, these days a house like this shouldn't cost more than—”

“That's enough!” the old woman cried. “I told you, Mr. Waterbury—I don't want to sit here all day and argue with you. If you won't pay my price, then we can forget all about it.”

“But, Mrs. Grimes—”

“Good day, Mr. Waterbury!”

She stood up, indicating that he was expected to do the same.

“But he didn't. ‘Wait a moment, Mrs. Grimes,’ he said. ‘Just a moment. I know it's crazy, but—all right, I'll pay what you want.’”

She looked at him for a long moment. “Are you sure, Mr. Waterbury?”

“Positive! I've enough money. If that's the only way you'll have it, that's the way it'll be.”

She smiled thinly. “I think that lemonade'll be cold enough. I'll bring you some—and then I'll tell you something about this house.”

He was mopping his brow when she returned with the tray. He gulped at the frosty yellow beverage greedily.

“This house,” she said, easing back in her rocker,

two. It was built some fifteen years before that. Every member of the family, except my son, Michael, was born in the bedroom upstairs. I was the only rebel,” she added raffishly.<sup>12</sup> “I had new-fangled<sup>13</sup> ideas about hospitals.” Her eyes twinkled.

“I know it's not the most solid house in Ivy Corners. After I brought Michael home, there was a flood in the basement, and we never seemed to get it dry since. Aaron tells me there are termites, too, but I've never seen the pesky things. I love the old place, though; you understand.”

“Of course,” Waterbury said.

“Michael's father died when Michael was nine. It was hard times on us then. I did some needlework, and my own father had left me the small annuity which supports me today. Not in very grand style, but I manage. Michael missed his father, perhaps even more than I. He grew up to be—well, wild is the only word that comes to mind.”

The fat man clucked, sympathetically.

“When he graduated from high school, Michael left Ivy Corners and went to the city. Against my wishes, make no mistake. But he was like so many young men; full of ambition, undirected ambition. I don't know what he did in the city. But he must have been successful—he sent me money regularly.” Her eyes clouded. “I didn't see him for nine years.”

“And,” the man sighed, sadly.

“Yes, it wasn't easy for me. But it was even worse when Michael came home because, when he did, he was in trouble.”

“Oh?”

<sup>12</sup>raffishly: with a devil-may-care attitude

"I didn't know how bad the trouble was. He showed up in the middle of the night, looking thinner and older than I could have believed possible. He had no luggage with him, only a small black suitcase. When I tried to take it from him, he almost struck me. Struck *me*—his own mother!

"I put him to bed myself, as if he was a little boy again. I could hear him crying out during the night.

"The next day, he told me to leave the house. Just for a few hours—he wanted to do something, he said. He didn't explain what. But when I returned that evening, I noticed that the little black suitcase was gone." The fat man's eyes widened over the lemonade glass.

"What did it mean?" he asked.

"I didn't know then. But I found out soon—too terribly soon. That night, a man came to our house. I don't even know how he got in. I first knew when I heard voices in Michael's room. I went to the door, and tried to listen, tried to find out what sort of trouble my boy was in. But I heard only shouts and threats, and then . . ."

She paused, and her shoulders sagged.

"And a shot," she continued, "a gunshot. When I went into the room, I found the bedroom window open, and the stranger gone. And Michael—he was on the floor. He was dead."

The chair creaked.

"That was five years ago," she said. "Five long years. It was a while before I realized what had happened. The police told me the story. Michael and this other man had been involved in a crime, a serious crime. They had stolen many, many thousands of dollars.

"Michael had taken that money, and run off with it, wanting to keep it all for himself. He hid it some-

where. Then the other man came looking for my son, came to collect his share. When he found the money gone, he—he killed my boy."

She looked up. "That's when I put the house up for sale, at \$175,000. I knew that, someday, my son's killer would return. Someday, he would want this house at any price. All I had to do was wait until I found the man willing to pay much too much for an old lady's house."

She rocked gently.

Waterbury put down the empty glass and licked his lips, his eyes no longer focusing, his head rolling loosely on his shoulders.

"Ugh?" he said. "This lemonade is bitter."



# REFLECT.....

According to Mr. Hacker, the real estate man, why is Sadie Grimes asking such a high price for her run-down old house? What is the *real* reason?

Though Sadie Grimes and the other people in Ivy Corners don't know it, Mr. Waterbury once knew Sadie's son. Describe Michael Grimes and Mr. Waterbury's secret past.

Why is Mr. Waterbury willing to pay such a high price for Sadie Grimes's run-down old house?

What do you think will happen to Mr. Waterbury? To Sadie Grimes?

In your opinion, is "The Right Kind of House" a mystery story, a revenge tale, or both? Explain why you feel as you do.

# WRITE.....

Imagine that you are making a movie based on "The Right Kind of House." What actors would you hire to play the following roles? Give reasons for each of your choices.

- Aaron Hacker
- Sally the secretary
- Sadie Grimes
- Mr. Waterbury

Imagine that you are selling your house or renting the apartment you live in. Write an ad that makes the place sound as attractive as possible. (Stick to the facts, but make them appealing.) Then describe the place in a way that would keep anyone from wanting to buy it.

The last lines of "The Right Kind of House" are as follows:

Waterbury put down the empty glass and licked his lips, his eyes no longer focusing, his head rolling loosely on his shoulders.

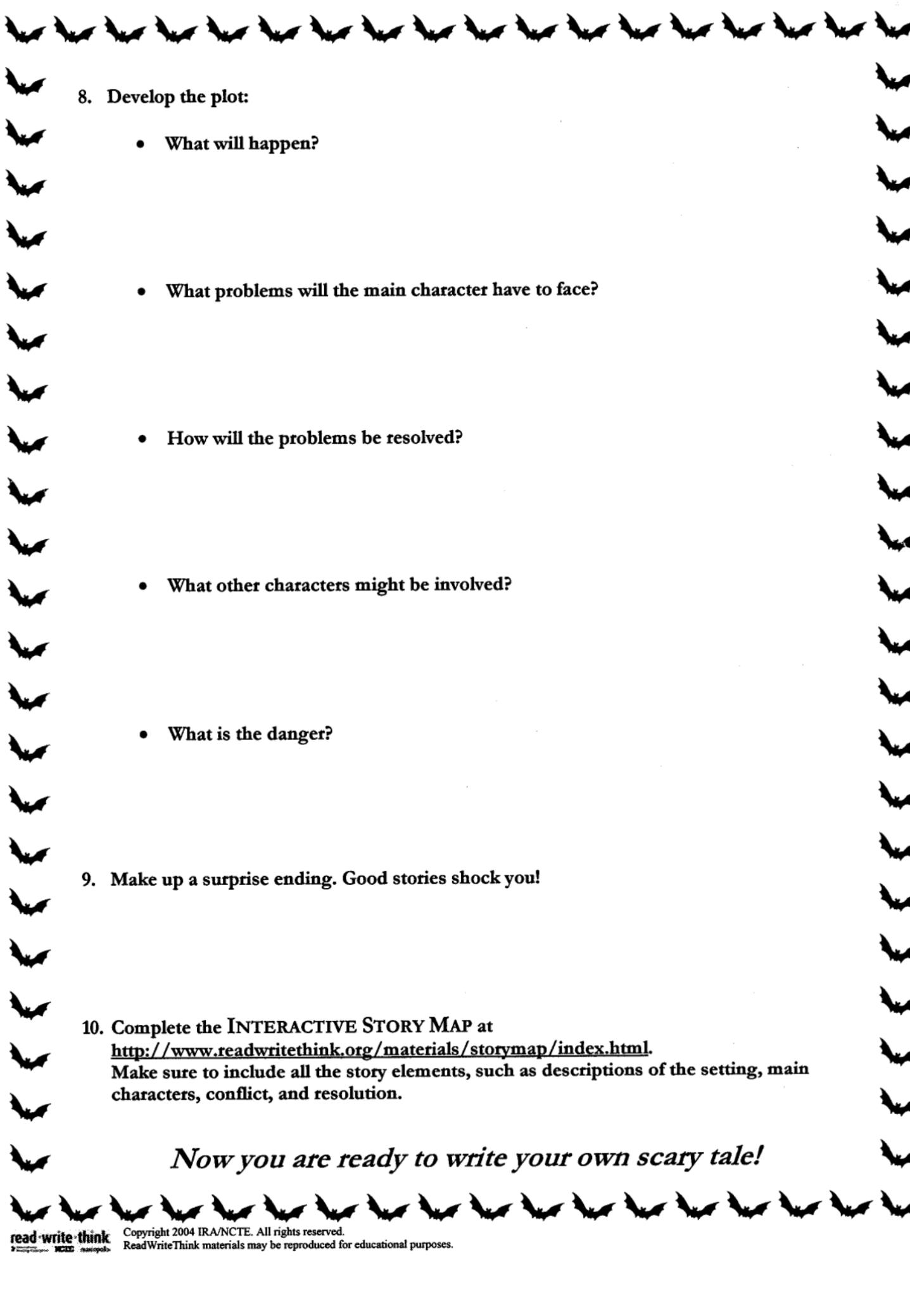
"*Ugh!*" he said. "This lemonade is bitter."

What happened just after the point where the story ends? Write a new ending that picks up where the present one leaves off.



## HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN SCARY STORY

1. Choose an interesting "what if." For example, what if you were trapped in a movie theater?
2. Think about all the scary things that could happen in that situation. Then think about all the ways a person could get out of that terrifying situation.
3. Who is the main character? Is it you or a fictional person?
4. Choose a scary setting. Decide where and when your story takes place.
5. How did the main character end up in the scary situation?
6. Choose a bad guy or villain. Describe this character and how he or she will provoke fear in the story.
7. Complete THE 5 WS OF SCARY STORY WRITING handout.



8. Develop the plot:

- What will happen?
- What problems will the main character have to face?
- How will the problems be resolved?
- What other characters might be involved?
- What is the danger?

9. Make up a surprise ending. Good stories shock you!

10. Complete the INTERACTIVE STORY MAP at

<http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/storymap/index.html>.

Make sure to include all the story elements, such as descriptions of the setting, main characters, conflict, and resolution.

*Now you are ready to write your own scary tale!*