

Building Tension and Suspense

Read this extract from 'The Curse of Cogston House' and see how many examples you can find of the following features of suspense and tension. You could tick the boxes, count the examples or choose a colour for each feature and highlight the examples in the text.

Detailed descriptions of the surroundings	
Clues to tantalise the reader and keep certain things hidden (e.g. a hunched silhouette)	
Short, shocking sentences	
Fronted adverbials, subordinate and relative clauses to make the reader wait even longer	
Ellipses (...)	

Physical reactions from the character	
Appealing to the reader's senses	
Exciting synonyms	
Similes and metaphors	
Onomatopoeia	

Luca had a sandstorm swirling in his throat. Desperately, he swallowed, trying to wash away the dryness, and dithered in the centre of the passage. Every second that he hesitated, Jack edged farther away from him.

Tick.

With each horrendous noise, Luca's breathing quickened.

Tick.

He was panting, now. Where was it coming from? Slowly, with dread filling him from toe to tip, he turned his head to track the source of the noise.

Tick.

Jack's story flashed through his head and Luca felt as if all the oxygen were being sucked out of him.

TICK.

Then, his heart in his mouth, Luca's eyes fell upon an explanation...

The high window that he had noticed earlier was being accosted by a long branch, which was being thrown around rhythmically in the breeze.

Building Tension and Suspense Answers

Detailed descriptions of the surroundings	Orange
Clues to tantalise the reader and keep certain things hidden (e.g. a hunched silhouette)	Light Green
Short, shocking sentences	Light Blue
Fronted adverbials, subordinate and relative clauses to make the reader wait even longer	Pink
Ellipses (...)	Grey

Physical reactions from the character	Yellow
Appealing to the reader's senses	Teal
Exciting synonyms	Purple
Similes and metaphors	Red
Onomatopoeia	Dark Green

Luca had a sandstorm swirling in his throat. Desperately, he swallowed, trying to wash away the dryness, and dithered in the centre of the passage. Every second that he hesitated, Jack edged farther away from him.

Tick.

With each horrendous noise, Luca's breathing quickened.

Tick.

He was panting, now. Where was it coming from? Slowly, with dread filling him from toe to tip, he turned his head to track the source of the noise.

Tick.

Jack's story flashed through his head and Luca felt as if all the oxygen were being sucked out of him.

TICK.

Then, his heart in his mouth, Luca's eyes fell upon an explanation...

The high window that he had noticed earlier was being accosted by a long branch, which was being thrown around rhythmically in the breeze.