

Mystery and Suspense

The Red Room

Read the following adapted extract of a short story called 'The Red Room' by H.G. Wells. A young man is visiting an old castle. He is met by three, strange looking old people who agree to show him to his room – a room where someone had once died. In this extract he is walking through the corridor, on his way to the room.

I left the door wide open until the candle was well alight, and then I shut them in and walked down the chilly, echoing passage.

I must confess that the oddness of these three old pensioners in whose charge her ladyship had left the castle, and the old-fashioned furniture of the housekeeper's room in which they gathered, affected me in spite of my efforts to keep myself at a matter-of-fact mood. The ornaments and conveniences of the room about them were ghostly--the thoughts of vanished men, which still haunted rather than participated in the world of to-day. But with an effort I sent such thoughts away. The long, draughty passage was chilly and dusty, and my candle flared and made the shadows cower and quiver. The echoes rang up and down the spiral staircase, and a shadow came sweeping up after me, and one fled before me into the darkness overhead. I came to the landing and stopped there for a moment, listening to a rustling that I thought I heard; then, satisfied of the absolute silence, I pushed open the door and stood in the corridor.

The effect was not what I expected, for the moonlight, coming in by the great window on the grand staircase, picked out everything in vivid black shadow or silvery illumination. Everything was in its place: the house might have been deserted yesterday instead of eighteen months ago. There were candles in the sockets of the sconces, and whatever dust had gathered on the carpets or upon the polished flooring was distributed so evenly as to be invisible in the moonlight. I was about to advance, and stopped abruptly. A bronze statue stood upon the landing, hidden from me by the corner of the wall, but its shadow fell with marvellous distinctness upon the white panelling, and gave me the impression of someone crouching to waylay me. I stood rigid for half a minute perhaps. Then, with my hand in the pocket that held my revolver, I advanced, only to discover another statue glistening in the moonlight. That incident for a time restored my nerve, and a porcelain ornament of a man on the table, whose head rocked silently as I passed him, scarcely startled me.

The door to the red room and the steps up to it were in a shadowy corner. I moved my candle from side to side, in order to see clearly the nature of the recess in which I stood before opening the door. Here it was, thought I, that the last person who visited this room was found, and the memory of the story gave me a sudden twinge of apprehension. I glanced over my shoulder at the statue in the moonlight, and opened the door of the red room rather hastily.



Now, answer the questions below in full sentences. Remember that the number of marks is a guide for how much to write.

1. How many people were looking after the castle? [1]
2. What impression does the narrator have of the old people? [1]
Impression – an opinion formed about a person.
3. Find **3** details which describe the corridor. [3]
4. When had the house been deserted? [1]
5. What is it that scares the narrator in the corridor? [2]
6. Find 2 pieces of evidence which show that the narrator is scared.
Explain how the evidence tells us that he is scared. [4]
7. Why is the narrator nervous about entering the room? [1]
8. How is the narrator feeling at the end of the passage? [2]
How do you know this?

Now, look again at the whole passage and then answer the question below.

How does the writer build suspense and create an atmosphere of tension? [5]

In your answer you should comment on:

- The setting.
- How the narrator feels at the start of the passage.
- What makes him feel nervous as he walks through the corridor.
- Any words or phrases which make us feel tense.

Remember to focus on the writer's use of language here.

Now, answer the questions below in full sentences. Remember that the number of marks is a guide for how much to write.

How many people were looking after the castle? [1]

What impression does the narrator have of the old people?

Impression – an opinion formed about a person. [1]

Find **3** details which describe the corridor. [3]

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

When had the house been deserted? [1]

What is it that scares the narrator in the corridor? [2]

Find 2 pieces of evidence which show that the narrator is scared. [4]

1. _____

2. _____

Explain how the evidence tells us that he is scared.

Why is the narrator nervous about entering the room? [1]

How is the narrator feeling at the end of the passage? [2]

How do you know this?

Now, look again at the whole passage and then answer the question below.

Find 3 examples in the story that you think create a spooky, tense feeling. Complete the grid below.

Example from the story	This creates tension because...

Now, answer the question below.

How does the writer build suspense and create an atmosphere of tension?

Use the sentences in the box below to help you.

The writer creates tension when....

An atmosphere of suspense is built by...

When the narrator.... a feeling of ... is created because....

The most tense part of the story was....

The use of... builds suspense because...

[illegible]

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Mark Scheme

1. How many people were looking after the castle? [1]
There were 3 old pensioners.

2. What impression does the narrator have of the old people? [1]
Impression – an opinion formed about a person.
They were odd.

3. Find **3** details which describe the corridor. [3]
1 detail = 1 mark

It was long/ It was draughty/It was chilly/ It was dusty/There was a spiral staircase/
Lit by candle light/very shadowy.

4. When had the house been deserted? [1]
18 months ago.

5. What is it that scares the narrator in the corridor? [2]
The darkness/shadows.
He mistook the statues for people.

6. Find 2 pieces of evidence which show that the narrator is scared. [4]
Explain how the evidence tells us that he is scared.

1 mark for each piece of evidence (up to 2 marks) and 1 mark for the explanation (up to 2 marks).

"I was about to advance and stopped abruptly."

"I stood rigid for half a minute perhaps."

He holds on to his revolver.

7. Why is the narrator nervous about entering the room? [1]
The last occupant of the room had been 'found' outside the door.

8. How is the narrator feeling at the end of the passage? [2]
How do you know this?
He is nervous/apprehensive. He glances over his shoulder. He opens the door 'hastily'.

9. Answering the 'how does' question. 5 Marks.

Total Marks /20.

