

# Suspense - Comprehension & Analysis Activity

USING NEIL GAIMAN'S  
"CLICK-CLACK THE  
RATTLEBAG"



Nouvelle ELA

## SUSPENSE ACTIVITY


Using Neil Gaiman's "Click-Clack the Rattlebag"



Comprehension & Analysis

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## SUSPENSE: "Click-Clack the Rattlebag"

<p><b>PURPOSE</b></p>	<p>"Click-Clack the Rattlebag" by Neil Gaiman is a fictional spooky short story about a narrator who is looking after his girlfriend's younger brother. The young boy asks for the narrator to put him to bed upstairs and tell him a scary story.</p> <p>This short story serves as an engaging tool for teaching how <b>suspense</b> builds in a story.</p>
<p><b>MATERIAL</b></p>	<p><a href="#">"Click-Clack the Rattlebag"</a> – this provided link may require you to sign up for Common Lit, which is a free educational resource that I HIGHLY recommend and use frequently. You can opt to find it through another free means with a quick online search.</p>
<p><b>OBJECTIVE(S)</b></p>	<p>Students will analyze how the author's choices to order events within the short story creates suspense (RL.9-10.5).</p>
<p><b>SUGGESTED LESSON</b></p>	
<p><b>BELL RINGER</b> (7-10 min)</p>	<p>Use <b>the corresponding bell ringer prompt</b> included in this resource (<a href="#">access the editable version here</a>). This includes a mini-introduction to the literary element and a quick practice for students to apply their learning of this literary element as they read the short story.</p> <p><b>Optional:</b> Have students share and discuss with a partner or in small groups.</p>
	<p>Conduct a first read of the short story. You can read this aloud as a class, listen to the audio reading aloud, have students read in pairs, groups, or independently. You know your students best.</p> <p>Complete the worksheet* and have students work through their literary analysis. This can be completed as a guided practice, a group analysis, or independent practice.</p>

Suggested ~50-minute lesson plan outline included complete with extension ideas, standard(s), and linked materials.

**Suspense** is **built** when readers are **tensely, excitedly,** or **mysteriously anticipating an outcome.**

### ELEMENTS OF SUSPENSE

**ACTION(S)**

**URGENCY**

**DIALOGUE**

**ENVIRONMENT**

**Suspense** is **built** when readers are **tensely, excitedly,** or **mysteriously anticipating an outcome.**

**Consider a murder mystery movie or book.** A GOOD murder mystery does not tell us who the killer is right away.

They **build suspense** to keep us **hooked.**



examine **4 elements** that **build suspense!**

(There are more than 4 elements of suspense, but we will look at these 4).

Includes an editable bell ringer activity that introduces the literary element & provides students with a guided practice opportunity



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## SUSPENSE: "Click-Clack the Rattlebag"

**Instructions:** This entire short story takes place as the narrator and young boy are climbing the stairs. In each staircase below, map out events in chronological order that build suspense. Label each event with at least one element of suspense (as learned in our bell ringer).

ELEMENTS OF SUSPENSE			
ACTION(S)	URGENCY	DIALOGUE	ENVIRONMENT
Actions that are <b>ominous</b> —suggesting an impending evil—or <b>obscure</b> —unknown or hidden—build suspense.	Timing can build suspense (i.e. nighttime approaching means the dark is coming).	Dialogue can reveal tension, motives, and/or untrustworthiness between characters which builds suspense.	The details within a story's setting can build suspense (i.e. a creepy noise in a haunted house).

USING THE TABLE ABOVE, LABEL AT LEAST ONE ELEMENT OF SUSPENSE FOR EACH OF THE 5 EVENTS YOU'VE CHOSEN →

## SUSPENSE: "Click-Clack the Rattlebag"

↓ ↓ EXAMPLE ANSWERS ↓ ↓

ELEMENTS OF SUSPENSE			
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### SUSPENSEFUL EVENT 5

The young boy squeezes the narrator's hand as he tries to let go. Then, the narrator is pulled into the boy's dark room.

Students read the short story, then analyze the suspense throughout.

Suggested answers included.



## SUSPENSE: "Click-Clack the Rattlebag"

There are many "right" answers to the following questions, so it's all about how you support your ideas. Use evidence from the short story, other texts (i.e. novels, movies, songs, etc.), and your own experiences to support your claims.

1. Author Neil Gaiman believes, "Short stories are tiny windows into other worlds and other minds and other dreams." Based on his quote and his short story "Click-Clack the Rattlebag," what can you infer about Gaiman's world, mind, and/or dreams?

*Answers will vary. A possible answer might be that Gaiman finds fear in the unknown. Throughout the short story, there's an emphasis on the Click-Clacks not being what people expect and what people don't pay attention to.*

2. Why might people enjoy the spooky, thriller literature genre?

*Answers will vary. A possible answer might be that they enjoy the thrill of not knowing what to anticipate next. A good spooky thriller will have a reader in suspense!*

time you felt scared or spooked. What suspenseful element(s) caused this  
er the four suspense elements shared in our bell ringer.



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# Includes optional short response questions:

- Text-to-text
- Text-to-world
- Text-to-self
- Drawing prompt