



# HOW TO WRITE WITH TENSION, SUSPENSE AND ATMOSPHERE LESSON PLAN

This lesson plan is a great way to inspire your students to write a story, as well as introducing them to a format of short story writing called the mini saga.

## PREPARATION

- Download the PowerPoint Presentation (also available in Google Slides) that complements this activity and bookmark the video.
- Each student needs a Spooky Sagas graphic organizer/entry form, which you can download from our website or copy.  
**Go paperless:** Alternatively, your students can type their work in the Online Writing Portal for submission. Create or login to your account at [www.youngwritersusa.com/online/teachers.php](http://www.youngwritersusa.com/online/teachers.php)
- Read through this lesson – each section has a guide to how long it should take, but you can adapt this depending on the needs of your students. You can also do the main teaching activity (40 mins) in class and set the writing activity as homework.

All contest information and resources can be viewed/downloaded at <https://youtu.be/yudyWPfZL44>

## INTRODUCTION (Slide 2)

Explain to your students that today they will be writing a mini saga. Explain that a mini saga is a story told in only 100 words!

## MAIN TEACHING ACTIVITIES

In this lesson students will practice writing using tension, suspense and atmosphere. When writing a spooky saga, which in essence is a very short ghost story, these three writing devices play a huge part in setting the scene, creating imagery and drawing the reader in...

Activity name	Slide reference	Activity details
Exploring Creative Writing Techniques (10 minutes)	4-8	<p>Explain to your students that to write a spooky saga they need tension, suspense and atmosphere to play a key role in creating the story. Blood, guts and gore sometimes shock a reader, but often bore them, and they don't make the spooky saga original! Creating a story that is creepy, that gives you goosebumps or has a surprise humorous ending is so much more enjoyable to read and to write!</p> <p>Now ask students if they can explain what tension, suspense and atmosphere are. If they can't that's fine as here is an explanation and an example of each for you to share with them:</p> <p><b>Tension:</b> Mental or emotional strain; intense suspense, anxiety or excitement. E.g. <i>As I walked past the abandoned house I heard music and decided to investigate...</i></p> <p><b>Suspense:</b> A state or condition of mental uncertainty or excitement, such as awaiting a decision or outcome with apprehension or anxiety. An element of risk is usually involved in creating suspense. E.g. <i>Exploring the forest seemed a good idea in daylight. Suddenly a blood-curdling scream pierced the silence of the forest.</i></p> <p><b>Atmosphere:</b> The dominant mood or emotional tone in a piece of writing. E.g. <i>The old, ivy-clad barn disappeared as the thick fog rolled in, silencing nature. The only sound to be heard was the thud of my heartbeat in my ears.</i></p> <p>Ensure your students understand the techniques before you move on to the next short activity.</p>

<b>Generating Ideas</b> (15 minutes)	<b>9-13</b>	<p>Split your students into 4 groups and provide them with a large sheet of paper to write their ideas on.</p> <p><b>Group 1</b> need to write ideas for settings on their paper – where can they think of that a spooky story would be set?</p> <p><b>Group 2</b> need to write down ideas of spooky characters on their paper – who could appear in their spooky saga?</p> <p><b>Group 3</b> need to write down ideas of ways the spooky saga could start on their paper – what time of day, what type of weather, is there an event? etc.</p> <p><b>Group 4</b> need to write down ideas of ways the spooky saga could end on their paper – what happens to end the story? A cliffhanger ending? Something funny? Was it a dream? etc.</p> <p>Give each group 1 minute to write down as many ideas as they can. Once the minute is up, each group passes their paper on to the next group. Give students another minute to add to ideas from the other group and so on until all 4 groups have contributed their ideas to all 4 sheets of paper. Suggest each group aims for a minimum of 3 ideas on each sheet (feel free to adapt this based on age and ability).</p> <p>This should take around 5 minutes to do. Use the remaining 10 minutes to read through the ideas as a class, highlighting any particularly good ideas, answering any questions and letting students briefly discuss ideas, so you're generating a buzz around the forthcoming writing activity!</p>
<b>Practicing Creative Writing Techniques</b> (10 minutes)	<b>14-16</b>	<p>Give students these 3 places: an abandoned house / a church / a forest. Ask them to write a short sentence about each one on a bright sunny day. Once they've done this, repeat the activity using awful weather at dusk or at night. How do they compare?</p> <p>Students need to set the scene using location and weather / time of day / time of year.</p> <p>Darkness, inclement weather, isolated property, ruins, graveyard etc, automatically give the reader a sense of something sinister. One or two short sentences can set a scene leaving the remainder of the mini saga to develop the plot. Did your students write any of these ideas down in the previous activity? Congratulate them if they did as this means they understand tension, suspense and atmosphere!</p>
<b>Planning a Mini Saga</b> (10 minutes)	<b>17-18</b>	<p><b>Ask students to consider the following points before writing their spooky saga:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will there be a ghost/apparition or will they just suggest that through the power of words?</li> <li>• Will the events be in the character's mind or real?</li> <li>• Will they use a cliffhanger ending or give the spooky saga a solid ending?</li> <li>• Will the ending have a twist or be funny?</li> <li>• Will they use description, dialogue or action to tell their spooky saga?</li> <li>• Will they plunge their reader straight into the action or use a sentence or two to set the scene beforehand?</li> </ul> <p><b>Remind students of the golden rules of mini saga writing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be original! Students can be inspired by other stories, but add a twist, make it their own!</li> <li>• Keep to the 100 word limit – less is always more! (Mini sagas can be up to 100 words long. The title isn't included in the word count!)</li> <li>• Remember that a mini saga must have a beginning, a middle and an end!</li> </ul>
<b>Composing a Spooky Saga</b> (20 minutes)	<b>19-22</b>	<p>It's time for students to write their own spooky saga! Show students the examples in the PowerPoint presentation (also available on Google Slides), should you wish to.</p>

## PLENARY (5-10 minutes) (Slide 23)

Ask students to work in pairs to read their mini sagas to one another. Their partner is to provide feedback; something they liked and something that can be improved. The partner can help edit the work down if it exceeds the 100-word limit. Provide students with a few minutes to make any changes to their work, should this be necessary.

**Download Spooky Sagas presentation from [www.youngwritersusa.com](http://www.youngwritersusa.com)**

