



# Haunted Birmingham



In partnership with



**Teacher guide to  
accompany the  
planning booklet**

# Haunted Birmingham – teacher guide

This document is made to accompany the *Haunted Birmingham* planning resource.

These resources were designed with KS3 students in mind, but may be useful for teachers of older students and adult learners.

## Lesson One: What makes a good spooky story?

**Learning Objective:** To analyse the conventions of a spooky story, as a tool for planning their own story in later lessons.

**Starter:** Students explore what they already know about the conventions of spooky stories.

**Main activity:** The group reads 'A Change of Heart' by Darren Shan as a model spooky story

**Plenary:** Participants reflect on the story with low-stakes, open conversation.

Time	Task	Guidance
5 mins	Discussion of the aims of Haunted Birmingham (verbal)	<p>Explain to the group that there is a city wide campaign for people to write scary stories set in Birmingham. This is not a competition: all stories that are written will be platformed and celebrated (some displayed at the Library of Birmingham, some shared online, some read aloud at public events).</p> <p>If working in a school, you could emphasise links to the gothic genre, which is part of the GCSE.</p> <p>Explain the objective of the three lessons – to help participants to plan a spooky story to submit. If you would like to supervise students writing a story, this will need a fourth lesson. Alternatively, they can write</p>

the story in their spare time using their completed planning booklets as a tool for support.

10  
mins

Starter task one –  
exploring generic settings  
for spooky stories

The booklet prompts  
participants to “fill in the  
boxes with ideas”

Participants are asked:

- what makes a setting  
spooky?
- what is the spookiest  
place near where you  
live and why’?

Give the participants a set time limit (5 minutes?) to  
complete the activity. Then, ask them to feedback  
responses.

Use your judgement to assess if they have chosen  
spooky things, or spooky places near them. This  
activity is more about unlocking the awareness they  
already have about the spooky genre, and getting  
them engaged with the activity, than teaching them  
new information.

Stories submitted to haunted Birmingham should be  
set in Birmingham – so linger over the box asking  
participants to think of spooky places near them, and  
ask questions to draw out ideas about what makes  
these local places foreboding.

10  
mins

Starter task two:  
considering common  
conventions of a spooky  
story

Participants are asked to  
circle the things they  
might find in a horror film  
or story.

Challenge task: List  
villains which you might  
find in spooky stories.

This activity aims to teach participants some of the  
common tropes of spooky literature. Many of these  
conventions can be found in the model story, which  
will be read following this task.

**Correct answers are:**

‘Flickering candles’, ‘dead things’, ‘supernatural  
events’, ‘dolls’, ‘cobwebs’, ‘spiders’, ‘eerie piano  
music’, ‘dark forests’, ‘gory deaths and violence’  
and ‘dark colours like red and black’.

If participants have chosen other things on the list,  
explain why these would not fit into a spooky story:  
they present too happy and pleasant a version of the  
world. They do not match the genre.

For the challenge, answers might include vampires, monsters, werewolves, imposters, evil wizards, forces of nature...

20–30  
mins

**Main task:** Group reading of 'A Change of Heart' by Darren Shan – which will be used as a model story in the planning booklet

The Darren Shan story uses many classic tropes from scary stories, and so is a good example for participants to use as a basis for planning their own story.

Read the story aloud to the group yourself – or – if they are confident readers, participants can also read aloud. The purpose of the first reading is just enjoyment, so refrain from asking any questions which disrupt the flow of the story, or make participants feel like this is a quiz.

10  
mins

**Plenary activities:** open discussion of the story

Participants are asked to write:

- What they liked about the story
- What they disliked about the story
- What made this story spooky

The purpose of this initial discussion is to engage participants in the story: later activities will draw out some of the spooky tropes and language to use in their own piece.

Give participants a set amount of time to fill in the boxes, and then ask them to read out responses, as springboards for group discussion.

Keep the conversation open, and allow participants to move on from these initial prompts to talk about the events of the story, and what makes it frightening.

## Lesson Two: Structural techniques

### Learning Objectives:

1. To consider how spooky stories are structured to build suspense, and conventional characters in the spooky genre

2. To plan a story harnessing 'suspense' and 'conventional characters' as structural techniques

**Starter:** Re-read the story [if necessary]

**Main activity:** DART activities to demonstrate how suspense is built throughout the model story, and what makes its characters appropriate for the spooky genre

**Plenary:** Participants plan a sequence of events and invent characters for their own stories, using the DART formats from the previous task

Time	Task	Guidance
10 mins	Re-read the story	Remind participants about the Haunted Birmingham story writing campaign. IF YOU FEEL THIS IS NECESSARY: read the story to them aloud, to remind them of its plot and characters (which will be important to the activities in this lesson).
10 mins	<p><b>Main task one:</b> Exploring the use of suspense</p> <p>Participants are asked to put events from the story in order, to show growing suspense</p>	<p>The objective of this task is to show participants that scary stories require a slow build-up of suspense to generate fear in the reader. Explain the meaning of the word 'suspense' – the gradual, frightening development of scary events.</p> <p>Set a time limit (5 minutes?) for groups to fill in the flow chart with events.</p> <p>If your group is struggling, write the following plot points on the board (but jumble the order) and ask them to sort.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maurice decides to go to a house on the edges of town, in a frightening forest</li> </ol>

2. Maurice finds an old man at the door, with a candle. When asked 'trick or treat?' the old man chooses 'trick'.
3. Maurice pelts the old man's house with smelly parcels, including vomit, rotting vegetables, and dirty nappies.
4. As Maurice leaves the house, he hears rustling in the trees and becomes frightened. He starts to run.
5. The old man appears in front of Maurice, and transforms into a hideous monster, which grabs Maurice with long, spiky tentacles.

After the task, ask whether the story would be as scary, if the old man was immediately revealed to be a monster. The group should say that it would not – the suspense helps to increase the frightening nature of the plot.

10  
mins

**Main task two:** Exploring conventional characters

Participants are asked to fill out bios about the two main characters in the story (Maurice and the Old Man). These include their age, adjectives to describe them, and what makes them a good character for a scary story.

The challenge is to find three quotations in the story which help to describe each character.

Set participants a time limit (5 minutes?) to fill up the character bios with information. Then, ask for feedback.

The characters have no established age, but you can infer that Maurice is aged 13-20, and the old man is 60+ (they could go as old as they like given he is a monster!)

Adjectives are 'describing words' such as "aggressive" or "frightening". Make sure to correct participants if they don't use adjectives in their lists about Maurice and the Old Man.

Examples of responses as to why Maurice and the Old Man are good characters for a scary story:

- **Maurice is hubristic** – he doesn't believe he will come to any harm, so it is satisfying when he does.

- **Maurice is unkind** – so he is a good target for an evil punishment
- **Maurice is strong** – so only supernatural events can frighten him.
- **The Old Man seems harmless** – so it is more frightening when he transforms into a villain
- **The Old Man doesn't speak much** – making him the subject of confusion and fear
- **The Old Man is really a monster** – which is a classic villain in a scary story

An example quote about Maurice is included in the planning booklet. Participants can find any quote that talks about the characters. Make sure to correct them if the quote is not directly copied from the text (this shows misunderstanding of the word 'quote').

10  
mins

### **Plenary one:** Creating characters task

Participants are asked to invent their own characters, to use in their story submission for Haunted Birmingham. They fill details of these characters into the same template as used to describe Maurice and The Old Man.

The challenge is to write three sentences describing each character, to use in their story.

Set a time limit (5 minutes?) to fill in the planning template, and then ask for feedback.

This activity builds on the previous one – asking participants to invent two characters for their own story. A small list of two characters has been used deliberately – as often, inexperienced writers create long lists of characters without due thought for each of their motivations and personalities.

This is a creative task, so participants may need support either from the teacher or peers in helping them to invent characters.

For a main character, you could prompt them to use:

- Themselves or one of their friends
- Someone their age

- Someone who has an obvious flaw (like Maurice, who is mean. They could be a coward, or someone who thinks they are really clever).

For a spooky character, you could suggest:

- Ghosts, vampires, monsters, werewolves, evil wizards...
- Someone pretending to be one of the above
- Someone who seems harmless, but turns out to have supernatural powers

10  
mins

**Plenary two:** Planning a story sequence

Participants are asked to invent a sequence of events for their story, using the same template as they had earlier used to examine a model story.

Set a time limit (5 minutes?) to fill in the flow chart of story events, and then ask for feedback.

This activity builds on the earlier sequencing task, asking participants to invent a story that grows in suspense.

Remind participants:

- Suspense means the story should become gradually scarier – save the spooky reveal for the end!
- The story should be set in Birmingham
- Try to use the characters invented in the previous task.

If participants are struggling, support them to invent the background of a story (which will just describe characters from the previous task, and a setting in Birmingham). Then, provide prompts like:

- What scary thing might [the character] decide to do?
- What dangerous decision might they make?



- Where's a scary place they could go?
- Why would they do that?
- How might the villain get involved?
- What unexpected thing might happen next?

It could be useful to split groups into pairs, so that they can each benefit from peer support.

### Lesson Three: Language techniques

**Learning Objective:** To analyse language devices used in the spooky genre, as a tool to later use these in their own story

**Starter:** Highlighting spooky words in an extract from the model story

**Main activity:** Learning four language devices appropriate for the genre, identifying examples in the model story, and devising their own

**Plenary:** Discussion about readiness to write a story

Time	Task	Guidance
10 mins	<p><b>Starter task:</b> Collate spooky vocabulary from the model text (to then use in their own writing).</p> <p>The challenge is to fill in boxes with additional scary adjectives</p>	<p>Give the group a set time limit to highlight spooky sounding words (5 minutes?) and then ask for feedback.</p> <p>Highlighted words could include: 'ventured', 'narrow', 'moonlight', 'gloom', 'unease', 'grim-looking', 'wary', 'deserted', 'retreated', 'flickering' and 'candle'. All of these contribute to a spooky</p>

(describing words) and  
verbs (action words)

atmosphere by evoking a dangerous, dark, and  
uneasy place.

The point of this task is to demonstrate that  
ghost stories use word choices to create a scary  
mood. If participants have completed the  
challenge, ask them to read them out to the  
group and encourage others to copy these into  
their planning booklet. These can then be used to  
support their writing in the next activity.

20  
mins

**Main task:** Identify the  
language devices used in  
the model text, through a  
structured table-fill  
activity.

The table lists four  
language devices, defines  
them, asks for  
participants to choose  
which is which, and then  
challenges them to create  
their own examples.

The idea is for  
participants to later use  
these language devices in  
their own stories.

Complete the first row of the table as a group, to  
demonstrate how it works. Then, allow the students 10  
minutes to complete the table, before asking for their  
responses.

Correct answers:

- “the monster’s **lips** spread wide over its fangs as it  
**smiled**” – is **sibilance**  
Notice the ‘s’ sounds in “monster(s)”, “lip(s)”,  
“(s)pread”, “fang(s)” and “(s)miled”
- “It was dark and coiled in on itself, **like a snake**” is a  
**simile**.  
It compares the monster to a snake, using the  
word “like”.
- “the laughter **died** on his lips” is a **metaphor**.  
The word ‘died’ is not meant to be taken literally,  
the smile did not really die. This non-literal  
language aids the description.

There are lots of good examples of short sentences  
being used to build suspense in the story. One  
instance:

“There was a small thumping sound ahead of him.

Maurice looked up and saw a shape on the path.  
It was a man-shaped shape. Or something the  
rough size of a man.”

Make sure the participants' invented examples of language devices are correct when they are read out. If some participants haven't managed to write their own, ask them to copy from other members of the group. This will support them to use similes, metaphors, sibilance and short sentences in their stories.

If the examples use good, frightening vocabulary, ask participants to write these words in the boxes (for adjectives and verbs) on the previous page. Again, the words can then be used in the story they write.

10  
mins

**Plenary:** Discussion about plans for the story

The objective of these lessons has been to prepare participants to write a scary story, set in Birmingham.

At the bottom of the page, participants are given a tick box to indicate if they are ready to make a start.

Ask for hands up for 'yes', 'no', or 'maybe'. For those who respond 'no' or 'maybe', refer them to the planning supports they have in their work booklets. They have:

- Invented two characters for their story
- Written an event sequence to guide their work
- Identified some spooky verbs and adjectives to help their description
- Learnt about language devices to help them describe things in a spooky way.

If they haven't done one or more of these tasks, use the spare time to finish them: until they feel confident to make a start.

It can be useful to also work with uneasy participants for the first five minutes, offering initial prompts such as 'so where in Birmingham is this set? Describe

it.' 'Who is the main character? What are they like? Write that down'.

10  
mins

**Writing:** Make a start on the story!

Requires use of the planning booklet

Use any spare time in this lesson to complete unfinished tasks.

If your group has done everything, and is ready to write a story, share the submission booklet (or, just some lined paper), and encourage them to make a start!

You may wish to schedule a fourth lesson to supervise participant writing their stories. Alternatively, this can be set as a homework task.