



# Haunted Birmingham



In partnership with



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

## Planning Booklet

## Session one: What makes a good spooky story?

**Task one:** Fill in the boxes with ideas.

**What makes a setting spooky?**

- Darkness
- Old or crumbling buildings
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**What is the spookiest place near where you live and why?**

**Task two:** Circle the things which you might find in a film or story from the horror genre.

*Flickering lights and  
candles*

*Dead  
things*

*Pleasant  
smells*

*Supernatural  
events*

*Bright  
sunshine*

*Cuddly and  
cute puppies*

*Happy  
endings*

*Dolls*

*Cobwebs, spiders*

*Eerie piano music*

*Dark  
forests*

*Gory deaths  
and violence*

*Talkative,  
friendly  
characters*

*Clean and tidy  
rooms with lovely  
fresh paint*

*Bright  
colours like  
yellow and  
white*

*Dark colours  
like red and  
black*

**Challenge:** What sort of villains do you find in spooky stories?

- Ghosts
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## *A Change of Heart* by Darren Shan

**Task three:** Read or listen carefully to the story below.

Maurice Morris was too old to go trick-or-treating, but he didn't care. He was at least a head taller than anyone else he had seen on the streets that night, but to Maurice that was an advantage, not something to be ashamed of.

Whenever Maurice knocked on a door (he never rang doorbells, as he felt a solid, thumping knock was more menacing), he puffed himself up and waited with a wicked scowl. The reaction was always the same. The homeowner would open the door with a warm smile, expecting a cute child in fancy dress. Their smile quickly faded when they saw the broad, towering Maurice, dressed in dark jeans and a blood-red T-shirt with a flaming skull sprayed across it.

"Trick-or-treat," Maurice always growled, eyes narrowing dangerously.

Taken by surprise, his targets usually gulped and meekly held out a box or jar full of sweets, though some offered fruit instead. Instead of taking his fair share, Maurice would grip the container and tip it into his large, black bin bag, emptying it of its contents. Then he would hand it back and glare again.

"Any more?" Maurice would ask, making it sound more like a threat than a question.

The person normally shook their head dumbly, leaving Maurice to grunt angrily and turn his back on them as if he had been insulted. Some did go back for more, but that had no bearing on Maurice's response. In fact he acted even more insulted in those instances, relishing their confused and wounded expressions.

Maurice had already filled two bin bags and dumped them back at his house, to sift through later. He would keep a few choice items and dump the rest. The size of his haul was of no interest to him. He just wanted to gather so much that there would be almost nothing left for anybody else.

If Maurice came across other children out by themselves without a guardian, he mugged them and took their sweets. Those were the encounters he enjoyed most, especially if the victims burst into tears. Maurice loved it when he made someone cry.

Late in the night, finding himself on the outskirts of town, Maurice headed for the forest. There were a few houses within walking distance and he figured he might as well give them a shot. Most trick-or-treaters never ventured this far out, but Maurice wasn't afraid of the dark or scuttling noises in the trees. There was very little in life that scared Maurice Morris.

Spotting a narrow, rarely used path, Maurice pushed through some thick bushes and headed deep into the forest. The moonlight didn't penetrate the tree cover here, but Maurice only whistled merrily and trudged along, at ease in the gloom.

After a ten minute stroll he came to a house. The trees grew in tightly around it, the tips of some of them brushing against the roof and upper windows. It had been painted a dark green colour, so that it blended in with its surroundings. Even the glass of the windows had been scrubbed over.

Maurice experienced a brief moment of unease, but shrugged it off and stomped forward. Some people wanted more privacy than others, that was all. The grim-looking windows were nothing to be wary of, certainly not if you were a brazen behemoth like him.

When he got to the porch, Maurice thought the house was deserted, and he nearly retreated. But then he spotted the flickering light of a candle coming from a room near the rear of the building.

"Trying to pretend you're not at home, eh?" he chuckled. "That old trick won't work with me."

Maurice made a fist and rapped on the door. When there was no answer he knocked again, then a third time.

"I'm not going away," he shouted when nobody answered. "I can see you in there. You can't hide from me. I can wait here all night."

At first nothing happened and he started to think that maybe there truly was nobody home. But then the light began to move forward as someone advanced with the candle in their hand.

Maurice squared his shoulders as the door was opened by a small man, so that he appeared as a giant. The man stared out at him, holding up the candle to get a clearer view of the glowering boy.

"Trick-or-treat," Maurice boomed, holding out his bag.

The man blinked as if he didn't know what Maurice was talking about. He was a thin, wrinkled man, with trembling fingers and long, grey hair. Not old, but aged before his time.

“Come on,” Maurice snorted, giving the bag a purposeful rattle. “Trick-or-treat.”

The man blinked again, then pointed back towards the path.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Maurice snarled.

The man cocked his head, as if he had never before been accused of having a sense of humour.

“I’m going nowhere until you answer the question,” Maurice said. “Trick-or-treat?”

The man pointed at the path again.

“Are you mute?” Maurice asked.

The man shook his head.

“Then forget about pointing. I want to hear you say it. Trick-or-treat?”

The man sighed and lowered his arm. Then he said, in a soft, reedy voice, “Trick.”

Maurice stared at the man with disbelief. Then he started to smile. “Oh, you beauty,” he whispered. “Are you sure?”

The man nodded, then closed the door and returned to the rear of the house.

Maurice had been waiting for this all night. Along with the black bin bags, he had been wearing a rucksack. Stepping back from the house, he took this off and opened it up. There was a large plastic bag inside, and three more plastic bags nestled inside that, each one carefully knotted to prevent any spillages or smells from escaping.

Maurice took out the plastic bag and laid it carefully on the grass at the side of the path. Then he untied the bags one by one, until his horde was revealed.

He had spent the last week putting together the collection, although some items dated even further back than that. There were the eggs that he had stolen from a shop two months earlier. The small cartons of milk that had been stewing beneath his bed for the last three weeks.

More recent additions included rotten meat, fruit and vegetables that he had

rescued from a street market skip. A jar of vomit that he had coaxed from his baby sister when his parents weren't looking. Along with one of her soiled nappies that he had sneaked off with that very morning.

"Where to start?" Maurice muttered, studying his materials as if he was an artist agonising over which colour paint to begin with.

In the end he went with the eggs, deciding to commence with a classic. He picked up one of the pungent bombs, felt its weight in the palm of his hand for a long, satisfying moment, then lobbed it at a downstairs window.

The shell exploded and the rotten contents sprayed across the glass. The stench hit Maurice immediately and he gagged. Holding his nose shut with one hand, he rooted through the rucksack until he found the cotton wool that he had forgotten about in his excitement. Ripping it into balls, he swiftly stuffed a couple up his nose, cutting out the worst of the smell.

"It's all about the fine details," Maurice smirked, then carried on bombing the house, striking every window that he could see, upstairs as well as down.

He noticed movement inside. The man had come to one of the windows and was gazing out at Maurice, his face distorted by the candlelight and dark green shade of the glass. It was impossible to tell what he might be thinking. Maurice didn't care. He didn't stop either, not until he had run out of eggs. If the man wanted to come out and confront him, all the better. Maurice was the larger and meaner of the two. He fancied his chances.

"Be careful what you wish for in future," Maurice hollered as he poured the vomit from the jar in through the letter box.

"Always have some treats in stock," he shouted as he rubbed the inside of the dirty nappy around the rim of the front door.

"It pays to be nice to children," he laughed as he lobbed maggot-ridden chunks of meat onto the roof, to catch in the guttering and stink up the area around the bedroom windows.

Maurice carried on until he had exhausted his supplies. He considered holding onto some of the mess, in case anyone blanked him on his way home, but he doubted he'd find anyone else as foolish as this lonely, trembling man. Nobody in control of their senses was dumb enough to get on the wrong side of the fearsome Maurice Morris.

As Maurice was balling up the bags and sticking them back into the rucksack (he was a thug, but he wasn't a litterbug), he heard a noise overhead. Looking up, he saw that one of the upstairs windows was open. The candle was sitting on the ledge inside.

There was no sign of the man.

"I'd keep the windows shut for a few weeks if I was you," Maurice yelled up.

Silence was the only response.

Maurice frowned. He couldn't say why, but he felt that the man was no longer inside, that he had slid out through the open window, into the branches of a tree that grew in close to the roof. That was silly, of course. The branches were spindly and wouldn't support the weight of even the slightest human. But Maurice couldn't shake the uneasy feeling.

"Getting soft in your old age," he sniffed, and finished packing away the bags.

As he turned to leave, Maurice thought he glimpsed movement in the branches. Pausing, he stared up into the leafy canopy, but he couldn't see anything.

"I'm going now," he roared, hoping his loud voice would mask the sound of his suddenly pounding heart. "See you again next year."

Maurice set off down the path, trying not to hurry, wanting to appear relaxed and unafraid.

There was a rustling noise high in the trees above him.

Then a snapping sound.

"What's up there?" Maurice cried. "I know it can't be you. Do you have a pet squirrel or something?"

Silence.

"You're wasting your time trying to frighten me," Maurice said, starting forward again, faster than before.

There was a creaking noise.

Then something that might have been two branches rubbing together.

Or fangs gnashing.

“Nuts to this,” Maurice moaned, and he broke into a sprint.

Maurice had never run much before. He had never needed to. Since he was the largest, most bullying child in the neighbourhood, nobody had ever pursued him, and he rarely bothered to chase kids who ran away from him. He lived in a small town, so he knew that he would cross paths with them again, sooner or later.

He realised very quickly that he wasn’t cut out for running. He was too heavy. Within no time at all he was panting and sweating. When a stitch struck, he had to stop and double over. He sank to his knees, wheezing like an old man, wiping sweat away from his eyes.

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.

“Mister?” Maurice croaked. “Is that you?”

Silence.

“I’m sorry,” Maurice said. “I’ll come back and clean your house tomorrow. I promise.”

The shape advanced. For a moment Maurice thought it was a monster, but then he saw that it was only the small, grey-haired man.

“Oh.” Maurice smiled shakily as the man stopped in front of him. “It really is you. I thought...” He chuckled edgily, regaining some of his spirit.

“Never mind what I thought,” Maurice said, getting back to his feet and cracking his knuckles. He glared at the man. “How did you get ahead of me? Is there another path that I don’t know about?”

The man stared at Maurice solemnly. He wasn’t trembling any longer. Then he spoke softly, as he had before.



“I’ve had a change of heart,” the man said.

“What do you mean?” Maurice growled, eyeing the man suspiciously.

The man bent backwards. He was wearing a shirt. It rode up as he stretched, exposing the flesh of his stomach. Maurice started to laugh, but then he saw the flesh begin to split across the middle, and the laughter died on his lips.

The man carried on bending, far past the point that any normal person could bend to. As he bent, something crawled out of the spreading hole in his stomach. It was dark and coiled in on itself, like a snake. As it began to uncoil, Maurice saw that it was full of sharp angles and spikes, like a figure that had been pieced together from triangular scraps and a cactus plant.

The creature reached up and grabbed a couple of branches. It could easily reach the upper levels of the trees with its long, nightmarish arms. It pulled itself out of the remains of the man’s body, and his flesh collapsed in on itself, revealing itself for the boneless piece of camouflage that it had always been.

The monster stood before a spellbound Maurice, prickly organs still unfolding and sliding around the bulk of its body, taking shape as the boy watched, becoming a man-like figure, only three times as tall, with five legs and any number of arms. It had one long, yellow slit of an eye that ran almost all the way around the bulging crown of its massive grey head. And a mouth full of spiky fangs.

The beast reached out with several of its arms and they curled around Maurice, spikes sticking into him wherever the tendrils touched. It was like falling into a bed of nettles, and Maurice cried out with pain. He tried to pull free, but the spikes dug in harder, so he stopped and stood still. Tears were falling from his eyes now, the first time he had cried in as long as he could remember.

The monster gurgled, and although the words were almost unrecognisable, Maurice was able to make them out.

“Ask me the question,” it said.

“No,” Maurice whined. “Please.”

The arms tightened a notch around him, spikes digging in again.

Maurice winced, wept some more, then said softly and miserably, "Trick-or-treat."

The monster's lips spread wide over its fangs as it smiled hungrily and nodded with punishing satisfaction.

"Treat," the monster whispered dreadfully.

And with a bloodthirsty grin, it tucked on in.

**What did you like about the story?**

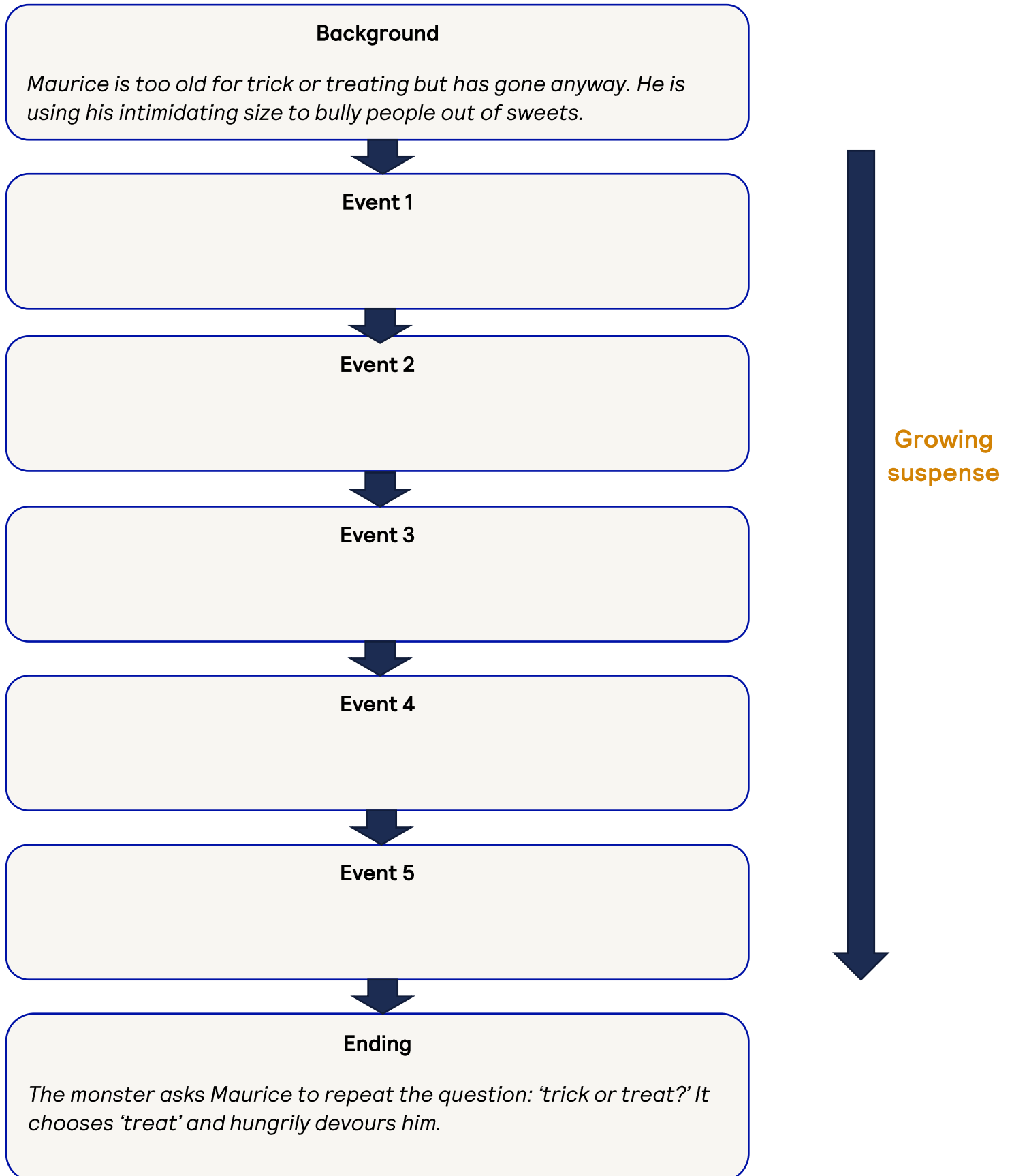
**What did you dislike about the story?**

**What made the story spooky?**

## Session two: Structural techniques

Spooky stories use techniques like suspense and character – let's learn these techniques so that you can use them in your work.

**Task one:** Fill in the flow chart to show growing suspense in the story



**Task two:** Fill in the table with details of the characters

**Main character:** *Maurice Morris*

**Age:**

**Adjectives to describe the character:**

- *Aggressive*
- *Mean spirited*
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**What makes this a good character for a scary story?**

**Spooky character:** *The Old Man*

**Age:**

**Adjectives to describe the character:**

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**What makes this a good character for a scary story?**

**Challenge:** Find three quotations in the text that describe the characters

**Maurice**

*"Maurice loved it when he made someone cry"*

**The Old Man**

**Task three:** Invent two characters for your own story, set in

**Main character:**

**Age:**

**Adjectives to describe the character:**

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**What makes this a good character for a scary story?**

**Spooky character:**

**Age:**

**Adjectives to describe the character:**

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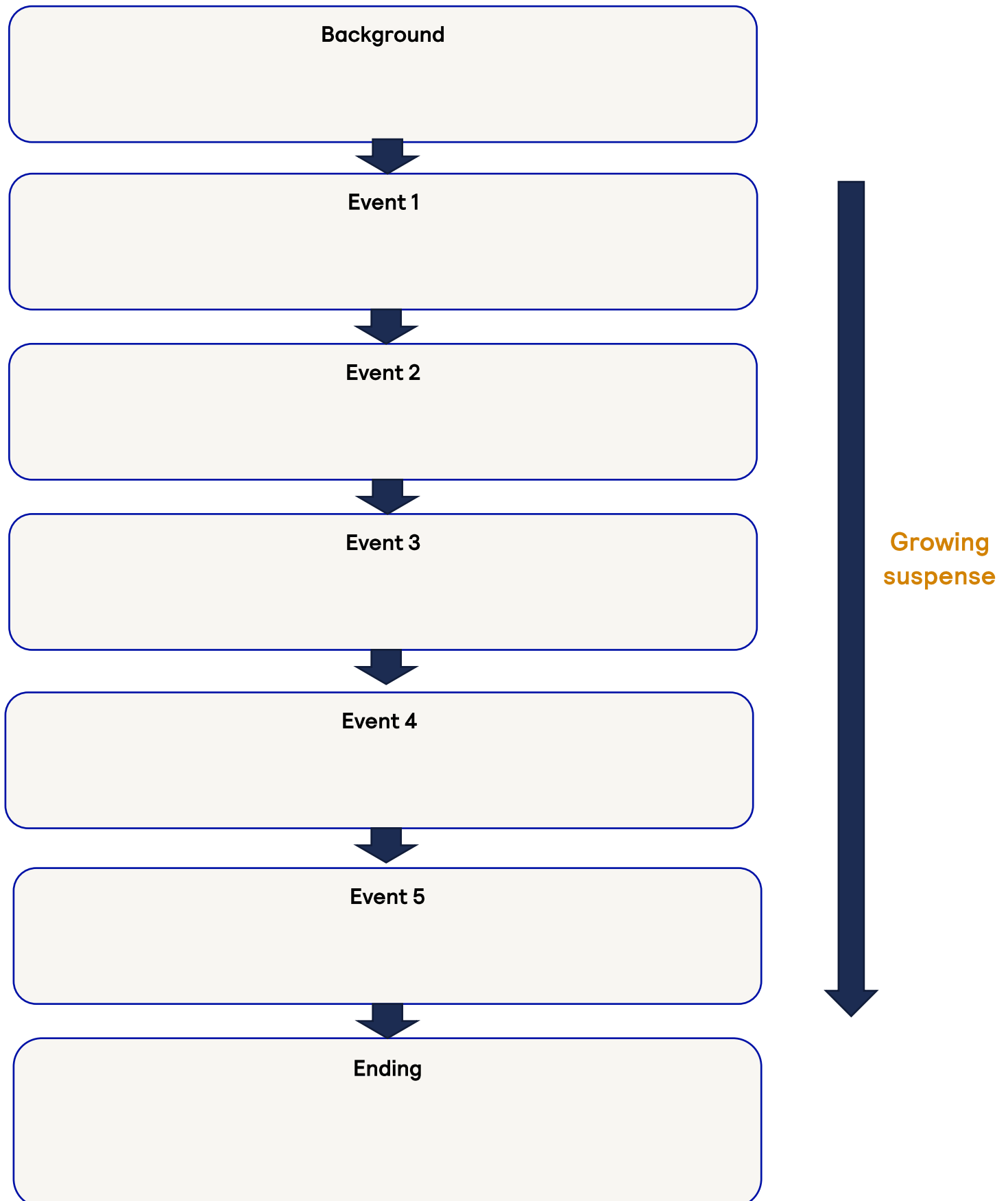
**What makes this a good character for a scary story?**

**Challenge:** Write three sentences to describe each of your characters

**Main Character**

**Spooky Character**

**Task four:** Plan your own story using the same structure. Remember, your story should be set in Birmingham.



## Session three: Language techniques

Let's explore the language devices used in spooky stories, so you can use them in your own story.

**Task one:** Highlight or circle the spooky words in the below extract

Most trick-or-treaters never ventured this far out, but Maurice wasn't afraid of the dark or **scuttling** noises in the trees. There was very little in life that scared Maurice Morris.

Spotting a narrow, rarely used path, Maurice pushed through some thick bushes and headed deep into the forest. The moonlight didn't penetrate the tree cover here, but Maurice only whistled merrily and trudged along, at ease in the gloom.

After a ten minute stroll he came to a house. The trees grew in tightly around it, the tips of some of them brushing against the roof and upper windows. It had been painted a dark green colour, so that it blended in with its surroundings. Even the glass of the windows had been scrubbed over.

Maurice experienced a brief moment of unease, but shrugged it off and stomped forward. Some people wanted more privacy than others, that was all. The grim-looking windows were nothing to be wary of, certainly not if you were a brazen behemoth like him.

When he got to the porch, Maurice thought the house was deserted, and he nearly retreated. But then he spotted the flickering light of a candle coming from a room near the rear of the building.

**Challenge:** Fill in the boxes with some other spooky words that you know already.

Adjectives (e.g., gloomy, terrifying)

Verbs (e.g., scuttling, sneaking)

## Task two: Fill in the table with language devices

Language device	Definition	Tick the correct example from the story	Challenge: Write your own scary example
<b>Simile</b>	Comparing two things with 'like' or 'as' to help description	<input type="checkbox"/> "the monster's lips spread wide over its fangs as it <b>smiled</b> " <input type="checkbox"/> "It was dark and coiled in on itself, <b>like a snake</b> " <input type="checkbox"/> "the laughter <b>died</b> on his lips"	
<b>Metaphor</b>	Using non-literal language to help description	<input type="checkbox"/> "the monster's lips spread wide over its fangs as it <b>smiled</b> " <input type="checkbox"/> "It was dark and coiled in on itself, <b>like a snake</b> " <input type="checkbox"/> "the laughter <b>died</b> on his lips"	
<b>Sibilance</b>	Using lots of 's' sounds to create a spooky atmosphere	<input type="checkbox"/> "the monster's lips spread wide over its fangs as it <b>smiled</b> " <input type="checkbox"/> "It was dark and coiled in on itself, <b>like a snake</b> " <input type="checkbox"/> "the laughter <b>died</b> on his lips"	
<b>Suspenseful, short sentences</b>	Short sentences can be used to create a growing sense of fear	<b>Have a look in the story and write below:</b>	

**Task three:** Do you feel ready to write your own scary story, set in Birmingham?

☐ Yes  
☐ Maybe  
☐ No

Speak to your session leader or visit [literacytrust.org.uk/communities/birmingham](http://literacytrust.org.uk/communities/birmingham) for details on how to submit a story.