

# New Windmills

2003

## support sheets

by Michele Paule

The following pages consist of teacher's notes and classroom support sheets for *Coraline* by Neil Gaimon. These pages can be downloaded and printed out as required.

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# Coraline

## by Neil Gaiman

### Synopsis

Coraline and her parents move into a flat in a mysterious old house. Other strange people live there. Bored and ignored by her busy parents, Coraline discovers a doorway into another world where she finds strange versions of her home, her parents and the other tenants. Coraline must solve a mystery and defeat her evil 'other mother' – with the help of a talking cat. However, even when she seems to have won, she finds something from the 'other' world has followed her home...

### Prior learning

It would be useful to explore pupils' experiences of fantasy stories such as:

#### Books

*Alice in Wonderland*  
*The Princess Bride*  
*Northern Lights*  
*Harry Potter*  
*Point Horror*

#### Film/TV Drama

*Jumanji*  
*Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*  
*Harry Potter*

It would also be useful to discuss genre and expectation.

### Study areas

The subject and structure of the story lend themselves well to work on narrative plotting and creating expectations, developing their understanding of the author's craft and development of their own writing. Changes in language over time can be explored through the ghost children.

Possible areas for study would include:

- **Creating mood and expectation through setting:** Y7, R12 Setting and mood; Y8, R10 Development of key ideas; Y9, R8 Readers and texts
- **Active reading and writing:** How tension is created through variety of sentence and paragraph structure in action parts of novel, and experimenting with this in own writing; Y7, S11 Sentence variety; Y7, W7 narrative devices; Y8, S2 Variety of sentence structure; Y8, W2 Anticipate reader reaction; Y9, S1 Complex sentences; Y9, W5 Narrative techniques
- **Exploration of overall structure of the novel** e.g. plotting tension graphs for chapters; exploring parallels in 'real' and 'other' world. Y8, R10 Development of key ideas; Y9, R8 Readers and texts

- **Creation of character and author's viewpoint** of parenting suggested through contrasting Coraline's real parents with her 'other parents' **Y7, R16** Author attitudes; **Y8, R10** development of key ideas
- **Looking at how language is used** to portray ghost children **Y7, W16** Unfamiliar words; **Y8, S13** Change over time; **Y9, S11** Trends over time

(Based on the National Literacy Strategy Framework objectives for Years 7, 8 and 9: W = Word level; S= Sentence level; R = Reading; Wr = Writing; S&L = Speaking & Listening)

## Teacher guidance

### *Support Sheet 1*

This support sheet explores the ways in which reader expectation is created in the opening chapter, building on pupils' previous experience of the conventions of mystery stories. It encourages them to keep a log as they continue to read the novel, to gain understanding of how such expectations continue to be created to sustain reader interest.

### *Support Sheet 2*

This support sheet explores the ways in which the author uses language and sentence structure to create atmosphere and tension. It gives an example annotated passage, and guidelines for pupils' own annotation work

### *Support Sheet 3*

This sheet supports pupils in the creation of tension in their own writing by means of a guidance frame.

# 1 Creating Expectations

## Chapter one – setting the scene

Beginnings of books are important. The writer has to grab our interest and make us want to read on and find out what happens. One of the ways in which they do this is by creating clues and hinting that exciting things might be going to happen.

In the table below, you will find examples of things that make the reader suspect they are reading a particular type of story. Complete the table and add more examples of your own from the first chapter.

Example	What it makes me think of/expect
A very old house	This is typical for a ghost or horror story. It makes me expect strange things or someone being trapped
An overgrown garden	
Names: Miss Spink and Miss Forcible	
A crazy old man with a mouse circus	
A haughty black cat	This makes me think of witches, spells and magic
A door that leads nowhere	

In pairs, look at your charts and discuss what sort of story you think this is going to be and how the different examples work to make you expect this.

## Building on clues from the whole text – Keeping a 'clue log'

Writers of mystery novels keep their readers guessing by including hints and suggestions about what is to come. These work as a 'story glue' that keeps the plot together. Read though the book and make a note of the sorts of clues that Neil Gaiman includes. See if you are right as the story develops. Some clues have been given below to start you off.

Clue	Makes me expect ...	Important later because ...
Coraline's dream		
The old man's warning		
The tea-leaves		
The stone		

## 2

# Active Reading – how writers create tension

## A passage from Chapter 2

This passage has been annotated to show how the writer builds up the atmosphere and pace. Look at the examples that have been highlighted.

The **old black** key felt **colder** than any of the others. She pushed it into the keyhole. It turned smoothly, with a satisfying clunk.

Coraline **stopped** and listened. **She knew she was doing something wrong, and she was trying to listen for her mother coming back, but she heard nothing.** Then Coraline put her hand on the doorknob and turned it; and, finally, she opened the door.

It opened onto a dark hallway. The bricks had gone, as if they'd never been there. There was a **cold, musty smell** coming through the open doorway: it smelled like something very old and very slow.

**Coraline went through the door.**

She wondered what the empty flat would be like – if that was where the corridor led.

Coraline walked down the corridor **uneasily**. There was something very familiar about it.

**The carpet beneath her feet was the same carpet they had in their flat. The wallpaper was the same wallpaper they had. The picture hanging in the hall was the same that they had hanging in their hall.**

**She knew where she was: she was in her own home. She hadn't left.**

**She shook her head, confused.**

Use of adjectives suggests spookiness.

Use of senses (smell and touch) to create vivid impressions for the reader.

Short sentences help build up tension.

The longer sentence with three clauses suggest the flow of thoughts in her head, and slows down the action as she stops to think.

Use of adjectives and adverbs to show the character's reactions.

Repetition of words and sentence structure emphasises the meaning.

**Task**

Now choose a passage from the book that you think creates atmosphere and tension. In the passage, look for examples of the writer doing these things:

- using a range of the senses to create a vivid impression [sight, sound, smell, touch, taste]
- using short sentences to build up tension
- using longer, complex sentences to suggest flow of thought or lots of action happening quickly
- using adverbs and adjectives to create vivid impressions of the place and the character's feelings
- using repetition for effect.

## 3

# Creating your own narrative – building tension and atmosphere

## The situation

A boy explores an abandoned old house. He finds an old trunk which he is about to open. He hears noises and is scared.

## Task

You are going to turn this situation into a passage of tense and spooky writing, using some of the techniques in *Coraline*. Use the frame below to help you build up your ideas.

### 1 The boy arrives at the house

Build up a vivid picture of the house using interesting adjectives, and similes to make it seem spooky.

### 2 The boy hesitates before going in

Describe the thoughts going through his head. Use sentences with two or three clauses to create a feeling of flow, and questions such as 'what if...?' And 'should he...?' to suggest uncertainty and fear.

### 3 The boy enters and walks through the house

Describe his impressions of the house using different senses to create a vivid impression in the reader's mind.

### 4 The boy sees an old trunk or chest

Describe the chest, using interesting adjectives to make it seem mysterious. Describe the boy's thoughts when he sees it – show that he is curious. Again, when describing his thoughts, try to use complex sentences.

### 5 The boy approaches the trunk to open it

Try using some shorter sentences to describe his actions to create tension. You can mix these with longer sentences to describe his thoughts as he moves towards the trunk.

### 6 He hears a noise and stops

Now you need to build up the fear as much as possible. Short sentences on lines of their own will help you to suggest surprise. Use adjectives and adverbs to describe the boy's reactions – you need to show fear through his actions and thoughts.

### 7 What happens next? You decide

You could end this with an amusing let-down, or continue with the mystery. Either way, try to continue using the techniques you have been practising. Think about the following:

- does he open the trunk? What's in there?
- do we find out what made the noise?
- does he run away? If so, show his panic.