

LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

Do you know of any?



Ghost stories

LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

Purpose and audience

- The purpose of a ghost story, as well as to entertain, is to create fear, often only through suggestion.
- There is usually a reason for the ghost's visit, often because they feel that they have some kind of unfinished business.
- In a ghost story, the protagonist often helps the ghost to complete this business and move on.

LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

Setting:	Can be isolated, mysterious, frightening, unusual, threatening, e.g. Castles, old houses, dark woods, etc are all very popular
Characters:	The ghost - frightening, mysterious, troubled The protagonist(s) - frightened, innocent, brave
Plot:	Usually builds to a climax Often an unusual, unexpected twist at the end Ghost usually allowed to rest in peace
Word Choice:	Deliberately chosen to heighten suspense and fear Use of figurative language (imagery) and sound words (alliteration and onomatopoeia)

LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

Look at the following two ghost story. What features has the author used? What has he done effectively?

## LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

John was tired to his bones. He was on a walking holiday and he had tramped for miles over the bleak and empty moors. His feet were sore and his legs felt as heavy as lead. His rucksack straps cut into his shoulders and his stomach rumbled with hunger. Then, to make matters worse, it started to rain. A thin cold rain that soaked through his clothes and chilled him. He needed to find a place to rest for the night. In his mind he had a vision of a welcoming country inn offering food, a hot bath and a soft, comfortable bed with clean sheets and a thick eiderdown. He looked about hopefully but the night had fallen and swirled around him like a thick cloak of darkness. He could barely see his hand in front of his face.

John stumbled on, then, at last, he came to an old road. It was little more than a country lane but John's spirits rose. He felt sure it would lead to a village or at least to a house or cottage where he could ask for a bed for the night. He stepped out with renewed energy and, before too long, he saw a dark shape looming up ahead of him. As he came closer he realised that it was an inn, though not the one he hoped to find. It was grim and gloomy and the windows were shuttered. There was not a glimmer of light showing anywhere. John's spirits fell but he strode up to the front door and used the old brass knocker to announce his presence. At first nothing happened so he hammered on the door again. Then a shaft of light appeared under the door and John heard the sound of bolts being pulled back and a key turning in the lock. A large, thickset man stood silhouetted in the doorway.

'You're hammering is enough to wake the dead,' he grumbled.

'Sorry,' said John, 'but I've been walking on the moors all day and I'm cold, soaked and famished. I need food, a hot bath and a comfortable bed or I won't last the night.'

'Then it's lucky for you that you're here,' replied the man. 'We pride ourselves on being the best inn for miles around. You'll not find a better place if you look from here 'til doomsday.'

'I'm more than happy to take your word for it,' said John stepping inside.

## LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

The landlord threw a couple of large logs onto the open fireplace and John warmed his hands on the leaping flames while steam rose from his wet clothes. Then he wolfed down a large bowlful of soup before making his way up to his room where he had a hot bath.

After his bath, John draped his clothes over the wooden chair to dry. He glanced at his reflection in the mirror. His face was ghostly pale and dark shadows skulked beneath his eyes. John shook his head at his sorry appearance. It's nothing that a good night's sleep won't put right, he told himself. He turned and tripped over his rucksack. He cursed his own clumsiness, picked the rucksack up and hung it from a hook that protruded from the wall. Then he climbed into bed, blew out the candle, pulled the covers up to his chin and fell into a deep sleep almost immediately.

John had no idea how long he slept but suddenly his eyes flew open. The darkness pressed down on him like a heavy blanket. He frowned, puzzled as to what had woken him. Then he realised that it was the acrid stench that filled his nostrils. Smoke! He couldn't see it but he could certainly smell it. His brain was still fuddled with sleep and he couldn't work out where the smoke was coming from. Then the old saying, "there's no smoke without fire" popped into his head and his heart lurched with fear. The inn must be ablaze and he was trapped on the upper floor. He became aware of running feet and distant shouts. People were

## LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

escaping from the building but John lay in his bed unable to move. A great weariness filled his bones and it seemed to him that if he only pulled the blankets over his head and went back to sleep he would be safe.

Then, from just outside his room, came a terrible crash. John sat up and dragged himself out of the bed. He staggered and swayed and bumped into the wooden chair containing his clothes. He swept them up into his arms and commanded his aching legs to carry him to the door. He wrenched it open and nearly collided with a shadowy figure who rushed past him and disappeared into the darkness. Flames were licking their way up the walls. A wooden doorway collapsed and an inferno of heat blasted along the passageway. John spun on his heel and dashed towards the stairs while blistering air scorched his back.

The stairwell was smothered in a fog of dense and choking smoke. The stairs themselves had vanished. Frantically, John turned to find another way of escape but a wall of flame was advancing towards him. The fire roared like a furious dragon and its breath singed John's hair. In despair he spun round and faced the pit where the stairs had been. There was nothing else for it. John had to jump into the swirling smoke. He had no idea where, or on what, he would land but he buried his face in his clothes and leapt.

He crashed into a smouldering banister that broke his fall and sent him tumbling across the floor. He sprawled half dazed for a moment then an old oak beam came hurtling down from the rafters in a shower of sparks and smashed into the ground right next to him. John scrambled to his feet. Panic flooded his mind. His throat was like sandpaper, his skin was raw; he knew he was going to die. Then he felt a cool draft of air on his face. It was coming from a rectangle of pure darkness away to his right. He hurled himself towards it as another blazing beam fell behind him and the ceiling collapsed.

John found himself alive and standing on the stone path outside the inn. The rectangle of darkness was, in fact, all that remained after the front door had burned away. John stared as fire danced on the roof and flags of bright red and yellow flame burst out of the windows. Suddenly it dawned on John that, although he had cheated death, he must fetch help for those still trapped inside. He sprinted off up the lane in search of someone, anyone, to come to the aid of the victims of the fire.

## LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

John ran until his lungs were bursting but there wasn't so much as a cottage anywhere nearby. He was almost on his knees with exhaustion when at last he came to a small house. With renewed energy he raced up the garden path and banged on the door. An upstairs window was thrown open and a very startled man demanded to know what on earth was the matter.

'Come quickly,' yelled John. 'The inn's ablaze and people are in deadly danger. You must help them.'

'You're drunk,' replied the man. 'There's no inn anywhere near here, more's the pity.'

'Yes there is! It's about two miles back down the road. You have to come. You can't just leave people to their fate. I only just escaped with my life.'

When he realised that John was not going to go away the man slammed the window shut and came down to the door. After a great deal of argument, John finally persuaded the man and his brother to go with him to the inn. They thought he was mad and only went to keep an eye on him. When they arrived back at the spot there was no fire and no inn. There were just the overgrown remains of an old ruin.

'I'll tell you what must have happened,' said the man. 'I bet you were so tired after walking on the moors all day you must have fallen asleep on your feet and had a nightmare, son. This place has been a ruin since before my grandfather's time. Nobody round here even remembers what kind of building it was.' He shook his head and with a shrug he and his brother went back home.

By now the sun was slowly climbing up into the sky and, by the early morning light, John could make out the layout of the ruin. He stepped over a pile of crumbling bricks and began to explore. He felt a chill shiver run up and down his spine like a spider and he shuddered. John was convinced what he had experienced had not been a nightmare. It had been far too real for that. Then he saw what remained of the fireplace where he had warmed



LO: I know the features of a ghost story.

his hands. His mouth went dry with excitement. There was a gap in the stones where a door would once have stood and he walked through it. This led him to the stairwell. John glanced up at the moss-covered wall and along to where his bedroom would have been. His stomach knotted and his blood ran cold for there, high above his head, was a hook and dangling from it was his rucksack!

© Roger Hum 2005  
[www.roger-hum.co.uk](http://www.roger-hum.co.uk)

## LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

To create a setting for your reader you need to describe:

- > What the place looks like. You should choose your words carefully here, giving as much description as you can.
- > If the place is light, dark, or has certain colours. Often a dark setting at night is used in these type of stories. However a bright, sunlit day could work well since it is an unexpected setting. You could also use colour as a warning to your reader. For example, each time the ghost, monster appears the room takes on a red glow.)
- > What the weather is like. Traditionally, storms and rain work well in ghost stories, as do snow, fog etc.
- > What sounds there are. Depending on the weather, this could be sounds of wind howling, thunder crashing, etc.
- > Any other impression made on the senses. The use of strange aromas works well; the feel of the walls, the dampness of the fog on the skin etc; unusual tastes, such as strong perfume which catches in the throat.

Today we are looking  
at setting  
descriptions.

LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.



LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.



Choose a setting to focus on for your description. Consider the building and the surrounding environment.

LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

see



hear



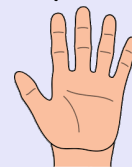
taste



smell



feel



LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

LQ: Can I create a word bank for a setting description?

The worksheet is titled "LQ: Can I create a word bank for a setting description?". In the center is a photograph of a dark, two-story house with a porch, set against a dark, stormy sky with some trees in the foreground. Four arrows radiate from this central image to four rectangular writing boxes. Each box is divided into four horizontal lines. To the left of the top-left box is an icon of a human eye. To the right of the top-right box is an icon of a human ear. Below the bottom-left box is an icon of a human nose. Below the bottom-right box is an icon of two human hands. This layout is designed to prompt students to describe the setting using their five senses.

Write down powerful descriptive phrases or words for each of your senses linked to your chosen setting.

LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

Which are the most powerful phrases we have written?

Why are they suitable for these settings?

a shutter banged, at the back of the house, making me jump

wafts of smoke.....in

my nostrils

creaks become louder as shuffling feet approach

moans filled the room

ancient cottage was covered in fog like  
a blanket

cobwebs sticking to my  
skin

LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

Choose one of the settings we have looked at (or a different one if you feel strongly about it). Consider which phrases would be effective in your description and record these in your book.



LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

Richard Kinnell wasn't frightened when he first saw the picture at the yard sale in Rosewood. He was fascinated by it, and he felt he'd had the good luck to find something which might be very special, but fright? No. It didn't occur to him until later ('not until it was too late' as he might have written in one of his own numbingly successful novels) that he had felt much the same way about certain illegal drugs as a young man.

*The Road Virus Heads North* by STEPHEN KING

Opening paragraphs in ghost/horror stories.

"I'd not go higher, sir," said my landlady's father.

I made out his warning through the shrill piping of the wind, and stopped and took in the plunging seascape from where I stood. The boom of the waves came up from a vast distance beneath; sky and the horizon of running water seemed hurrying upon us over the lip of the rearing cliff.

*Dark Diqnum* by BERNARD CAPES

LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

Read this description of a haunted house in London.

PORTMAN SQUARE, LONDON, 1911.

It was an old house which stood on the corner of the street. The corridors were very long and not very well lit. The sun didn't shine in the windows, and so the house didn't have a good view.

At night, the house grew very dark. As well as being difficult to light, the house was always very cold.

Is it effective? How could it be improved?

LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

PORTMAN SQUARE, LONDON, 1911.

It was a strange and rambling house, full of old oak stairways. Long and narrow corridors seemed to hold dark and evil secrets. Windows gave no warming sunlight, only gloomy views of shadowed courtyards at the back and the blank, blind faces of houses at the front.

After sunset a shroud of darkness seemed to wrap itself around the house before creeping slowly inside. Blazing log fires hardly seemed to warm the rooms and hissing gaslight was strangely dimmed.

## LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

### BEN'S JOURNEY

The car engine seemed to cough a few times before it finally shuddered to a halt. Ben sighed in frustration. Fifty miles from home, in the middle of nowhere, half past midnight. His choice was simple: stay put in the icy darkness till the morning or leave the car and see if there was any sign of human life nearby.

The moonlight glimmered on the white frost which covered the road like a gossamer sheet and on the tussocks of grass standing stiffly and blackly along the roadside. The bushes cast strange shaped shadows in his path, and a solitary owl hooted from a nearby wood. He felt the skin at the back of his neck prickle with cold sweat. The clouds momentarily cut off the moonlight and the shadows melted into general darkness. The air was thick with darkness, so thick that he could almost touch it. His breath seemed to materialise into something solid in the icy air, and he could hear his heart beat like a drum. Something touched his face, something as cold as the grave and his teeth clacked and chattered uncontrollably.

1. Is this an effective setting?
2. What imagery do you find particularly effective?
3. Which words help to add to the spooky atmosphere?

## LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

1. Is this an effective setting?
2. What imagery do you find particularly effective?
3. Which words help to add to the spooky atmosphere?

Underline which of the words in bold you think is most effective in describing the following setting.

The road up to the castle was littered with/covered in/full of stones that were so big/sharp/uneven that they caught the traveller unawares and cut/tore/sliced through his shoes or threw him off balance so that his ankles were sore/tender/racked with pain. Around the castle there ran a deep river whose surface was covered with green weeds/slime/vegetation. A few wild birds floated hopelessly/uneasily/sadly in it, their feathers dull and drooping.

Overhead grey/stormy/cloudy skies cast a dull/dark/dead light over the castle. It seemed that the thick clouds would perpetually stop any sun from reaching/warming/touching the castle with its rays.

The walls of the castle were hidden/entwined/covered with tangled creepers which seemed to be trying to choke the life out of it. The creepers had pulled/dragged/wrenched stones from the wall so that the whole building threatened to/was about to/might fall on anyone who entered and kill/crush/hurt him.

Please **ONLY** continue if you are not coming in to school **AT ALL!**

LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.

Today we are going to use our wordbanks and our exploration from yesterday to help us write our own setting descriptions.

The moonlight glimmered on the white frost which covered the road like a gossamer sheet and on the tussocks of grass standing stiffly and blackly along the roadside. The bushes cast strange shaped shadows in his path, and a solitary owl hooted from a nearby wood. He felt the skin at the back of his neck prickle with cold sweat. The clouds momentarily cut off the moonlight and the shadows melted into general darkness. The air was thick with darkness, so thick that he could almost touch it. His breath seemed to materialise into something solid in the icy air, and he could hear his heart beat like a drum. Something touched his face, something as cold as the grave and his teeth clacked and chattered uncontrollably.

## LO: I can write a setting description for a ghost story.



- ▶ What the place looks like. You should choose your words carefully here, giving as much description as you can.
- ▶ If the place is light, dark, or has certain colours. Often a dark setting at night is used in these type of stories. However a bright, sunlit day could work well since it is an unexpected setting. You could also use colour as a warning to your reader. For example, each time the ghost, monster appears the room takes on a red glow.)
- ▶ What the weather is like. Traditionally, storms and rain work well in ghost stories, as do snow, fog etc.
- ▶ What sounds there are. Depending on the weather, this could be sounds of wind howling, thunder crashing, etc.
- ▶ Any other impression made on the senses. The use of strange aromas works well: the feel of the walls, the dampness of the fog on the skin etc; unusual tastes, such as strong perfume which catches in the throat.

Shadows shifted across the mottled sky.  
The bright glow of the full moon, appeared fleetingly, in between the drifting clouds, creating dark silhouettes against the dark house. The cool wind whispered gently in my ear, as I stood anxious but reluctant to leave. She would only be a minute, she had said.