

Worksheet 1

Runaway Ghost Train

Building Tension

*'Joe was calmly reading a paper and drinking a cup of coffee.
Suddenly everything changed. A warning bell sounded. Why?
Joe looked out into the yard, alarmed. No movements were scheduled.
He turned back and looked up at his track board...not a single track on the board was lighted.'*

In the story *Runaway Ghost Train*, the author uses particular language features to help build tension as the terrifying tale of the runaway train unfolds. Here are some examples:

- ◇ short sentences:
Joe was scared.
And then the impossible happened.
Joe's pulse raced.
- ◇ tension-inducing adverbs:
Suddenly, everything changed.
Abruptly, a white light blinked on.
Frank knew **immediately** how dangerous the situation was.
- ◇ disaster-specific vocabulary
e.g. *destruction, crisis, explosion, horrified, appalled, catastrophic.*
- ◇ exclamation marks:
"Hold everything on Three!"
The runaway was running without lights!
But it was only a few hundred metres back!
- ◇ rhetorical questions:
A warning bell sounded. Why?
Why had he stopped? This was a potentially catastrophic change of plan.
What had happened in those two minutes?

Task 1: Think about an incredibly frightening experience (it can be something you have experienced first hand or an imaginary scenario). Compose a text relating the events of this experience and build tension along the way using the language features outlined above.

Task 2: Read your text to an audience. Did they feel scared? Ask them to reflect on the parts of your story that helped to build tension as the events unfolded.

Extension Activity:

- Unlike written texts, audio-visual texts (such as films) can use sound and visual features to help build tension e.g. menacing music, eerie sound effects, frightening camera close-ups etc. Write an informative text comparing the techniques used to build tension in written texts to those used in visual texts.