

Building Suspense in Your Story

In my years of teaching storytelling, I have found it most helpful to focus on *internal* techniques for storytelling. In other words, we make sure we are seeing and sensing and feeling things, and then let these things affect our outward telling such as using gestures, voices, characters, etc. Sometimes, however, it is good to look at *external* ways of preparing for stories. The images and feelings still have to be there, but this time we're working on the outer stuff first.

What follows is a very suspenseful story (er . . . part of one)! Or it could be, if you use some of the vocal techniques I provide after it. Try them on for size!

An Exciting Story

Once there was a little girl who was very curious. She saw a dark object in a field nearby. She walked closer, closer, closer, closer, closer until it reached out and grabbed her!

Method #1: As you tell the story, experiment with volume: getting louder and louder until the end.

Method #2: As you tell the story, experiment with rate: getting faster and faster until the end.

Method #3: As you tell the story, experiment with body tenseness: getting more and more tense and stiff until the end.

Method #4: As you tell the story, experiment with pitch: getting higher and higher in vocal tone until the end.

Method #5: As you tell the story, experiment with contrasts: find times to contrast volume or rate or pitch or body tenseness.

And remember: rules were meant to be broken. Try getting softer, or slower, or lowering your pitch and see the effect. It may be just what your story needs!

Now listen to the story, "The Eeny Weeny Beeney Ghost," by one of my family's favorite storytellers: Bill Harley. The story comes from his *The Battle of the Mad Scientists* CD. List ways in which he uses vocal techniques to amplify the suspense in his story. He uses some of the above methods, but he also adds a few of his own! See if you can pick them out!