

Suspense by Sequence

Track how event order creates tension and resolution.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3c "Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution)."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number five key events in the order they happen, then underline two details that raise suspense or release it. Notice how the sequence moves from uncertainty to resolution.

The Records Room

- ① At 8:40 p.m., Mara locked the small museum's front doors and began her final round. Rain tapped the skylight above the fossil hall, while the building's old pipes clicked behind the walls. Near the loading dock, she noticed a narrow strip of light under the records-room door. The room should have been empty. Mara checked the sign-out board, then saw that the curator's name was missing from its usual line. Instead of calling out, she took the flashlight from her belt and listened. A soft scrape sounded once, then stopped.
- ② She moved toward the door, counting each step to keep her shoes from squeaking. Before she reached it, her phone vibrated with a message from the curator: "I left ten minutes ago. Did you?" Mara stared at the screen. The light beneath the door vanished. For a moment, the hallway held only the rain and the ticking wall clock. Then the records-room handle turned slowly from the inside. Mara stepped behind a display case, but her flashlight slipped from her hand and rolled across the tile. Its beam stopped at the door, brightening the brass handle.
- ③ The door opened only a few inches. Mr. Vale, the night security guard, stood there holding a folder against his chest. "The alarm panel showed this room unlocked," he whispered. Mara recognized him, yet the scrape and the vanished light still made no sense. Together, they switched on the overhead lamp. A fallen metal drawer lay open beside the desk, and a gray cat crouched behind it, tangled in a string of inventory tags. Mara exhaled, then laughed quietly as Mr. Vale freed the cat. Outside, the rain softened. Mara returned the flashlight to her belt and finished her round, this time with the cat following at her heels.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 What three events in the first paragraph lead Mara to investigate the records room?

2 How does the curator's text message increase suspense at that point in the sequence?

3 How do the falling flashlight and its beam increase suspense while Mara waits behind the display case in paragraph 2?

4 How does the final paragraph shift the tone from suspense to resolution? Use two details from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 120 to 150-word, three-paragraph suspense scene with a clear resolution. Sequence events so each new event raises tension, include a delay before the reveal, and use sensory details to show the final change in tone.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Number five key events in the order they happen, then underline two details that raise suspense or release it. Notice how the sequence moves from uncertainty to resolution. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What three events in the first paragraph lead Mara to investigate the records room?	Mara sees light under the door, notices the curator's name is missing from the sign-out board, and hears a scrape inside the room.
2	How does the curator's text message increase suspense at that point in the sequence?	It confirms that the curator has already left, making the light and sounds in the supposedly empty room more mysterious.
3	How do the falling flashlight and its beam increase suspense while Mara waits behind the display case in paragraph 2?	The flashlight rolls away from Mara and its beam highlights the slowly turning door handle. These details focus attention on the unknown person or thing behind the door while the cause of the strange events is still unrevealed.
4	How does the final paragraph shift the tone from suspense to resolution? Use two details from the passage.	The overhead lamp reveals that a cat caused the noise by getting tangled in inventory tags, and Mara laughs as Mr. Vale frees it. The softened rain and cat following Mara also create a calmer ending.

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At dawn, I entered the school greenhouse to water the seedlings. A wet trail crossed the concrete floor and ended beneath the storage bench. I set down the hose, but a pot clattered behind the ferns. I followed the trail slowly, stopping when the glass roof groaned in the wind. Another clatter came from the far corner, then silence. I reached for the bench handle and heard a faint, rapid scratching underneath it.

When I lifted the bench, a soaked puppy backed against a bag of soil. Its collar tag named a family from the next street. I wrapped it in my jacket, called the number, and watched its tail begin to wag. Minutes later, its owner arrived, crying with relief. The wind still rattled the roof, but the greenhouse felt warm again.

Accept numbered events that accurately show the passage's movement from clues, to escalating uncertainty, to the cat reveal. For the writing task, accept varied subjects and outcomes if the response is 120 to 150 words, has three paragraphs, and uses a logical sequence that builds and resolves suspense.