

Tales of the Supernatural

Aim

- To stimulate students to read the book.

1 Tell students that the title of the book is *Tales of the Supernatural*, and ask them what they think the supernatural is.

Suggested answer: something that happens that cannot be explained by logic or science, e.g. ghosts.

2 Ask students if they know of any stories or films in this genre. Write the suggestions up on the board. Divide students into small groups and ask them to make a list of things that often happen in such stories (e.g. someone often dies, people are surprised and shocked, rooms go cold, the ending of the story or film is often unhappy). The groups should then share their lists with the whole class. Ask students whether they like these kinds of stories or not and why.

3 Ask students to read Extract 1 (from *Irish Rose*), Extract 2 (from *Haw Par Villa*), Extract 3 (from *Banshee*) Extract 4 (from *The Yew Trees*) and Extract 5 (from *Tea*) on the next page. Which extract was the scariest? Why? Ask them what mood they think the writer is trying to create in each story. Write the suggestions up on the board and, if necessary, teach them some relevant vocabulary.

Suggested answers: creepy, scary, sinister, strange, frightening, threatening, surprising, terrifying, chilling, makes your blood run cold, your flesh creep, gives you the shivers, etc.

4 Tell students to look at the Story Titles. Ask them to make notes about what they think might happen in the stories. Divide students into small groups to share their ideas. Report back to the whole class. How similar were people's ideas?

5 Ask students to read Extract 7 (from *The Yew Trees*). Ask them to make some notes about what they think happens next. Students should then share these ideas with the whole class. How similar are they? Are all the ideas about the supernatural, or do some of them change the genre of the story (e.g. into a detective story or a romance)? If not, ask students for ideas for how the genre might be changed.

6 Ask students to read Extract 2 again, and then Extract 7, both from *Haw Par Villa*. Ask them what they think Johnnie's bad dream means. Divide the class into pairs and ask them to tell their partner about a bad dream they have had.

7 Ask students to write down what happened in their bad dream (or any dream they have had if they are unable to think of a bad dream). They should do this as if they are writing about it in their diary, and they should use some words and phrases that show how they feel in the dream. Tell them to use their dictionaries if necessary. When they have finished this, ask them to work in the same pairs as before to read out what they have written. Their partner should say whether the writing is as clear as when they talked about the bad dream. Ask partners to suggest other words that might show feelings and describe the atmosphere of the dream. While students are working on this exercise, go around the room to help and note down any useful vocabulary to share with the whole class.

8 Ask students to read Extract 8 (from *We Will Wait, Too*). Ask them what they think of this idea. Ask if any of them have ideas for characters for a story.

9 As a class make up a ghost story or a story of the supernatural, with each student in turn contributing a sentence to the story. Begin with the sentence 'As I walked through the dark wood, I saw the old house in front of me through the trees.'

10 If there are enough copies of *Tales of the Supernatural* for everybody, ask students to start reading the book.

Tales of the Supernatural

Extract 1

She moved her arm and the stick moved. Then she felt sick as she realised what the stick was.

Extract 2

Johnnie Ang and his father were looking at lots of little people made from something that looked like painted plastic. They were all meant to be people whose ghosts had gone to places after their death. Some ghosts were in places of happiness for the good things they had done in their lives. Others, like the man they were looking at, were in places of terrible pain for their crimes. This man was in a lot of pain. He would be in pain for a long, long time until he had the chance to be born again into another body, perhaps that of an animal.

Extract 3

It was the same woman they had seen on the computer screen. The window was at least fifteen metres above the ground but there she was. Conor could see her green eyes and long red hair. Then the woman opened her mouth and screamed.

Extract 4

‘Adam and Eve are older than Tislington, older than London. They have grown together, like man and wife, for thousands of years. Cut Eve’s branches if you must, but leave her life. Leave Adam with his wife.’

Rupert and Zoe did not look at all comfortable. Before he could say anything, Ross got up.

‘I’ll go now,’ he said quietly. ‘I’ve said what I have to say. I can cut back branches for you, but I won’t cut Eve down. If anybody hurts Eve, soon they will hurt themselves.’

Extract 5

Chris reached for the large knife. He held it with both hands close to his stomach. The room went cold.

Alice was terribly afraid. It was the knife! It was the same knife that Zen had used to kill himself all those years ago. Was the ghost of Zen going to make Chris do *seppuku*?

Story Titles

Irish Rose
Haw Par Villa
Banshee
The Yew Trees
Tea
A Bed for Ambrose
We Will Wait, Too

Extract 6

‘Let’s get the axe!’ Zoe told Rupert. ‘Before it gets dark. We can make a start on that yew.’

Rupert did not mind hard work. He often went to the gym and was quite a strong man for his age. He offered to do all the work alone but Zoe refused. She wanted to begin cutting the tree down herself. Either the yew tree went or she did – she had decided.

When they got to the graveyard the sun was already low. The colours of the grass and the trees were strong in the late sunlight. Eve’s red berries were like drops of blood on her green leaves.

‘Right,’ said Zoe as she picked up the sharp new axe. ‘Stand back, Rupert; I’m going to chop this tree down if it’s the last thing I do!’

Rupert stood back and watched as Zoe made her first cut into the tree. The axe bit into the tree and there was a terrible scream, a woman’s scream.

Extract 7

That night Johnnie’s bad dreams came back to him. He saw the little painted man from Haw Par Villa looking at him with his eyes wide open, full of pain. This time the man was real and he was moving and screaming. It was as if he knew Johnnie and Johnnie knew him. Johnnie woke up. He was shaking and could not get back to sleep.

Extract 8

But what happens when writers think up characters but don’t use them in their stories? What happens when writers decide to cut characters out of a story? Where do we go? Once we are born in the head of a writer, we cannot be unborn, just as a thought cannot be unthought. We want to be free. We want writers to give us life.

So where do we go?