

Suspense

Definition of Suspense

Suspense is a literary device that authors use to keep their readers' interest alive throughout the work. It is a feeling of anticipation that something risky or dangerous is about to happen. The purpose of using this type of anxiety in literature is to make readers more concerned about the characters, and to form sympathetic association with them. Therefore, authors create scenarios that could force readers to understand, and to want to read on to see what their beloved characters face the next.

Difference Between Suspense and Mystery

Mystery and suspense are interrelated. Sometimes it becomes difficult to differentiate between them. For example, the author exposes the same information for his readers in the mystery [narrative](#) that a detective may know. In a suspense narrative, on the other hand, the [protagonist](#) gradually becomes aware of the peril and dangers, which readers already know. Secondly, in a mystery, a major event such as a murder or robbery happens at first and then the protagonist solves it, whereas in a suspense story, a major event occurs at the end, and various events unfold, twist, turn, and surprise the readers prior to that event.

Examples of Suspense in Literature

Example #1: *Tarzan of the Apes* (by Edgar Rice Burroughs)

In his novel, *Tarzan of the Apes*, Edgar Rice Burroughs builds suspense through different verbal clues. Tarzan falls for a girl named Jane, who is carried away by a brutal gorilla. Then, Jane asks, "How can anyone vanquish such a mighty [antagonist](#)?" It is quite a surprising question, which informs readers that the gorilla is a very strong and powerful

opponent, and that Jane thinks Tarzan has very little chance of besting him. This situation creates suspense in Tarzan's life, pushing readers to keep reading the story to find out what Tarzan and Jane are going to face in their lives.

Example #2: *Othello* (by William Shakespeare)

An author may also use dramatic [irony](#) to create suspense in his work. [Dramatic irony](#) occurs when readers or audiences know something that characters do not. This is exactly what Shakespeare has done in "Othello" in which malevolent Iago plays the role of a villain who creates jealousy in Othello, to destroy his life and career by convincing him that his wife is deceitful. The readers know that Othello's wife is not guilty, and that Iago has wicked intentions toward Othello. However, Othello is ignorant of this fact.

Throughout the play, readers feel curious and worried, because they know that Iago is making a fool of Othello. This creates suspense for readers and members of the [audience](#), encouraging them to continue reading and watching, as they are eager to know if Othello gets out of Iago's trap or not.

Example #3: *Sharp Objects* (by Gillian Flynn)

The novel, *Sharp Objects*, is a chilling story of a Chicago-based journalist, Camille Preaker, who comes from a family with a dead sister, a troubled mother, and an irritable stepsister. The suspense starts when Camille's boss asks her to go to her hometown in Missouri, to cover the story of a local girl who had been brutally murdered. During her trip home, a series of suspicious murders occurs. As the story unravels, Camille discovers the real source of evil is close to her beloved home.

Example #4: *Twilight* (by Stephenie Meyer)

Twilight falls under the [categories](#) of suspense, [romance](#), and horror. Bella falls in love with a mysterious and handsome boy, Edward Cullen. She learns that Edward is a vampire who, unlike other vampires, does not drink human blood, but that of animal. It is an exquisite [fantasy](#) and suspense

story in which readers discover these two star-crossed lovers. Edward has a difficult time controlling the blood lust Bella arouses in him, because, after all, he is a vampire.

At any time, Edward's blood hunger could drive him to kill Bella. This leaves him in a constant state of anxiety over the danger. While a sadistic vampire, James, draws towards Bella, hunting her down, Edward and his other family members defend her. Looking for protection, Bella leaves for Phoenix, Arizona, but James tricks her, and tries to murder her. Though Edward saves her, Bella is wounded.

Function

Suspense ensures the interest of readers by putting them on the edges of their seats, waiting for what's next. If an author does this well, suspense continues to increase gradually until the [climax](#), or the turning point, and final confrontation is reached. Writers and authors use suspense to create empathy with their readers, by giving their characters internal struggles with which readers can identify. Readers feel apprehension for their beloved characters whenever they are in danger.