**Suspense**

**Suspense** is the quality of a story, novel, play, or film that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events. Suspense makes readers ask, “What will happen next?” or “How will this turn out?” and impels them to continue reading. Suspense is greatest when it focuses attention on a sympathetic character. Thus, the most familiar kind of suspense involves a character in mortal danger: hanging from the ledge of a cliff; tied to railroad tracks as a train approaches; or alone in an old house, ascending the staircase to open the attic door. However, suspense may simply arise from curiosity, as when a character must make a decision, or seek an explanation for something. An author may create suspense by using one or more of the following techniques:

- **Pacing:** advancing or developing the plot at a particular rate.
- **Dangerous action:** placing the character in a life-threatening situation.
- **Foreshadowing:** a literary device in which the author gives clues as to what will happen later in the story.

In the table below, describe three different suspenseful moments in your novel. For each moment, analyze what techniques the author uses in order to create the suspense.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suspenseful moment:</th>
<th>Author’s technique:</th>
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Pre-reading:

1. Think about times in your life when you took risks to achieve something. What did you risk losing? In the space below, list risks that you have taken and evaluate whether each risk was worth taking.

As you read this story, compare Jerry’s risks with your own.

During reading:

2. Read the first paragraph of the story. How does Lessing describe the two characters and the surroundings in order to sum up the whole situation of Jerry and raise our interest in what is to follow?

3. Describe Jerry’s encounter with the local boys. What effect does it have on him?

4. What do you think will happen to Jerry by the end of the story? Record two predictions.
5. How does Jerry prepare for his big test? Which things encourage him and which things might give him good reason to forget the whole idea?

6. How does Jerry seem to feel about himself and his swim at the end of the story?

7. Throughout Jerry’s experience with the tunnel, readers are able to recognize Jerry’s thoughts and feelings. What do we know of Jerry’s fears and desires at various points in the story.

8. What techniques does the author, Doris Lessing, use to create suspense throughout this story?

9. A ticking clock is a technique often used for creating suspense. What device does Lessing use to create a sort of "ticking clock" that increases our anxiety?
10. Why do you think it is so important to Jerry to swim through the tunnel? *Hint: Think about his age and family situation, his interactions with the older boys, and the risks involved.

11. At the end of the story, why is going to the bay “no longer of the least importance” to Jerry?

12. If Jerry had failed to make it through the tunnel (yet had survived the attempt), how might the story have ended?

13. Swimming through the tunnel is a rite of passage for Jerry. Describe some rites of passage common today among teenagers and explain what risks are involved.

14. What is it about stories like this that a lot of people find fascinating? Connections: Can you think of other stories or films where people have to make similar difficult or dangerous journeys?
Pre-reading:

1. Think about times in your life when you took risks to achieve something. What did you risk losing? In the space below, list risks that you have taken and evaluate whether each risk was worth taking.

As you read this story, compare Jerry's risks with your own.

During reading:

2. Read the first paragraph of the story. How does Lessing describe the two characters and the surroundings in order to sum up the whole situation of Jerry and raise our interest in what is to follow?
   - Introduces Jerry first as “the young English boy” immediately establishing that he is likely in a foreign place and the only English boy around.
   - The idea of being over-protective is touched upon. Both Jerry and his mother are concerned with each other’s whereabouts.
   - Neither the mother nor Jerry communicates with one another freely. His mother stutters when asking him if he’d like to join her on the beach: “Why, darling, would you rather not come with me? Would you rather…” It is clear that she is concerned with what he’d rather be doing but she is unable to ask him openly.
   - Jerry’s feelings towards his mother are developed in the line, “he was very familiar with that anxious, apologetic smile.” It becomes clear to the reader that their relationship isn’t necessarily healthy and Jerry may use this to his advantage at times.
   - There is a hint that the father may not be in the picture based on how the mother tries to parent Jerry.
   - Lessing makes it apparent that there is something about the wild bay that Jerry desires but cannot have yet, intriguing the reader. The reader wants Jerry to get to the wild bay as much as he does.

3. Describe Jerry’s encounter with the local boys. What effect does it have on him?
   - When Jerry meets the local boys, his differences are intensified for both him and the reader. We are certain now that he is not from the area because he doesn’t understand what language they are speaking and his skin is a different color.
   - The boys appear to be older than Jerry in that they are more confident in themselves, and they are physically bigger than him.
   - Jerry is drawn to the boys – he longs to be accepted by them.
   - After meeting the boys, Jerry becomes obsessed with trying to swim as well as they can and overcome his fears of swimming through the rock tunnel.

4. What do you think will happen to Jerry by the end of the story? Record two predictions.
5. How does Jerry prepare for his big test? Which things encourage him and which things might give him good reason to forget the whole idea?

**Encouraging:**
- Once he gets down under the water with his goggles it is a beautiful sight (the fish, the colors etc.)
- Improves his breathing
- The local boys were able to do it
- He can swim like a fish
- The feeling of accomplishing something; facing his fears

**Forget the whole idea:**
- His goggles get knocked off the first time he goes under
- “Something soft and clammy touched his mouth”
- His nose bleeds profusely due to the pressure under water
- His head and lungs can just barely take the pressure of staying under for so long
- He has no idea how long the tunnel is

6. How does Jerry seem to feel about himself and his swim at the end of the story?

- The strain that he put on his body doesn’t seem to register with Jerry.
- He forgets altogether that while he was under he thought he was about to die – the surface air washed away the fear and panic that strangled him in the tunnel.
- He feels that he accomplished his goal and has grown emotionally.
- Perhaps now he is more mature or older in some way.

7. Throughout Jerry’s experience with the tunnel, readers are able to recognize Jerry’s thoughts and feelings. What do we know of Jerry’s fears and desires at various points in the story.

**Fears:**
- Unknown aspects/creatures in the sea
- Bleeding too much, dizziness, passing out
- Being trapped in the tunnel and dying
- Octopi or being tangled in weeds
- Dying and not being found until the following summer

**Desires:**
- To get through the tunnel
- To be like the other boys and have them accept him
- To accomplish his goals
- To be someone
- To overcome any fears

8. What techniques does the author, Doris Lessing, use to create suspense throughout this story?

- Jerry’s thoughts and feelings are described in great detail especially as he is swimming through the tunnel – the most suspenseful part of the story
- Lessing paces the story in such a way that there is a great deal of rising action as we await the climax – the reader is already on the edge of their seat waiting for the moment Jerry finally enters the tunnel
• Foreshadowing: when Jerry watches the boys swim through the tunnel we see him panic slightly at the length of time it takes for them to resurface – the reader can guess that Jerry will want to swim through the tunnel as well but perhaps it’s too long to stay under water

9. A ticking clock is a technique often used for creating suspense. What device does Lessing use to create a sort of "ticking clock" that increases our anxiety?

• While Jerry is swimming through the tunnel he is keeping track of the seconds that go by.
• As the reader, we are able to keep track with him and understand just how long he is under water – when Jerry suddenly loses track of time and can’t get past 115 seconds, the reader also has no idea how long he’s been under and starts to panic with him

10. Why do you think it is so important to Jerry to swim through the tunnel? *Hint: Think about his age and family situation, his interactions with the older boys, and the risks involved.

• Jerry is initially concerned with being accepted by the local, older boys who can swim through the underwater tunnel without fear.
• It becomes clear to the reader that Jerry is also wanting to prove to himself that he is able to accomplish something big and face any fears that may have usually gotten in the way.
• It is possible that Jerry is so desperate to cross this rite of passage because his father is not in the picture and Jerry has no other older male figure to look up to – he may feel that he needs to be a strong male figure for his mother’s sake too

11. At the end of the story, why is going to the bay “no longer of the least importance” to Jerry?

• He has already faced his fears and met his goal
• His single-mindedness has been put at ease and he is able to see the rest of the world around him

12. If Jerry had failed to make it through the tunnel (yet had survived the attempt), how might the story have ended?

• Despite the toll Jerry took on his body by forcing himself through the tunnel, if he had have quit and not made it through there would be an overwhelming feeling of dissatisfaction for the reader (and Jerry).
• The ending would feel incomplete – Jerry wouldn’t have found his sense of accomplishment; he wouldn’t have grown up at all and would still be desperate to be accepted by the local boys.

13. Swimming through the tunnel is a rite of passage for Jerry. Describe some rites of passage common today among teenagers and explain what risks are involved.

• Getting a driver’s license – more responsibility, chance of hurting themselves or others
• Dating – risks emotional well-being
• Getting a job for the first time – more responsibility, falling behind in school, emotional stress
• Joining sports teams – physical dedication, responsibility to teammates

14. What is it about stories like this that a lot of people find fascinating? Connections: Can you think of other stories or films where people have to make similar difficult or dangerous journeys?
Reading Response: Suspense

Dear _____________________________,

1. **TITLE, AUTHOR and PAGES READ** this week: ____________________________________________

2. Write a **SUMMARY** of the pages read for this response. What is happening in your novel? Discuss what took place and where; discuss the characters and conflicts. Be specific but do not spend a lot of time summarizing plot.

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3. **ANALYSIS:** Tell about a part in your novel where the author has used suspense. Include a quote or quotes from your novel to show the suspense. Explain why you, the reader, are in suspense. What technique(s) does the author use to create suspense? Does s/he use pacing, dangerous action, and/or foreshadowing?

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4. **CONNECTIONS**: How do you feel about what you read this week? Why? What feelings or experiences do you share with the character(s)? Does this novel remind you of any other books you have read or films you have viewed?

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5. **PREDICTIONS**: What do you think might happen next? Why? What are the clues in the text that have lead you to predict this? What would you like to happen next? Why?

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Bye,