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# The PECULIAR PEGGS of RIDDLING WOODS

RESOURCE PACK  
FOR KS2 TEACHERS



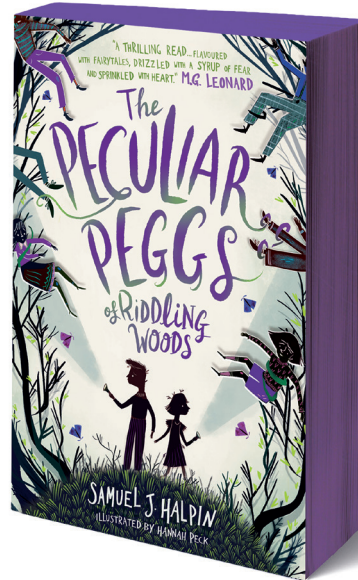
SAMUEL J. HALPIN

ILLUSTRATED BY HANNAH PECK

# THE PECULIAR PEGGS OF RIDDLING WOODS

SAMUEL J. HALPIN

RESOURCE PACK FOR KS2 TEACHERS



## DEAR DELICIOUSLY DARK AND PECULIAR TEACHERS,

This Resource Pack is based on *The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods* – the highly anticipated new book by Samuel J. Halpin, illustrated by Hannah Peck, a dark and twisting fairytale for you and your KS2 class to be enthralled by!

Each lesson uses extracts from the book (which are also read by Samuel himself in the corresponding videos), giving you the full package to share with children (recommended ages 9+) and to excite their imaginations! The videos can be found on YouTube by searching “peculiar peggs”.

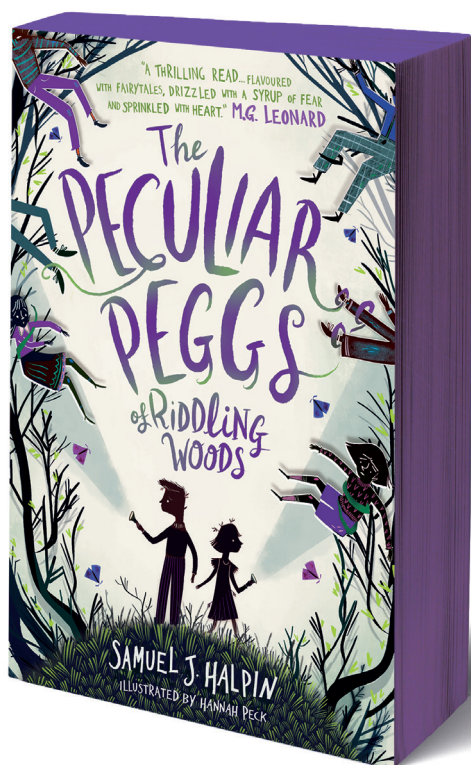
The activities included have a literacy focus, looking in particular at fairytales and the different world-building techniques within this genre. The activities can be taught as whole units or as individual activities to be dipped in and out of.

These notes include reading comprehension questions to support and elevate understanding of the text and to improve reading inference, retrieval and predictive skills, as well as suggestions for classroom activities to enjoy the book – from reading by torchlight, to drawing book covers for fairytales, creating suspense and mystery, and sending postcards from peculiar dreams!

Best wishes,

USBORNE





## ABOUT THE BOOK

**“A thrilling read... flavoured with fairytales, drizzled with a syrup of fear and sprinkled with heart.”**

- M.G. Leonard, author of ‘Beetle Boy’.

This is the story of a sleepy town called Suds. A place where stories fill the air of children turning grey and disappearing without a trace.

Poppy and Erasmus are certain there’s something peculiar going on in Suds, and they’re determined to unravel its secrets. But when they discover the answers might lie in the dark and twisting woods, can they find the courage to creep inside and solve this riddling mystery?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Tasmania with Irish roots, Samuel. J. Halpin is twenty-seven and writes daily. Having studied journalism at the university of New South Wales, Samuel went on to take cinematography at AFTRS, the national Australian film school in Sydney before moving to London and working in comedy TV production.

*The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods* is Samuel’s first answer to a childhood raised on a hodgepodge of fairytales, crowded bookshelves and cups of hot chocolate.



# OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

## Lesson 1: Just Like a Fairytale

### Objectives:

- To understand and be able to list the features of different genres in fiction
- To be able to predict the genre of a story based on its title and book cover
- To define the criteria of the 'fairytale' genre and create a book cover that conveys them

**Outcomes:** A list of criteria for the fairytale genre; a book cover for a book in the fairytale genre

## Lesson 2: Suspense and Mystery

### Objectives:

- To understand and define the terms: 'mystery', 'tension', and 'suspense'
- To identify techniques used by the writer to create suspense in the story
- To map out a scene using a suspense graph and to perform a creative piece that builds suspense

**Outcomes:** A completed suspense graph for a scene; a piece of drama that creates mystery and suspense

## Lesson 3: A Peculiar Dream

### Objectives:

- To understand what we mean by 'descriptive writing' and why it is important
- To analyse descriptive writing in an extract from the book and identify effective literary techniques and vocabulary
- To describe a dream-scene using sensory description

**Outcomes:** A written description of a peculiar dream; a drawing of the same dream-scene



# INTRODUCTORY TASK: READING BY TORCHLIGHT...

## Lead-in questions:

- What do you find scary?
- What is your biggest fear?
- In one of his videos, Samuel J. Halpin says that ‘the things you don’t see are often more frightening than the things that you do see.’ What do you think he means by this?

## Task 1:

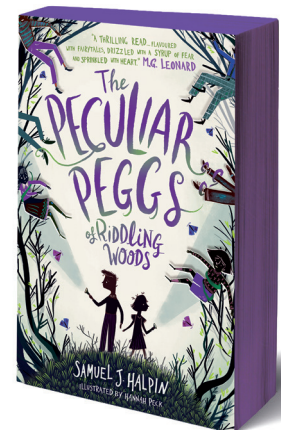
In pairs, read Samuel J. Halpin’s letter addressed to the readers of *The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods*.

## Look at the following three statements taken from the letter:

1. There is something terrifically safe about a book.
2. Fear excites our imaginations and challenges our barriers [...]
3. [...] the fairytale tradition of doing battle with our fears in order to master them should be upheld and celebrated.

Together, discuss these statements and what you think they mean or why they are important.

Before you begin, cut out the ‘Torchlight’ template below. Then, sit around the classroom with all of your classmates in a big circle. Turn the lights out in the classroom to create a spooky atmosphere. Pass the ‘Torchlight’ around the circle (or better still, use a real torch!); when you have it, it is your turn to read by torchlight, meaning it is your turn to speak your thoughts about the statements. Remember to listen carefully to what everyone has to say.



Dear reader,

When I was small, I used to **creep** around our creaking farmhouse at night and check that the windows were shut. It was my ritual, and sleep wouldn't come without it. Behind the farm house was a hill that rose up like a great black wave, cloaked in tangles of white gum trees that stretched out like pale arms in the night. It was my belief that there were things up there: **peculiar** things.



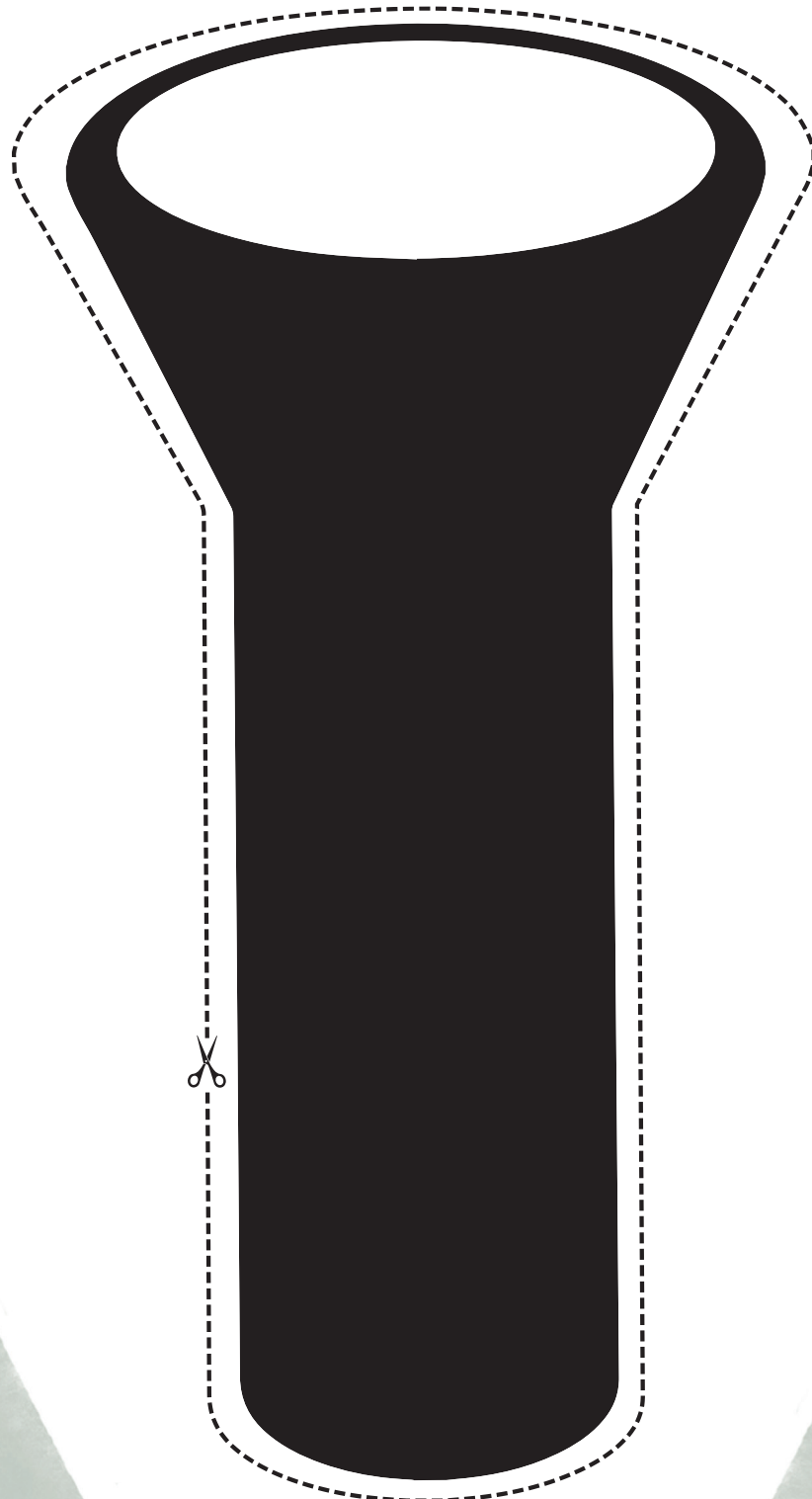
There is something terrifically safe about a book. Perhaps you remember an illustration in a favourite story of yours that filled you with such a surging **terror** that you had to skip over it or cover it up with your outstretched palm whilst you read. There is a unique scope to explore and face fear that only a book can give, and for me, understanding and encountering fear is spectacularly important. **Fear** excites our imaginations and challenges our barriers, which is why I think it's so vital that readers are given the opportunity to confront what scares them, be it real or imagined, within the confines of the written word.

For many years, fairytales have been an apparatus for tackling our anxieties and reminding us that there is no courage without fear. Courage is the power to triumph over fear, to look at what scares us straight in the eye – be that fear a ghost, a peculiar thing in the woods or simply a drawing peeking out from between our fingers.

**The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods** is the product of this – that the fairytale tradition of doing battle with our fears in order to master them should be upheld and celebrated. I dearly hope you'll read – and as an added bonus, enjoy – Poppy's journey as she bravely faces that which she dreads most. And, if you're game, then I'd advise reading this book beneath the sheets, with the help of the enclosed torch, preferably on a night when the wind is playing games with your windows... And remember: hide the sugar, should you be wise. Stow away your dreams. And watch the skies with wary eyes least no one hear your screams.

Best wishes,

**SAMUEL J. HALPIN**



**Task 2:**

Think about your own fears. How could you use them to write a spooky or scary story?  
How would writing a story help you to face your fears?

Fill in one of the Riddling Woods stickers below – make sure you keep it as you complete the lessons in this Resource Pack. Don't forget to let your fear motivate you and to let your imagination run wild...

MY GREATEST FEAR IS

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BUT I'M BRAVE ENOUGH TO ENTER THE RIDDLING WOODS



MY GREATEST FEAR IS

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BUT I'M BRAVE ENOUGH TO ENTER THE RIDDLING WOODS



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# LESSON ONE: JUST LIKE A FAIRYTALE

## Lead-in questions:

- What is your favourite 'type' of story to read?
- What do we mean by the word 'genre'?

## Task 1:

In pairs, look at the title: *The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods*.

- What are the connotations of the different words in the title?
- Which words draw the reader in the most? Why?
- What sort of themes do you think this story might have?

## Task 2:

Cut out the genre cards below. For each of them, think of an example of a book that fits into that particular genre. One of the cards has been left blank for you to come up with your own! Is it possible for a book to fit into more than one genre?

Adventure

Romance



Fairytale

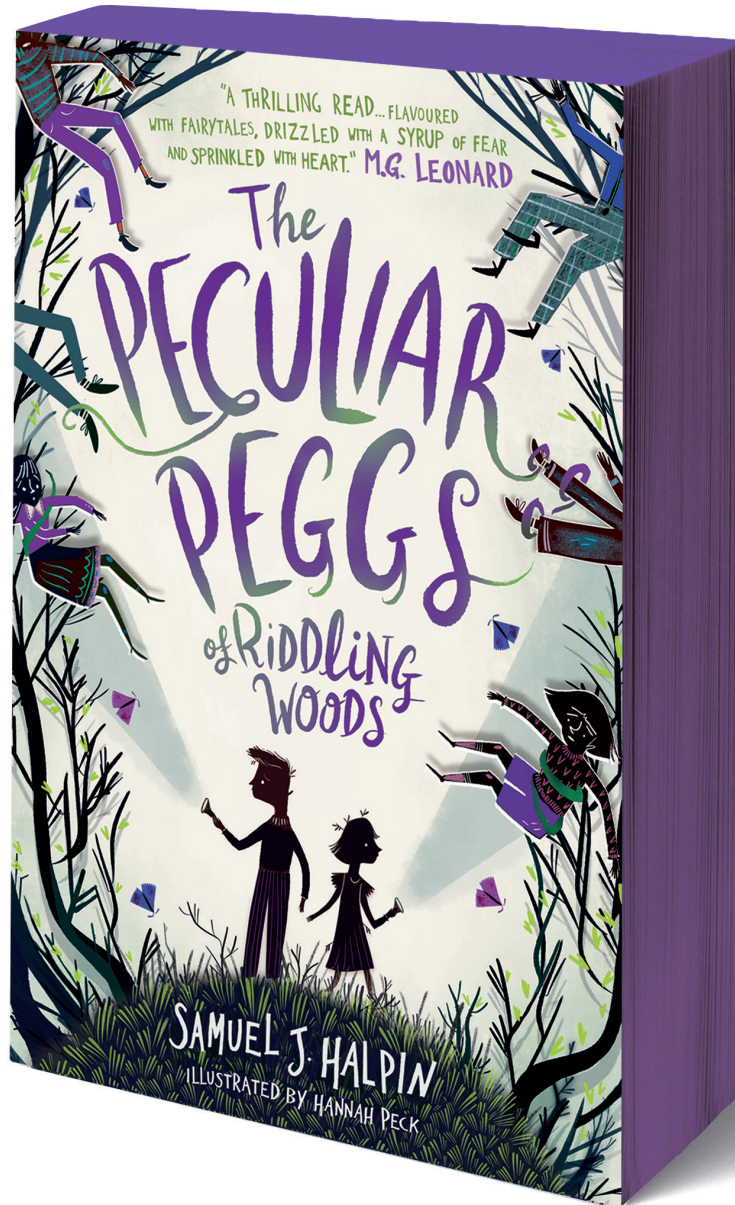
Horror

Comedy



**Task 3:**

Look at the cover for *The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods*.



Which genre do you think the book might fit into based on its cover and title?  
Give reasons for your answer. Remember that books can fit into more than one genre!



### Task 4:

Samuel J. Halpin explains in his letter and videos that *The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods* is heavily influenced by the 'fairytale' genre. What do you think are the features of fairytale stories?

In pairs, try to complete the list below:

- An interesting, faraway or magical setting
- A heroic central character
- 
- 
- 

### Task 5:

Imagine that you have been asked to write your own modern fairytale based on your spookiest secrets and greatest fears. What would you call it? Design a front cover for your book.

Remember the following success criteria when creating a book cover:

- Bold design
- Strong colours
- A clear title

Make sure that you refer to the success criteria above when you create your cover, and don't forget to share it with us on Twitter at [@Usborne](https://twitter.com/Usborne) or using the hashtag [#ThePeculiarPeggs](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ThePeculiarPeggs).



Design your book cover here!



## LESSON TWO: SUSPENSE AND MYSTERY

### Lead-in questions:

- What do we mean by the words ‘mystery’, ‘tension’ and ‘suspense’?
- How do writers create suspense in their stories?

### Task 1:

Read the extract from *The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods* that Samuel J. Halpin reads in his video, and then answer the comprehension questions below:

*Poppy put the kettle on the stove.*

*“Where did we leave off? Oh, that’s right,” Gran said, unpicking a few of the scales from a pair of beetle wings she was making. “The fabric made in the Helligan Mills became more and more famous. The town of Suds prospered and grew... until something odd began to happen.”*

*The kettle whistled as it began to boil and Poppy poured the hot water over the fragrant tea leaves.*

*“One by one, like the birds of summer, children began to vanish.”*

*Poppy put the kettle down and brought Grandma her tea.*

*“What do you mean? How did they vanish? When did this happen?”*

*Churchill the pig rested his snout on the edge of his basket, as if listening to the story too.*

*“I mean just what I say: children began to vanish. One here, one there. They faded away. I remember I was twenty-three when Wilma Norbles disappeared. Wilma was a swimming champion. Every day before school she would swim up and down the river like a seal, until one morning something peculiar began to happen. It started with Wilma’s eyes. Very slowly, little by little, their colour began to fade. Before she knew it, the colour from her hair began to drain away too. The last time Wilma climbed into the river, despite being ten years old, she was as grey as an old woman. People watching from the shore said that she took a deep breath, sunk beneath the water and dissolved like a blob of paint. Some said she was eaten by the old fish rumoured to live in the River Suds. But even I’m not superstitious enough to think that’s likely.”*



Poppy nodded politely. She didn't quite know if she believed her wily old gran. She was twelve after all, and twelve is the age when one truly starts reasoning what is real and what is fabricated.

*"I can see you don't believe me, but let me tell you this: ever since, and ever so slowly, the children of Suds have been dwindling away."*

*"Where did they go?" Poppy asked. "When was the last time it happened?" Gran looked at Poppy and answered only one of her questions. "No one knows. Sugar, my button. Two lumps."*

*Poppy retrieved the sugar, heeding Grandma's instructions.*

*"And what's happened to the Mills now?"*

*"They're still there," said Gran, sipping her tea. "Somewhere in the woods outside of town. Riddling Woods. Neglected, ruined and overgrown. Whether the fabric which floats down the river comes from the Mills or not is anybody's guess. People in the village like to say they are haunted."*

*"Haunted?"*

*"Haunted," said Gran. "By the ghost of a washerwoman who crouches beside the river's edge, washing the stains from a grey cloth."*

*"That's not real," muttered Poppy, her chest swimming with unease.*

*"It might not be real, but it's a fact that people have seen her," said Gran wryly.*

*"Now, while your dad is away for the next few weeks and you're staying with me here in Suds, I want you to follow four simple rules. No one else seems to bother with them these days, but I'm a bit old-fashioned sometimes, Poppy, and I like to stick to them."*

*Poppy fetched her notepad from her backpack and wrote down what Grandma said. With each line she wrote, her fingers stiffened and her heart began to dance its familiar dance.*

#### **RULES:**

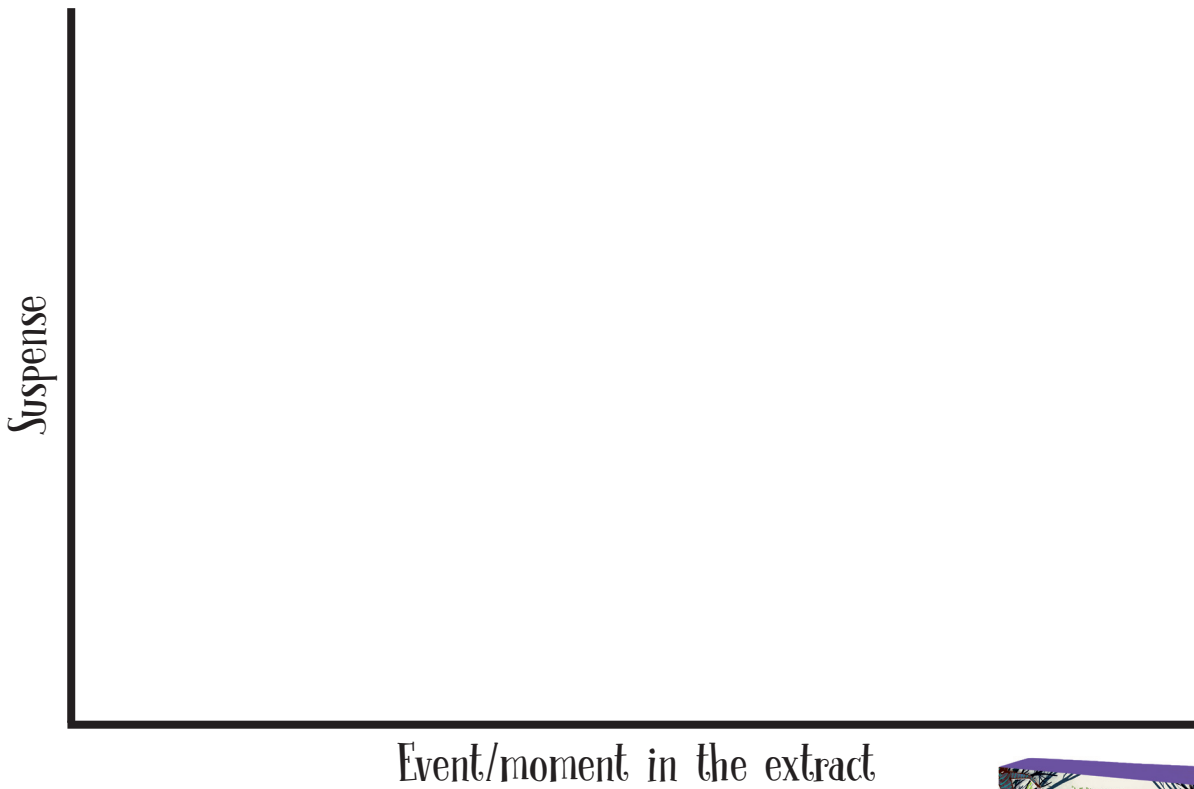
- 1. All washing must be done during the day. Bring your clothes in off the washing line (even if they are wet) before six o'clock every night.*
- 2. All sugar cubes are to be kept under lock and key.*
- 3. At night close your window, lock it, draw the curtains.*
- 4. NEVER, DON'T YOU EVER, dust the window sills.*



1. Why do you think Samuel J. Halpin chooses to weave Gran's story in and out of descriptions of Poppy making a cup of tea? How does this provide a contrast?
2. How does Samuel J. Halpin create a sense of mystery or suspense in this extract?
3. Is there any information that Gran withholds from Poppy? Why is this effective?
4. How does Poppy feel in this extract? How does Samuel J. Halpin make the reader share the same point of view as Poppy?

**Task 2:**

Plot the moments of suspense or mystery on the graph below. Consider when the suspense is at its highest and at its lowest in the extract. How does the author achieve this?



### Task 3:

Read the extract again. Can you find examples of the following techniques to create suspense?

- A variation of short and long sentences to create pace
- Dialogue
- Vocabulary to evoke an ominous atmosphere
- Contrast
- Strong emotions from the characters
- Withholding information

### Task 4:

If you're feeling in the mood for some **deliciously dark drama**, get into groups and recreate the scene described in Samuel J. Halpin's extract – or even your own scene from Task 4!

Use props and sound effects to try to convey the suspense in your chosen scene – you could even use musical instruments to create the mood and atmosphere.

### BONUS TASK!

Re-read Gran's very peculiar list of rules:

#### RULES:

1. All washing must be done during the day. Bring your clothes in off the washing line (even if they are wet) before six o'clock every night.
2. All sugar cubes are to be kept under lock and key.
3. At night close your window, lock it, draw the curtains.
4. NEVER, DON'T YOU EVER, dust the window sills.

If you could create five peculiar rules in your own scary story, what would they be?

Share all of your work with us – including your drama performances and your five peculiar rules – on Twitter at [@Usborne](https://twitter.com/Usborne) or using the hashtag [#ThePeculiarPeggs!](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ThePeculiarPeggs)





## LESSON THREE: A PECULIAR DREAM

### Lead-in questions:

- What do we mean by the term, ‘descriptive writing’?
- Why is it important that a story has good descriptive writing?
- One of Samuel J. Halpin’s tips in his video is to ‘add texture’ to your writing. For example, when describing a character’s hair, instead of describing it as ‘dark hair’ - you could describe it as ‘dark straps of liquorice-coloured hair’. What is the difference between the two descriptions?

### Task 1:

Read the extract from *The Peculiar Peggs of Riddling Woods* that Samuel J. Halpin reads in his video, and then answer the comprehension questions below:

*Poppy threw an extra blanket across her bed. She fell asleep with the chalk in her hands and faded into a peculiar dream.*

*She was in the waiting room at the hospital. Although it wasn’t really a waiting room at all. It was a train carriage, and where the doors of the carriage were supposed to be, that was the entrance to the ward. The lady who had disappeared from the train was standing at the door, with her arms covering the entrance. Poppy couldn’t see in. She couldn’t speak. She tried to shout at the lady, but her jaw felt dull and heavy. Dad was in the room. Poppy could hear his voice.*

*“Take her heart,” he said to the nurse with the purple streak of hair she’d seen with Gran at the hospital. “Take her heart.”*

*The lady at the door turned to Poppy and grinned, showing her white teeth. One by one the objects in the room began to fade to grey.*

*“Her heart,” said the lady at the door, looking straight at Poppy. “Take her heart.”*

*Poppy woke up in a cold sweat. She’d left the heating on before she went upstairs, but her room was freezing. There was a sudden weight in her chest. The window was open, swinging gently in the breeze.*

Listen to the rest of the extract in Samuel J. Halpin’s video reading!



1. Which parts of the extract are real and which parts are from Poppy's dream? How can you tell?
2. How does Poppy feel in the extract? How can you tell?
3. What is frightening or scary in the extract? Why?
4. What is strange or peculiar in the extract? Why do you think strange or peculiar things make us feel uncomfortable?
5. How do you get the sense that Poppy's dream is significant?

**Task 2:**

Read the extract again and find your favourite examples of descriptive writing by completing the following tasks:

- Underline any powerful words that stand out to you.
- Underline as many ADJECTIVES as you can.
- Underline as many ADVERBS as you can.

**Task 3:**

Can you match the following senses to a word or phrase used by Samuel J. Halpin in the extract?

- SMELL
- SOUND
- TOUCH
- TASTE
- SIGHT

**Task 4:**

Consider a recent, peculiar dream that you had. It can be a scary dream or a nice dream.

Complete the following sentences:

- I can smell...
- I can hear...
- I can touch...
- I can taste...
- I can see...



**Task 5:**

Create a piece of descriptive writing about your peculiar dream. Describe what it is like and how you feel. Use the techniques that you have learned throughout this lesson to help you. If you have time, draw a picture of what is happening in your dream. Share your dream-scenes with us on Twitter at

@Usborne or using the hashtag #ThePeculiarPeggs!

My Peculiar Dream by .....



My Peculiar Dream by .....

