

Sharpen your skills

Opening effects

Read from 'The witch descended the dark steps of the Palace. It was a freezing night' to "'Why bother to make yourself look nice, Dragwena? You don't normally care what they think.'" (Chapter 1)

This is the opening of *The Doomspell*, a book set on the frozen world of Ithrea – a world ruled by the evil witch, Dragwena. In the story Dragwena cruelly snatches children from Earth to use as slaves on her world.

Thinking points

1. 'Snow blew wildly in the sky and the wind howled like a starving wolf.' What device is the author using here?
2. How does the author build up an atmosphere in his writing?
3. Pick out two details that you thought were effective in creating the atmosphere of the extract. Explain why you liked them.
4. What sounds does the writer use in this extract? How does the use of sound contribute to the overall effect of the opening?
5. What do you think might happen next in the story?

Dragwena's true face

'The Witch reverted to her normal appearance: **blood-red** skin, **tattooed** eyes, the **four sets** of teeth, two inside and two outside the **writhing snake**-mouth. Morpeth watched as the rows of teeth **snapped** at each other, fighting for the best eating position. A few **purple-eyed**, armoured spiders **swarmed** between the jaws, cleaning the remains of her last meal.'

1. What is the overall effect of this description of Dragwena?
2. How does it make the reader feel, knowing she is waiting for children to arrive in her world?
3. Does she remind you of any witches that you might have read about in other stories?
4. What do you notice about a) the use of colour and b) the use of animals in this extract?
5. What do you think is the most effective detail in painting a portrait of Dragwena?

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Writer's challenge

Read the section of text from **'The Witch reverted to her normal appearance: blood-red skin, tattooed eyes, the four sets of teeth'** to **"What will we do with them this time?" She grinned, and all four rows of teeth thrust forward menacingly.'**

Task

Your challenge is to write the next section of the story, describing the arrival on Ithrea of two children who have been snatched from their home.

Thinking points

- What will the children's first impressions of Ithrea be?
- How will they react to Dragwena? What face will she decide to show them?
- How will the children react to their situation? Will they share the same reaction or will each child react differently?
- What will Dragwena offer them? How will she speak and behave towards them?

Think carefully about your choice of words and the way that you structure your writing. You could try to write in a similar style to the author. What techniques could you 'borrow' from him?

Keep focused on the learning objective WAF1: write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts.

Editor's challenge

Below is the first draft of the blurb for *The Doomspell* but it is too long and needs editing. A good editor will make careful choices in their writing to make sure that the words they choose are the most effective, powerful and clear. They will also focus on cohesion – making the text flow. Cohesion is important as it helps texts make sense. You could think of it like glue, without the cohesive glue, texts don't stick together.

Task

Read the blurb and decide what you can cut out of the text so that it still makes sense and has cohesion. At the moment the text is too long for a blurb, it is 178 words. Can you edit it to around 100 words?

The text will need to be paragraphed so think about where you want to divide ideas up.

As you work, keep checking your text is cohesive and clear.

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Eric and Rachel are just normal everyday children. Doing nothing one Saturday they get taken away to another world. In a blaze of light, rush of wind and scrabble of claws, Rachel and Eric are ripped through the wall in the basement of their house and hurtled on to another very different world, miles away from home. Like thousands of other children before them, they have been snatched away by the Witch who is very cruel and vicious, caring for nobody and following no one's rules but her own. But this time the Witch has met her match. Rachel discovers that she has extraordinary gifts: she can transform herself into a feather, or fly on an owl's back, just as the Witch can. She has magic to help her. The Witch is excited she has found someone to use for her own evil purposes and is glad that Rachel has arrived so that she can train her up to be as cruel and as wicked as she is. But for the Witch's victims, Rachel is their only hope.