



**2020
SCHOOLS
PROGRAMME**

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The Ruskovian Ratastrophy: Exercises

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1.

Part A: Years 7-13

Underline all the sensory details you can find that describe the setting in ‘The Ruskovian Ratastrophy’.

Part B: Years 7-13

Choose a specific location at your school, and a specific time of day. Describe it using sensory details. What can you see, hear, smell, touch or taste?

2.

Part A: Years 7-13

What kind of fears does this short story play on?

Part B: Years 7-13

Identify something you fear, or something you used to fear. How can you use this fear to inform a setting description? How can you make it creepy?

Start small. Use menacing verbs (i.e. shadows slithering, curtains trembling). Let small aspects of the setting feel 'wrong' or 'off'. Build up the fear as the description goes on. Remember to use sensory details to make your writing vivid.

Tip: If the phobia is one of monsters (or monstrous humans) don't reveal them until you're near the end!

3.

Part A: Years 7-13

Look at the photo you've been given. Pick one of the people in it and answer these questions about them.

- Name?
- Do they have a nickname? Do they like being called that?
- Where have they lived?
- Are they usually late or early?
- Do they prefer the top bunk or bottom bunk?
- Do they seem more of an introvert or an extrovert?
- Where do they work? Do they like their work?
- How important is money to them?
- What's their most valued possession?
- What do they always carry with them?
- Do they have any phobias?
- What do they lie about?
- What's their biggest ambition?
- Do they have a lot of friends? How close are they to their friends?
- Are they good in a crisis?

Redo the above with another person in the photo. Make sure your answers are quite different.

Part B: Years 10-13

He Said She Said

Choose one to be your point of view character. Now, write a scene where these two characters argue.

Push the argument past where you would normally stop. The longer it continues, the more you'll learn about your characters. You can trim the excess later (you might find it's the start you cut).

Let the fight surprise you – each thing a character says or does should be in response to what the other character just said or did. Don't rush towards an end point you have mapped out.

4.

Part A: Years 7-13

Character is Action

The actions your characters take is the easiest way to reveal their personalities.

Read the following excerpt from ‘The Ruskovian Ratastrophy’:

“Eew!” said Lottie, holding her hand to her nose, the stench of the sewers rising up to greet them.

‘Stanley grinned, an expression his cheeky boyish face seemed to have been designed for. “Smells like someone dropped a big rasper, don’t it?” He pressed a button on the side of his bowler hat and a circle of felt flapped open. A brass chemlamp with a purple lens telescoped from inside. The violet light played across Lottie’s puzzled face, picking out the mass of freckles that Stanley found so appealing.

“You know,” said Stanley. “Raspberry tart, far-“

‘Lottie raised her palm, cutting Stanley short. “I am unfortunately well aware of the crudities of your rhyming slang. I was surprised by the luminous pawprints.”

‘Fluorescing in the chemlamp’s light a tiny glowing trail of rat pawprints led down the steps and into the dark.

“Looks like the professor left us a clue, just like the note said.” Stanley adjusted the wickerwork basket strapped to his back then descended into the hole.

‘ “Or is leading us into a trap,” replied Lottie, following behind.’

- Who goes into the tunnel first?
- What does their dialogue reveal about their personalities?
- What about their gestures and facial expressions?
- Come up with two adjectives to describe each character.

Part B: Years 7-13

Now, take the characters you’ve invented and put them inside your own creepy setting. Choose one to be your point of view character.

How do they both react initially? And how do they react when the extent of the danger is revealed? Let their actions reveal as much as you can about their personalities, and what they’re feeling in the moment.

5.

Part A: Years 7-13

A good story will have what is called an ‘Emotional and Dramatic Moment’. Look at the first of these in ‘The Ruskovian Ratastrophy’:

‘A twisted iron gantry that had once crossed the cistern hung in a mangled mess down one wall. Stanley had seen enough explosions on COG’s weapons range to deduce that the collapse was due to a detonation of high explosive and not any form of rust induced metal fatigue. In place of the gantry a wooden plank barely wide enough for the glowing trail of rat prints that ran across it bridged the torrid waters.

“Be careful,” said Lottie, placing a hand onto Stanley’s shoulder as he took a step onto the plank.

“Because I was thinking of being reckless and swimming in poo.”

“You wouldn’t be able to swim in all this gear. The decomposition fills the water with gas. You’d have no buoyancy and sink straight to the bottom like a stone.”

“Thanks for sharing that,” said Stanley. “I think I’ll be careful.”

‘Years of climbing and traversing the parapets and ledges of Coxford’s tallest buildings had given Stanley an excellent sense of balance and he strode across the beam without so much as a wobble. Safely positioned on the slim path of the opposite sewer tunnel he reached back for Lottie. His outstretched hand made it little more than a quarter of the way. “You can do this. It’s just like the balance beam on the assault course,” he said, staring into Lottie’s pensive eyes.

‘His mission partner stepped onto the plank, the soles of her chunky boots overhanging the edges of the wood. She took three steps then the wood groaned threateningly. Lunging for the safety of the far bank her fingers brushed Stanley’s outstretched palm. Issuing a crack that echoed around the brick cylinder the plank gave way, tumbling into the surging waters.

“No!” shouted Stanley and leapt for Lottie. Grabbing her wrist, his trailing hand seized the wrecked gantry’s twisted rail. His body jerked taut, the rusted iron cutting into his fingers. Below him dangled Lottie, her feet inches above the churning sewage. The gantry groaned then jolted, one of the securing bolts giving way. Lottie’s bowler hat tumbled from her head, plopping into the dirty waters.

“You’ve got to climb out,” yelled Stanley. The metal vibrated below his pained fingers, more of the securing bolts inching away from the brickwork. Lottie grasped Stanley’s belt and heaved herself up, taking hold of the mangled rail. Hand over hand she scaled the ironwork, Stanley pushing her with his free arm from below. With one final effort she collapsed onto the footpath.’

What happens to the pace here, compared to the rest of the story? Does this section feel more or less detailed?

What other moments in the story might constitute an emotional and dramatic moment?

Part B: Years 11-13

Think of a recent time where you've felt something intensely – e.g. love, hate, anger, fear, jealousy.

This is your emotional and dramatic moment. Write it as a scene.

The main rule is that you stay inside the moment.

- This is not where you step back and give us a flashback or a description of something outside the window.
- Imagine any necessary information, for example how you got to this place and what has happened in the past, has already been established.
- Don't be afraid to draw it out.

Part C: Years 11-13

Now, your task is to take that moment from your life and fictionalise it.

Consider what will put pressure on the scene. You can change the setting so that your character or characters are:

- In public
- Trapped for a length of time
- Physically forced together

And you can change the time of day:

- Late at night
- Very early
- Dinnertime

Try to make it as intense a scene as possible.