

UNIT 2 Tall tales

There are examples of fantasy fiction in this unit, including tales of horror in prose and verse. You will be able to practise your own narrative writing, including choosing titles, and using direct speech for dramatic effect. You will also look at the use of single dashes and hyphens.

Activities

1 A tale is a short, often anonymous, story which relates imaginary events. Working in pairs, look at the following questions and discuss your ideas in response to them:

- How many different kinds of tale can you think of?
- Why do you think people tell each other tales?
- What do you think makes a good tale? Give some examples.

Text 2A

Jim, the boy who ran away

There was a Boy whose name was Jim;
His Friends were very good to him.
They gave him Tea, and Cakes, and Jam,
And slices of delicious Ham,
And Chocolate with pink inside
And little Tricycles to ride,
And read him stories through and through,
And even took him to the Zoo –
But there it was the dreadful Fate
Befell him, which I now relate.

You know – or at least you *ought* to know,
For I have often told you so –
That Children never are allowed
To leave their Nurses in a Crowd;
Now this was Jim's especial **Foible**,
He ran away when he was able,
And on this inauspicious day
He slipped his hand and ran away!
He hadn't gone a yard when – Bang!
With open Jaws, a Lion sprang,
And hungrily began to eat
The Boy: beginning at his feet.





Now, just imagine how it feels
When first your toes and then your heels,
And then, by **gradual** degrees,
Your shins and ankles, calves and knees,
Are slowly eaten, bit by bit.
No wonder Jim detested it!
No wonder that he shouted 'Hi!'
The Honest Keeper heard his cry;
Though very fat, he almost ran
To help the little gentleman.
'Ponto!' he ordered as he came
(For Ponto was the Lion's name),
'Ponto!' he cried, with angry Frown,
'Let go, Sir! Down, Sir! Put it down!'
The Lion made a sudden Stop,
He let the Dainty **Morsel** drop,
And slunk **reluctant** to his Cage,
Snarling with Disappointed Rage.
But when he bent down over Jim,
The Honest Keeper's Eyes were dim.
The Lion having reached his Head . . .
The miserable Boy was dead!
When Nurse informed his Parents, they
Were more Concerned than I can say:
His Mother, as She dried her eyes,
Said, 'Well – it gives me no surprise,
He would not do as he was told!'
His Father, who was self-controlled,
Bade all the children round attend
To James' miserable end,
And always keep a-hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse.

Hilaire Belloc

2 a The poem in Text 2A is a cautionary tale. What do you think this means?

b Illustrate the text with a simple drawing to show what happens to Jim in the tale.

c Discuss in pairs whether you like the tale or not, giving your reasons. Think about the humour, the description and the rhyme.



3 In this activity you will be looking at the vocabulary in the poem in Text 2A. You may need to use a dictionary or thesaurus to help you, but first try to work out the meaning of the words from their context, i.e. from the meaning of the other words around them.

- Find the five words in bold in Text 2A. Decide on the part of speech of each of the words. Give synonyms (words with a similar meaning) for the words as they are used in the poem, using the same part of speech.
- Find the words in Text 2A which are not at the beginning of a line but which start with a capital letter. What part of speech are they?
- Now find the underlined words in Text 2A. Match them with their correct meanings in each line:

<u>dreadful</u>	fatal	terrible	predicted
<u>befell</u>	fell on	struck	happened to
<u>inauspicious</u>	unlucky	unhappy	unimportant
<u>detested</u>	examined	hated	ignored
<u>rage</u>	annoyance	sadness	fury

4 What do you think is the moral, or message, of the cautionary tale in Text 2A? Think about what happens in the poem and the characters in it. What do you notice about how the poem is arranged (its form)? Copy the table below into your notebook and complete it with your ideas.

Moral / Message	Content / Events	Characters	Form / Layout

5

- In his cautionary tale about Jim, Hilaire Belloc has used direct speech. In other words, he has given the actual words spoken by the characters. Look at how direct speech is used in Text 2A. What do you think is the effect of using direct speech in tales?
- Work with a partner and list all the verbs you can think of which can be used to follow direct speech (you can find some of these verbs in Text 2A, for example). Compare lists with the rest of the class. Which pair has thought of the most?
- Why do you think it is better to use a range of verbs with direct speech than to always use *said*?



6

- As a class, collect a list of warnings which parents might wish to convey to children. For example, children should not eat too many sweets.
- Working in pairs, choose one you like and discuss some story ideas for your own cautionary tale.
- Agree on a suitable name for your child character (and think about what will rhyme with it). Agree on a title for the tale. Give it the same form as the title in Text 2A: 'Name, the boy/girl who ...'

7

- Plan your story in a series of five boxes like a comic strip. Give speech bubbles to the characters in each box so that they can explain what is happening.
- Decide which bits of dramatic speech to include in your tale, and decide how to express the moral at the end of the tale to make the warning to children clear.
- Read the key point below about language features, then write your own cautionary tale. The first line should be similar to that in Text 2A: 'There was a ... whose name was ...' (Your cautionary tale can be shorter than the one in Text 2A.)

Key point



Language features of cautionary tales

- In Text 2A each pair of lines is rhymed (the words at the end of the lines contain the same or a similar vowel sound).
- The number of sounds (syllables or beats) in each line is eight, arranged as four pairs. Read one of the lines in the poem and count the beats on your fingers as you read. The second beat in each pair is stressed, so it has the rhythm dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-dum, dee-dum. (This poetic metre, or pattern, is called iambic tetrameter.) See if you can copy this pattern in your own cautionary tale.
- You find quite a lot of exclamations and questions in a cautionary tale, especially in dialogue, because these add drama and strong feeling or humour.
- Humorous names, like Ponto, are used for comic effect. Try to use some in your tale.



Text 2B is an example of an urban legend, a short, popular, modern tale spread orally or in writing, and told as if it is true.

Text 2B

One cold winter night, sixteen-year-old Kathy was home alone. Her parents had gone out to a dinner party. It had been snowing all that afternoon, but had recently stopped. After studying for a few hours Kathy decided to relax by lying on the couch and watching TV in the living room. The television was in front of the glass door that led to the back garden.

By midnight Kathy's parents still hadn't come home and she was terrified because she thought she had caught a glimpse of a very strange-looking man staring at her, standing outside the glass sliding door behind the television. Shaking with fear, she pulled a blanket over her head and grabbed the phone by her side. She called the police and in a few minutes officers arrived.

Kathy told them about the strange man who had been standing outside, staring in through the glass.

The police opened the sliding door and looked around. They explained that there could not have been anyone standing outside as there would be footprints in the snow. They told her that she was probably just overtired and had imagined it. As the officers were about to leave, one of them stopped behind the couch Kathy was sitting on. His jaw dropped as he shouted, 'Look here!' Kathy looked: there were wet footprints on the carpet behind the couch. She hadn't seen the man outside the door; she'd seen his reflection when he was standing behind her in the room!

Text 2C is another example of an urban legend.

Text 2C



About a month ago in Soweto, a man was on the side of the road hitch-hiking on a very dark night and in the middle of a storm.

No car went by, and the rain was so heavy he could hardly see a few metres ahead of him. Suddenly, a car came towards him and

stopped. Without thinking about it, the man got in and closed the door, realising too late that there was nobody in the driver's seat. The car started slowly. The man looked at the road, and he saw that a bend was approaching.

He was terrified, but just before he hit the curve a hand appeared through the window and moved the steering wheel. This happened again and again; every time there was a bend in the road, the hand took control. The man escaped from the car and ran to the nearest township.

Wet and in shock, he went into a café and told everybody there about the petrifying experience he had been through, and they were stunned into silence.

About half an hour later, two men entered the café and one said to the other, 'Look, Lewa, there's that idiot who got into our car when we were pushing it.'



8 Read Texts 2B and 2C.

- a** How would you define the content of an urban legend?
- b** Why do you think this type of tale exists?
- c** Decide which of the urban legends in Texts 2B and 2C is in your opinion more scary. Explain your reasons to the class.
- d** Share with the class any other urban legends you have heard.
- e** Work in pairs to make a list of the features which make urban legends scary.

9 **a** Decide on an idea for your own urban legend. If you can't think of a new idea, you can adapt one you have already heard or use the plot-line of a scary film or book. Use the tip about urban legends to help you.

b Draft your story of about half a page. Use your answers to Activity 8 and the ideas in the key point on the next page about writing a short story to help you.

c Practise reading your story, and then read it out to the class. As you read, use changes of speed, pauses and expression in your voice to make it seem more frightening.



For Activity 9a
Urban legends

There will usually be crime or violence, or at least the threat of it, in an urban legend. The victim is always someone alone and vulnerable. Don't overstate anything gruesome, but concentrate on how close the victim came to having a terrible experience. Bear in mind that the victim is usually someone naïve, who does not realise the danger they are in or that they are being tricked. At the same time, they are ordinary people and we sympathise with them because we see the situation through their eyes and it could happen to any of us.



Key point



Writing a short story

- The endings to all short narratives are more effective if they are unpredictable, to keep up the suspense and provide a memorable and often ironic (something unexpected, undesired or undeserved) twist.
- It is important to know before you begin your story how it is going to end, so that you can plant the clues along the way, but without revealing too much.
- To keep up the narrative pace, it is important not to waste any words. It is the events which matter, not descriptions or details. On the other hand, it is important to build up suspense by not reaching the conclusion too soon.
- Direct speech is often a good way of creating fear or urgency, but it should be kept for the dramatic or comic moments, and not used for ordinary conversation between characters.

Text 2D

Mini-sagas

A saga is a long prose tale of the adventures and achievements of a hero. A mini-saga is a narrative of exactly 50 words. Mini-sagas are often a mixture of sad and amusing ideas, and have surprise twists at the end.

These five mini-sagas were written by Secondary 1 students.

1

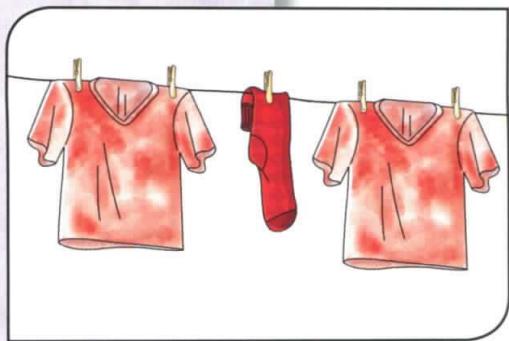
I had longed to get rid of him for weeks. Finally, I had the chance. I climbed the stairs, cautiously entered the room – and saw him grinning in the mirror. The door slammed. A cry of agony, and it was over. Wreathed in blood, my tooth dangled on the string.

2

I am thrown in with a crowd. The door slams shut. I hear gushing water. I feel redness oozing from me, colouring the water. Gasping for air, I am knocked out by arms and legs. I come round hanging on the washing line – a red sock among pale pink laundry.

3

Another dawn. The frosty walk to the front line, heart pounding, chest tight. He stands exposed,





awaiting the inevitable onslaught. The first missiles whistle overhead. The enemy's roar rises to a crescendo. He must counter-attack, already knowing the futility and tasting defeat. 'Alright, 3C, settle down. Let's have some quiet!'

4

My teacher, Mrs Bailey, wears a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles. They're rounded, and perched there, glaring at you. One day they fell! She perched them on again. The left lens said, 'I hate looking at books. I want holidays in the sun.' Mrs Bailey only sees half the class now.

5

Sitting, watching, goggling at the box, his legs begin to shrink. His bottom grows fatter and fatter, filling the armchair he sits in, slowly at first, then faster and faster. His eyes grow square instead of round. His head slowly turns to jelly – from sitting in front of the telly.



10

- Read the five mini-sagas in Text 2D. Which of them have unexpected endings? How have these been created?
- Look at the five mini-sagas again. Make a list of the narrators and subjects of each of them. Which of them are unusual, and what is the effect?
- Mini-sagas normally have a title but the titles in Text 2D have been removed. In small groups, discuss possible titles for the five mini-sagas and decide on a good title for each one. Look at the key point to help you.

Key point



Short story titles

Short story titles usually consist of between one and three words. The best ones sound intriguing but do not give away the story. They often contain a pun, i.e. a word which sounds like another word but which has a different spelling and meaning, or the same word which has two different meanings. You can give a hint that there is a double meaning by adding a question mark at the end. You could also use the pattern 'adjective + noun' as your title. This is a common form of title for short stories as well as poems and novels.



11 **a** Mini-saga 3 relies on an extended image. When we first read it, we think we are reading about a soldier preparing for battle, but in the last sentence the real situation (a teacher preparing to face his class) becomes clear. List the words which give the idea of a battle.

b Sometimes the meaning of a mini-saga is left for you to work out. What do you think mini-saga 4 is saying about Mrs Bailey?

c If mini-saga 5 were a poem, where do you think would be the best place to start new lines? Discuss how giving it a different form (or layout) changes the effect of the story.

12 Punctuation and grammar are very important in very short narratives, for saving words and for creating tone (emotion). In the five mini-sagas in Text 2D, find examples of the following and think about how they are used. Discuss in pairs what effect is created.

- present participles (-ing words) in mini-sagas 2, 3, 4 and 5
- dashes in mini-sagas 1, 2 and 5
- direct speech in mini-sagas 3 and 4

13 **a** Draft two different mini-sagas, trying out the ideas you have discussed in your previous answers. Look at the advice in the key point box about writing a mini-saga to help you too.

b Reduce each of your drafts to exactly 50 words without losing any of the meaning. This can be done by:

- removing unnecessary words, not needed by the grammar or the meaning
- using compound adjectives (two words joined by a hyphen, e.g. *steel-rimmed*)
- replacing phrasal with single verbs (e.g. *to be afraid of* → *to fear*)
- using full stops rather than simple sentence connectives (*and*, *but*, *so*)
- using dashes, which also create dramatic effect
- using direct speech concisely
- giving it a title which gives a clue to the meaning.

c Swap your mini-sagas with a partner. Decide which of your partner's mini-sagas is better and should be read out to the class.



Key point



Writing a mini-saga

- Mini-sagas are in every sense a miniature narrative, i.e. they usually contain at least one character, an event, the passage of time, and possibly some speech.
- The narrator may be unusual, or the event may be seen from an unusual perspective, like an object photographed from a strange angle which is then not immediately recognisable.
- Their aim is to make the reader amused or sympathetic towards the character.
- They need a strong ending to be effective, so make the last word(s) significant.
- The title, if carefully chosen, can be part of the story; it should say something important, or create a mystery, in a very concise way.
- There isn't space for many adjectives or adverbs, but with the right choice of verb you shouldn't need them; make the verbs do the work in telling the story. Present participles save words.
- Every word should carry weight, and it is even better if one word can be made to do the work of two, as in a pun.
- The very best mini-sagas have a rhythm too, a satisfactory sound and a shape to the sentences, as in mini-saga 5.

Text 2E

This is an extract from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Arthur Conan Doyle.

A terrible scream – a prolonged yell of horror and anguish – burst out of the silence of the moor. That frightful cry turned the blood to ice in my veins. I gasped. ‘What is it? What does it mean?’

Holmes had sprung to his feet, and I saw his dark, athletic outline at the door of the hut, his shoulders stooping, his head thrust forward, his face peering into the darkness.

‘Hush!’ he whispered. ‘Hush!’

The cry had been loud on account of its vehemence, but it had pealed out from somewhere far off on the shadowy plain. Now it burst upon our ears, nearer, louder, more urgent than before.

‘Where is it?’ Holmes whispered; and I knew from the thrill of his voice that he, the man of iron, was shaken to the soul.

‘There, I think.’ I pointed into the darkness.



Again the agonised cry swept through the silent night, louder and much nearer than ever. And a new sound mingled with it, a deep, muttered rumble, musical and yet menacing, rising and falling like the low, constant murmur of the sea.

'The hound!' cried Holmes. 'Come, Watson, come! Great heavens, if we are too late!'

He had started running swiftly over the moor, and I had followed at his heels. But now from somewhere among the broken ground immediately in front of us there came one last despairing yell, and then a dull, heavy thud. We halted and listened. Not another sound broke the heavy silence of the windless night.

I saw Holmes put his hand to his forehead like a man distracted. He stamped his feet upon the ground.

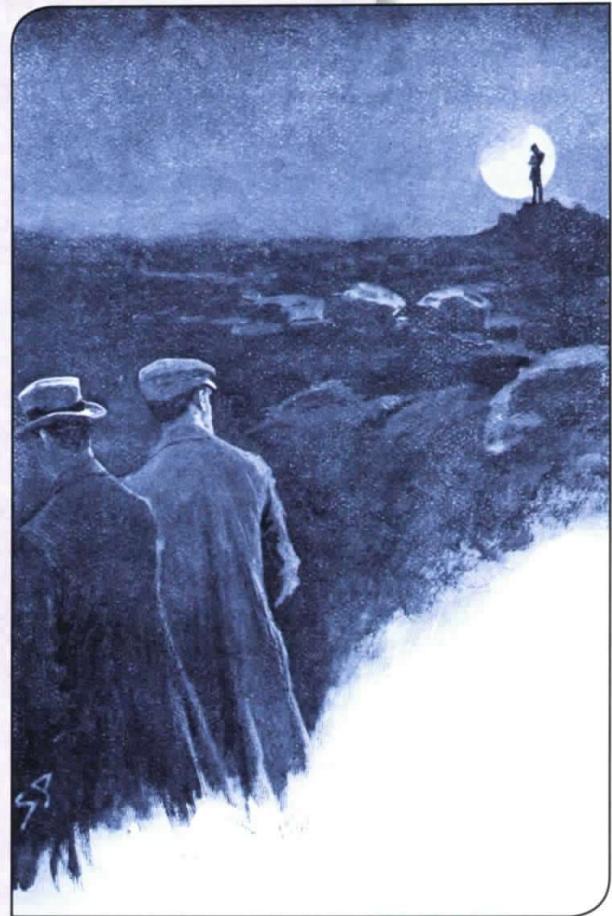
'He has beaten us, Watson. We are too late.'

'No, no, surely not!'

Blindly we ran through the gloom, blundering against boulders, forcing our way through gorse bushes, panting up hills and rushing down slopes, heading always in the direction whence those dreadful sounds had come. At every rise Holmes looked eagerly round him, but the shadows were thick upon the moor, and nothing moved upon its dreary face.

'Hark, what is that?'

A low moan had fallen upon our ears. There it was again upon our left! On that side a ridge of rocks ended in a sheer cliff which overlooked a stone-strewn slope. On its jagged face was spread-eagled some dark, irregular object. As we ran towards it the vague outline hardened into a definite shape. It was a prostrate man face downward upon the ground, the head doubled under him at a horrible angle, the shoulders rounded and the body hunched together as if in the act of throwing a somersault. So grotesque was the attitude that I could not for the instant realise that that moan had been the passing of his soul. Not a whisper, not a rustle, rose now from the dark figure over which we stooped. Holmes laid his hand upon him and held it up again with an exclamation of horror.





14

- a** Text 2E is an extract from a Sherlock Holmes story about a giant supernatural Hound of the Baskervilles. Read it aloud with different voices for the narrator and the direct speech of Holmes and his fellow detective, Watson. How does the use of dialogue add to the effect of the passage?
- b** Look again at the examples of direct speech in Text 2E. What can you say about:
 - i** the length and amount of direct speech?
 - ii** its content?
 - iii** its punctuation?
- c** Text 2E contains many examples of the typical features of horror texts. These are used to create suspense (making the reader wait and become tense) in the story. Copy the table below into your notebook and complete it with descriptions and examples of the different features.

Feature	Description	Example / Quotation
Time of day		
Setting		
Type of characters		
Speed of action		
Sentence length		
Use of repetition		
Sense of sound		
Sense of sight		
Vocabulary		
Imagery		

15 Referring to the table in Activity 14, plan and write a page of suspense/horror that makes use of as many of the features of Text 2E as possible. You could use the same two characters, Holmes and Watson, in a different situation, or you could make up your own characters. Include some dialogue for dramatic effect.