

## Halloween horror story



<b>Language level:</b>	Intermediate; Upper intermediate (B1; B2)
<b>Learner type:</b>	Teens; Adults
<b>Time:</b>	45 minutes (+ Follow up)
<b>Activity:</b>	Reading (+ Writing follow up)
<b>Topic:</b>	Horror; Halloween
<b>Language:</b>	Past perfect
<b>Materials:</b>	Video; Worksheet

**Warning:** This lesson plan contains some particularly gruesome language and ideas. It may not be suitable for your learners!



## Preparation, materials and equipment

1. For this activity, you will need a short film titled *The Life and Death of a Pumpkin*. To access the video, click on the following link:  
<http://bit.ly/hfcMyZ>
2. For each student, make a copy of the word cloud on page 6 and a copy of the **Horror Story** worksheet on page 7.
3. In the activity, you will have to play the clip to your students without letting them see it (i.e. audio only). If you are using a projector and screen, find out how to disable the display so that students hear the clip only.

Decide how you are going to display the clip in class. Possibilities include:

- Laptop or desktop (good for small groups)
- Computer, projector + screen
- iPhone or other mobile device (good for one-to-ones/intimate classes)

Don't forget the loudspeakers

If you don't have Internet access in class, you could download or 'capture' the video from YouTube. Use **www.savevid.com** or a similar site. Note, however, that in doing so, you will be breaching YouTube's Terms of Use.

## Lesson plan

1. Write the following on the board and ask students to suggest words that could fill the gap:

\_\_\_\_\_ *story*

(Example possibilities: *sad, news, love, ghost, horror, tragic, true*, etc).

2. Tell students that they are going to hear a story. Write the following questions on the board or dictate them:
  - *What type of story is it?*
  - *Who do you think the main character is and what does he look like?*

3. Play the video clip from 0:12 to 3:00 but importantly, do not let students see the screen. Ask students to consider the questions from Step 2 as they listen.

**Important:** It is essential that you play the video from 0:12 after the words "*I am a pumpkin. Hello*". If your students hear these words, the main task will be ruined.

4. Let students share their ideas.
5. Give out copies of the word cloud. Tell students that it contains some important words from the story. Clarify the meaning of any new words or allow students to look up definitions in a dictionary.
6. Ask students to reconsider the questions in Steps 2. Perhaps their ideas have changed now that they have seen the word cloud.
7. Give out copies of the **Horror Story** worksheet. Let students follow the text as you let them hear the clip a second time (0:12 – 03:00). Ask students if they can work out the missing word. Ask them to write down answers rather than shout them out.

Note that some of the language in the story is quite grotesque (e.g. "*They had cut a giant hole in my skull and were now tearing my innards from my body...*"). Please be aware of this and be sympathetic to your students. Perhaps you should let them know that they will soon realise that the story is not as bad as it sounds.

8. Go around the class and ask students to show you (i.e. only you) what they have written for the missing word.

Note that students should not share their ideas with each other at this stage. It is very likely that someone will work out that the protagonist is a *pumpkin*. As long as this is not made public, you will be able to prolong students' curiosity and engagement.

9. Go over and clarify any new words or language in the text. In some cases, you will be consolidating students' understanding of individual words from the cloud. In other cases, you will be dealing with new phrases (e.g. *I came to my senses = I regained consciousness*).

Also draw students' attention to the bold phrases in the text and ask them to guess what they refer to but don't tell them the answers at this stage.

- ***A wheeled box*** (= a wheel barrow)
- ***Hard grey earth*** (= a door step)
- ***A stick of hot fire*** (= a candle)
- ***A gruesome visage*** (= a face)

10. Show students the clip (audio and video) from the very beginning until 3:00 - the same stopping place as before. Students will now realise that the protagonist is a pumpkin. Perhaps they know about Halloween and this custom in particular. If not, tell them about it (find out more at the "Jack-o'-lantern" entry on Wikipedia).
11. Ask students to predict what happens next in the clip before playing it to the end.
12. Past perfect practice: Tell students to put away their texts and dictate the following sentences:

- *Who were these sick people and why had they done this to me?*
- *When I came to my senses, I saw that my abductors had placed me on hard grey earth*
- *My captors had carved a gruesome visage into me*
- *They had cut a giant hole in my skull and were now tearing my innards from my body*
- *I was afraid I had just been left to die.*

13. Ask students to compare what they have written before identifying the common grammar point (the past perfect). Finally, ask them to put the sentences into the correct chronological order before checking their answers by looking at the texts again.

## Comment

Some gentle changes have been made to the actual transcript. In most cases, this has been an attempt to replace lower-frequency terms (*impaling, strewn, nauseated*, etc) with their higher-frequency synonyms (*stabbing, thrown, sick*, etc). Although students may not notice such changes, it is something that you may decide to discuss with them (see **Follow ups** below).

## Follow ups

- Tell students that you changed some of the language in your transcription. Give out copies of the **Actual Transcript** on page 8. Ask students to compare the two transcripts to find out what changes were made. This is a potentially interesting activity which can lead to discussion on why teachers and course book writers amend or simplify language for learners.
- Find out how students celebrate Halloween in their own country or if they have a similar festival.
- Ask students to write their own horror stories for other everyday objects or food (boiled eggs, strawberries being made into jam, a golf ball, carpenter's nails). There are other clips on YouTube that could be used for inspiration. E.g. show the **Screaming Eggs** clip (link below) with the sound turned down and ask students to write an account from one of the victims.



Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2Cfg3swvbc>

placed mad  
roughly warning pain ribbons  
fate innards burning wheeling  
kin tearing skull  
rescue peaceful  
stabbing  
sunlight  
skin especially  
dark captors incredible lowered  
dragging sick  
senses gift  
joke belly daring awesome waved  
torture hands fearing  
dizzy guesse  
carved  
shock abductors  
cruel fade  
distance  
remained  
flame

## Horror Story

*I am a \_\_\_\_\_. Hello*

*In the beginning, my life was peaceful: Days spent with my family in the garden; The sunlight warming my skin. Peaceful.*

*Until they came without warning - cruel hands dragging me roughly from my dreams into **a wheeled box**.*

*I was carried past my brothers and sisters and friends. My family. I cried out for rescue but my kin remained silent and unmoving, perhaps fearing similar fate.*

*My home began to fade in the distance. And suddenly, everything went dark.*

*When I came to my senses, I saw that my abductors had placed me on **hard grey earth**. I was afraid I had just been left to die. Now I know if I had, I would have been lucky.*

*The pain was incredible. I became dizzy - I felt sick. They had cut a giant hole in my skull and were now tearing my innards from my body and throwing them in front of me, like ribbons from a gift.*

*Moments later, the knives returned, stabbing me over and over again.*

*What made those people do what they did that day? I do not know. I began to think they were playing some sort of mad game especially when they put a really big knife inside me and just sort of waved it around.*

*When the cutting was done I sat in shock, not daring to think that the torture might be at an end. But of course it was not.*

*They lowered **a stick of hot fire** into my belly. Burning, burning flame.*

*My captors had carved **a gruesome visage** into me, as if this was all some kind of sick joke. Who were these sick people and why had they done this to me? Why? Why? Why?*

## Actual transcript

*I am a pumpkin. Hello.*

*In the beginning, my life was idyllic: Days spent with my family in the patch; The sunlight warming my skin. Idyllic.*

*Until they came without warning – cruel hands dragging me roughly from my dreams into a wheeled box.*

*I was carried past my brothers and sisters and friends. My family. I cried out for rescue but my kin remained silent and unmoving. Perhaps fearing similar fate.*

*My home began to fade in the distance. And suddenly, everything went dark.*

*When I came to my senses, I saw that my abductors had placed me on hard grey earth. I was afraid I had just been left to die. Now I know if I had, I would have been lucky.*

*The pain was incredible. I became dizzy – nauseated. They had cut a giant hole in my skull and were now tearing my innards from my body and strewing them before me, like ribbons from a gift.*

*Moments later, the knives returned, impaling me over and over again.*

*What made those people do what they did that day? I do not know. I began to think they were playing some sort of mad game especially when they put a really big knife inside me and just sort of waved it around.*

*When the cutting was done I sat in shock, not daring to think that the torture might be at an end. But of course it was not.*

*They lowered a stick of hot fire into my belly. Burning, burning flame.*

*My captors had carved a gruesome visage into me, as if this was all some kind of demented joke. Who were these sick people and why had they done this to me? Why? Why? Why?*

*A while later, I returned to consciousness and heard someone approaching. A glimmer of hope sprang up inside me. Could these be my liberators, come to save me from this hell? No – it was a parade of tiny demons who stared at my ruined body. I knew then that the reason I had been hacked and disfigured was merely for the entertainment of these demons. They were even receiving some sort of payment from my captors for coming to see me. They tormented me and mocked me. My humiliation was complete.*

*And now, now I sit mangled, deformed, waiting for the sweet peace of death to arrive. Freedom!*