

## Haunted Houses



Soot the Victorian ghost has been haunting Saxby Hall ever since his death, in the chimney he was sweeping:

*'I didn't have nowhere else to go, did I? Didn't have a home, didn't even have a name, did I? So I couldn't even try and find me family in that place in the clouds they tell you about in church. So I just stayed here. Going up and down the chimneys all night.'*

Stella now knows the cause of the strange noises she would sometimes hear in the walls.

Britain has many old houses and castles which are supposed to be haunted. Whether or not you believe in them, ghosts make good stories. Like Soot at Saxby Hall, most hauntings seem to be conducted by ghosts who met unfortunate deaths.

Here are a few examples:

- Tiverton Castle , Devon

Visitors have reported seeing the ghostly figure of a young lady in a wedding dress. This is apparently the ghost of a woman who mistakenly got herself locked in a wooden chest on her wedding night, whilst playing a game of hide-and-seek. Her remains weren't found until many years later.

- Knebworth House, Hertfordshire

Some say that there is a room on the East Wing where on certain nights you can hear the sound of spinning. This is said to be the ghost of 'Jenny Spinner' a servant who was imprisoned in there by the Lady of the house, whose Son had fallen in love with her. Jenny had nothing to do all day but spin yarn until she died.

- Athelhampton House, Dorset

This is supposed to be one of the most haunted houses in Britain. One report is that one day a woman was sitting reading book in the Great Hall when two unknown men burst into the chamber in the middle of a sword fight. The woman continually pulled on the bell rope for the servants but nobody arrived. She turned to her side and carried on reading while the fight continued until one of the men were cut on the arm and left the room. When she mentioned it to the owner he was mystified as all the guests at the house at the time were at tea.

Visitors have also reported hearing a strange scratching noise coming from the walls of the Great Chamber. The story is that this is the sound of a pet ape that had been shut in a secret room with his mistress who had killed herself there following an unhappy love affair.

### Exercise 1

#### Setting the Scene

- With the whole group sitting in a large circle, ask them to close their eyes and imagine a drawing room in an old stately home. What furniture might be in there? What would it be made of? What pictures are on the walls?
- After a minute or so, the group open their eyes. Explain that they are now going to make a physical picture of the room using their bodies to make the fixtures and fittings.
- Ask someone to suggest a piece of furniture and then 'make' it in the centre of the circle using one or two peoples' bodies joined together.
- Continue filling the circle with people objects until the whole group is involved.
- Ask for suggestions for the name of the big house.
- Select two people from the group to assume the roles of tourists and another to play a tour guide.
- The tour guide then shows the visitors around the room, pointing out the various different pieces of furniture/ notable pictures etc.
- The group relax and reform the circle.

- Tell them that there have been reports of strange occurrences in that room – strange noises, sudden drops in temperature and a ghostly figure has been seen wandering through it.
- Ask them what noises might have been heard?
- Divide them into small groups – each group is responsible for one of the noises
- Make a sound picture of the room.
- Divide the group into fours
- Ask each group of four to come up with an idea of who the ghost is that has been seen. They must decide what happened to it and why it haunts the room.
- Each group then reports back a short summary of their story
- Re- form the picture of the room and improvise one or two of the stories.

### Follow up

Imagine you are working a tourist guide to the grand house. A group of ghost hunters are coming to visit. Write a leaflet explaining the story of the ghost making it sound as spooky and exciting as possible.

### Exercise 2



## The Haunted House

- In pairs, choose one of the pictures above.
- Each pair imagines the following scenario:
- *One day, two friends are taking a dog for a walk in the countryside. Suddenly the dog pricks up its ears, begins to bark, and charges off.*
- *The two friends run after it and are just in time to see it disappearing into an old, empty house.*
- *The children, nervously follow, and find themselves inside.*
- *Filled with curiosity, they begin to explore. Suddenly the door they came in through slams shut all by itself.....and soon they find they are not alone.....*
- Decide what / who they meet inside the house, how they are affected by it and they recover the dog and get out.
- Write a brief scenario of the main events of the story.
- Choose one event and write it as a script .

### **Exercise 3**

Draw a picture of a haunted house. Add labels to draw attention to any particularly spooky features.

### **Exercise 4**

#### Poltergeists

Poltergeists (a German word meaning 'noisy spirit') are supposedly a type of troublesome ghost or spirit. They are sometimes reported as causing physical disturbances such as moving objects, making loud noises or pinching and biting people.

Soot uses such techniques to distract Aunt Alberta to allow Stella to phone the Police:

- SOOT            What if I cause a diversion?
- STELLA        Like what?
- SOOT            Throw some plates around or summink. Us ghosts love a bit of plate throwin.  
                    Normally works a treat.
- STELLA        Is that what ghosts really do?

SOOT            Oh yer! - we like to knock on doors and run away. Or put on records really loud. Or throw books around the library. Flush the toilet when yer sittin on it. My favourite is to jangle chains. Ya can't beat a good bit of janglin. But I fink plate throwin will work best.

Stella and Soot think up many different tricks to play on Aunt Alberta to make her life miserable. '*Turn Saxby Hall into her very worst nightmare, so she'll run away screaming!* They put ants in her pants, shoe polish in her soap as well as flooding her floor with marbles.

- Imagine you are Soot. Make a list of other tricks you could play on Aunt Alberta and Wagner.
- In threes, take the roles of Soot, Stella and Alberta. Improvise some of your ideas – what are the results?
- Share your best trick with the rest of the group. Ask them to vote on which trick would be the most effective.