Setting the tension

The opening chapter, ‘Christmas Eve’, sets readers up for a ‘story of haunting and evil.’ One method the writer uses to build tension builds during this chapter is contrast.

Examine the following aspects of the opening chapter and find contrasts. Select quotations to highlight these.

- Weather
- Location
- Lifestyle
- Ghost stories (the Ainleys’, Arthur’s)
- Emotions (the Ainleys’, Arthur’s)

There are more contrasts in this chapter. Can you find them?

What is the effect of using so many contrasts in the opening chapter? (Give at least two explanations.)

Further questions

1. Which is the biggest contrast in your opinion? Explain your answer.

2. What expectations might readers have of the opening chapter from the title, ‘Christmas Eve’?

3. Does the chapter live up to these expectations? Explain your answer.

4. ‘Utter blackness’ and ‘darkness ahead of me’ are used to describe the weather. How could these phrases be seen as a metaphor for Arthur himself based on what we learn in this chapter?

5. What is the effect of using the first person narrator in this chapter?

6. Why does Arthur go into great detail about Esme’s family in the middle of this chapter? Explain what effect this has.

7. What is the overall effect of Arthur taking so long to write his ghost story?

8. Why does Arthur decide to write down his ghost story rather than tell it?

9. Write down three quotations from the opening chapter that create an effect of tension and suspense.
Setting the tension

Teacher’s notes

Contrasts:

- **Weather**: ‘flowers of midsummer’, ‘calm and sweetness’ to ‘utter blackness’, ‘pattering of rain’
- **Location**: ‘but two miles from a good sized village’ to ‘an air of remoteness and isolation’ (at Monk’s Piece)
- **Lifestyle**: ‘sit back and do nothing’ to ‘In London I lived for my work’, ‘the business began to irk me’
- **Ghost stories**: ‘casual entertainment’, ‘wilder and sillier’, ‘gasps and cries’, ‘fits of choking laughter’ (the Ainleys) to ‘the truth is quite other, and altogether more terrible’, ‘a story for my eyes only’
- **Emotions**: ‘delight’, ‘happy home’ to ‘my mounting unease’, ‘bitter battle within myself’

Other contrasts:

- **Age**: ‘young man’ (Arthur) to ‘nearing the age when he had begun ...’ (Mr Bentley)
- **Health**: ‘although in good general health, was prone to occasional nervous illnesses and conditions.’
- **Sounds**: ‘a final, banshee howl’ to ‘And then silence in the room.’
- **Internal conflict:**
  - Edmund Ainley – ‘the youngest’, ‘a desire to be somewhat private, which had always singled him out from the rest of Esme’s family, just as he was also unlike the others in looks, being pale-skinned, and long-nosed, with hair of an extraordinary blackness, and blue eyes.’
  - Аthur Kipps – ‘I began to feel set apart from them all, an outsider to their circle.’; ‘I knew that I must have left the family in a state of consternation and bewilderment, for they knew me normally as an even-tempered man of predictable emotions.’