STORY STARTS

Lights, Camera ... Aaaaahhhh! It's time for the annual Haunted Tales student writing contest—just in time for the opening fright, er, opening night of the Murray Theater. This building showed its first films in 1938, and in 2025, it's DYING to tell a new story!
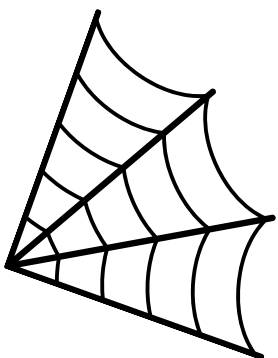
Since this is your chance to entertain (and frighten) an audience, we've gathered some story starts to get your artistic blood flowing. None of these topics are required, they're just spine-tingling ideas to get you thinking.

Grades 3-6

What happens when...

- An old, dusty film reel shows your future!
- The on-screen characters suddenly step off the screen.
- A ghostly usher guides you to a seat that transports you to another time.
- There's strange music coming from the stage—and nobody's there.
- You and your friends explore the attic and wake the bats.
- Cold and clammy water fills the Theater's basement. And it won't go away... (based on a true story!)
- An old ticket stub grants you a wish. At a chilling cost.
- A long-lost magician returns to perform one final, terrifying trick.
- The grand reopening goes dark mid-show. Only your flashlight and courage can save the audience.
- You sit down, and feel someone already sitting in your seat.
- A glowing green EXIT sign leads you somewhere that's not...an exit.
- A script falls from the balcony, and its story starts to come true.
- The ancient concession manager has never left the building. Ever.

STORY STARTS

Grades 7-12

Build on the story prompts above, give them your own twist, or come up with your own story ideas!

- **Spotlight Terror:** The theater is a place to be seen… until the spotlight starts choosing its own victims.
- **Reel-to-Real:** Old movies are harmless, right? Until the film tears open a portal between fiction and fright.
- **House Left, House Right:** Strange things are happening in the audience. Choose your seat wisely.
- **Beneath the Boards:** Something (or someone) lives under the stage… and they're ready for their comeback.
- **The Echo:** You hear your name called from the balcony. Again. And again. And again.
- **The Flood Below:** Water in the basement has a source. It wants out.
- **The Silent Performance:** No script. No sound. No exit. Can you act your way out?
- **Midnight Matinee:** The theater opens for a special showing—only for those who never left.

MURRAY HAUNTED TALES CONTEST

Criteria	Rating (according to appropriate grade-level writing standards)				Points
Creativity Is the story interesting and original?	**Yes!** 30 pts Your story was very interesting, and it didn't sound like other scary stories	**Some** 26 pts Your story was interesting, but it sounded like other scary stories at some points	**Kinda** 22 pts Your story was somewhat interesting, but it sounded like other scary stories at multiple points	**Missing** 18 pts Your story wasn't very interesting, and it sounded like other scary stories throughout	/30
Plot Does the story have a clear set of events that unfold, and are they connected?	**Yes!** 30 pts Your events are all clear and connected	**Some** 26 pts You stray off target a bit, but most of the events are clear and connected	**Kinda** 22 pts You have some events, but they are not very well connected	**Missing** 18 pts You have few to no events, and they are not connected	/30
Theater Theme Does the story include a theater in a meaningful way?	**Yes!** 20 pts Your story included a theater in a meaningful way throughout	**Some** 18 pts Your story included a theater	**Kinda** 15 pts Your story included a theater in a minor way	**Missing** 12 pts Your story did not include a theater	/20
Clarity Does the story avoid grammar and style issues that would make readers not understand it?	**Yes!** 20 pts Your story had no grammar or style issues	**Some** 18 pts Your story had a few grammar or style issues, but they were minor	**Kinda** 15 pts Your story had some grammar or style issues that caused readers to not understand it	**Missing** 12 pts Your story had major grammar or style issues that caused readers to not understand it	/20
				Total.	/100