Teacher's Key

Why We Love Scary Movies: The Science of Fear and Fun (Level B2)

Vocabulary Matching

1 paradox = **N**
2 startle = **A**
3 heightened = **H**
4 surge = **L**
5 suspense = **G**
6 overwhelmed = **M**
7 sweet spot = **I**
8 thrill-seeking = **E**
9 morbid curiosity = **D**
10 rehearse = **O**
11 cope with = **J**
12 resilience = **K**
13 linger = **B**
14 wary = **C**
15 gauge = **F**

Fill in the Blank

1 paradox
2 startle
3 heightened
4 surge
5 suspense
6 overwhelmed
7 sweet spot
8 morbid curiosity
9 rehearse
10 resilience
11 cope with
12 linger
13 wary
14 gauge

True or False

1 **False.** The writer says nobody would choose that, yet people pay to be frightened by films.
2 **True.** The reading says the alarm sounds before you have time to think.
3 **True.** They found that creeping dread and sudden shocks involve different brain systems.
4 **False.** The writer says the evidence for this is mixed.
5 **True.** They were fitted with heart monitors and later rated their fear and enjoyment.
6 **False.** Enjoyment rose up to a point and then fell.
7 **False.** The reading says the link between thrill-seeking and liking horror is weaker than you might expect.
8 **True.** This is how the reading describes the third type of fan.
9 **False.** The reading says the finding shows a link, not a cause.
10 **True.** This is the reason the writer gives for parents to be wary.

Language Focus: Participle Clauses

Example answer: **Frightened by the sudden noise**, the viewers screamed and dropped their popcorn.

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1 The paradox is that horror films are designed to cause fear, which people normally avoid, yet millions of people choose and enjoy them. Nobody would choose to be chased through a dark forest in real life.

2 The brain's alarm system, centered on the amygdala, reacts before you have time to think. Stress hormones such as adrenaline are released, the heart beats faster, breathing quickens, and the senses become heightened. This is the fight-or-flight response.

3 The thinking part of the brain knows the danger is fictional and that you chose to be there and can leave. With that safety net, the body's arousal can be felt as excitement, as on a roller coaster.

4 They found that creeping dread and sudden shocks involve different brain systems.

5 The sweet spot is the level of fear at which enjoyment is highest. In the Danish study, visitors wore heart monitors and rated their fear and enjoyment at each scare. Enjoyment rose with fear up to a point and then fell, forming an upside-down U.

6 Each person has a different sweet spot for fear, so a film that is thrilling for one friend can be too much for another. The reading says one friend may laugh through a film that keeps another awake all night.

7 Adrenaline junkies love the rush. White-knucklers often find horror stressful but feel they learn something about themselves. Dark copers report both a better mood and a sense of personal growth.

8 The survey found that horror fans reported lower distress and greater resilience, but it does not show that horror caused this. People who are already hardy may simply be more likely to choose horror.

9 Notice how you feel during and after a film, and stop if the thrill turns into distress. Young children are treated differently because the younger the viewer, the longer fright effects tend to last, so parents are right to be wary.

10 False. The writer says the finding shows a link, not a cause, and calls the idea worth testing. It has not been proved.

11 No. The writer says that none of this means everyone should push their limits, and describes a link between horror and resilience that is not a proven cause.

12 Best answer: to invite the reader to notice their own reaction, as a way to think about their personal sweet spot. It is not a medical warning (that comes earlier in the paragraph) and not an attempt to prove a theory. Accept a reasoned answer.

Notes on the Evidence

- Haunted house study: Andersen, Schjoedt, Price, Rosas, Scrivner, and Clasen, 2020, Psychological Science 31(12):1497-1510. 110 visitors aged 12 to 57 at a commercial attraction in Vejle, Denmark, wearing heart monitors. Self-reported enjoyment had an inverted-U relationship with fear. Fear rose in a straight line with average heart rate and large heart rate fluctuations. Participants rated fear and enjoyment after the experience for each encounter (APS report, November 2020). The reading says visitors rated at each scare, which matches this.
- Brain scans: Hudson, Seppala, Putkinen, Sun, Glerean, Karjalainen, Karlsson, Hirvonen, and Nummenmaa, 2020, NeuroImage 216:116522. 37 viewers watched feature-length horror films in an fMRI scanner. Sustained fear mainly amplified sensory regions, and acute fear increased activity in the brainstem, thalamus, amygdala, and cingulate cortices. The Turku press release also reports that people found psychological horror and unseen threats scariest, and that many prefer to watch with others (not used in the reading).
- Three types of fan: Scrivner, Clasen, and colleagues, 2022, Journal of Media Psychology (survey of about 256 American fans, replicated with about 258 visitors to a Danish haunted house). Thrill-seeking: Clasen and colleagues, 2020, Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences. Fans scored higher in thrill-seeking on average, but the differences were small, and Scrivner and Clasen caution that many fans are not thrill-seekers. Martin (2019, Frontiers in Psychology) reviews the literature and calls the evidence for sensation seeking inconsistent. Morbid curiosity and horror: Scrivner and colleagues, 2021.
- Pandemic study: Scrivner, Johnson, Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, and Clasen, 2021, Personality and Individual Differences 168:110397. 310 US participants recruited in April 2020. Horror fans reported greater resilience (and, per Science News Explores, lower distress) and fans of alien-invasion, apocalyptic, and zombie films reported both greater resilience and preparedness (this detail was cut from the reading for length). Horror fans in general did not feel more prepared. The study is correlational, and the authors and Clasen both note it is not proof. The “people who are already hardy” explanation is a possible alternative, not a finding.
- Excitation transfer and suspense: Zillmann's theory (1970s onward) holds that arousal from threat is carried over into enjoyment when the threat is resolved. Martin (2019) says suspense and its resolution are thought to be key factors, but that the evidence for the competing explanations is mixed, which is why the reading hedges. Heart safety: a cardiologist quoted by BuzzFeed News says the spikes in heart rate and blood pressure from scary films are not a problem for most people; no figures are given in the reading.
- Children and sleep: Harrison and Cantor, University of Michigan, 1999. Roughly one in four college students reported lingering effects from a frightening film or TV program in childhood, from sleep problems to avoidance, and the younger the viewer, the longer the effects lasted. The reading uses “many adults” for this. Adults: Martin (2019) reports no evidence that exposure to horror causes mental ill health, and Christopher Ferguson, quoted by Science News Explores, says a frightening film is unlikely to affect long-term well-being; the reading says “little sign”. Martin also notes that cross-cultural research is lacking, and the reading draws mainly on Danish and Finnish studies plus US surveys. Study figures were checked in September and October 2026; no source in the reading changes quickly. The Michigan report is from 1999.