A POST-HALLOWEEN LESSON

Controlling Time & Hitting the Plot Twist



Ms. Martocello · Creative Writing 2



A Post-Halloween Lesson

Controlling Time & Hitting the Plot Twist.

Three pacing tools writers use to stretch, flip, and snap a story — built around the November 1st candy hangover.

On today's bench · three pacing tools

01 · TOOL

Slow Motion

⏸️

Stretches a half-second into a page.
Best at the highest stakes.

02 · TOOL

Flash-back

⏪

Cuts back to swap the reader's footing.
Plants clues. Sets up the twist.

03 · TOOL

Cliff & Twist

⏩

Freezes on the height, or lands a reveal.
The page-turn payoff.

Five phases · one slow-motion deep dive · one flashback · one twist · a 15-minute mystery draft · a homework that reverse-engineers the clue.

By the end of today, you will learn how to...

manipulate *time* through pacing tools, fold in a *flashback* that earns its place, and land a *climax or twist* the reader didn't see coming.

01 · Manipulate

Stretch or compress time on purpose, the way a director would with a remote.

02 · Plant

Drop a flashback whose detail retconns one thing at the very end.

03 · Land

Stop on a cliff or drop a twist, and trust the reader to feel the floor give way.

How I'll know

Slide 04 · Warm-Up · 5 min

The candy-stash cliffhanger.

Write a three-sentence micro-scene set at midnight on Halloween night — bring it up to read in 4 minutes.

05:00



The 3-sentence formula

01

A normal post-trick-or-treat moment.

Sorting candy on your bed. Counting the Reese's. Bragging by phone.

02

One detail that doesn't belong.

A tap at the window. A wrapper unwrapping on its own. A shadow in the closet.

03

A cliff, with the reader on it.

Stop the action at peak. Don't resolve. Save that for the next scene.

Slide 05 · Mini-Lesson · 12 min

The time-control remote. Three buttons, three effects.

Writers don't move through a story second by second like a clock. They squeeze, stretch, and skip time the way a director would with a remote — and the three buttons below are all you've got.

⏸ · SLOW-MOTION

Stretches the half-second.

Effect · Increases Suspense

Zoom into micro-detail. Repeat a heartbeat. Name the cold sweat. Time stops feeling like time.

“Three seconds reaching into an unlabeled pillowcase for the last full-sized bar.”

⏪ · FLASHBACK

Cuts back — but quietly.

Effect · Adds Context / Misdirection

Cut back to a past moment that secretly sets up the twist. Drop it without announcing it.

“At 8:00 PM, she'd remembered the trick-or-treater in the glowing mask.”

⏩ · CLIFF + TWIST

Stops — or subverts.

Effect · Creates Impact & Shock

Freeze on height, or drop a reveal that flips everything the reader thought they knew.

“Inside the wrapper, no chocolate. A glowing key.”

⏸ · TOOL 01

Slow-Motion.

Effect

Increases suspense.



Use it *only* when the stakes are highest.

How it works in narrative

Zoom into micro-detail during high-stakes moments.
Spend sentences where seconds live. Make time *feel* thick.

Physical sensation

The heartbeat in the ear. The cold under the shirt. The caught breath.

THE SKIN BRIGHTENS WITH IT.

Tiny, ordinary detail

A wrapper crinkle. The grain of the pillowcase. Static in the dark.

THE WORLD GOES MUNDANE.

Internal thought repeat

Narration catches on one sentence-like thought and turns it over once too often.

THE BRAIN STUTTERS.

Post-Halloween example

***Slow down* the three seconds spent reaching into an unlabeled pillowcase to grab the last full-sized bar.**

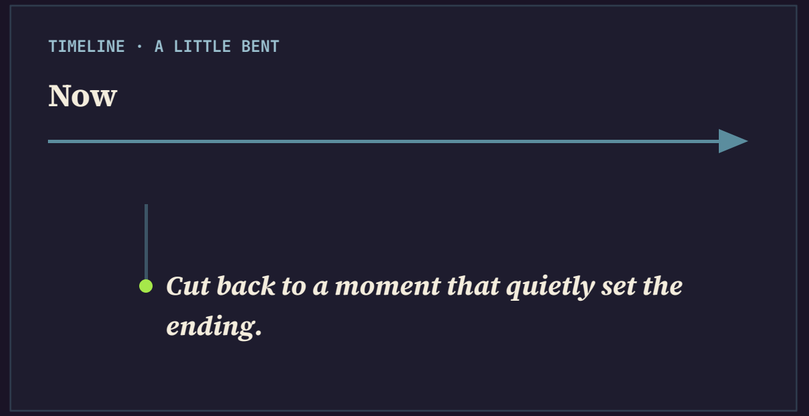
What was a beat is now a paragraph. What was a paragraph is now a page. The reach is the scene.

Slide 07 · Mini-Lesson · Flashback

Flashback.

Effect

Adds context. Plants a clue. Sets up the twist.



How to plant one

01 · USE A TRANSITION

Cut with a phrase, not a label.

“Three hours earlier…” or *“They remembered the strange trick-or-treater in the glowing mask…”*

02 · STAY QUIET

Don't announce it.

Let the scene open in media res. Trust the reader; they'll feel the seam at the end.

03 · EARN IT LATER

Make the twist re-read it.

The flashback is a sentence whose meaning changes once the reader knows the end. Plant once, lean later.

Cliff & Twist.

Effect

Creates impact. Or shock.

THE CLIFFHANGER

Freeze on the height. Walk away.

Stop the action at peak. Pull back the camera. The reader's hand stays on the page because *what happens next* hasn't been written yet.

Save a paragraph of aftermath — a scream, a door, a switch — for the next page.

THE TWIST

Subvert what they thought they knew.

Drop a reveal that makes complete sense *only in retrospect*. Use the flashback already planted. Re-pose the question.

The candy wrapper opens — and it's not chocolate. It's a glowing, ancient key.

Slide 09 · The Rule

Carry this with you into the free write.

Fast pacing **speeds up low-stakes action.**

Slow pacing **stretches high-stakes tension.**

EXAMPLE · HIGH-STAKES MOMENT

Reaching into that pillowcase.

Three seconds of real time. Three paragraphs on the page. Stretch.

EXAMPLE · LOW-STAKES MOMENT

Walking down the stairs.

Twelve stairs. Twelve words. Half a sentence. Compress.

Slide 10 · Free Write · 15 min

It's the morning after Halloween.



You wake up surrounded by wrappers. There's one item in your candy stash that wasn't there last night — and it definitely isn't candy.

Three things the draft must do

REQ · 01

Slow down time.

Spend *at least four or five sentences* on *one* five-second high-stakes moment.

Reaching for the object. Noticing the glow. Opening the door.

⏸

REQ · 02

Include a flashback.

Use a transition phrase. Cut back to a clue the reader won't see yet.

"Three hours earlier..." · "They remembered the strange trick-or-treater in the glowing mask..."

⏪

REQ · 03

Land a twist or a cliff.

Stop the scene where the floor tilts. Catch the reader mid-breath.

⏩

Slide 12 · Homework · Due next class

The reverse-flashback twist challenge.

Revise your class free write — or start fresh. Write a 1-page narrative (250–350 words) centered on a Halloween-aftermath mystery.

Target length

250 – 350

WORDS · ONE PAGE

Criteria · all three

CRITERION 01

Pacing Stretch

Find the highest-stakes scene and expand it with sensory detail — heartbeat, cold sweat, ambient sound.

CRITERION 02

Flashback Integration

A 3–5 sentence flashback that drops a subtle hint about the ending. Don't underline it.

CRITERION 03

The Twist

An unexpected ending that makes complete sense once the reader remembers the flashback clue.

