

Thinking about the story

Susan Hill has said that when she began writing the story, she did not really plan it out. She considered all the essential elements of a successful ghost story, which include:

1. A haunted place. A lonely house or church
2. Atmosphere
3. Weather – fog or mist, dusk, twilight, drizzle...
4. A ghost – not as silly as it sounds. The ghost story is not necessarily a horror story and it must have a ghost, which is defined as the spirit of someone now dead which looks as they looked in life and which is seen by people still living.
5. The ghost must have a purpose – that seemed essential. There has to be a motive for the hauntings. It is not very interesting if a dark-robed monk walks through walls or a veiled lady drifts up and down a staircase frightening people but doing nothing much else and without any reason or purpose.

http://www.susan-hill.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56&Itemid=52

1. Write out titles in your book for each of the above and then, as you read the story, make a note of where you find examples of each one.
2. For each example that you find, make a note of the way in which it affects the story and how you feel about it.
3. Think about what else you might consider to be necessary to a successful ghost story, particularly one of the Victorian era. Can you add anything to Susan Hill's list? Does she include it in her story?
4. Here are a few examples to start you off: a train journey; the time of year; the role of the narrator. Can you find these in the text and in what ways, if any, do they seem relevant to the success of her story?
5. Why do you think Susan Hill might have chosen to set *The Woman in Black* in the past?
6. Do you think her story is successful as a ghost story? Give reasons for your answer and be prepared to share your ideas with the rest of the class.