

## Helpful Notes on Effective Cliffhangers!

### Dictionary Definition

***Cliffhanger – a film, game, story, etc. which is exciting and full of suspense because its outcome is uncertain***

Sometimes our cliffhangers aren't as effective as we'd hoped, so here are a few ideas to help you improve the 'groan-factor' achieved at your story finale!

You will know whether your cliffhanger has worked if the kids all give out a huge groan of disappointment as you drop the bombshell that you are finished for today!

### Key characteristics of a BAD cliffhanger

- There is no surprise that the end of the story has been arrived at
- There is no crescendo of events in the story and no suspense is created – it just stops
- A series of questions are asked which give away the actual outcome of the suspenseful event!
- The line "if you want to know what happens next come back next week" is said in the same tone as the final story line, there is no contrast

### Key Characteristics of a GOOD cliffhanger

- The sudden end is not expected
- The end comes when a critical event is about to happen
- The end is midway through a sentence that has a crescendo, and suspense has been built
- The line "if you want to know what happens next come back next week" is said in a quiet, low, emotionless tone compared to the adrenaline-filled, emotionally-charged final story line

### Examples (based on "Jacob about to meet Esau & 400 men" story)

BAD cliffhangers.... Where the outcome is NOT uncertain at all! All of these would be said in a level voice...

"Jacob looked up and saw his brother Esau on the other side of the river. Come back next week to see what happens when Esau crosses the river to say hello to Jacob"

"Jacob looked up and saw his brother Esau on the other side of the river. Will Esau cross the river and forgive Jacob for all the wrong he has done? Will Jacob be surprised by Esau's forgiveness? Come back next week to see if that's what happens"

"Listen up kids, we're at the end of the story now. Esau had arrived at the other side of the river and next week we'll be finding out what happens next. Thank you." (sits down)

"Jacob looked up and saw his brother Esau on the other side of the river. Will the 400 men come and kill Jacob or will they not be mentioned at all next week as they have very little to do with the actual plot? Come back next week if you care, to find out!"

### GOOD cliffhangers....

Both of these would be said with a crescendo'ing voice with passion and intensity.....

““Jacob looked up and saw his brother Esau on the other side of the river. With horror, his heart began to race and beads of sweat poured from his brow. His eyes widened as fear gripped his very being.... and Esau came closer and closer and closer and..... if you want to find out what happens next, you'll have to come back next week!”

“As Jacob awoke, his eyes fell on the most terrifying thing he had ever seen. He staggered backwards away from the water, his heart pounding. He tried to run but his legs gave way beneath him, for there, right before his very eyes was his worst nightmare, a..... if you want to know what Jacob saw you'll have to come back next week!”

### Hints for creating a GOOD cliffhanger

Suspense is created by helping the child's imagination to be fired. Just like yours and mine, there are certain stimuli, which are guaranteed to help the imagination kick into action.

Lighting – use the lights we have available to create moods at different points in your story, light & dark for day & night for example.

Music – start collecting CD's of 'Original Movie Soundtracks' (not the ones that have all the pop songs from a movie – rather the background score that you don't usually notice is there when watching a movie) and get to know their characteristics well. They are a superb resource for story telling and can transform a non-descript and bland retelling into a multi-million dollar epic! Choosing the right piece of music to back your scene is vital, but with practice you can take your cliffhangers to the next level!

Voice – the best resource you have! Visualise the scene in your imagination and then paint that picture in words for the kids. Graphic description of your cliffhanger is a million times better than a PowerPoint picture, which can severely limit the imagination of a child. Carefully work out your descriptions and consider richer adjectives and vocabulary.

Be dramatic – Let your imagination run wild & be in the story world yourself, and then draw the kids into your world with you! Feel the emotion of the characters and let it flow out of you! That way, when you drop the bombshell, they are shocked out of the story-world back into reality with a bang . . . and a groan will ensue!

### A testing question for your cliffhanger:

Does your story ending leave the kids hanging onto the cliff-top edge by their fingernails, not knowing whether they will fall to a certain death or be pulled to safety? It should! Such is the power of a good cliffhanger! ☺