Thirteen O'Clock: model answer and marking guide

Give your child the task sheet first and let them write without help. Then read the model answer together: it shows what a strong Year 5 answer can look like. It is not the only right answer, and your child's writing does not need to be like it.

> Continue the story that begins with this sentence: "The moment Grandad's old clock struck thirteen, the whole house held its breath." Think carefully about what happens next and how your story will end.

Model answer

The moment Grandad's old clock struck thirteen, the whole house held its breath.

I was sitting on the bottom stair, waiting for Mum to finish her phone call, when the first chime rang out. Then the second. I counted them without really meaning to, the way you count stairs in the dark. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen.

Thirteen?

I stood up slowly. The hallway looked the same as always: the coat hooks, the wonky picture of Blackpool Tower, Grandad's walking stick leaning by the door. But something was wrong. Mum's voice had stopped mid-sentence in the kitchen. The radio had stopped too. Even the dripping tap, which had been annoying everyone for weeks, was silent.

"Mum?" I whispered. Nothing.

I crept into the kitchen. Mum was standing by the window with the phone pressed to her ear, completely still, like a statue in a museum. A drop of water hung under the tap and refused to fall. Outside, a pigeon was frozen above the washing line, its wings spread like a paper fan.

My heart was thumping so loudly I was sure it would wake the whole street. Then I noticed the clock. Its pendulum was still swinging, slow and steady, as if it was the only thing in the world that was allowed to move. Apart from me.

Grandad always said that clock was "older than the King and twice as stubborn". He had also told me, more than once, never to wind it backwards. I had always thought that was one of his jokes.

With trembling fingers, I opened the little glass door. The key was hanging inside on a hook. I took a deep breath, fitted it into the hole and turned it, very gently, the wrong way.

Click.

The pendulum shuddered. The hands spun backwards so fast they blurred, and a sound like a hundred whispering voices filled the hall. I squeezed my eyes shut.

When I opened them, the tap was dripping again. The pigeon flapped away over the fence. Mum wandered into the hallway, still chatting on the phone, and raised an eyebrow at me.

"Why have you got Grandad's key?" she mouthed.

I hung it back up very carefully and closed the little door. Behind the glass, the clock said five past four, exactly as it should. But as I turned away, I could have sworn I heard it chuckle.

What makes it work

> **"Thirteen?"**
> A one-word paragraph makes the reader stop and notice that something is wrong. It is a simple trick that builds suspense quickly.

> **"the way you count stairs in the dark"**
> This comparison comes from everyday life, so the reader instantly recognises the feeling. It sounds like a real child noticing things.

> **"like a statue in a museum"**
> A clear simile that helps the reader picture Mum frozen in place without a long explanation.

> **"A drop of water hung under the tap and refused to fall."**
> A tiny, precise detail shows that time has stopped. Showing a small detail is often more powerful than saying "everything froze".

> **"older than the King and twice as stubborn"**
> A remembered saying gives Grandad a personality even though he never appears in the story.

> **"With trembling fingers,"**
> This fronted adverbial, followed by a comma, shows the character is nervous without using the word "scared".

> **"Click."**
> A one-word sound paragraph marks the turning point of the story and slows the reader down at the exciting moment.

> **"I could have sworn I heard it chuckle"**
> The ending links back to the clock and leaves a small mystery, so the story feels finished but still makes the reader smile.

Next steps

- Rewrite the second paragraph so that it begins with a sound, for example "Bong!"
- Add one sentence describing what the kitchen smells like while time is frozen.
- Write an alternative last line that ends with a question instead.

Checklist for your child's writing

What to look for	Strong	Developing	Not yet
The story follows on smoothly from the given opening sentence.			
There is a clear beginning, problem, turning point and ending.			
Paragraphs change when the time, place, action or speaker changes.			
Short sentences or one-word paragraphs are used to build suspense.			
Feelings are shown through actions (for example, trembling fingers) rather than only named.			
Speech is punctuated correctly, with a new line for each new speaker.			
At least two well-chosen similes or descriptive details help the reader picture the scene.			
Sentences start in different ways, including fronted adverbials with commas.			
The ending links back to the start or gives the reader something to think about.			
Spelling and full stops are accurate, especially in the most exciting parts.			

Pick one thing to praise and one thing to work on next time. In the Kent Test the writing task is not scored, but it can be read by a panel of headteachers if a child's scores are close to the line.

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