Free Halloween and scary stories for kids

Peabody · checked 2026-10-19

Peabody has 16 free scary stories for kids to read online, from a level 7 mystery in the fog to retold classics like Hansel and Gretel and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow. Each is marked scary so a grown-up can choose first, and each opens at once with no sign-up. Free through the end of 2027.

- Story: The Tapping in the Fog · Level: Level 7 · Pages: 21 · What happens: A strange tapping stops every time Juno stops, and it is coming from the old boathouse in the fog.
- Story: The Time Machine · Level: Level 9 · Pages: 13 · What happens: An inventor rides a time machine into a future full of laughing, helpless people who lock their doors at night.
- Story: Hansel and Gretel · Level: Level 9 · Pages: 18 · What happens: In a hungry year, Hansel and Gretel get lost in the great forest and find a little house made of bread and cake.
- Story: The Wizard of Oz · Level: Level 10 · Pages: 13 · What happens: A cyclone drops Dorothy and her dog into a land of munchkins, talking scarecrows and one very bad-tempered witch.
- Story: Fort Lantern · Level: Level 11 · Pages: 14 · What happens: At 4:12 on Saturday, a fuzzy green monster in a bathrobe announces that Lantern Court now belongs to the monsters of the storm drain.
- Story: The Well That Breathed · Level: Level 12 · Pages: 17 · What happens: Something is breathing at night in the old well at Gran's farm, and every afternoon it runs dry.
- Story: Perseus and Medusa · Level: Level 13 · Pages: 18 · What happens: A fisherman's foster son promises a wicked king the head of Medusa, whose stare turns people to stone.
- Story: Vasilisa the Brave · Level: Level 14 · Pages: 13 · What happens: Sent into the dark forest to fetch fire from Baba Yaga, the witch whose hut walks on chicken legs, Vasilisa has nothing but her mother's tiny doll in her pocket.
- Story: Theseus and the Minotaur · Level: Level 14 · Pages: 14 · What happens: A young prince sails to Crete to end a terrible tribute, armed with a princess's thread and a maze full of echoes.
- Story: A Christmas Carol · Level: Level 14 · Pages: 14 · What happens: On Christmas Eve, the stingiest man in London is visited by the ghost of his old partner, rattling in chains, and then by three spirits.
- Story: The Stuck Note · Level: Level 14 · Pages: 14 · What happens: Every afternoon, middle C on the old school piano sticks, and the little kids swear it is the ghost of a

choirmaster named R.T.
• Story: The Legend of Sleepy Hollow · Level: Level 14 · Pages: 15 · What happens: Ichabod Crane, a skinny schoolteacher who believes every ghost story, sets his heart on marrying Katrina Van Tassel, while Brom Bones plays pranks on him.
• Story: Odysseus and the Cyclops · Level: Level 15 · Pages: 12 · What happens: Odysseus and his crew are locked in a giant's cave behind a boulder no army could move, and the giant's idea of dinner is them.
• Story: The Hound of the Baskervilles · Level: Level 16 · Pages: 13 · What happens: An old curse says a giant hound haunts the Baskerville family across the foggy moors of Devon, and now Sir Charles Baskerville has been found dead beside the footprints of an enormous dog.
• Story: Beowulf and Grendel · Level: Level 16 · Pages: 13 · What happens: For twelve years a monster has been stealing the sleepers from the great hall of Heorot, and nobody dares even to hum.
• Story: Frankenstein · Level: Level 17 · Pages: 13 · What happens: A young scientist named Victor Frankenstein discovers how to give life to lifeless matter, builds a giant, and runs from the creature the moment it opens its eyes.

What scary means here

Every Peabody story is marked gentle, scary, very scary or horror before anyone reads it. A scary story may have a witch, a ghost, a monster or a tense night, and it is told short and plain for young readers. Stories marked very scary or horror are not in the open library at all, so none are on this page, and none can be read without an account. The 16 here run from levels 7 to 17. The year-round shelf is scary stories for kids.

Where to start

Read the first page yourself if you are not sure. These six are a good way in, easiest first:

• The Tapping in the Fog (level 7): A strange tapping stops every time Juno stops, and it is coming from the old boathouse in the fog.
• Hansel and Gretel (level 9): In a hungry year, Hansel and Gretel get lost in the great forest and find a little house made of bread and cake.
• The Wizard of Oz (level 10): A cyclone drops Dorothy and her dog into a land of munchkins, talking scarecrows and one very bad-tempered witch.
• Fort Lantern (level 11): At 4:12 on Saturday, a fuzzy green monster in a bathrobe announces that Lantern Court now belongs to the monsters of the storm drain.
• The Stuck Note (level 14): Every afternoon, middle C on the old school piano sticks, and the little kids swear it is the ghost of a choirmaster named R.T.
• The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (level 14): Ichabod Crane, a skinny schoolteacher who believes every ghost story, sets his heart on marrying Katrina Van Tassel.

Halloween HQ: games, jokes and treats after a scary story

Halloween HQ has everything Halloween at Peabody in one place, with a countdown to the big night and a bucket list to print. After a story, a child can read Halloween jokes aloud; or make Halloween treats like banana ghosts with a grown-up. For a grade's own games, see the learning games; for another story, the library.

A level is not a scare rating

The level number says how hard the reading is: how long the sentences are and how common the words are, from level 0 for a child who cannot read yet up to level 18. It says nothing about how frightening a story is. A level 14 story is a harder read, not a scarier one, and a level 9 story can have a witch in it. Each story's page shows its level and its scary mark; the level pages explain what each level reads like.

Printable passages with questions

Every story here is also a free printable reading passage with comprehension questions and an answer key, for a classroom or the kitchen table. No sign-up.

- The Tapping in the Fog: reading passage — level 7, 6 questions
- The Time Machine: reading passage — level 9, 6 questions
- Hansel and Gretel: reading passage — level 9, 6 questions
- The Wizard of Oz: reading passage — level 10, 6 questions
- Fort Lantern: reading passage — level 11, 6 questions
- The Well That Breathed: reading passage — level 12, 6 questions
- Perseus and Medusa: reading passage — level 13, 6 questions
- Vasilisa the Brave: reading passage — level 14, 6 questions
- Theseus and the Minotaur: reading passage — level 14, 6 questions
- A Christmas Carol: reading passage — level 14, 6 questions
- The Stuck Note: reading passage — level 14, 6 questions
- The Legend of Sleepy Hollow: reading passage — level 14, 6 questions
- Odysseus and the Cyclops: reading passage — level 15, 6 questions
- The Hound of the Baskervilles: reading passage — level 16, 6 questions
- Beowulf and Grendel: reading passage — level 16, 6 questions
- Frankenstein: reading passage — level 17, 6 questions

More free stories

- The whole library: free stories by reading level, no account needed.
- Classic stories retold short: fables, fairy tales, myths and legends.
- Free Aesop's fables for kids, with the lesson of each
- Free classic fairy tales for kids

- Free Greek myths for kids
- Free folk tales, tall tales and legends for kids
- By level: Level 7 · Level 9 · Level 10 · Level 11 · Level 12 · Level 13 · Level 14 · Level 15 · Level 16 · Level 17

Questions parents ask

Are these stories too scary for young children?

That depends on the child, so read a story's short description first and the opening page yourself. A story marked scary can have a witch, a ghost, a monster or a tense night, told short and plain. The easiest to start with is The Tapping in the Fog (level 7). Stories marked very scary or horror are not open to visitors at all.

Do I need an account, or to pay?

No. Every story on this page is free to read through the end of 2027, with no account and no card.

What do the level numbers mean?

A level is how hard the reading is, from level 0 for a child who cannot read yet to level 18, worked out from the text itself. It is not a rating for how scary a story is. The level pages show the limits for each one.

Free at peabody.kids/holidays/halloween/stories