Tales From the Telephone: True Horror

An Author’s Purpose Spooky Story

An author’s purpose is his or her reason for writing. When you write a shopping list, your purpose is to remind yourself what you need when you’re at the store. When you write a ghost story, your purpose is to terrify—and to entertain. Most authors have more than one purpose. What is the author’s purpose in this strangely scary telephone tale?

Welcome to Tales From the Telephone, the world’s only newsletter featuring actual telephone calls made by real people just like you. Today we focus on Madge Fackley. When Madge placed the call you’re about to read, she had just bought a new Potco pot. The handle was loose. To get help, Madge dialed 1-800-POTCO. We present to you a word-for-word transcript of Madge’s actual conversation. Here’s a warning: This call may terrify you. If you have the guts, listen in.
MADGE: Hello?

VOICE: Welcome to Potco International. Your call is very important to us. For English, press 1. For Spanish, press 2. For dolphin or chimpanzee language, press 3. For gibberish, press 4. To hear somebody mumbling and coughing, press 5.

_Madge presses 1._

VOICE: Your call is very important to us. All of our lines are busy at this time. Please wait for the next available representative.

_Forty minutes pass._

FRANK: Hello, and welcome to the customer service line for Potco International. This is Frank Zilch. How many I help you?

MADGE: Oh, thank goodness I finally reached somebody!

FRANK: Your call may be monitored for security reasons.

MADGE: Okay. But I just wanted to ask a question.

FRANK: For questions, press 1. For answers, press 2. For questions without answers, press 3. For answers without questions, press 4. For neither questions nor answers, press 5. Or, please stay on the line to hear some elevator music.

_Madge presses 1._

VOICE: Thank you for calling the Potco Question Line. Your call is very important. To speak to a representative who knows nothing about your problem, press 1. To speak to a representative who knows nothing about other problems, press 2. To speak to a representative who doesn’t even know his or her name, press 3. To speak to a robot, press 4.

_Madge presses 4._

VOICE: To speak to a robot who knows nothing about your problem, press 1. To speak to a robot that just repeats the same phrase over and over again, press 2. To be put on hold for another forty minutes, press 3.
Madge presses 1. Forty minutes pass.

ROBOT: Hello, and welcome to the Potco Robot Help Line. Your call is very important. All of our robots are currently on lunch break right now. To leave a message for a robot to call you back as soon as pigs have wings, please press 5 now, or stay on the line for the next available robot . . .

For more telephone terror, look for next week’s issue of this newsletter, Tales From the Telephone. To subscribe or to share your own telephone travails, call us at 555-FONE. For subscriptions, press 1. To tell your tale, press 2. And remember, at Tales From the Telephone your call is always very, very important to us.

1. What does the author’s main purpose appear to be in this story?
   - A. To criticize pot makers
   - B. To criticize Madge
   - C. To criticize automated phone systems
   - D. To criticize the U.S. government

2. What other purpose does the author have?
   - A. To entertain
   - B. To inform
   - C. To describe
   - D. To make an excuse

3. To communicate purpose, the author uses which literary devices?
   - A. Logic and persuasion
   - B. Humor and irony
   - C. Rhythm and rhyme
   - D. Allusion and symbolism

4. Which outward tone does the author use for the voices that speak to Madge?
   - A. A harsh tone
   - B. A pleasant tone
   - C. A biting tone
   - D. A scary tone

5. What does the author want readers to think the voice really means when it says, “Your call is very important”?
   - A. Your call is important.
   - B. Your call is somewhat important.
   - C. Your call is not important.
   - D. Other people’s calls are unimportant.

6. Which of the following is evidence of the author’s attitude?
   - A. The polite words of the voice
   - B. The ridiculous choices that the phone voices give Madge
   - C. The helpfulness of people that Madge gets on the phone
   - D. The fact that Madge bought a pot

7. Some of the choices that are given to Madge are dead ends or make no sense. The author is trying to show that callers like Madge often feel
   - A. helpless.
   - B. well taken care of.
   - C. pleased.
   - D. frightened.

8. Imagine that you are Madge. On a separate sheet of paper, write a complaint letter to Potco International describing your experience and asking for service. Use as much humor and irony as you like.

50

Reading Skills Chills & Thrills © Dan Greenberg, Scholastic Teaching Resources