

Sorry, Right Number

Teleplay by Stephen King

What sends a **CHILL** down your spine?

COMMON CORE

RL 5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text and order events within it create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

RL 10 Read and comprehend dramas.

Not all horror stories give readers a fright by portraying gory scenes. Some present ordinary people doing ordinary things—until something creepy, or even supernatural, happens. In *Sorry, Right Number*, a family is puzzled by a mysterious phone caller pleading for help.

QUICKWRITE Supernatural events play a part in many stories of fantasy, mystery, and horror. Work with a group to generate a list of supernatural occurrences in stories, movies, and TV programs. Arrange them in a “chill factor” chart according to how powerfully they affect you.



● TEXT ANALYSIS: PLOT IN DRAMA

As you probably know, a **drama** is basically a story told in dialogue form. Like a work of fiction, drama establishes a setting, presents a series of **plot** events, and centers around one or more **conflicts** that the characters must cope with. Because a drama does not use a narrator to describe what happens, the plot unfolds through the characters' words and actions. As you read this drama, note what the dialogue and camera directions reveal about the setting, the conflict, and the unusual events that surround the cast of characters. Also, be ready for Stephen King's special brand of suspense.

● READING SKILL: READING A TELEPLAY

Reading a teleplay is different from reading a script for a stage play. Your mind's eye will be challenged to **visualize** what the camera is focusing on. For example, in *Sorry, Right Number*, when a camera direction calls for an extreme close-up and then takes you inside a telephone receiver, you have to imagine not only how this looks but also what effect it creates. In addition, in a teleplay, you don't have to wait for formal scene changes to have changes in setting, as you do with a regular stage play. You can be instantly thrown from one setting to the next, even from one time period to another, by a camera direction that reads "slam cut to."

Standard **dramatic conventions** in teleplays can also help you visualize the action. Like plays, teleplays begin with a list of characters, and each character's name is identified before his or her lines of dialogue. Additionally, stage directions—passages of italicized text—describe the location and action of the scene, as well as some sounds. By combining the two in your mind, you can "see" what is happening in the scene.

Before you read *Sorry, Right Number*, study Stephen King's note at the beginning of the teleplay to familiarize yourself with common teleplay terms. As you read, use your experience watching TV and movies to help you visualize what the camera wants you to see.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Stephen King

born 1947

From the Trash Can to the Bestseller List
Stephen King nearly threw away his writing career before it began. He dumped the manuscript of his first horror novel, *Carrie*, into the trash, but his wife retrieved it and urged him to continue working on it. Later, after *Carrie* became a hit movie, King went on to have six titles on the *New York Times* bestseller list at the same time. Credited with reviving the market for both horror fiction and horror films, King has been called a "one-man entertainment industry."

From Brain to Screen

King has written that the idea for *Sorry, Right Number* came to him "one night on my way home from buying a pair of shoes." He wrote the script in two sittings and about a week later submitted it to a friend who produced a TV series called *Tales from the Darkside*. The friend bought the teleplay the day he read it and had it in production a week or two later; and it was broadcast a month after that—"one of the fastest turns from in-the-head to on-the-screen that I've ever heard of," King commented.

BACKGROUND TO THE DRAMA

Writing for Television

Mixed in with the camera directions in *Sorry, Right Number* are passages in King's own voice. King acts as both author and "narrator" of the play, frequently addressing the reader. He explains abbreviations, points out things he wants the reader to know, and comments on situations.

Author
Online

THINK
central

Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML9-155



SORRY, RIGHT NUMBER

Stephen King

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Katie Weiderman

Jeff Weiderman

Connie Weiderman

Dennis Weiderman

Bill Weiderman

Polly Weiderman

Operator

Dawn

Minister

Groundskeeper

Hank

Author's note: Screenplay abbreviations are simple and exist, in this author's opinion, mostly to make those who write screenplays feel like lodge brothers.¹ In any case, you should be aware that *CU* means *close-up*; *ECU* means *extreme close-up*; *INT.* means *interior*; *EXT.* means *exterior*; *B.G.* means *background*; *POV* means *point of view*. Probably most of you knew all that stuff to begin with, right?

Act I

(Fade in on Katie Weiderman's mouth, ECU)

(She's speaking into the telephone. Pretty mouth; in a few seconds we'll see that the rest of her is just as pretty.)

Katie. Bill? Oh, he says he doesn't feel very well, but he's always like that between books . . . can't

sleep, thinks every headache is the first symptom of a brain tumor . . . once he gets going on something new, he'll be fine.

¹⁰ *(Sound, B.G.: the television)*

(The camera draws back. Katie is sitting in the kitchen phone nook, having a good gab with her sister while she idles through some catalogues. We should notice one not-quite-ordinary thing about the phone she's on: it's the sort with two lines. There are lighted buttons to show which ones are engaged. Right now only one—Katie's—is. As Katie continues her conversation, the camera swings away from her, tracks across the kitchen, and through the arched doorway that leads into the family room.)

²⁰ **Katie** *(voice, fading)*. Oh, I saw Janie Charlton today . . . yes! Big as a house! . . .

1. **lodge brothers:** members of the same men's social organization. Lodges sometimes have special rituals or vocabularies.



(*She fades. The TV gets louder. There are three kids: Jeff, eight, Connie, ten, and Dennis, thirteen. Wheel of Fortune is on, but they're not watching. Instead they're engaged in that great pastime, Fighting About What Comes On Later.*)

Jeff. Come *onnn!* It was his first *book!*

Connie. His first *gross* book.

30 **Dennis.** We're gonna watch *Cheers* and *Wings*,² just like we do every week, Jeff.

(*Dennis speaks with the utter finality only a big brother can manage. "Wanna talk about it some more and see how much pain I can inflict on your scrawny body, Jeff?" his face says.*)

Jeff. Could we at least tape it?

Connie. We're taping CNN³ for Mom. She said she might be on the phone with Aunt Lois for quite a while.

40 **Jeff.** How can you tape CNN, for God's sake? It *never stops!*

Dennis. That's what she likes about it.

Connie. And don't say God's sake, Jeffie—you're not old enough to talk about God except in church.

Jeff. Then don't call me Jeffie.

Connie. Jeffie, Jeffie, Jeffie.

(*Jeff gets up, walks to the window, and looks out into the dark. He's really upset. Dennis and Connie, in*
50 *the grand tradition of older brothers and sisters, are delighted to see it.*)

Dennis. Poor Jeffie.

Connie. I think he's gonna commit suicide.

Jeff (*turns to them*). It was his *first* book! Don't you guys even *care?*

Connie. Rent it down at the Video Stop tomorrow, if you want to see it so bad.

Jeff. They don't rent R-rated pictures to little kids and you know it!

60 **Connie** (*dreamily*). Shut up, it's Vanna! I *love* Vanna!

Jeff. Dennis—

Dennis. Go ask Dad to tape it on the VCR in his office and quit being such a totally annoying little booger.

(*Jeff crosses the room, poking his tongue out at Vanna White as he goes. The camera follows as he goes into the kitchen.*)

Katie. . . . so when he asked me if *Polly* had tested strep positive,⁴ I had to remind him she's away at prep school⁵ . . . Lois, I miss her . . .

70 (*Jeff is just passing through, on his way to the stairs.*)

Katie. Will you kids *please* be quiet?

Jeff (*glum*). They'll be quiet. *Now.*

(*He goes up the stairs, a little dejected. Katie looks after him for a moment, loving and worried.*)

Katie. They're squabbling again. *Polly* used to keep them in line, but now that she's away at school . . . I don't know . . . maybe sending her to Bolton wasn't such a hot idea. Sometimes when
80 she calls home she sounds so *unhappy* . . .

(*INT. Bela Lugosi⁶ as Dracula, CU*)

(*Drac's standing at the door of his Transylvanian castle. Someone has pasted a comic-balloon coming out of his mouth which reads: "Listen! My children of the night! What music they make!" The poster is on a door but we only see this as Jeff opens it and goes into his father's study.*)

(*INT. a photograph of Katie, CU*)

90 (*The camera holds, then pans slowly right. We pass another photo, this one of Polly, the daughter away at school. She's a lovely girl of sixteen or so. Past Polly is Dennis . . . then Connie . . . then Jeff.*)

2. **Cheers** and **Wings**: popular television sitcoms of the 1980s and 1990s.

3. **CNN**: the Cable News Network.

4. **had tested strep positive**: had strep throat, an infection caused by bacteria called streptococci.

5. **prep school**: a private high school that prepares students for college.

6. **Bela Lugosi**: a Hungarian-born actor (1882–1956) best known for his roles in U.S. horror films of the 1930s and 1940s.

(The camera continues to pan and also widens out so we can see Bill Weiderman, a man of about forty-four. He looks tired. He's peering into the word-processor on his desk, but his mental crystal ball must be taking the night off, because the screen is blank. On the walls we see framed book-covers. All of them are spooky. One of the titles is Ghost Kiss.)

100 (Jeff comes up quietly behind his dad. The carpet muffles his feet. Bill sighs and shuts off the word-cruncher. A moment later Jeff claps his hands on his father's shoulders.)

Jeff. BOOGA-BOOGA!

Bill. Hi, Jeffie.

(He turns in his chair to look at his son, who is disappointed.)

Jeff. How come you didn't get scared?

Bill. Scaring is my business. I'm case-hardened.

110 Something wrong?

Jeff. Daddy, can I watch the first hour of *Ghost Kiss* and you tape the rest? Dennis and Connie are hogging *everything*.

(Bill swivels to look at the book-jacket, bemused.)

Bill. You sure you want to watch *that*, champ? It's pretty—

Jeff. Yes!

(INT. Katie, in the phone nook)

120 (In this shot, we clearly see the stairs leading to her husband's study behind her.)

Katie. I *really* think Jeff needs the orthodontic work but you know Bill—

(The other line rings. The other light stutters.)

Katie. That's just the other line, Bill will—

(But now we see Bill and Jeff coming downstairs behind her.)

Bill. Honey, where're the blank videotapes? I can't find any in the study and—

Katie (to Bill). *Wait!*

130 (to Lois). Gonna put you on hold a sec, Lo.



(She does. Now both lines are blinking. She pushes the top one, where the new call has just come in.)

Katie. Hello, Weiderman residence.

(Sound: desperate sobbing)

Sobbing voice (filter). Take . . . please take . . . t-t-

Katie. Polly? Is that you? What's wrong?

(Sound: sobbing. It's awful, heartbreaking.)

Sobbing voice (filter). Please—quick—

140 (Sound: sobbing . . . Then, click! A broken connection.)

Katie. Polly, calm down! Whatever it is can't be that b—

(hum of an open line)

(Jeff has wandered toward the TV room, hoping to find a blank tape.)

Bill. Who was that?

(Without looking at her husband or answering him, Katie slams the lower button in again.)

Katie. Lois? Listen, I'll call you back. That was
150 Polly, and she sounded very upset. No . . . she hung up. Yes. I will. Thanks.

(She hangs up.)

Bill *(concerned)*. It was Polly?

Katie. Crying her head off. It sounded like she was trying to say "Please take me home" . . . I knew that school was bumming her out . . . Why I ever let you talk me into it . . .

(She's rummaging frantically on her little phone desk. Catalogues go slithering to the floor around her stool.)
160

Katie. *Connie did you take my address book?*

Connie *(voice)*. No, Mom.

(Bill pulls a battered book out of his back pocket and pages through it.)

Bill. I got it. Except—

Katie. I know, dorm phone is always busy. Give it to me.

Bill. Honey, calm down.

Katie. I'll calm down after I talk to her. She is
170 sixteen, Bill. Sixteen-year-old girls are prone to depressive interludes. Sometimes they even k . . . just give me the number!

Bill. 617-555-8641.

(As she punches the numbers, the camera slides in to CU.)

Katie. Come on, come on . . . don't be busy . . . just this once . . .

(Sound: clicks. A pause. Then . . . the phone starts ringing.)

180 **Katie** *(eyes closed)*. Thank You, God.

Voice *(filter)*. Hartshorn Hall, this is Frieda.

Katie. Could you call Polly to the phone? Polly Weiderman? This is Kate Weiderman. Her mother.

Voice *(filter)*. hang on, please, Mrs. Weiderman.
(Sound: the phone clunks down.)

Voice *(filter, and very faint)*. Polly? Pol? . . .
Phone call! . . . It's your mother!

(INT. a wider angle on the phone nook, with Bill)

190 **Bill.** Well?

Katie. Somebody's getting her. I hope.

(Jeff comes back in with a tape.)

Jeff. I found one, Dad. Dennis hid em. As usual.

Bill. In a minute, Jeff. Go watch the tube.

Jeff. But—

Bill. I won't forget. Now go *on*.

(Jeff goes.)

Katie. Come on, come on, come on . . .

Bill. Calm down, Katie.

200 **Katie** *(snaps)*. If you'd heard her, you wouldn't tell me to calm down! She sounded—

Polly *(filter, cheery voice)*. Hi, mom!

Katie. Pol? Honey? Are you all right?



Polly (*happy, bubbling voice*). Am I *all right*? I aced my bio exam, got a B on my French Conversational Essay, and Ronnie Hansen asked me to the Harvest Ball. I'm so all right that if one more good thing happens to me today, I'll probably blow up like the *Hindenburg*.⁷

210 **Katie**. You didn't just call me up, crying your head off?

(*We see by Katie's face that she already knows the answer to this question.*)

Polly (*filter*). Heck no!

Katie. I'm glad about your test and your date, honey. I guess it was someone else. I'll call you back, okay?

Polly (*filter*). 'Kay. Say hi to Dad!

Katie. I will.

220 (*INT. the phone nook, wider*)

Bill. She okay?

Katie. Fine. I could have *sworn* it was Polly, but . . . *she's* walking on air.

Bill. So it was a prank. Or someone who was crying so hard she dialed a wrong number . . . "through a shimmering film of tears," as we veteran hacks like to say.

Katie. It was not a prank and it was not a wrong number! It was someone in *my family*!

230 **Bill**. Honey, you can't know that.

Katie. No? If Jeffie called up, just crying, would you know it was him?

Bill (*struck by this*). Yeah, maybe. I guess I might. (*She's not listening. She's punching numbers, fast.*)

Bill. Who you calling?

(*She doesn't answer him. Sound: phone rings twice. Then:*)

Older Female Voice (*filter*). Hello?

240 **Katie**. Mom? Are you . . . (*She pauses.*) Did you call just a few seconds ago?

Voice (*filter*). No, dear . . . why?

Katie. Oh . . . you know these phones. I was talking to Lois and I lost the other call.

Voice (*filter*). Well, it wasn't me. Kate, I saw the *prettiest* dress in La Boutique today, and—

Katie. We'll talk about it later, Mom, okay?

Voice (*filter*). Kate, are you all right?

Katie. I have . . . Mom, I think maybe I've got diarrhea. I have to go. 'Bye.

250 (*She hangs up. Bill hangs on until she does; then he bursts into wild donkey-brays of laughter.*)

Bill. Oh boy . . . diarrhea . . . I gotta remember that the next time my agent calls . . . oh Katie, that was so cool—

Katie (*almost screaming*). *This is not funny!*

(*Bill stops laughing.*)

(*INT. the TV room*)

(*Jeff and Dennis have been tussling. They stop. All three kids look toward the kitchen.*)

260 (*INT. the phone nook, with Bill and Katie*)

Katie. *I tell you it was someone in my family and she sounded*—oh, you don't understand. I *knew* that voice.

Bill. But if Polly's okay and your mom's okay . . .

Katie (*positive*). It's Dawn.

Bill. Come on, hon, a minute ago you were sure it was Polly.

270 **Katie**. It *had* to be Dawn. I was on the phone with Lois and Mom's okay, so Dawn's the only other one it *could* have been. She's the youngest . . . I could have mistaken her for Polly . . . and she's out there in that farmhouse alone with the baby!

Bill (*startled*). What do you mean, alone?

Katie. Jerry's in Burlington! It's Dawn! *Something's happened to Dawn!*

(*Connie comes into the kitchen, worried.*)

Connie. Mom? Is Aunt Dawn okay?

Bill. So far as we know, she's fine. Take it easy, doll. Bad to buy trouble before you know it's on sale.

7. *Hindenburg*: an airship that exploded, crashed, and burned spectacularly in 1937.

280 (Katie punches numbers and listens. Sound: the dah-dah-dah of a busy signal. Katie hangs up. Bill looks a question at her with raised eyebrows.)

Katie. Busy.

Bill. Katie, are you sure—

Katie. She's the only one left—it had to be her. Bill, I'm scared. Will you drive me out there?

(Bill takes the phone from her.)

Bill. What's her number?

Katie. 555-6169.

290 (Bill dials. Gets a busy. Hangs up and punches 0.)

Operator (filter). Operator.

Bill. I'm trying to reach my sister-in-law, operator. The line is busy. I suspect there may be a problem. Can you break into the call, please?

(INT. the door to the TV room)

(All three kids are standing there, silent and worried.)

(INT. the phone nook, with Bill and Katie)

Operator (filter). What is your name, sir?

Bill. William Weiderman. My number is—

300 **Operator (filter).** Not the William Weiderman that wrote *Spider Doom*?!

Bill. Yes, that was mine. If—

Operator (filter). Oh, I just loved that book! I love all your books! I—

Bill. I'm delighted you do. But right now my wife is very worried about her sister. If it's possible for you to—

Operator (filter). Yes, I can do that. Please give me your number, Mr. Weiderman, for the records.

310 (She giggles.) I promise not to give it out.

Bill. It's 555-4408.

Operator (filter). And the call number?

Bill (looks at Katie). Uh . . .

Katie. 555-6169.

Bill. 555-6169.

Operator (filter). Just a moment, Mr. Weiderman . . . *Night of the Beast* was also great, by the way. Hold on.

(Sound: telephonic clicks and clacks)

320 **Katie.** Is she—

Bill. Yes. Just . . .

(There's one final click.)

Operator (filter). I'm sorry, Mr. Weiderman, but that line is not busy. It's off the hook. I wonder if I sent you my copy of *Spider Doom*—

(Bill hangs up the phone.)

Katie. Why did you hang up?

Bill. She can't break in. Phone's not busy. It's off the hook.

330 (They stare at each other bleakly.)

(EXT. A low-slung sports car passes the camera. Night.)

(INT. the car, with Katie and Bill)

(Katie's scared. Bill, at the wheel, doesn't look exactly calm.)

Katie. Hey, Bill—tell me she's all right.

Bill. She's all right.

Katie. Now tell me what you really think.

340 **Bill.** Jeff snuck up behind me tonight and put the old booga-booga on me. He was disappointed as hell when I didn't jump. I told him I was case-hardened. (pause) I lied.

Katie. Why did Jerry have to move out there when he's gone half the time? Just her and that little tiny baby? *Why?*

Bill. Shh, Kate. We're almost there.

Katie. Go faster.

(EXT. the car)

(He does. That car is smokin.)

350 (INT. the Weiderman TV room)

(The tube's still on and the kids are still there, but the horsing around has stopped.)

Connie. Dennis, do you think Aunt Dawn's okay?

Dennis (thinks she's dead, decapitated by a maniac). Yeah. Sure she is.

(INT. the phone, POV from the TV room)

(just sitting there on the wall in the phone nook, lights dark, looking like a snake ready to strike)

(Fade out.)



Act II

(EXT. an isolated farmhouse)

(A long driveway leads up to it. There's one light on in the living room. Car lights sweep up the driveway. The Weiderman car pulls up close to the garage and stops.)

(INT. the car, with Bill and Katie)

Katie. I'm scared.

(Bill bends down, reaches under his seat, and brings out a pistol.)

¹⁰ **Bill** *(solemnly)*. Booga-booga.

Katie *(total surprise)*. How long have you had that?

Bill. Since last year. I didn't want to scare you or the kids. I've got a license to carry. Come on.

(EXT. Bill and Katie)

(They get out. Katie stands by the front of the car while Bill goes to the garage and peers in.)

Bill. Her car's here.

(The camera tracks with them to the front door. Now we can hear the TV, playing loud. Bill pushes the

20 *doorbell. We hear it inside. They wait. Katie pushes it. Still no answer. She pushes it again and doesn't take her finger off. Bill looks down at:*

(EXT. the lock, Bill's POV)

(big scratches on it)

(EXT. Bill and Katie)

Bill (*low*). The lock's been tampered with.

(Katie looks, and whimpers. Bill tries the door. It opens. The TV is louder.)

Bill. Stay behind me. Be ready to run if something happens. I wish I'd left you home, Kate.

(He starts in. Katie comes after him, terrified, near tears.)

(INT. Dawn and Jerry's living room)

(From this angle we see only a small section of the room. The TV is much louder. Bill enters the room, gun up. He looks to the right . . . and suddenly all the tension goes out of him. He lowers the gun.)

Katie (*draws up beside him*). Bill . . . what . . .

(He points.)

40 *(INT. the living room, wide, Bill and Katie's POV)*
(The place looks like a cyclone hit it . . . but it wasn't robbery and murder that caused this mess; only a healthy eighteen-month-old baby. After a strenuous day of trashing the living room, Baby got tired and Mommy got tired and they fell asleep on the couch together. The baby is in Dawn's lap. There is a pair of Walkman earphones on her head. There are toys—tough plastic Sesame Street and PlaySkool stuff, for the most part—scattered hell to breakfast. The baby
50 *has also pulled most of the books out of the bookcase. Had a good munch on one of them, too, by the look. Bill goes over and picks it up. It is Ghost Kiss.)*

Bill. I've had people say they just eat my books up, but this is ridiculous.

(He's amused. Katie isn't. She walks over to her sister, ready to be mad . . . but she sees how really exhausted Dawn looks and softens.)

(INT. Dawn and the baby, Katie's POV)

(Fast asleep and breathing easily, like a Raphael painting of Madonna and Child.⁸ The camera pans down to: the Walkman. We can hear the faint strains of Huey Lewis and the News. The camera pans a bit further to a Princess telephone⁹ on the table by the chair. It's off the cradle. Not much; just enough to break the connection and scare people to death.)

(INT. Katie)

(She sighs, bends down, and replaces the phone. Then she pushes the stop button on the Walkman.)

(INT. Dawn, Bill, and Katie)

70 *(Dawn wakes up when the music stops. Looks at Bill and Katie, puzzled.)*

Dawn (*fuzzed out*). Well . . . hi.

(She realizes she's got the Walkman phones on and removes them.)

Bill. Hi, Dawn.

Dawn (*still half asleep*). Shoulda called, guys. Place is a mess.

(She smiles. She's radiant when she smiles.)

Katie. We tried. The operator told Bill the phone was off the hook. I thought something was wrong. How can you sleep with that music blasting?

Dawn. It's restful. (*Sees the gnawed book Bill's holding*) Oh Bill, I'm sorry! Justin's teething and—

Bill. There are critics who'd say he picked just the right thing to teethe on. I don't want to scare you, beautiful, but somebody's been at your front door lock with a screwdriver or something. Whoever it was forced it.

Dawn. Gosh, no! That was Jerry, last week. I
90 locked us out by mistake and he didn't have his key and the spare wasn't over the door like it's supposed to be. He was mad because he had to take a whiz real bad and so he took the screwdriver to it. It didn't work, either—that's one tough lock. (*pause*) By the time I found my key he'd already gone in the bushes.

8. **Raphael . . . Madonna and Child:** Raphael (1483–1520) was a well-known painter of mostly religious subjects in the period known as the Renaissance.

9. **Princess telephone:** an early type of compact telephone, popular in the 1960s.

Bill. If it wasn't forced, how come I could just open the door and walk in?

Dawn (*guiltily*). Well . . . sometimes I forget to
100 lock it.

Katie. You didn't call me tonight, Dawn?

Dawn. Gee, no! I didn't call *anyone!* I was too busy chasing Justin around! He kept wanting to eat the fabric softener! Then he got sleepy and I sat down here and thought I'd listen to some tunes while I waited for your movie to come on, Bill, and I fell asleep—

(*At the mention of the movie Bill starts visibly and looks at the book. Then he glances at his watch.*)

110 **Bill.** I promised to tape it for Jeff. Come on, Katie, we've got time to get back.

Katie. Just a second.

(*She picks up the phone and dials.*)

Dawn. Gee, Bill, do you think Jeffie's old enough to watch something like that?

Bill. It's network. They take out the blood-bags.

Dawn (*confused but amiable*). Oh. That's good.

(*INT. Katie, CU*)

Dennis (*filter*). Hello?

120 **Katie.** Just thought you'd like to know your Aunt Dawn's fine.

Dennis (*filter*). Oh! Cool. Thanks, Mom.

(*INT. the phone nook, with Dennis and the others*)

(*He looks very relieved.*)

Dennis. Aunt Dawn's okay.

(*INT. the car, with Bill and Katie*)

(*They drive in silence for awhile.*)

Katie. You think I'm a hysterical idiot, don't you?

Bill (*genuinely surprised*). No! I was scared, too.

130 **Katie.** You sure you're not mad?

Bill. I'm too relieved. (*laughs*) She's sort of a scatterbrain, old Dawn, but I love her.

Katie (*leans over and kisses him*). I love *you*. You're a sweet man.

Bill. I'm the *boogeyman!*

Katie. I am not fooled, sweetheart.

(*EXT. the car*)

(*Passes the camera and we dissolve to:*)

(*INT. Jeff, in bed*)

140 (*His room is dark. The covers are pulled up to his chin.*)

Jeff. You *promise* to tape the rest?

(*Camera widens out so we can see Bill, sitting on the bed.*)

Bill. I promise.

Jeff. I especially liked the part where the dead guy ripped off the punk rocker's head.

Bill. Well . . . they *used* to take out all the blood-bags.

150 **Jeff.** What, Dad?

Bill. Nothing. I love you, Jeffie.

Jeff. I love you, too. So does Rambo.

(*Jeff holds up a stuffed dragon of decidedly unmilitant aspect.*¹⁰ *Bill kisses the dragon, then Jeff.*)

Bill. 'Night.

Jeff. 'Night. (*as Bill reaches his door*) Glad Aunt Dawn was okay.

Bill. Me too.

(*He goes out.*)

160 (*INT. TV, CU*)

(*A guy who looks like he died in a car crash about two weeks prior to filming [and has since been subjected to a lot of hot weather] is staggering out of a crypt. The camera widens to show Bill, releasing the VCR pause button.*)

Katie (*voice*). Booga-booga.

(*Bill looks around companionably. The camera widens out more to show Katie, wearing a nightgown.*)

170 **Bill.** Same to you. I missed the first forty seconds or so after the break. I had to kiss Rambo.

Katie. You sure you're not mad at me, Bill?

10. **unmilitant aspect:** unaggressive appearance.

(He goes to her and kisses her.)

Bill. Not even a smidge.

Katie. It's just that I could have sworn it was one of mine. You know what I mean? One of mine?

Bill. Yes.

Katie. I can still hear those sobs. So lost . . . so heartbroken.

180 **Bill.** Kate, have you ever thought you recognized someone on the street, and called her, and when she finally turned around it was a total stranger?

Katie. Yes, once. In Seattle. I was in a mall and I thought I saw my old roommate. I . . . oh. I see what you're saying.

Bill. Sure. There are sound-alikes as well as look-alikes.

Katie. But . . . *you know your own.* At least I thought so until tonight.

190 *(She puts her cheek on his shoulder, looking troubled.)*

Katie. I was so *positive* it was Polly . . .

Bill. Because you've been worried about her getting her feet under her at the new school . . . but judging from the stuff she told you tonight, I'd say she's doing just fine in that department. Wouldn't you?

Katie. Yes . . . I guess I would.

Bill. Let it go, hon.

200 **Katie** *(looks at him closely)*. I hate to see you looking so tired. Hurry up and have an idea, you.

Bill. Well, I'm trying.

Katie. You coming to bed?

Bill. Soon as I finish taping this for Jeff.

Katie *(amused)*. Bill, that machine was made by Japanese technicians who think of near everything. It'll run on its own.

Bill. Yeah, but it's been a long time since I've seen this one, and . . .

210 **Katie.** Okay. Enjoy. I think I'll be awake for a little while.

(She starts out, then turns in the doorway as something else strikes her.)

Katie. If they show the part where the punk's head gets—

Bill *(guiltily)*. I'll edit it.

Katie. 'Night. And thanks again. For everything.

(She leaves. Bill sits in his chair.)

(INT. TV, CU)

220 *(A couple is necking in a car. Suddenly the passenger door is ripped open by the dead guy and we dissolve to:)*

(INT. Katie, in bed)

(It's dark. She's asleep. She wakes up . . . sort of.)

Katie *(sleepy)*. Hey, big guy—

(She feels for him, but his side of the bed is empty, the coverlet still pulled up. She sits up. Looks at:)

(INT. a clock on the night-table, Katie's POV)

(It says 2:03 A.M. Then it flashes to 2:04.)

(INT. Katie)

230 *(Fully awake now. And concerned. She gets up, puts on her robe, and leaves the bedroom.)*

(INT. the TV screen, CU)

(snow)

Katie *(voice, approaching)*. Bill? Honey? You okay? Bill? Bi—

(INT. Katie, in Bill's study)

(She's frozen, wide-eyed with horror.)

(INT. Bill, in his chair)

240 *(He's slumped to one side, eyes closed, hand inside his shirt. Dawn was sleeping. Bill is not.)*

(EXT. a coffin, being lowered into a grave)

Minister *(voice)*. And so we commit the earthly remains of William Weiderman to the ground, confident of his spirit and soul. "Be ye not cast down, brethren . . ."

(EXT. graveside)



(All the Weidermans are ranged here. Katie and Polly wear identical black dresses and veils. Connie wears a black skirt and white blouse. Dennis and
250 *Jeff wear black suits. Jeff is crying. He has Rambo the Dragon under his arm for a little extra comfort.)*

(Camera moves in on Katie. Tears course slowly down her cheeks. She bends and gets a handful of earth. Tosses it into the grave.)

Katie. Love you, big guy.

(EXT. Jeff)

(weeping)

(EXT. looking down into the grave)

(scattered earth on top of the coffin)

260 *(Dissolve to:)*

(EXT. the grave)

(A Groundskeeper pats the last sod into place.)

Groundskeeper. My wife says she wishes you'd written a couple more before you had your heart attack, mister. *(pause)* I like Westerns, m'self.

(The Groundskeeper walks away, whistling.)

(Dissolve to:)

(EXT. A church. Day.)

(Title card: Five Years Later)

270 *(The Wedding March is playing. Polly, older and radiant with joy, emerges into a pelting shower of rice. She's in a wedding gown, her new husband by her side.)*

(Celebrants throwing rice line either side of the path. From behind the bride and groom come others. Among them are Katie, Dennis, Connie, and Jeff. . . all five years older. With Katie is another man. This is Hank. In the interim, Katie has also taken a husband.)

280 (Polly turns and her mother is there.)

Polly. Thank you, Mom.

Katie (*crying*). Oh doll, you're so welcome.

(*They embrace. After a moment Polly draws away and looks at Hank. There is a brief moment of tension, and then Polly embraces Hank, too.*)

Polly. Thank you too, Hank. I'm sorry I was such a creep for so long . . .

Hank (*easily*). You were never a creep, Pol. A girl only has one father.

290 **Connie.** Throw it! Throw it!

(*After a moment, Polly throws her bouquet.*)

(*EXT. the bouquet, CU, slow motion*)

(*turning and turning through the air*)

(*dissolves to:*)

(*INT. The study, with Katie. Night.*)

(*The word-processor has been replaced by a wide lamp looming over a stack of blueprints. The book jackets have been replaced by photos of buildings.*)



300 *Ones that have first been built in Hank's mind, presumably.)*

(Katie is looking at the desk, thoughtful and a little sad.)

Hank (voice). Coming to bed, Kate?

(She turns and the camera widens out to give us Hank. He's wearing a robe over pajamas. She comes to him and gives him a little hug, smiling. Maybe we notice a few streaks of gray in her hair; her pretty pony has done its fair share of running since Bill died.)

310 **Katie**. In a little while. A woman doesn't see her first one get married every day, you know.

Hank. I know.

(The camera follows as they walk from the work area of the study to the more informal area. This is much the same as it was in the old days, with a coffee table, stereo, TV, couch, and Bill's old easy-chair. She looks at this.)

Hank. You still miss him, don't you?

320 **Katie**. Some days more than others. You didn't know, and Polly didn't remember.

Hank (gently). Remember what, doll?

Katie. Polly got married on the five-year anniversary of Bill's death.

Hank (hugs her). Come on to bed, why don't you?

Katie. In a little while.

Hank. Okay. Maybe I'll still be awake.

330 *(He kisses her, then leaves, closing the door behind him. Katie sits in Bill's old chair. Close by, on the coffee table, is a remote control for the TV and an extension phone. Katie looks at the blank TV, and the camera moves in on her face. One tear rims one eye, sparkling like a sapphire.)*

Katie. I do still miss you, big guy. Lots and lots. Every day. And you know what? It hurts.

(The tear falls. She picks up the TV remote and pushes the on button.)

(INT. TV, Katie's POV)

(An ad for Ginsu Knives comes to an end and is replaced by a star logo.)

340 **Announcer** (voice). Now back to Channel 63's Thursday night Star Time Movie . . . *Ghost Kiss*.

(The logo dissolves into a guy who looks like he died in a car crash about two weeks ago and has since been subjected to a lot of hot weather. He comes staggering out of the same old crypt.)

(INT. Katie)

(Terribly startled—almost horrified. She hits the off button on the remote control. The TV blinks off.)

350 *(Katie's face begins to work. She struggles against the impending emotional storm, but the coincidence of the movie is just one thing too many on what must have already been one of the most emotionally trying days of her life. The dam breaks and she begins to sob . . . terrible, heartbroken sobs. She reaches out for the little table by the chair, meaning to put the remote control on it, and knocks the phone onto the floor.)*

(Sound: the hum of an open line)

(Her tear-stained face grows suddenly still as she looks at the telephone. Something begins to fill it

360 *. . . an idea? an intuition? Hard to tell. And maybe it doesn't matter.)*

(INT. the telephone, Katie's POV)

(The camera moves in to ECU . . . moves in until the dots in the off-the-hook receiver look like chasms.)

(sound of open-line buzz up to loud)

(We go into the black . . . and hear:)

Bill (voice). Who are you calling? Who do you want to call? Who would you call, if it wasn't too late?

370 *(INT. Katie)*

(There is now a strange hypnotized look on her face. She reaches down, scoops the telephone up, and punches in numbers, seemingly at random.)

(Sound: ringing phone)

(Katie continues to look hypnotized. The look holds until the phone is answered . . . and she hears herself on the other end of the line.)

Katie (voice; filter). Hello, Weiderman residence.

380 *(Katie—our present-day Katie with the streaks of gray in her hair—goes on sobbing, yet an expression of*

desperate hope is trying to be born on her face. On some level she understands that the depth of her grief has allowed a kind of telephonic time-travel. She's trying to talk, to force the words out.)

Katie (sobbing). Take . . . please take . . . t-t-

(*INT. Katie, in the phone nook, reprise*)

(*It's five years ago, Bill is standing beside her, looking concerned. Jeff is wandering off to look for a blank tape in the other room.*)

390 **Katie**. Polly? What's wrong?

(*INT. Katie, in the study*)

Katie (sobbing). Please—quick—

(*Sound: click of a broken connection*)

Katie (screaming). Take him to the hospital! If you want him to live, take him to the hospital! He's going to have a heart attack! He—

(*Sound: hum of an open line*)

(*Slowly, very slowly, Katie hangs up the telephone.*

400 *Then, after a moment, she picks it up again. She speaks aloud with no self-consciousness whatever.*

Probably doesn't even know she's doing it.)

Katie. I dialed the old number. I dialed—

(*Slam cut to:*)

(*INT. Bill, in the phone nook with Katie beside him*)

(*He's just taken the phone from Katie and is speaking to the operator.*)

Operator (filter, giggles). I promise not to give it out.

410 **Bill**. It's 555-

(*Slam cut to:*)

(*INT. Katie, in Bill's old chair, CU*)

Katie (finishes). -4408.

(*INT. the phone, CU*)

(*Katie's trembling finger carefully picks out the number, and we hear the corresponding tones: 555-4408.*)

(*INT. Katie, in Bill's old chair, CU*)

420 (*She closes her eyes as the phone begins to ring. Her face is filled with an agonizing mixture of hope and fear. If only she can have one more chance to pass the vital message on, it says . . . just one more chance.*)

Katie (low). Please . . . please . . .

Recorded voice (filter). You have reached a non-working number. Please hang up and dial again. If you need assistance—

(*Katie hangs up again. Tears stream down her cheeks. The camera pans away and down to the telephone.*)

430 (*INT. the phone nook, with Katie and Bill, reprise*)

Bill. So it was a prank. Or someone who was crying so hard she dialed a wrong number . . . “through a shimmering film of tears,” as we veteran hacks like to say.

Katie. It was not a prank and it was not a wrong number! It was someone in my family!

(*INT. Katie [present day] in Bill's study*)

Katie. Yes. Someone in my family. Someone very close. (pause) Me.

440 (*She suddenly throws the phone across the room. Then she begins to sob again and puts her hands over her face. The camera holds on her for a moment, then dollies across to:*)

(*INT. the phone*)

(*It lies on the carpet, looking both bland and somehow ominous. Camera moves in to ECU—the holes in the receiver once more look like huge dark chasms. We hold, then:*)

(*Fade to black.*)

MEMOIR Stephen King wrote a memoir of his life as a writer. Here are a few words of advice from the book.



from
On Writing

Stephen King

If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of, no shortcut.

I'm a slow reader, but I usually get through seventy or eighty books a year, mostly fiction. I don't read in order to study the craft; I read because I like to read. It's what I do at night, kicked back in my blue chair. Similarly, I don't read fiction to study the art of fiction, but simply because I like stories. Yet there is a learning process going on. Every book you pick up has its own lesson or lessons, and quite often the bad books have more to teach than the good ones.

Good writing, on the other hand, teaches the learning writer about style, graceful narration, plot development, the creation of believable characters, and truth-telling. A novel like *The Grapes of Wrath* may fill a new writer with feelings of despair and good old-fashioned jealousy—"I'll never be able to write anything that good, not if I live to be a thousand"—but such feelings can also serve as a spur, goading the writer to work harder and aim higher. Being swept away by a combination of great story and great writing—of being flattened, in fact—is part of every writer's necessary formation. You cannot hope to sweep someone else away by the force of your writing until it has been done to you.

Comprehension

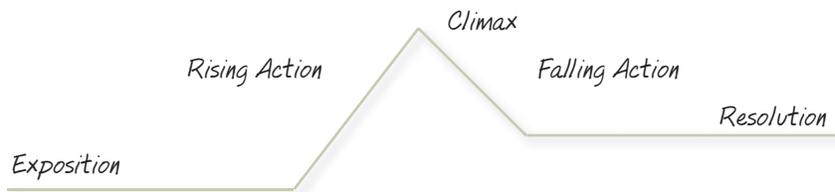
1. **Recall** At first, whom does Katie believe the sobbing caller to be?
2. **Recall** Why doesn't Bill return to bed after watching the movie?
3. **Summarize** What happens on the fifth anniversary of Bill's death?
4. **Clarify** Who is the sobbing caller?



RL 5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text and order events within it create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.
RL 10 Read and comprehend dramas.

Text Analysis

5. **Reading a Teleplay** Look back through the play. What clues do the camera and stage directions give you for interpreting the play's supernatural occurrences?
6. **Analyze Plot in Drama** Create a plot diagram like the one shown. Then place the events of *Sorry, Right Number* in their correct positions on the diagram.



7. **Analyze Foreshadowing** In drama as in other fiction, foreshadowing can deepen a mood of suspense by hinting at future events. Go back through the teleplay and find examples of foreshadowing. For each example, provide a description of what eventually happens.
8. **Interpret** How would you explain the vague understanding—the “desperate hope . . . trying to be born”—that comes to Katie after she hears her own voice on the phone? Support your answer.
9. **Make Judgments** Could Katie be in any way responsible for Bill's death?
10. **Evaluate** Revisit the “chill factor” chart you created. Where would you place *Sorry, Right Number* on a scale of 1 to 10? Support your answer.

Text Criticism

11. **Author's Style** In the excerpt from *On Writing* (page 171), Stephen King lists what he considers the qualities of good writing: “style, graceful narration, plot development, the creation of believable characters, and truth-telling.” Which of these qualities does this teleplay best exemplify? Cite details, including lines of dialogue and examples of camera directions, to support your opinion.

What sends a **CHILL** down your spine?

Describe a time when something ordinary seemed or became frightening.

Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Create Realistic Characters

At various points, King uses **slang** to suggest the youth of a character. In writing dialogue, it is important to choose language that accurately reflects the characteristics of the people who are speaking; otherwise, your audience will find it difficult to believe what they are reading. Here is an example of King's use of slang in *Sorry, Right Number*:

Katie. *Just thought you'd like to know your Aunt Dawn's fine.*

Dennis (filter). *Oh! Cool. Thanks, Mom.* (Act II, lines 120–122)

Notice how the revisions in blue make the following dialogue more accurately reflect the ages of the speakers. Revise your response to the prompt below by making the same kinds of revisions.

STUDENT MODEL

Katie. Now, I know you're going to think this couldn't have happened.

But five years ago, on the day Bill died, I got a call from myself.

Whatever, Mom.
Polly. ~~That sounds really odd.~~

you're freaking out!
Dennis. Mom, ~~that's a strange thing to say.~~

Hank. You're wrong, Katie. Let's talk about this.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Increase your understanding of *Sorry, Right Number* by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Short Constructed Response: Dialogue

Imagine that Katie tries to explain to her family what occurred with the phone call. What does she say? How does her family react? Write **one-half page** of the dialogue that you imagine would occur.

REVISING TIP

Review your dialogue. Do you use language and slang to reflect the age of the characters? If not, revise to make your dialogue match the speakers.



L3 Apply knowledge of language to make effective choices for meaning or style.

Interactive Revision **THINK** central
Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML9-173