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A person wearing a brown hooded jacket and a backpack is hitchhiking on the side of a road. They are holding up their right hand with the thumb pointing up. The background is a blurred landscape with trees and a road.

THE HITCHHIKER

By Lucille Fletcher

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LUCILLE FLETCHER



- Lucille Fletcher was an American screenwriter of film, radio, and TV.
- She was born on March 28, 1912 in Brooklyn, New York.
- Her stories are filled with suspense, mystery, and terror.
- She attended Vassar College where she earned a degree in the bachelor of arts.
- After college, she worked as a music librarian, copyright clerk and publicity writer at CBS.
- She first gained attention as a playwright when her story "My Client Curley" was adapted for radio by Norman Corwin.
- Her popularity only increased after her script, "The Hitch-Hiker" was broadcast on The Orson Welles Show (radio).
- Fletcher wrote more than 20 radio plays. Some of her other famous works include: "Sorry, Wrong Number," "Night Watch," and "Mirror Image."



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RADIO DRAMA

- A radio drama is a play that is performed on a radio station where the audience can only hear the audio of the story. There are no visual components.
- It's also referred to as a radio play, audio play, audio theater, or radio theater.
- Radio dramas highly rely on dialogue, music and sound effects to tell the story.
- Throughout the 1920s — 1940s, radio plays were a leading form of popular entertainment. Most American households did not have television sets until the late 1950s.
- "The Hitchhiker," a radio drama written by Lucille Fletcher, debuted on The Orson Welles Show on CBS Radio on November 17, 1941.
- "The Hitchhiker" was later adapted for television and became the 16th episode of the American television anthology series "The Twilight Zone" by Rod Serling.



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VOCABULARY

lark (noun)

something done for fun; an
adventure or escapade

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VOCABULARY

willies (noun) *slang*

a strong feeling of nervous
apprehension and
discomfort

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VOCABULARY

gradually (adverb)

in a slow way

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VOCABULARY

hail (verb)

to call out to someone

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VOCABULARY

sinister (adjective)

Describes evil or
threatening

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VOCABULARY

beckoning (verb)

to beckon: to encourage or invite someone to come closer with a gesture

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VOCABULARY

indifference (noun)

a lack of interest or concern

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VOCABULARY

prostrated (adjective)

in a state of mental distress

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FLASHBACK

- Flashbacks interrupt the chronological order of the narrative to take a reader back in time to past events.
- A writer uses this literary device to help readers better understand present-day elements in the story or learn more about a character.

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FORESHADOWING

- Foreshadowing is when a writer provides hints that suggest future events will occur in a story.

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SUSPENSE

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- Suspense is a literary device that authors use to keep their readers' interest eager throughout the work.
- It is a feeling of anticipation or uneasiness when you don't know what is going to happen next.

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MOOD

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- Mood is the feelings the reader experiences while reading a text.
- An author establishes mood through the setting, atmosphere, voice, dialogue, and tone.

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DIALOGUE

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- Dialogue is the exchange of spoken words between two or more characters in a book, play, or other written work.

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JOURNAL PROMPT

- Monsters, demons and ghosts are terrifying in a very obvious way. But what about the villains you don't see much of, or at all?
- The tension that truly makes a story scary is rooted in the unknown. It's not knowing where the killer is hiding in the darkness or sometimes when the characters do not know there is a threat at all.
- When the villain makes its appearance, sure, it's frightening... But these moments of suspense are quickly resolved and the shock factor is over. The questions that go unanswered and the moments that are left up for interpretation stick with viewers or readers for the long haul.
- **JOURNAL QUESTIONS:** Do you agree with the statements above? Why or why not? Is it far more petrifying when things are left up to our imagination? Provide an example to support your answer.



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THE HITCHHIKER

RADIO PLAY BY LUCILLE FLETCHER

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Orson Welles	Girl
Ronald Adams	Operator
Adams's Mother	Long-Distance Operator
Voice of Hitchhiker	Albuquerque Operator
Mechanic	New York Operator
Henry, a <i>sleepy man</i>	Mrs. Whitney
Woman's Voice, <i>Henry's wife</i>	

Welles. Good evening, this is Orson Welles . . . (music in) Personally I've never met anybody who didn't like a good ghost story, but I know a lot of people who think there are a lot of people who don't like a good ghost story. For the benefit of these, at least, I go on record at the outset of this evening's entertainment with the sober assurance that although blood may be curdled on this program none will be spilt. There's no shooting, knifing, throttling, axing or poisoning here. No clanking chains, no cobwebs, no bony and/or hairy hands appearing from secret panels or, better yet, bedroom curtains. If it's any part of that dear old phosphorescent foolishness that people who don't like ghost stories don't like, then again I promise you we haven't got it. What we do have is a thriller. If it's half as good as we think it is you can call it a shocker, and we present it proudly and without apologies. After all a story doesn't have to appeal to the heart—it can also appeal to the spine. Sometimes you want your heart to be warmed—sometimes you want your spine to tingle. The tingling, it's to be hoped, will be quite audible as you listen tonight to The Hitchhiker—That's the name of our story, The Hitchhiker—

(*sound: automobile wheels humming over concrete road*) (*music: something weird and shuddery*)

Adams. I am in an auto camp on Route Sixtysix just west of Gallup, New Mexico. If I tell it perhaps it will help me. It will keep me from going mad. But I must tell this quickly. I am not mad now. I feel perfectly well, except that I am running a slight temperature. My name is Ronald Adams. I am thirty-six years of age, unmarried, tall, dark, with a black mustache. I drive a 1940 Ford V-8, license number 6V-7989. I was born in Brooklyn. All this I know. I know that I am at this moment perfectly sane. That it is not I, who has gone mad—but something else—something utterly beyond my control. But I must speak quickly. At any moment the link with life may break. This may be the last thing I ever tell on earth . . . the last night I ever see the stars. . . . (*music in*)

Adams. Six days ago I left Brooklyn, to drive to California . . .

Mother. Goodbye, son. Good luck to you, my boy . . .

Adams. Goodbye, mother. Here—give me a kiss, and then I'll go . . .

Mother. I'll come out with you to the car.

Adams. No. It's raining. Stay here at the door. Hey—what is this? Tears? I thought you promised me you wouldn't cry.

Mother. I know dear. I'm sorry. But I—do hate to see you go.

Adams. I'll be back. I'll only be on the coast three months.

Mother. Oh—it isn't that. It's just—the trip. Ronald—I wish you weren't driving.

Adams. Oh—mother. There you go again. People do it every day.

Mother. I know. But you'll be careful, won't you. Promise me you'll be extra careful. Don't fall asleep—or drive fast—or pick up any strangers on the road . . .

Adams. Of course not! You'd think I was still seventeen to hear you talk—

Mother. And wire me as soon as you get to Hollywood, won't you, son?

Adams. Of course I will. Now don't you worry. There isn't anything going to happen. It's just eight days of perfectly simple driving on smooth, decent, civilized roads, with a hotdog or a hamburger stand every ten miles . . . *(fade) (sound: auto hum) (music in)*

Adams. I was in excellent spirits. The drive ahead of me, even the loneliness, seemed like a lark. But I reckoned without him. *(Music changes to something weird and empty.)*

Adams. Crossing Brooklyn Bridge that morning in the rain, I saw a man leaning against the cables. He seemed to be waiting for a lift. There were spots of fresh rain on his shoulders. He was carrying a cheap overnight bag in one hand. He was thin, nondescript, with a cap pulled down over his eyes. He stepped off the walk, and if I hadn't swerved, I'd have hit him. *(sound: terrific skidding) (music in)*

Adams. I would have forgotten him completely, except that just an hour later, while crossing the Pulaski Skyway over the Jersey flats, I saw him again. At least, he looked like the same person. He was standing now, with one thumb pointing west. I couldn't figure out how he'd got there, but I thought probably one of those fast trucks had picked him up, beaten me to the Skyway, and let him off. I didn't stop for him. Then—late that night, I saw him again. *(music changing)*

Adams. It was on the new Pennsylvania Turnpike between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. It's 265 miles long, with a very high speed limit. I was just slowing down for one of the tunnels—when I saw him—standing under an arc light by the side of the road. I could see him quite distinctly. The bag, the cap, even the spots of fresh rain spattered over his shoulders. He hailed me this time . . .

Voice *(very spooky and faint).* Hall-ooo . . . *(echo as through tunnel)* Hall-ooo . . . !

Adams. I stepped on the gas like a shot. That's lonely country through the Alleghenies, and I had no intention of stopping. Besides, the coincidence, or whatever it was, gave me the willies. I stopped at the next gas station. *(sound: auto tires screeching to stop . . . horn honk)*

Mechanic. Yes, sir.

Adams. Fill her up.

Mechanic. Certainly, sir. Check your oil, sir?

Adams. No, thanks. *(sound: gas being put into car . . . bell tinkle, et cetera)*

Mechanic. Nice night, isn't it?

Adams. Yes. It—hasn't been raining here recently, has it?

Mechanic. Not a drop of rain all week.

Adams. Hm. I suppose that hasn't done your business any harm.

Mechanic. Oh—people drive through here all kinds of weather. Mostly business, you know. There aren't many pleasure cars out on the turnpike this season of the year.

Adams. I suppose not. (*casually*) What about hitchhikers?

Mechanic (*half laughing*). Hitchhikers here?

Adams. What's the matter? Don't you ever see any?

Mechanic. Not much. If we did, it'd be a sight for sore eyes.

Adams. Why?

Mechanic. A guy'd be a fool who started out to hitch rides on this road. Look at it. It's 265 miles long, there's practically no speed limit, and it's a straightaway. Now what car is going to stop to pick up a guy under those conditions? Would you stop?

Adams. No. (*slowly, with puzzled emphasis*) Then you've never seen anybody?

Mechanic. Nope. Mebbe they get the lift before the turnpike starts—I mean, you know—just before the toll house—but then it'd be a mighty long ride. Most cars wouldn't want to pick up a guy for that long a ride. And you know—this is pretty lonesome country here—mountains, and woods . . . You ain't seen anybody like that, have you?

Adams. No. (*quickly*) Oh no, not at all. It was—just a—technical question.

Mechanic. I see. Well—that'll be just a dollar forty-nine—with the tax . . . (*fade*) (*sound: auto hum up*) (*music changing*)

Adams. The thing gradually passed from my mind, as sheer coincidence. I had a good night's sleep in Pittsburgh. I did not think about the man all next day—until just outside of Zanesville, Ohio, I saw him again. (*music: dark, ominous note*)

Adams. It was a bright sunshiny afternoon. The peaceful Ohio fields, brown with the autumn stubble, lay dreaming in the golden light. I was driving slowly, drinking it in, when the road suddenly ended in a detour. In front of the barrier, he was standing. (*music in*)

Adams. Let me explain about his appearance before I go on. I repeat. There was nothing sinister about him. He was as drab as a mud fence. Nor was his attitude menacing. He merely stood there, waiting, almost drooping a little, the cheap overnight bag in his hand. He looked as though he had been waiting there for hours. Then he looked up. He hailed me. He started to walk forward.

Voice (*far off*). Hall-ooo . . . Hall-ooo . . .

Adams. I had stopped the car, of course, for the detour. And for a few moments, I couldn't seem to find the new road. I knew he must be thinking that I had stopped for him.

Voice (*closer*). Hall-ooo . . . Hallll . . . ooo . . . (*sound: gears jamming . . . sound of motor turning over hard . . . nervous accelerator*)

Voice (*closer*). Halll . . . oooo . . .

Adams (*panicky*). No. Not just now. Sorry . . .

Voice (*closer*). Going to California? (*sound: starter starting . . . gears jamming*)

Adams (*as though sweating blood*). No. Not today. The other way. Going to New York. Sorry . . . sorry . . . (*sound: car starts with squeal of wheels on dirt . . . into auto hum*) (*music in*)

Adams. After I got the car back onto the road again, I felt like a fool. Yet the thought of picking him up, of having him sit beside me was somehow unbearable. Yet, at the same time, I felt, more than ever, unspeakably alone. (*sound: auto hum up*)

Adams. Hour after hour went by. The fields, the towns ticked off, one by one. The lights changed. I knew now that I was going to see him again. And though I dreaded the sight, I caught myself searching the side of the road, waiting for him to appear. (*sound: auto hum up . . . car screeches to a halt . . . impatient honk two or three times . . . door being unbolted*)

Sleepy Man's Voice. Yep? What is it? What do you want?

Adams (*breathless*). You sell sandwiches and pop here, don't you?

Voice (*cranky*). Yep. We do. In the daytime. But we're closed up now for the night.

Adams. I know. But—I was wondering if you could possibly let me have a cup of coffee—black coffee.

Voice. Not at this time of night, mister. My wife's the cook and she's in bed. Mebbe further down the road—at the Honeysuckle Rest . . . (*sound: door squeaking on hinges as though being closed*)

Adams. No—no. Don't shut the door. (*shakily*) Listen—just a minute ago, there was a man standing here—right beside this stand—a suspicious looking man . . .

Woman's Voice (*from distance*). Hen-ry? Who is it, Hen-ry?

Henry. It's nobuddy, mother. Just a feller thinks he wants a cup of coffee. Go back into bed.

Adams. I don't mean to disturb you. But you see, I was driving along—when I just happened to look—and there he was . . .

Henry. What was he doing?

Adams. Nothing. He ran off—when I stopped the car.

Henry. Then what of it? That's nothing to wake a man in the middle of his sleep about. (*sternly*) Young man, I've got a good mind to turn you over to the sheriff.

Adams. But—I—

Henry. You've been taking a nip, that's what you've been doing. And you haven't got anything better to do than to wake decent folk out of their hardearned sleep. Get going. Go on.

Adams. But—he looked as though he were going to rob you.

Henry. I ain't got nothin' in this stand to lose. Now—on your way before I call out Sheriff Oakes. (*fades*) (*sound: auto hum up*)

Adams. I got into the car again and drove on slowly. I was beginning to hate the car. If I could have found a place to stop . . . to rest a little. But I was in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri now. The few resort places there were closed. Only an occasional log cabin, seemingly deserted, broke the monotony of the wild wooded landscape. I had seen him at that roadside stand; I knew I would see him again—perhaps at the next turn of the road. I knew that when I saw him next, I would run him down . . . (*sound: auto hum up*)

Adams. But I did not see him again until late next afternoon . . . *(sound: of railroad warning signal at crossroads)*

Adams. I had stopped the car at a sleepy little junction just across the border into Oklahoma—to let a train pass by—when he appeared, across the tracks, leaning against a telephone pole. *(sound: distant sound of train chugging . . . bell ringing steadily)*

Adams *(very tense)*. It was a perfectly airless, dry day. The red clay of Oklahoma was baking under the southwestern sun. Yet there were spots of fresh rain on his shoulders. I couldn't stand that. Without thinking, blindly, I started the car across the tracks. *(sound: train chugging closer)*

Adams. He didn't even look up at me. He was staring at the ground. I stepped on the gas hard, veering the wheel sharply toward him. I could hear the train in the distance now, but I didn't care. Then something went wrong with the car. It stalled right on the tracks. *(sound: Train chugging closer. Above this sound of car stalling.)*

Adams. The train was coming closer. I could hear its bell ringing, and the cry of its whistle. Still he stood there. And now—I knew that he was beckoning—beckoning me to my death. *(sound: Train chugging close. Whistle blows wildly. Then train rushes up and by with pistons going, et cetera.)*

Adams. Well—I frustrated him that time. The starter had worked at last. I managed to back up. But when the train passed, he was gone. I was all alone in the hot dry afternoon. *(sound: Train retreating. Crickets begin to sing.) (music in)*

Adams. After that, I knew I had to do something. I didn't know who this man was or what he wanted of me. I only knew that from now on, I must not let myself be alone on the road for one moment. *(sound: Auto hum up. Slow down. Stop. Door opening.)*

Adams. Hello, there. Like a ride?

Girl. What do you think? How far you going?

Adams. Amarillo . . . I'll take you to Amarillo.

Girl. Amarillo, Texas.

Adams. I'll drive you there.

Girl. Gee! *(sound: Door closes—car starts.) (music in)*

Girl. Mind if I take off my shoes? My dogs are killing me.

Adams. Go right ahead.

Girl. Gee, what a break this is. A swell car, a decent guy, and driving all the way to Amarillo. All I been getting so far is trucks.

Adams. Hitchhike much?

Girl. Sure. Only it's tough sometimes, in these great open spaces, to get the breaks.

Adams. I should think it would be. Though I'll bet if you get a good pick-up in a fast car, you can get to places faster than—say, another person, in another car?

Girl. I don't get you.

Adams. Well, take me, for instance. Suppose I'm driving across the country, say, at a nice steady clip of about 45 miles an hour. Couldn't a girl like you, just standing beside the road, waiting for lifts, beat me to town after town—provided she got picked up every time in a car doing from 65 to 70 miles an hour?

Girl. I dunno. Maybe she could and maybe she couldn't. What difference does it make?

Adams. Oh—no difference. It's just a—crazy idea I had sitting here in the car.

Girl (*laughing*). Imagine spending your time in a swell car thinking of things like that!

Adams. What would you do instead?

Girl (*admiringly*). What would I do? If I was a goodlooking fellow like yourself? Why—I'd just enjoy myself—every minute of the time. I'd sit back, and relax, and if I saw a good-looking girl along the side of the road . . . (*sharply*) Hey! Look out!

Adams (*breathlessly*). Did you see him too?

Girl. See who?

Adams. That man. Standing beside the barbed wire fence.

Girl. I didn't see—anybody. There wasn't nothing, but a bunch of steers—and the barbed wire fence. What did you think you was doing? Trying to run into the barbed wire fence?

Adams. There was a man there, I tell you . . . a thin gray man, with an overnight bag in his hand. And I was trying to—run him down.

Girl. Run him down? You mean—kill him?

Adams. He's a sort of—phantom. I'm trying to get rid of him—or else prove that he's real. But (*desperately*) you say you didn't see him back there? You're sure?

Girl. I didn't see a soul. And as far as that's concerned, mister . . .

Adams. Watch for him the next time, then. Keep watching. Keep your eyes peeled on the road. He'll turn up again—maybe any minute now. (*excitedly*) There. Look there— (*sound: Auto sharply veering and skidding. Girl screams.*) (*sound: Crash of car going into barbed wire fence. Frightened lowing of steer.*)

Girl. How does this door work? I—I'm gettin' outta here.

Adams. Did you see him that time?

Girl (*sharply*). No. I didn't see him that time. And personally, mister, I don't expect never to see him. All I want to do is to go on living—and I don't see how I will very long driving with you—

Adams. I'm sorry. I—I don't know what came over me. (*frightened*) Please—don't go . . .

Girl. So if you'll excuse me, mister—

Adams. You can't go. Listen, how would you like to go to California? I'll drive you to California.

Girl. Seeing pink elephants all the way? No thanks.

Adams (*desperately*). I could get you a job there. You wouldn't have to be a waitress. I have friends there—my name is Ronald Adams—You can check up. (*sound: door opening*)

Girl. Uhn-hunh. Thanks just the same.

Adams. Listen. Please. For just one minute. Maybe you think I am half cracked. But this man. You see, I've been seeing this man all the way across the country. He's been following me. And if you could only help me—stay with me—until I reach the coast—

Girl. You know what I think you need, big boy? Not a girl friend. Just a good dose of sleep. . . . There, I got it now. (*sound: door opens . . . slams*)

Adams. No. You can't go.

Girl (*screams*). Leave your hands offa me, do you hear! Leave your—

Adams. Come back here, please, come back. (*sound: struggle . . . slap . . . footsteps running away on gravel . . . lowing of steer*)

Adams. She ran from me, as though I were a monster. A few minutes later, I saw a passing truck pick her up. I knew then that I was utterly alone. (*sound: lowing of steer up*)

Adams. I was in the heart of the great Texas prairies. There wasn't a car on the road after the truck went by. I tried to figure out what to do, how to get hold of myself. If I could find a place to rest. Or even, if I could sleep right here in the car for a few hours, along the side of the road . . . I was getting my winter overcoat out of the back seat to use as a blanket, (Hall-ooo) when I saw him coming toward me, (Hall-ooo), emerging from the herd of moving steer . . .

Voice. Hall-ooo . . . Hall-oooo . . . (*sound: auto starting violently . . . up to steady hum*) (*music in*)

Adams. I didn't wait for him to come any closer. Perhaps I should have spoken to him then, fought it out then and there. For now he began to be everywhere. Whenever I stopped, even for a moment—for gas, for oil, for a drink of pop, a cup of coffee, a sandwich—he was there. (*music faster*)

Adams. I saw him standing outside the auto camp in Amarillo that night, when I dared to slow down. He was sitting near the drinking fountain in a little camping spot just inside the border of New Mexico. (*music faster*)

Adams. He was waiting for me outside the Navajo Reservation, where I stopped to check my tires. I saw him in Albuquerque where I bought 12 gallons of gas . . . I was afraid now, afraid to stop. I began to drive faster and faster. I was in lunar landscape now—the great arid mesa country of New Mexico. I drove through it with the indifference of a fly crawling over the face of the moon. (*music faster*)

Adams. But now he didn't even wait for me to stop. Unless I drove at 85 miles an hour over those endless roads—he waited for me at every other mile. I would see his figure, shadowless, flitting before me, still in its same attitude, over the cold and lifeless ground, flitting over dried-up rivers, over broken stones cast up by old glacial upheavals, flitting in the pure and cloudless air . . . (*music strikes sinister note of finality*.)

Adams. I was beside myself when I finally reached Gallup, New Mexico, this morning. There is an auto camp here—cold, almost deserted at this time of year. I went inside, and asked if there was a telephone. I had the feeling that if only I could speak to someone familiar, someone that I loved, I could pull myself together. (*sound: nickel put in slot*)

Operator. Number, please?

Adams. Long distance.

Operator. Thank you. (*sound: return of nickel; buzz*)

Long-Distance Opr. This is long distance.

Adams. I'd like to put in a call to my home in Brooklyn, New York. I'm Ronald Adams. The number is Beechwood 2-0828.

Long-Distance Opr. Thank you. What is your number?

Adams. 312.

Albuquerque Opr. Albuquerque.

Long-Distance Opr. New York for Gallup. (*pause*)

New York Opr. New York.

Long-Distance Opr. Gallup, New Mexico calling Beechwood 2-0828. (*fade*)

Adams. I had read somewhere that love could banish demons. It was the middle of the morning. I knew Mother would be home. I pictured her, tall, white-haired, in her crisp house-dress, going about her tasks. It would be enough, I thought, merely to hear the even calmness of her voice . . .

Long-Distance Opr. Will you please deposit three dollars and 85 cents for the first three minutes? When you have deposited a dollar and a half, will you wait until I have collected the money? (*sound: clunk of six coins*)

Long-Distance Opr. All right, deposit another dollar and a half. (*sound: clunk of six coins*)

Long-Distance Opr. Will you please deposit the remaining 85 cents. (*sound: clunk of four coins*)

Long-Distance Opr. Ready with Brooklyn—go ahead please.

Adams. Hello.

Mrs. Whitney. Mrs. Adams' residence.

Adams. Hello. Hello—Mother?

Mrs. Whitney (*very flat and rather proper . . . dumb, too, in a frizzy sort of way*). This is Mrs. Adams' residence. Who is it you wished to speak to, please?

Adams. Why—who's this?

Mrs. Whitney. This is Mrs. Whitney.

Adams. Mrs. Whitney? I don't know any Mrs. Whitney. Is this Beechwood 2-0828?

Mrs. Whitney. Yes.

Adams. Where's my mother? Where's Mrs. Adams?

Mrs. Whitney. Mrs. Adams is not at home. She is still in the hospital.

Adams. The hospital!

Mrs. Whitney. Yes. Who is this calling, please? Is it a member of the family?

Adams. What's she in the hospital for?

Mrs. Whitney. She's been prostrated for five days. Nervous breakdown. But who is this calling?

Adams. Nervous breakdown? But—my mother was never nervous . . .

Mrs. Whitney. It's all taken place since the death of her oldest son, Ronald.

Adams. Death of her oldest son, Ronald . . . ? Hey—what is this? What number is this?

Mrs. Whitney. This is Beechwood 2-0828. It's all been very sudden. He was killed just six days ago in an automobile accident on the Brooklyn Bridge.

Long-Distance Opr. (*breaking in*). Your three minutes are up, sir. (*silence*) Your three minutes are up, sir. (*pause*) Your three minutes are up, sir. (*fade*) Sir, your three minutes are up. Your three minutes are up, sir.

Adams (*in a strange voice*). And so, I am sitting here in this deserted auto camp in Gallup, New Mexico. I am trying to think. I am trying to get hold of myself. Otherwise, I shall go mad . . . Outside it is night—the vast, soulless night of New Mexico. A million stars are in the sky. Ahead of me stretch a thousand miles of empty mesa, mountains, prairies—desert. Somewhere among them, he is waiting for me. Somewhere I shall know who he is, and who . . . I . . . am . . . (*music up*)

"The Hitchhiker" Radio Play by Lucille Fletcher — Suggested Lesson Procedure

- 1) Show Powerpoint presentation with students to review: Lucille Fletcher background info and Radio Drama history.
- 2) Review the vocabulary terms and literary devices with students using the Powerpoint presentation.
- 3) Have students complete the journal prompt before reading.
- 4) Read The Hitchhiker script while listening to the radio play out loud. (~30 minutes)

Radio play audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eZ1slmDFwE>

- 5) Finish the story if you ran out of time Day 1. Direct students to work independently or in pairs to answer the after reading literary analysis questions. Once everyone is done, you should review the answers as a class to open up discussion.

- 6) Watch the adapted TV version of "The Hitchhiker," which is Season 1, Episode 16, of *The Twilight Zone*. As of October 2021, this episode is available on Hulu, Paramount Plus, or click the following link to view the episode online for free:

https://www.schooltube.com/media/the+hitchhiker+twilight+zone/1_q5etv1aj

You can also purchase the episode on Amazon's video streaming service for \$1.99.

- 7) Ask students to complete the Media Analysis questions in groups or independently. Collect worksheets or review the answers as a class (your choice).
- 8) Have students complete the after reading reflection question independently.

Name:

Date:

Before Reading

Who is Lucille Fletcher?

PREVIEW

Vocabulary

Word	Part of Speech	Definition
lark	Noun	
willies	Noun	
gradually	Adverb	
sinister	Adj	
hail	Verb	
beckoning	Verb	
indifference	Noun	
prostrated	Adj	

Literary Elements

Flashback	
Foreshadowing	
Suspense	
Mood	
Dialogue	

Name:

Date:

“The Hitchhiker” by Lucille Fletcher
Journal Prompt

Monsters, demons and ghosts are terrifying in a very obvious way. But what about the villains you don't see much of, or at all? The tension that truly makes a story scary is rooted in the unknown. It's not knowing where the killer is hiding in the darkness or sometimes when the characters do not know there is a threat at all. When the villain makes its appearance, sure, it's frightening... But these moments of suspense are quickly resolved and the shock factor is over. The questions that go unanswered and the moments that are left up for interpretation stick with viewers or readers for the long haul.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Do you agree with the statements above? Why or why not? Is it far more petrifying when things are left up to our imagination? Provide an example to support your answer.

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Name:

Date:

“The Hitchhiker” by Lucille Fletcher
Literary Analysis

1. Who is the main character? What information does he/she reveal about himself/herself?

PREVIEW

2. What does the dialogue between Adams and his mother suggest about their relationship?

3. Why does Adams ask the mechanic if it had been raining?

PREVIEW

4. Why does Adams pick up the young girl? What internal conflict is Adams struggling with?

5. What impacts do the stage directions have on the play? What do they tell you about how Adams is feeling? Give an example.

6. Why is the girl hitchhiker frightened by Ronald?

PREVIEW

7. Why does Ronald decide to call his mother?

8. What does Adams learn about his mother at the end of the play? What inference should readers make about Ronald's situation?

9. What are two specific examples of foreshadowing from the text? Explain what future events they foreshadow.

10. How does the author build suspense in the story?

11. Who is the hitchhiker? What does the hitchhiker symbolize?

12. What is the mood of the story? What words or phrases support your answer?

13. What theme or message is present in this story?

14. If the point of view of this story was from the perspective of the hitchhiker, would it still have been suspenseful and mysterious? Why or why not?

Name:

Date:

**"The Hitchhiker" by Lucille Fletcher
Media Analysis**

1. How is the beginning of *The Twilight Zone* episode different from the radio play?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

2. List an example of foreshadowing from the episode. How is it similar or different from the radio play?

PREVIEW

3. What techniques did the radio play use to build suspense? What techniques did the film director use to build suspense? Which was more suspenseful and why?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

4. Why did the director of *The Twilight Zone* episode change Ronald Adams character to Nan Adams? How does gender effect the narrative of the story?

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

5. What was the appearance of the hitchhiker in the filmed episode? Was it what you were expecting based off the original play's script? Explain.

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

6. What other major or minor differences did you notice between the film and the play?

Name:

Date:

“The Hitchhiker” by Lucille Fletcher
After Reading Reflection

This story was written during the 1940s. Explain how the story would be different in today’s world.
How could an author hold the reader’s attention and sustain the same level of suspense despite the changes
in society and advancements in technology?

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Answer Keys

Before Reading

Who is Lucille Fletcher?

She was an American screenwriter of film, radio, and TV. Her stories are filled with suspense, mystery, and terror.

Vocabulary

Word	Part of Speech	Definition
Lark	Noun	something done for fun; an adventure or escapade
Willies	Noun	a strong feeling of nervous apprehension and discomfort
Gradually	Adverb	In a slow way
Sinister	Adjective	Describes evil or threatening
Hail	Verb	To call out to someone
Beckoning	Verb	To encourage or invite someone to come closer with a gesture
Indifference	Noun	A lack of interest or concern
prostrated	Adjective	in a state of mental distress

Literary Elements

Flashback	Flashbacks interrupt the chronological order of the narrative to take a reader back in time to past events.
Foreshadowing	Foreshadowing is when a writer provides hints that suggest future events in a story will occur.
Suspense	It is a feeling of anticipation or uneasiness when you don't know what is going to happen next.
Mood	Mood is the feelings the reader experiences while reading a text.
Dialogue	Dialogue is the exchange of spoken words between two or more characters in a book, play, or other written work.

Answer Keys

“The Hitchhiker” by Lucille Fletcher Literary Analysis

1. Who is the main character? What information does he/she reveal about himself/herself?

The main character is Ronald Adams. He is 36 years old, unmarried, tall, dark, with a black mustache. Something bizarre is happening to him, but he insists he is not crazy. He is embarking on a cross-country road trip to California.

2. What does the dialogue between Adams and his mother suggest about their relationship?

The mother and son have a close relationship. She is worried about his trip and they keep in touch frequently.

3. Why does Adams ask the mechanic if it had been raining?

Adams noticed raindrops on the hitchhiker's jacket, which is why he inquires about the weather. He learns it has not rained where he is, but remembers it was raining on the Brooklyn Bridge where he first saw the hitchhiker.

4. Why does Adams pick up the young girl? What internal conflict is Adams struggling with?

Adams does not want to be alone. He thinks if he's with someone else, the hitchhiker won't appear. His struggle is if he is actually seeing what he thinks he is seeing. Is the hitchhiker real or is it all in his head?

5. What impacts do the stage directions have on the play? What do they tell you about how Adams is feeling? Give an example.

Adams is feeling very tense and desperate; the stage directions show his fear by emphasizing Adams is “shaking” and “breathless.” The stage directions also show the hitchhiker's creepiness despite his “nondescript” appearance. For example, the way in which the hitchhiker says, “Hello,” as if it were an echo, describes that this man is not normal.

6. Why is the girl hitchhiker frightened by Ronald?

Ronald tried to “kill” the hitchhiker by running him over while the girl was a passenger in the car. The girl did not see anyone and now is afraid of Ronald because he seems crazy and he may be a killer.

7. Why does Ronald decide to call his mother?

Ronald says, “I had the feeling that if only I could speak to someone familiar, someone that I loved, I could pull myself together.” This shows Ronald was trying to calm himself down and speak with someone who would believe him. He wanted to be brought back to reality because his mind was playing tricks on him.

8. What does Adams learn about his mother at the end of the play? What inference should readers make about Ronald's situation?

Mrs. Adams is in the hospital from a nervous breakdown because her son was killed in an automobile accident. Readers now know that Ronald is dead and has been dead since he was on the Brooklyn Bridge—assumingly from a car accident.

9. What are two specific examples of foreshadowing from the text? Explain what future events they foreshadow.

Answers will vary.

The flashback in the beginning of the story tells readers that something supernatural or inexplicable will occur to Ronald. He says, "But I must speak quickly. At any moment the link with life may break. This may be the last thing I ever tell on earth." This foreshadows his death and that he is dead the entire time he is telling his story.

Ronald's mother tells him to be careful driving. She says, "But you'll be careful, won't you. Promise me you'll be extra careful. Don't fall asleep—or drive fast—or pick up any strangers on the road . . ." This foreshadows that Ronald will get into a car accident and run into a hitchhiker.

The mechanic explains to Adams that there are never hitchhikers on Route 66 and that it hasn't been raining. This foreshadows that the hitchhiker is not real.

Adams swerves to avoid a hitchhiker on the Brooklyn Bridge and there is a terrible skidding sound which foreshadows that Adams was killed that day on the Brooklyn Bridge.

10. How does the author build suspense in the story?

Every time the hitchhiker appears, it drives Ronald closer and closer to insanity which builds suspense. When Adams realizes it's impossible for the hitchhiker to be following him (since he's not in a car) the readers are left to imagine what supernatural occurrence is happening. Readers are constantly wondering when the hitchhiker will make "a move" to kill or rob Ronald, but he never does. Readers know through the flashback that the road trip will end badly, so the rising actions build suspense throughout the story until finally Ronald calls his mother.

11. Who is the hitchhiker? What does the hitchhiker symbolize?

The hitchhiker is not a living man, but the personification of death, the angel of death, or the grim reaper. He symbolizes that Ronald is dead and he must go with the hitchhiker to "the other side" or wherever one goes after they die.

12. What is the mood of the story? What words or phrases support your answer?

The mood of the story is suspenseful, dreadful, ominous, and mysterious. The "screeching" tires and "spooky" voices are what make this story dreadful. The "phantom" hitchhiker that only Ronald can see makes this story ominous and mysterious.

13. What theme or message is present in this story?

Answers will vary.

What you see in front of you is not always reality.

Death cannot be avoided by anyone.

People cannot change their fate.

14. If the point of view of this story was from the perspective of the hitchhiker, would it still have been suspenseful and mysterious? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Probably, no—the dread of this story comes from the unknown. Readers are as confused as Ronald. It's the mystery behind the vague man that causes fear for Ronald.

Answer Keys

"The Hitchhiker" by Lucille Fletcher Media Analysis

1. How is the beginning of *The Twilight Zone* episode different from the radio play?

In the play, readers are introduced to Ronald's mother before he has embarked on his road trip. In the episode, we do not meet Nan's mother at all; plus, there is no flashback scene. Viewers see that Nan has already begun driving on her trip to California. Viewers are introduced to Nan at the scene with her tire being changed in Pennsylvania. In the radio play, there's no roadside mishap until the end, when Ronald learns that he was in an accident on the Brooklyn Bridge.

2. List an example of foreshadowing from the episode. How is it similar or different from the radio play?

Answers will vary.

The mechanic says Nan "should have called for a hearse" instead of a mechanic indicating she is dead.

Nan says paying for the car's repair is "cheaper than a funeral" foreshadowing she is dead.

The man at the rest stop tells Nan, that only a "fool would hitchhike on the turnpike" because no one would ever pick them up indicating that the hitchhiker is not real.

Nan says, "She hates that car" which foreshadows the car is what killed her.

The voiceover of Nan often indicates that something is not right, and that the hitchhiker is not real.

3. What techniques did the radio play use to build suspense? What techniques did the film director use to build suspense? Which was more suspenseful and why?

One example from the radio play is the train scene. In the radio play, Fletcher writes, "The train was coming closer. I could hear its bell ringing, and the cry of its whistle. Still he stood there. And now—I knew that he was beckoning—beckoning me to my death." Suspense is built through the volume and sound of the train chugging close. The whistle blows wildly indicating the train is getting closer and closer and readers think Ronald will be killed. In *The Twilight Zone* scene, viewers can see the train approaching and the suspense is built by watching the actress struggle to get her car to move forward or in reverse. The suspense is built through the fear depicted on Nan's face as well as the image of the train getting closer. Nan escapes death in the very last minute.

Another example is when Nan runs out of gas and is stranded. This scene builds suspense because there is seemingly no way out or no way to escape the hitchhiker. In the play, though Ronald chose to stop for coffee, he was not stranded. The director adds more fear to the story as opposed to the play because Nan is deserted in complete darkness and she pleads for someone to help her.

4. Why did the director of *The Twilight Zone* episode change Ronald Adams character to Nan Adams? How does gender effect the narrative of the story?

Answers will vary. Some might say that a female character is more emotional and sympathetic to watch. Apparently, Serling thought there would be greater dramatic potential placing a lone young woman in danger rather than a man. (Lucille Fletcher was outspokenly against this gender swap.) Ronald describes himself as a tall man, so why would he be so afraid of an average man who is just standing around with no car? Perhaps

the director considered that the other characters wouldn't believe a woman who claims to be seeing an apparition whereas people would listen to a man who was making this same claim (considering society during this era). Audiences—during this time—may have been more likely to believe a woman would be hysterical over this situation as opposed to a man who “wouldn't be scared.”

5. What was the appearance of the hitchhiker in the filmed episode? Was it what you were expecting based off the original play's script? Explain.

Answers will vary. The hitchhiker was thin, nondescript, and forgettable looking in the play version. He is described as mousy, shabby, and vague in *The Twilight Zone* episode. He looks nonthreatening which stays true to the script.

6. What other major or minor differences did you notice between the film and the play?

Many answers—answers will vary.

In the play, Ronald picks up a hitchhiker that is a woman. In the film, Nan picks up a hitchhiker who is a man, (and a sailor on leave).

At the end of the episode, Nan accepts her death. She says, “The fear has left me now. I'm numb. I have no feeling. It's as if someone had pulled out some kind of a plug in me and everything — emotion, feeling, fear — has drained out. And now I'm a cold shell.” Then, as she adjusts the mirror, she sees the hitchhiker in her back seat.

Ronald does not accept his death in the play; instead, he is frantic and confused.

Ronald died on the Brooklyn Bridge and Nan died in Pennsylvania.