



## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

### Video: Setting the Stage

#### *Setting* (overview)



#### Creating a Place

When an author creates a setting, whether real or imagined, it offers the reader an opportunity to take a fresh look at the familiar, discover the unknown, and imagine what exists in the mind's eye. The author creates these opportunities through descriptive language, vivid photographs, and illustrations. In addition, readers are introduced to characters that find places they never knew existed nor appreciated – until they took time to observe.

Setting is an essential element of a story because the characters' action (the plot) needs to take place somewhere. One way place is made known to the reader is through characters' memories, as imperfect as they may be. When characters are part of the story's action, the setting is revealed to the reader as the events unfold. A second way place is revealed is when the character is not present as the events occur. Then, the author must include a higher level of detail so that the reader can be convinced of the setting "secondhand." The stakes are highest when the setting is an actual place the reader may know or visit. The author has to get it right, through rich details, in order for the story to be credible.

Describing scenes is only part of creating an authentic setting. Skillful authors also describe detailed actions that preserve the sequence of events and the social interactions of the characters. This context, or "milieu," creates a culture in which the story happens. This culture impacts what characters say, think, and do. For example, characters throw basketballs, dip French fries in ketchup, talk slang, or drive Chevys. Describing significant details allows readers to imagine themselves in those scenes, which helps them relate to and develop understanding of the author's message. When this is accomplished, the author has successfully created a setting that is unforgettable. The reader feels as if he/she is participating in the story right along with the character.

#### Creating Time

In order to have a story, an author has to represent time. One way that authors consider time is as it relates to the setting or time period. Science fiction and historical fiction use time period as an important part of the plot, often connecting the time period and the conflict of the story.

A second way that time is used in a story is when the author signals time changes within a story. The story starts at one point and ends at another. Often the plot unfolds in some sort of chronological sequence, but not always. The author may use foreshadowing techniques, flashbacks, and flashforwards to keep the reader interested in the action. It is important that readers notice ways authors signal the passage of time through the use of signal words (first, then, next, finally), specific times (4:00 p.m., Saturday morning), or implication (soon after the moon set) in order to understand the author's message.

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