

More Than Details: Working Your Setting

1. Sensory toolbox

In creating your setting, remember you have the full sensory toolbox to work with: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

Consider: What do you notice when you enter a space? How might each of your five senses come into play?

In-session exercise: brainstorming sensory info about a place

Sight:

Sound:

Smell:

Touch:

Taste:

2. Setting reveals character

What your character notices in a given place, how s/he responds to it and interacts with it, tells us about that character's personality.

Consider: An adult and a child enter the same place. How might the adult's observations, interactions, and responses to the setting *differ* from the child's?

In-session exercise: describing a setting from the perspective of two different characters

*Note: you can keep your setting description *active* by telling us about the place *as* the character moves through and interacts with it.

3. Setting reveals conflict

Story = Character + Conflict

Your character's response to a setting can *also* change depending on how s/he is feeling in the moment. Those feelings might depend on the conflict your character faces in your story.

Consider: Imagine visiting a particular place on a day when you're in a good mood. Think about how you react to the place and what you notice about it. Then imagine visiting the *same* place on a day when you're in a bad mood. How do your perception and experience of it change?

Consider: Depending on the situation your character is in when s/he goes to a particular place, how do you think s/he will experience that place? How do you think s/he will describe or think about it?

4. Setting as character

Story = Character + Change

Setting can have a powerful impact on your characters. In some cases, setting can create change, drive conflict, and stand out as a distinct "personality."

Consider: What gives a place a powerful sense of identity or personality? In your reading, have you encountered settings that also seemed to act like characters?

In-session exercise: Think of a place you've known that has a strong "personality" or sense of character. Write a short description of this place from your own perspective, particularly mentioning what gave it that sense of identity, and how it affected you when you were there.