

Setting

I. *Setting* includes three closely related aspects of a work of fiction.

- a. The physical, sensuous world of the work.
- b. The time in which the action of the work takes place.
- c. The social environment of the characters (i.e. the manners, customs, and moral values of the characters' society).

II. Just as a picture has a foreground and a background, so too does a story.

- a. The main characters and their actions, which are of greatest interest to the reader, form the foreground.
- b. The time and place of the events and the circumstances that surround these events form the background, or setting.

III. A story which uses a setting that is or was true to a specific time and place uses *verisimilitude*.

- a. The story appears to be real.

IV. Sometimes setting and plot are inseparable and sometimes not.

- a. Some story conflicts could only occur in a particular setting.
- b. Other times, the conflicts and story could occur in any time and place.

V. Setting can also help to reveal character.

- a. The environment in which the character lives may help the reader to understand the character's motives and behavior. (e.g. The theft of a loaf of bread from the rich by a poor, starving person would give one interpretation of a character, whereas the same theft from other poor people would give another. The theft by a rich person of that same loaf of bread would lead to a different impression.)
- b. The way that the setting is described can also show the inner feelings of a character.

VI. The way that a setting is described can also affect the mood of the story. (e.g. contrast a cold, wet drizzle with a cool, gentle, spring rain)

Questions about place

- I. One should first get the details of the physical setting clear.
 - a. Where does the action take place?
 - In what planet, country, locale?
 - What does it look like, sound like, feel like?
 - Is there a dominant impression of the setting?

Then ask:

- a. What relationship does place have to characterization and theme? In some novels, geographical location seems to have no effect on characters. Indoors or out, in one locale or another they behave the same. In other stories, place affects the characters profoundly.

Questions about time

- I. Three main types of questions about time are important.
 - a. What period in history does the action take place?
 - What historical events affect the characters?
 - b. How long does it take for the action to occur?
 - What clues does the author give for the passage of time?
 - Is the passage of time important to the theme?
 - Is the passage of time important to the believability of the story?
 - Is time used to structure the story?
 - c. How is the passage of time perceived by the characters?
 - Does the slow or fast passage of time help to understand the character's actions and thoughts?

Questions about social environment

- I. Sometimes the social environment is unimportant and others times it is very important.
 - a. What is the social environment of the story?
 - What does the author feel about the manners, mores, customs, rituals, or codes of conduct of the society?
 - How do they affect the characters?