

Settings

Settings (place, time period, environment), when they're used well, take the reader into the world of your story. They can be used in for atmosphere, to give information about characters, to create drama and suspense, and as a way of elaborating on themes and ideas.

For example, weather can contribute to the mood of a story e.g. an argument during a thunderstorm. Also, depending on the mood and circumstances of the character, they might notice different details in the environment.

So descriptions of the setting can show the reader the world of the story, and show how the character feels at the same time.

Warm up

Think about where you are right now. What can you smell? Is it a nice smell or unpleasant? Is it familiar or new? Does this place usually smell like this or has something changed? Write a description of the smell to show how it fits, or doesn't fit, within the setting.

Extract from 'Tomorrow is too far' by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche

It was the last summer you spent in Nigeria, the summer before your parents' divorce, before your mother swore you would never again set foot in Nigeria to see your father's family, especially not Grandmama. You remember the heat of that summer clearly, even now, thirteen years later, the way Grandmama's yard felt like a steamy bathroom, a yard with so many trees that the telephone wire was tangled in leaves and different branches touched one another and sometimes mangoes appeared on cashew trees and guavas on mango trees. The thick mat of decaying leaves was soggy under your bare feet. Yellow-bellied bees buzzed around you, your brother Nonso and your cousin Dozie's heads. Grandmama let only your brother Nonso climb the trees to shake a loaded branch, although you were a better climber than he was. Fruits would rain down, avocados and cashews and guavas, and you and your cousin Dozie would fill old buckets with fruit.

Exercise 1 (Atmosphere):

Close your eyes and think back to your childhood home. Try and remember what the house / land looked like, how it made you feel. Think about the objects you had. What your bedroom looked like. It might be helpful to make notes. Jot down anything you remember or things that stand out. Now write a paragraph of description., thinking about the mood you want to create

In the Park by Francine Witte

On an afternoon when the sun goes stone and thuds itself under the horizon, and the trees shake their veiny leaves like hands about to hit, and the bench nearby is a gather of slats holding up the elderly couple we were going to be, him spooning ice cream into her quivery mouth and not even minding the dribble. And then, over there, the children on swings, sailing the air as if practicing for a life of come and go. And right in the smacky centre of that, is you sitting there, your eyes two blackened holes, your mouth telling me about the sometimes death of love

Exercise 2 (Character development)

Close your eyes and think back to the place (village/town/city) you grew up in. Try and think about what makes the place you unique or special in some way. Does that reflect in the people who choose to live there?

Think of someone you knew as a child (or think about what you remember), wrote a description of the city from that character's point of view