

Setting The Tone: Created by Chris Speckman (Based on Philip Jason)

First, ask the students if they can define setting. If they need help, tell them that setting is “the element of place or location in fiction.” Explain that setting is more than just simply the where and the when, and that vivid descriptions of the places a character encounters help the reader envision the scene, which brings the story to life.

Pass out one *setting card* to each student (each will have a basic locale: a janitor’s closet, a doctor’s office, a 7-11 convenience store, etc.). Tell them this will be a place that their character will encounter during their story, and that they should try to picture the setting through the eyes of their character. Pair them up with a tutor and have them answer the following questions:

The Basics

Where is this setting geographically (country, city, neighborhood, etc.)?

What time of day is it?

What is the weather like outside?

Why is your character there?

The Five Senses

Look down...what does the floor look like?

Look up...what does the ceiling look like? Is the room dark or well-lit?

Look left and right...what are the walls like?

What kind of furniture is the room?

What are five other objects your character might observe?

What item in the room is most distracting to your character and why?

How many other people are there (NOTE: your character might be alone)? Give some snap judgment descriptions of the others based on physical appearance, as you would when walking into a room.

What are five sounds your character might hear?

Which noise gets on your character’s nerves?

What are three smells your character gets a whiff of when walking through the room?

What does the air taste like?

What in the room makes your character feel hungry?

What is the temperature like? Is your character more likely to sweat or to shiver?

What object/surface/person/other does your character touch? How does it feel?

What in the room is your character afraid to touch?

After all the questions have been answered, have the student write his/her character into a scene taking place in the setting. Have them consider the attitude their character might have towards his/her surroundings and write a paragraph from one of the five perspectives that follow:

1. **Nostalgia** – the setting reminds the character of his/her past for better or worse
2. **Torment** – the setting brings out the character’s frustration or just plain drives them nuts
3. **Mystery** – the setting confuses the character, who wants desperately to make sense of his/her surroundings and solve the riddle
4. **Humor** – the setting seems like a joke to the character, who mocks everything he/she sees
5. **Optimism** – the setting leads the character to believe that everything is right with the world or that everything will be OK