

# Setting and Plot

It is important to know the ways in which the setting and the plot of a story are related.

## Setting

The setting is the background for the story's plot. It includes elements such as place, time, and weather. The setting is more important in some stories than in others.

## Plot

The plot is the series of events that occur in a story. The way that these events relate to each other and affect the characters in the story are what make each plot different. Usually a plot will have five parts: the exposition, the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution or denouement.

avalanche

Sometimes, the setting provides details about the mood and tone of the story. **For example**, a story set in an old house might be filled with suspense and horror. A story could also be set in a historical time period. How might a story set in the 1800s have a different plot than one set in the 2000s?

Other times, the setting may actually be part of the conflict in the story. This is common in adventure stories in which characters become lost in the forest, caught in bad weather, and so forth. The setting may also provide the way in which the conflict is resolved. In such instances, a character uses a feature of the setting to his/her advantage.

The setting of the story can also determine who the antagonists (characters that oppose the main character) of the story will be. For example, if the story is set during a great battle, the antagonists would probably be the enemy soldiers.

## Question 1 .

The light from the sun had yet to reach Echo Falls. Brian was up, as early as he usually is, even before most farmers. The purple glow from the east signaled that daylight would break within the hour. He had been up for an hour already when he arrived at his job. Brian had been working at the donut shop for 3 years, but he still couldn't get used to waking up early.

When he arrived at the donut shop, he let out a yawn. His senses and reflexes still had yet to awaken. Then, he noticed that the usual hum and bustle of the morning had quieted. Usually, there would be clicking and snapping from crickets. Usually, there would be a croaking from the bullfrogs in the creek behind the store.

That's when he heard the bushes a few feet away from the store shake. He just knew something was inside, but he didn't want to find out what it was. He fumbled for his keys to unlock the door and dash inside the shop, but his senses again betrayed him, and he dropped

his keys. The shaking in the bushes got louder and louder, and Brian had to decide whether or not to just run back to his car.

**What is the setting for the passage?**

- A. during the evening near a creek
- B. late night as one character is closing his shop
- C. inside a car as the sun is setting
- D. the early morning hours at a donut shop

**Question 2 .**

The man's garden was overgrown with weeds and wildflowers. The lawn was bald in some places, overpopulated with crab grass in others. There was a sign in the front yard that read "No Trespassing." Nobody dared to touch the man's mailbox, not even the mailman. Rumors spread that the man had locked it up tight, so no one would be able to read his mail. How the man got his mail still remains a mystery to this day.

**Based on the description of the man's front yard, the author wants the reader to believe that the man is**

- A. gentle.
- B. crazy.
- C. sad.
- D. asleep.

**Question 3 .**

I am at my house in the country, and it is late October. It rains. In the back of my house, there is a forest, and in front, there is a road and beyond that open fields. The country is one of low hills, flattening suddenly into plains. Some twenty miles away, across the flat country, lies the huge city of Chicago.

Yesterday morning, I arose at daybreak and went for a walk. There was a heavy fog, and I lost myself in it. I went down into the plains and returned to the hills, and everywhere the fog was as a wall before me. Out of it, trees sprang suddenly, grotesquely, as in a city street late at night, people come suddenly out of the darkness into the circle of light under a street lamp. Above, there was the light of day forcing itself slowly into the fog. The fog moved slowly. The tops of trees moved slowly. Under the trees the fog was dense, purple. It was like smoke lying in the streets of a factory town.

adapted from "Brothers" by Sherwood Anderson

**How does the setting affect the narrator of the story?**

- A. It makes the narrator feel like he is in a city.
- B. It makes the narrator wish he was in the forest.
- C. It makes the narrator feel far away from the city.
- D. It makes the narrator wish he was in the city.

**Question 4 . Circle the sentence in the passage that best shows how the setting contributes to the narrator's feeling about the future:**

**adapted from The Enchanted Bluff  
by Willa Cather**

**We had our swim before sundown, and while we were cooking our supper the oblique rays of light made a dazzling glare on the white sand about us.** The translucent red ball itself sank behind the brown stretches of cornfield as we sat down to eat. The warm layer of air that had rested over the water and our clean sand bar grew fresher and smelled of the rank ironweed and sunflowers growing on the flatter shore. The river was brown and sluggish, like any other of the half-dozen streams that water the Nebraska corn lands. On one shore was an irregular line of bald clay bluffs. There, a few scrub oaks with thick trunks and flat, twisted tops threw light shadows on the long grass. The western shore was low and level, with cornfields that stretched to the skyline, and all along the water's edge were little sandy coves and beaches.

It was on such an island, in the third summer of its yellow green, that we built our watch fire.**It was not in the thicket of dancing willow wands, but on the level terrace of fine sand which had been added that spring.** It was a little new bit of world, beautifully ridged with ripple marks, all as white and dry as if they had been expertly cured. We had been careful not to mar the freshness of the place, although we often swam to it on summer evenings and lay on the sand to rest. This was our last watch fire of the year, and there were reasons why I should remember it better than any of the others. Next week the other boys were to file back to their old places in the Sandtown High School, but I was to go up to the Divide to teach my first country school in the Norwegian district.**I was already homesick at the thought of quitting the boys with whom I had always played; of leaving the river, and going up into a windy plain that was all windmills and cornfields and big pastures; where there was nothing willful or unmanageable in the landscape, no new islands, and no chance of unfamiliar birds—such as often followed the watercourses.**

We began to talk about the places we wanted to go to.**The Hassler boys wanted to see the stockyards in Kansas City, and Percy wanted to see a big store in Chicago.** Arthur was interlocutor<sup>1</sup> and did not betray himself.

"Now it's your turn, Tip."

Tip rolled over on his elbow and poked the fire, and his eyes looked shyly out of his unusual, tight little face. "My place is awful far away. My Uncle Bill told me about it." "Where is it?"

"Aw, it's down in New Mexico somewheres. There aren't no railroads or anything. You have to go on mules, and you run out of water before you get there and have to drink canned tomatoes."

"Well, go on, kid. What's it like when you do get there?"

Tip sat up and excitedly began his story.

**1. interlocutor: a person who takes part in a conversation or dialogue**

**Question 5 .**

**Waiting Among the Adobe Walls**  
**by Jon Caswell**

Under the thatched roof porch that ran the length of the agency office, Jeremiah slouched in a canvas-backed chair with his boots propped against one of the support posts. The Sun was mercilessly bright as he gazed out on the adobe buildings that rimmed the vacant compound. The Sun's glare and the lack of a single shade tree or any attractive feature all added to his sense of being abandoned. There was not a soul in sight. All the Apaches that were his charges had received their two-week supply of beef and flour and had ridden their ponies off to their portable shelters, which they called wickiups, to feast.

Jeremiah surveyed his desolate surroundings. He had not seen an American or spoken English in two months. He didn't feel comfortable visiting the Apaches in their wickiups, and they certainly didn't think of him as a friend. He was the agency man, always had been and always would be. They never asked him to join them when they hunted deer and small game to supplement their meager government rations.

**What is the setting for this passage?**

- A. a famous hunting ground
- B. 23rd century America
- C. an ancient Apache city
- D. a government office

**Question 6 .**

**Breaking the String**  
**by Jon Caswell**

The large crowd was making a huge noise. With four events going on at the same time, there was always something to cheer about. Standing behind her starting blocks, Elaine didn't hear any of it. She gazed down the track looking intensely at something she could not see but knew was there. Even though she couldn't see the string stretching across the finish line, she imagined herself breaking it. Although there were three other events occurring at the same time as her qualifying heat in the 100-yard dash, she was totally focused on the finish line. She didn't care about the crowd because they weren't there for her, and she sure wasn't there for them. Elaine was there to win the gold medal at the state championship meet. She glanced left and right at her competitors, but it was only a glance before she returned her gaze to her lane and that finish line. It was as if none of the rest of it—the crowd, the other events, or her competitors—existed, and she were in a silent tunnel that contained her lane and that finish line.

**What is the setting of this passage?**

- A. a shopping mall
- B. a circus
- C. a concert
- D. a track meet

**Question 7 .**

**Retreating, Wisely  
by Moll Flowers**

At the base of the mountain were three signs. One showed a stick figure falling off a cliff. Another showed a rock hitting a stick figure on the head. A third said simply, "No Emergency Services."

I turned to Maria and asked her whether she really thought this hike was a good idea.

"Are you trying to say I'm not tough enough?" she asked.

"Actually, I'm saying maybe I'm not tough enough."

Maria laughed and started up the rocky trail. I followed her and told myself that the warning signs weren't meant for us. They were for people who had no common sense.

Within half a minute, I was panting like a dog. Two guys passed us, their faces sunburned and smudged with dirt. "Good luck," they told us. They didn't smile.

After that, I started to notice that the other hikers had more gear than Maria and I did. They also had huge, bulging calf muscles. Half of them looked like Olympic athletes.

"How much water did you bring?" I asked Maria.

"About half a liter," Maria said. "Why?"

"We should have brought more," I said.

At the first mile marker, we downed half of the water. The sun beat down from a cloudless sky. I looked up the steep path, strewn with rocks and gravel. My legs were already trembling.

"What a great view," Maria said. "Maybe this is a good stopping point for us?"

"I am so glad to hear you say that," I told her.

"C'mon, I'll race you to the bottom," she said, heading down the trail.

I followed her, taking my time on the steep parts. This was a race I had no intention of winning.

**How are the narrator's decisions influenced by the setting?**

- A. She realizes that the hike is too challenging and decides to turn back.
- B. She decides that she and Maria should camp overnight on the trail.
- C. She becomes bored and talks with the other hikers to pass the time.
- D. She hikes faster because she is competitive and wants to finish first.

**Question 8 .**

**Carter's Grandparents**

Carter opened the door and entered the silent house. His entire family had persuaded his hardworking grandparents to take a much-needed break. Carter had promised his grandmother that he would water her precious plants during her absence. He looked around at the familiar surroundings and smiled fondly, remembering all the fun he and his cousins had had there during their childhood. Carter thought that it would be a nice surprise for his grandmother if she found some beautiful flowers in her garden when she came back from the trip because he knew she loved flowers. He watered the plants in the garden and returned home.

That night, over dinner, he told his mom about the surprise he had planned for his grandmother. His mom nodded and also suggested that they repaint the entire house. Carter and his mom decided to involve the whole family, so Carter immediately called up his cousins, who said they would be glad to help. Carter reminded them that they had only two weeks to get the house ready.

Carter and his cousins gathered at their grandparents' house every evening. Apart from applying a fresh coat of paint to the entire house, they also repaired the leaky faucets and dusted and polished everything in the house until it sparkled. Carter and his cousins went to the plant nursery nearby and chose some violet plants for their grandmother's little garden. They mowed the lawn, weeded the flower beds, and planted the new violet plants. Soon, the house was ready for their grandparents' arrival.

On the day of their arrival, all the family members gathered at Carter's grandparents' house to welcome them. When the grandparents arrived, they were overjoyed to see the freshly painted house and the whole family under one roof. Grandmother hugged Carter and his cousins when she saw her garden and thanked them for the violet plants. The family was moved to tears and decided to have more family gatherings.

**The setting of this story is**

- A. a locker room.
- B. a house.
- C. a classroom.
- D. a parking lot.

## Answers

1. D
2. B
3. A
4. --
5. D
6. D
7. A
8. B

### Explanations

1. If you read the passage carefully, you'll notice that the story takes place during the early morning as Brian is opening up the donut shop for business.
2. If you had encountered a house with a dying lawn and a sign like that, you would probably assume that the man is clearly mentally unstable.
3. The narrator describes his walk through the foggy woods that make him feel like he's in a city. The fog creates images that remind him of a city street late at night, or the smoke lying in the streets of a factory town.
4. In the passage, the narrator talks about how he is leaving one place and moving to another. He talks fondly of the place where he is currently teaching, the happy memories of that place. However, the new place that he has to move to is unknown and unfamiliar. Hence the correct answer is "I was already homesick at the thought of quitting the boys with whom I had always played; of leaving the river, and going up into a windy plain that was all windmills and cornfields and big pastures; where there was nothing willful or unmanageable in the landscape, no new islands, and no chance of unfamiliar birds—such as often followed the watercourses." The setting of the unfamiliar place highlights the uncertainty that the narrator feels about the future.
5. This passage takes place at the time when the American government was first occupying the lands of the Native Americans in the second half of the 19th century. The first paragraph states that Jeremiah is on the porch of the agency's office.
6. The setting is where and when something happens. There are many clues throughout the passage that show the action is taking place at a track meet:
  - 1) Elaine is on a track in a 100-yard dash competition.
  - 2) The author refers to "the state championship meet."
  - 3) Elaine wants to win a gold medal.
  - 4) The author refers to the finish line.
7. The narrator notices warning signs at the beginning of the hike. Further along, she observes that the trail is steep and rocky. She also realizes that the other hikers are more equipped and more physically fit than she and her friend. These observations lead her to decide

that the hike is too challenging. When her friend, Maria, suggests that they turn back, the narrator readily agrees.

8. Most of the story takes place at Carter's grandparent's house. He takes care of it while they are on vacation. Therefore, the setting is a house.