

How Setting, Props, and Sensory Details Add Magic to Your Story

Presentation Handout
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Three areas of discussion:

- Setting Up Your Story World
- Propping Up Your Characters
- Does Your Setting Have Sensory Deprivation?

Setting Up Your Story World

- Setting is the when and where of your story.
- Setting is an essential component of your story.
- Setting can be as broad as the story world and as focused as the scene.

In this presentation, we looked at setting from three perspectives: tone, mood, and atmosphere. Setting carries a lot of weight because it enables the reader to step through the door you have opened and enter your story world.

Three questions to ask yourself during the writing process:

- Tone: What type of story am I telling? (Or Where is a book seller going to put my novel when it's time to shelve it?)
- Mood : How can I use setting to evoke an emotional response from the reader?
- Atmosphere: Did I create an atmosphere that enriched the setting?

Whatever the setting, remember it is the mental image the reader forms while reading the story. In order to utilize setting to its fullest, the reader

needs to be anchored in each location as soon as possible. Avoid reader confusion.

If initially you have trouble weaving setting details into a scene, just keep in mind you can always add information as you and your characters become more familiar with the setting. True enjoyment of a fine piece of art is a gradual process, as is expanding the reader's knowledge of your story world.

Artwork offers a good example of how tone, mood, and atmosphere work together in an imaginary world.

Propping” Up Your Characters

In theater terms, a prop is the abbreviated form of the word “stage properties” and refers to all things appearing on the stage other than scenery. Props work with setting to create the illusion of time and place.

Props can help:

- Dress the scene
- Contribute to look and feel of scene
- Help fill space appropriately
- Contribute to the style and mood of the story
- Add information about characters

It's up to you to find the perfect setting for your story and then to fill it with props that help to ground the reader in the setting. If you fill your imaginary scene with appropriate props, your characters can use them to enhance the believability of your story world's setting.

Does Your Setting Have Sensory Deprivation?

Why is it important to incorporate the five senses into your story? People rely on their senses to interpret the world around them. Writers can filter a setting through the five senses of the point-of-view character or narrator. When a character sees, hears, tastes, touches, or smells the story world, the story setting comes alive.

Five Senses

Sight: This is the capability of the eyes to focus, detect images, and derive meaning from what is seen. Writers tend to use sight more than any other sense to describe a setting.

Hearing: The ability to perceive sound. Our ears are designed to capture sound waves and send them to the brain for processing.

Taste: The ability to detect the flavor of substances such as food. It involves a complex combination of taste and smell that also depends on texture and temperature.

Smell: The sense of smell ranks next to sight as one of the easiest senses to use in writing. More than any other sense, smell is linked directly to memory.

Touch: The sense of touch provides a wide ranging canvas for the writer. Touch occurs across the whole body because touch activates receptors in the skin which can feel pressure, pain, and changes in the temperature.

Suggestion: Build a sensory source notebook filled with sensory adjectives to use in your writing. No matter how you ensure your setting includes the five senses, keep in mind as in cooking, less is better than more. Use these details to enhance, not overload a setting.

And for those who write historical fiction, remember some sensory details have existed throughout time.

The following handouts available at www.gingerhanson.com:

1. Genre Tone Examples
2. Tone, Mood, and Atmosphere in Setting
3. Five Senses Word List
4. Presentation Handout

Resources

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