Setting and Its Roles

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**setting:** the time and place where action unfolds in a story, drama, or other literary work.

HERE’S HOW

**Step 1: Identify where the action takes place.** Look for details that tell:
- if the action happens in a real place or imaginary place, indoors or outdoors.
- if the action happens in the country, city, or other area.
- what you as an observer of the scene can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel.
- how people act in this place—ways they speak, actions they must take.

**Step 2: Identify when the action takes place.** Look for details that tell:
- if the action takes place in the past, present, or future.
- what time of day and what season of the year it is.
- what the habits or customs of the people are at this time.

**Step 3: Explore how the setting affects the story, its role or roles in the story.** How does the setting help determine the conflict? The plot? The mood? How does it shape the characters’ feelings or personalities?

**Step 4:** Sometimes readers must infer the setting, or make a logical guess based on evidence. When a narrator does not directly state the time or place, you can use past experience and details from the text to infer the time and place.

**EXAMPLE**

What can you infer about the setting from this story detail from “The Monkey’s Paw” by W. W. Jacobs?

> Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man started nervously at the sound of a door banging.

**Detail:** “Outside . . .”

**Inference:** The action unfolds indoors.

**Detail:** “the wind was higher than ever”

**Inference:** The action unfolds during a storm.

**Detail:** “the old man stared nervously”

**Inference:** The location may be old and/or remote.

**Detail:** “sound of a door banging.”

**Inference:** The action unfolds in an old, quiet house.