KS3 Descriptive Writing
Describing a Setting
Learning Objective

• To understand the importance of describing a setting.

Success Criteria

• To understand the terms ‘setting’ and ‘atmosphere’.
• To use descriptive techniques to describe a setting.
• To be able to identify a range of descriptive techniques in a setting description.
Every story has a ‘setting’.

Pause for Thought
What do you think this means?

Every good story creates ‘atmosphere’.

Pause for Thought
What do you think this means?

**Key Terms**

- **setting** - where a story takes place
- **atmosphere** - the tone or mood created
Why Is the Setting Important?

Just like when you describe a character, the reader has to visualise where the story is taking place. We all want readers to engage with and enjoy our writing. A descriptive setting in narrative writing helps the reader to do this.

Create a table like the one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title/Genre</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Atmosphere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holes, adventure</td>
<td>Middle of desert</td>
<td>Lonely/isolated/difficult conditions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Complete the table with at least three more examples from books you have read.

Key Terms

genre – the style or category of a novel
Take a Closer Look

The boys moved off and disappeared in the gloom. Before long, they were wading through the tall grass of the ghastly graveyard. It was a graveyard of the old-fashioned western kind; a large crypt surrounded by smaller graves on a hill just beyond the village. It had a crazy board fence around it, which leaned inwards in places, and outwards in others. ‘Sacred to the memory of So-and-So’ had been painted onto or etched into the tired faces of each of the tombstones once, but it could no longer be read on the most of them, even in the light of day.

A faint wind moaned through the trees, and Tom feared it might be the spirits of the dead complaining at being disturbed. The boys talked little, and only under their breath when they did. It seemed appropriate.

Finally, they found the place they were seeking. Then, they waited in silence for what seemed like an hour. Tom’s reflections grew oppressive. He had to speak out to break the tension: “Hucky, do you believe the dead people like it for us to be here?”
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Further Investigation

It is likely that you found that the two were linked together. This is because effective description of a setting also helps to create atmosphere for the reader.

Join with another pair to do some more annotation of the extract. Can you find any of the following? You may colour code if you wish:

1. adjectives/noun phrases
2. powerful verb choices
3. metaphors/personification
4. pathetic fallacy
5. alliteration

Pause for Thought
Why might it be difficult to spot individual techniques? The best writers combine techniques.

Challenge: Are there any other word classes or literary techniques you can spot?
The boys moved off and disappeared in the gloom. Before long, they were wading through the tall grass of the ghastly graveyard. It was a graveyard of the old-fashioned western kind; a large crypt surrounded by smaller graves on a hill just beyond the village. It had a crazy board fence around it, which leaned inwards in places, and outwards in others. ‘Sacred to the memory of So-and-So’ had been painted onto or etched into the tired faces of each of the tombstones once, but it could no longer be read on the most of them, even in the light of day.

A faint wind moaned through the trees, and Tom feared it might be the spirits of the dead complaining at being disturbed. The boys talked little, and only under their breath when they did. It seemed appropriate.
Consider the two images below:
In your pair, pick out as many interesting details as possible that you think could be described about one of the settings.

Make a list of words to describe the type of atmosphere you would want to create when describing this setting.

Create a table, like the one shown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details to Describe</th>
<th>Type of Atmosphere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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Time to Get Creative

Choose one of the images below: it does not have to be the image you worked on in your pair.

Task: write a piece of description, focusing on the setting and creating atmosphere for the reader.

Challenge: Can you use pathetic fallacy?

Aim to use:
- Adjectives/Noun phrases
- Metaphors
- Powerful verb choices/adverbs
- Alliteration
- Personification
- Similes

Photo © George Rankin (cc-by-sa/2.0)
Swap pieces of writing with your partner:

- Can you identify which image they used?
- Can you identify any descriptive techniques they have used?
- Can you highlight any specific areas where they have described the setting?
- Can you discuss with them the type of atmosphere you feel they have created?