



TeachingLive | Season 10 | Brightstorm | Week 5 | TEACHING NOTES | Skyship Adventure 2 | Tuesday 20th February 2024

Please keep reading Vashti Hardy’s book Brightstorm.

Creative Game

As usual, the session begins with a game for children to play. **Make sure that they have their notebooks and pencils ready and listen carefully. The game does NOT involve using the padlet. Children at home either play with a sibling or parent or write ideas rapidly in their notebooks.**

Today’s Game – ‘From the Stargrazer, I can see...’

Warm up the imagination and get ideas buzzing with this creative starter. **The challenge is to make a list of what you can see/ hear/ feel/ smell/ taste from the skyship as it descends. The trick is to pick out details, using a sentence of three. Please display the sentence patterns given below:**

I can see a wind-swept lake, gigantic oak trees and a lonely stone tower.

I can hear the wind moaning, the ship's hull creak and the distant call of skydragons.

I can feel the icy blasts of snow, the roughness of a wolf's fur and the cold metal of the skyship's seeing-stone.

I can smell stale fish, ancient swamps and a bear's den.

Modern or ancient city	A fishing village
Futuristic or fantasy city	The edge of the sea
Forest or ancient Ruins	A rocky landscape
Swamps and lakes	Mountains and a valley
A river winding through a valley	Small village or mysterious creatures
An armed citadel	Landing space with other skyships

The Objective: practice descriptive sentences of a setting, using sentences of 3.

Padlet 1 – The skyship has landed. The children have a few minutes to complete one or more ‘post it notes’ to create detailed sentences to build the setting. [The examples below should be provided or displayed:](#)

MC saw: a, b and c.

Ty saw three things: the moon, a stone tower and icy rain.

Mariana saw three things: trees, pathways and a fox.

Ty saw three things: the moon shining down on the skyship like an albino eye, a stone tower looming above the abandoned skyship and icy rain whipping across the hillside.

Mariana saw three things: tall trees leaning inwards like strange doorways, crooked pathways snaking onwards and a russet-coated fox.

Remind children about what we have been learning so far. This might make a good poster:

- Accurate punctuation.
- Use concrete images – what you saw, heard, etc.
- Each word earns its place.
- No overwriting.
- Alliteration, similes and metaphors to build pictures.
- Personification to add atmosphere – the wind moans.
- Name it – ‘Poodle’ not ‘dog’; ‘Kings Street’ not ‘the road’.

The Objective – to write a variety of descriptive sentences that set the scene, using a colon to introduce an extended list.

Gallery Challenge –create an imaginary setting.

1. Sketch your setting lightly:



2. Fill in the background using patterns – I used oil pastels for this – smudging can help – look at the mountain on the left side.



3. If using pastels, use fainter lines for sky and smudge. Outline buildings with bold marker.



4. Complete by drawing stone patterns in fine detail and then watercolour to complete.



Children's Audio – *Objective – listen attentively, enjoy and reflect on what makes effective writing and performance.*

Padlet 2 – Setting the scene- This activity prepares the children for creating an atmospheric setting for their blog post. [Display or provide a copy of the model paragraph and preposition grid below.](#)

Confident writers could attempt different settings to create different atmospheres for the reader. To get everyone started, Pie will read aloud and discuss the model paragraph – make sure the children take notes – listen for ideas and approaches that can be used.

Objective – experiment describing a setting through a character's eyes, using prepositional phrases to build the scene.

Marianna stared round at the ruined city. In front of her, ornate, stone buildings, that once must have been magnificent, lay crumbled. To one side, several great pillars jutted up, oak doorways stood ajar and huge, empty windows stared down. In a far corner, stood a ruined statue of some long-forgotten god. In a dark courtyard, there were several fountains but they no longer sprayed. The place itself was quite empty and strangely silent as overhead the thunderstorm drifted south. The evening sun had already begun to cast darkening shadows and a cold wind blew dust across the square.

Across	Beside	Near,
Along,	Between	On
Above	By	On top of
Against	Down,	To one side of
Among,	From,	Towards,
At the edge/side	In,	Under
Below	Inside	Underneath
Behind,	In the distance	Upon
Beneath	Into	

Blogging Activity – Write the section for your skyship adventure where the skyship lands, describing the place where it has landed.

Pie will read through and talk about the second chapter of his story. The challenge is to use some of the techniques to write a story setting for the skyship adventure. **Ideally, the children should have a copy of the next part of Pie’s story so that they can see the way in which he builds the setting to create an ominous atmosphere. The text is below.**

Objective – continue their story, writing a setting that captures the reader’s interest and creates an atmosphere.

Audio Challenge – If children want to record their own blog ensure that they have read it aloud a number of times. They should read it slowly and clearly with expression.

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Stargrazer - Episode 2 - 'The Airship Lands'

Ty stared in horror as the ground rushed up to meet them. They were swooping ever downwards to what looked like an ancient, ruined city. Captain O'Shea wrestled with the tiller, trying her best to steer the Stargrazer towards an open square in the city center. By Ty's side, Mariana stood holding a sky grappling iron, fending off a strange, flying creature from the skin of the balloon. Its huge talons tore into the covering and sliced an irreparable tear, like a gaping wound out of which poured the air that had kept them flying.

With a dying hiss, the airship thudded down, landing in the square. Mariana had won the battle with the weird bird and it had already flown back up into the storm clouds. Ty peered over the railings at the city square that surrounded the wounded airship. He saw three things: the evening moon shining down on the skyship like an albino eye, a stone tower looming above the abandoned skyship and icy wind whipping across the city, battering the skyship's ragged balloon.

Marianna too stared round at the ruined city. In front of her, ornate, stone buildings, that once must have been magnificent, lay crumbled. To one side, several great pillars jutted up, oak doorways stood ajar and huge, empty windows stared down. In a far corner, stood a ruined statue of some long-forgotten god. In a dark courtyard, there were several fountains but they no longer sprayed. The place itself was quite empty and strangely silent as overhead the thunderstorm drifted south. The evening sun had already begun to cast darkening shadows and a cold wind blew dust across the square.

Twenty minutes later, the children found themselves alone on board the Stargrazer. Captain O'Shea and the crew had already left in search of materials to mend the balloon, leaving strict instructions that the children should not leave the ship. Ty and Mariana stood on deck, staring into the encroaching darkness. A few stars had appeared and the bone-white moon shone above them.

At that moment, they heard something.



Just in case you fancy using it – here is a ‘breaking news broadcast’ that could be provided as part of the adventure. Children love writing, filming or making an audio of broadcasts.

Breaking News

News Break - Airship Missing

'We are interrupting this programme to bring you news that the spaceship Stargrazer has gone missing during its first flight under new ownership. The Stargrazer airship was bound for Outer Tregonzia on an exploratory trip to find the legendary lost city of Atlantis. Rumours have spread like wildfire that the airship may have been captured by air pirates. Stay tuned to this station for regular updates. I'm handing back to Barry in the news room. Barry can you tell us any more....?'

'Yes - the Stargrazer was recently purchased by a young explorer named Captain O'Shea for a bargain price of 100,000 punts but her crew is inexperienced. It is feared that they may have been attacked as you suggest or may have been blown off course by last week's terrible thunderstorms. More of this story on the six o'clock news. Now, we're taking you back to today's episode of Street Vendors.'

Creating atmospheric settings

Try the game of 'compare' where you show the children a rather sparsely written setting and one that builds the picture for the reader. Which is better and why?

Kezzi went into the shed. It was messy, dark and dirty. There was a load of stuff in there. She hid.

Kezzi stared round the shed. A fly crawled up the dusty windowpane, cobwebs hung from the rafters and a broken chair lay beside a pile of old carpets. The air smelled musty. From the back of the room, where it was quite dark, came the sound of something scratching, something scraping, something alive. But she had not got time to worry about that. Kezzie ducked down behind a large box and waited.

Generally, writers describe settings to tune the reader into imagining where the action takes place. However, as in the example above, a setting can be described in order to create an atmosphere. Collect examples of such descriptions and you will notice how writers use sensory impressions to build pictures.

One useful habit is to show the reader the setting through the eyes of the main character (*Kezzie stared round the shed*). For instance, in Book 1 of *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, Jared finds himself in a hidden room:

'Jared looked around the room. It was a smallish library, with one huge desk in the centre. On it was an open book and a pair of old-fashioned round glasses that caught the candlelight....'

It is also helpful to show what is in a setting by using prepositions (nearby, below, above, under, on) as well as making lists of things:

'A collection of glass jars containing berries, dried plants and one filled with dull river stones sat at the edge of the desk. Nearby a watercolour sketch showed a little girl and a man playing on the lawn. Jared's eyes fell on a note tossed on top of an open book, both coated in a thin layer of dust....'

In this extract, you can see how the author introduces into the setting something to lead the story forwards – a message!

To make a setting sound real – collect examples in reading and use in writing:

- When writing, see the scene in your head;
- show the scene through the character's eyes, e.g. *Jill looked round at the room;*
- use sensory details to help the reader imagine the scene, e.g. *it smelled damp and the surfaces were slimy;*
- introduce something out of place that will lead the story forwards, e.g. *in the corner, she could see the treasure box;*
- describe what is there in detail; *The windows were smothered in a film of green grime that let in a strange light. Cobwebs strung across the ceiling and dust powdered every surface.*
- make lists of what can be seen, using sentences of three; *The floor was covered in a tangled mess of broken boxes, old furniture and moth-eaten blankets.*
- use prepositions to show the scene, e.g. *below, above, nearby, on top of, beside, under, on the side....*

Building the setting

Everyone knows that they have to have a setting for their story. Children may well leave this as a rather vague blur so that the reader cannot actually see it in their mind. However, it is quite easy to build up a setting.

- **Be exact** – where is the story set? A vague answer such as ‘London’ is no good. Encourage children to be specific. Where is the main character? Sitting on the steps of the British Museum? Running past a pond in Hyde Park? We need the exact place, e.g.

Reluctantly, Skater sat outside Sharky’s on the cold, stone step waiting. He tapped his foot. From inside, he could hear chips sizzling. He sniffed and counted the flies crawling up and down the grease-stained window. Skater’s stomach grumbled. At exactly six o’clock, the door swung open and he found his way into the oily warmth.

- **Use what you know** – invention is hard, so encourage children to use places they know, and then if they want to, they can invent a bit by adding in some new or extra detail. There is a time-honoured tradition in doing this – Alan Garner uses his own local area for his novels and Michael Morpurgo sets many of his stories on the Isles of Scilly where he takes a summer holiday every year. If the children use elements of a setting they know well, they will find it easier to imagine events taking place. There is also the benefit that they know the physical details, which will help to bring the place alive.
- **Not too many places** – of course, some young writers are tempted into stories that rocket from one place to another with a tumble of action. The problem with this is that soon the reader loses any sense of what is happening or where. A

useful tip is to start the story in one place – somewhere homely, perhaps like the kitchen or classroom. Then the characters have to move to another place for the main adventure – somewhere more unusual or atmospheric like an alley, a deserted house, a hillside or an old allotment. At the end of the story, let the characters return home or back to where the story began.

Thinking about the setting is not just a matter of the place that the characters are in – it is an opportunity to paint the whole backcloth for the reader, so this includes thinking about:

- **Location** – choose an exact place that you know well;
- **The background detail**, for example: clothing, furnishings, distant view, sounds to bring the setting alive for the reader so that it feels as if they are almost there;
- **Weather** – change the mood by using the weather so scare the reader with a storm or have your character lost in the fog;
- **Time of day** – if it is at night you create a different mood to a sunny afternoon.

Outside, the wind howled across Stroud. Inside, Parliament Primary School was dark. Sally tiptoed down the corridor, slipped into the classroom and began to search for the map.

It does help if the children get used to ‘visualising’ – being able to see in their mind’s eye what they are writing about. That is why it is helpful to base settings on familiar places.

Settings for different genres

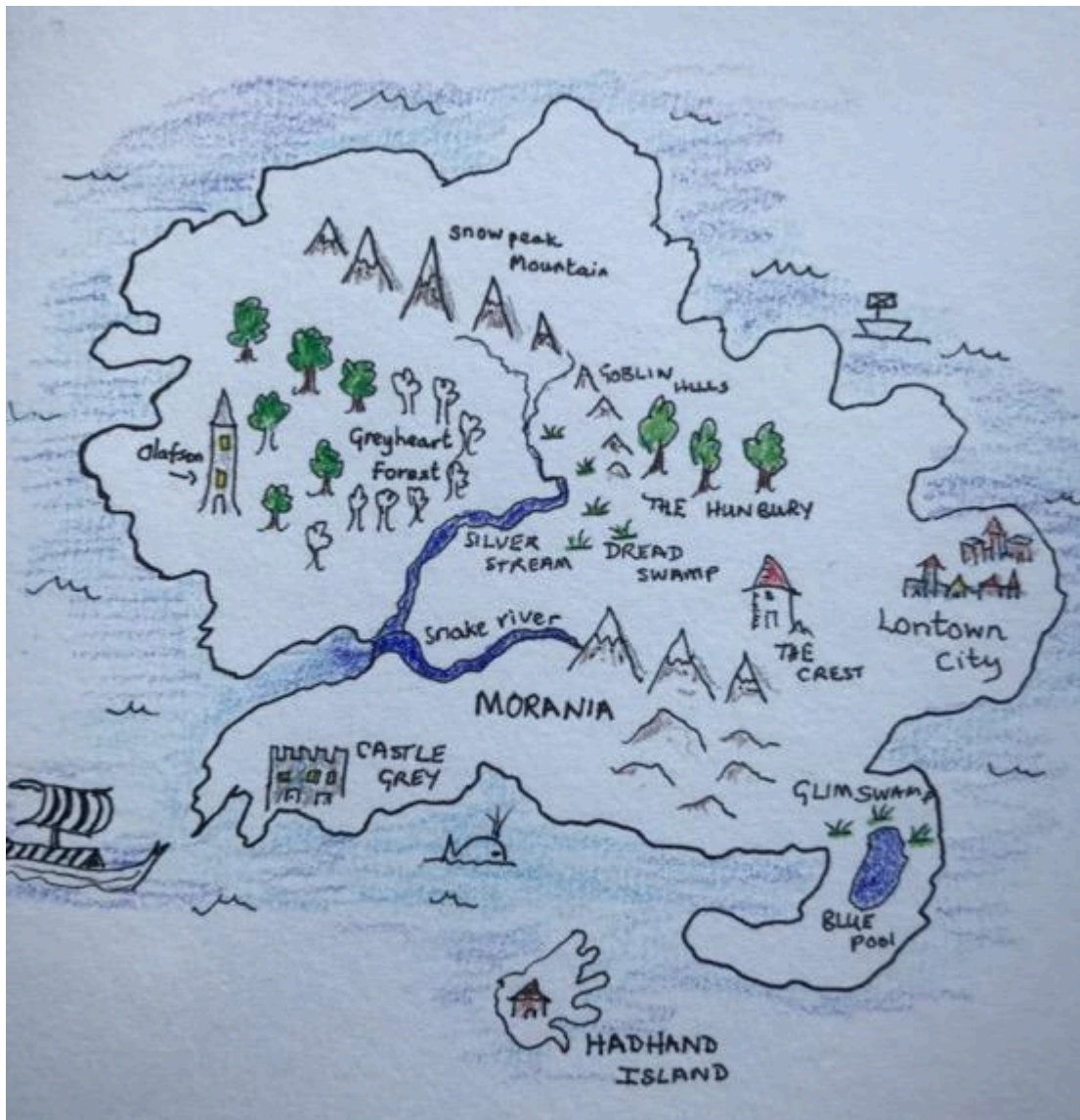
Different types of story use different sorts of setting. This will help to locate a narrative within its typical environment.

Traditional tales usually have very thin settings and familiar settings can be drawn straight from experience. Others may be more challenging:

- **Historical** – settings include details from the historical period: clothing, specific objects and pastimes. For example (World War 2):

'we grabbed our gas masks and ran down the garden to the Anderson shelter where we listened to the distant crump of bombs exploding.'

- **Fantasy** – settings include everyday objects that become fantastic in some way. For example a window that speaks, a serving bowl on legs, a miniature elephant that acts as a sugar bowl, a sunflower whose centre is an eye, a sky with two moons, shadows with a life of their own, and so on. Encourage children to use fantasy place names such as Elf Forest, Misty Hill or Dragon's Lane.
- **Quests** – settings are often similar to settings for a traditional tale settings: castles, towers, mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, deserts, magical cities, villages, wayside inns, swamps, underground mine and so on. Encourage children to draw a map of their setting to help visualise the terrain. Model how to draw an outline and then populate the map with mountains, forest, rivers, swamps, lakes, villages, towers, castles, etc. get the children to invent place names for their map and then choose one place to use as a starting point for their story.



- **Sci-fi** – settings include strange planets and spaceships. Futuristic settings include everyday objects given a scientific and futuristic twist, for example, a cup that automatically brews its own drink. Encourage the children to give places and objects scientific and futuristic sounding names, for example: ‘the time warp oscillator’, ‘the oxygenator’ and so on.
- **Thrillers and chillers** – settings are usually dark, cold, lonely places, visited at night and filled with strange vague sounds, for example: scrape, scratching, whispering, muttering, low whine, moan, groan and so on. Encourage children to introduce a slight movement – a glimpse of something that

might be ominous, such as a shadow, a flash of light, a red eye, a hand, feet and so on. For example:

The door creaked open. Ben stared at the old, wooden desk. It was covered in a thousand carvings. Strange animals, serpents and what looked like dragons. Without warning, the door closed shut. It was quite dark in the room. Ben spun round and reached out, but the door was no longer there! He paused and then heard a strange, low whispering... from right behind him!

Key Questions when inventing a setting to jumpstart a story

Who lives there/near there?

What has just happened/is about to happen?

What is hidden there?

What has been lost there?

What sort of atmosphere does the setting suggest?

Who is about to arrive at the setting?

What do they do?

What happens next?

Moving between settings

Encourage the children to look at the settings they have chosen, perhaps using their maps. Ask: *Which of these settings starts your story? Which will be the setting at the end?* Choose three settings and discuss the sorts of stories that might have an A to B to C structure: quest stories, escape stories, journey stories and so on. Explain that some stories have an A to B to A structure: these might begin in a homely and comfortable setting – for example the school classroom, home, kitchen, the child's bedroom, Gran's house, a friend's house and so on – before launching the characters off into something more

dramatic, such as a an alien planet, a deserted house, a wasteland or a distant galaxy. The character will finally return to the original setting, possibly having learned something along the way. These stories can also be quest stories and are also adventure stories, time-slip or fantasy stories.

Activities for creating settings

Use the following ideas to help the children to create settings that feel real:

- Choose an evocative name for the setting, for example, Catherine Fisher uses 'Darkwater Hall' in her novel of that name. You do not need much of a description on top of this – already it is suggesting something frightening and the imagination of the reader is beginning to picture the sort of gloomy, ominous building it might be.
- Keep an ongoing class list of possible place names.
- Make lists of precise places where a story might start or a scene might take place, for example, *on the Princess Park bench by the pond*.
- For each place, ask the children to invent one detail that can be seen, for example, *scratch marks on the bench*.
- Use photos, videos, posters and postcards of settings for description writing. Encourage children to get used to annotating a scene – jotting words, phrases and similes around an image that might be useful when writing.
- Use location writing - go on a walk around the local area. Stop at interesting points, such as an alley, a busy street, an old house, a park, a sea wall and so on. Provide the children with clipboards and ask them look around them and note down details that might be useful when writing.
- Talk about settings as if they were scenes in a television play. What can they see in this scene? Where are the characters? What does it look like? What is in the background?
- Place a few items (or pictures of items) that may be found in a setting in a bag, for example a bucket, a spade and some

suntan cream, or a broken cup, an candle and an old key. Show the items and ask the children to guess the location. Ask: *What do these items tell us about the place?* Work together to create noun phrases for one or two of the items.

Using the five senses

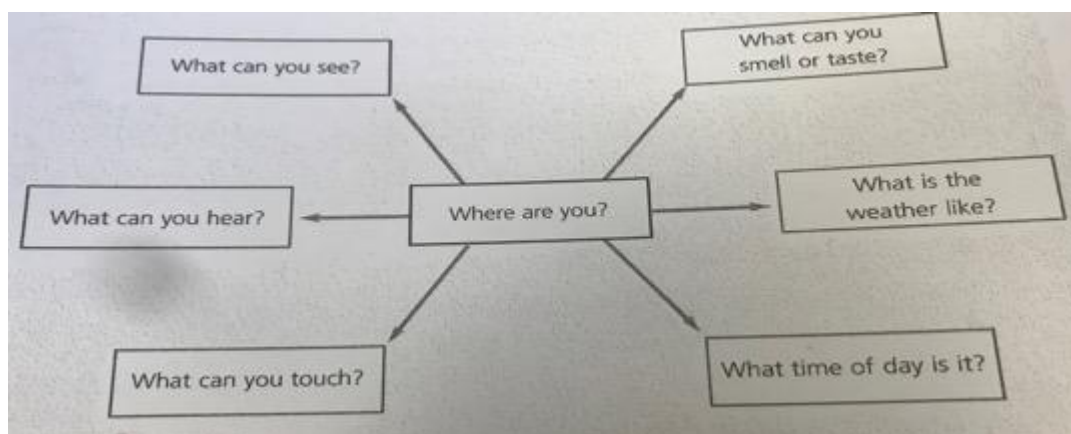
Having chosen a setting, it is important to use the five senses to help bring it alive for the reader. Ask a child to take the hot-seat in role as a character in the story they are planning. Ask the children in the class to ask them where they are and to describe what they can see around them, what they can hear, what objects and furnishings look and feel like. When children become used to this, use it as a paired technique prior to writing.

What can you see, smell, taste or hear?

What is the weather like?

What can you touch?

What time of day is it?



1. What does it look like?

Ask the children to think about the most important setting in their story. Ask: *What can you see?* Once they have noted down the key descriptive phrases, ask them to imagine one interesting detail into the setting. For example, 'the table was set for two' or 'on the table was a small pyramid of golden

coins'. This helps to act as a trigger to a new event or scene. It can be a useful tactic when writing, at the start of a story to get it going – or when a writer gets stuck and the story needs to take a new turning.

2. What can you hear?

Again, ask the children to first focus on the obvious sounds in their setting, noting down any ideas they have. Next, ask them to imagine a more unusual 'sound effects' such as a hissing kettle, the sound of scratching or something rustling in the darkness. This is because something out of place might suggest that something is wrong or is about to take place. Not only will this bring the setting to life, it will also feed into plot development.

3. What can you smell?

It is not always possible, or useful, to add smell into a setting, but it is something that the children should think about. Caves may be damp, old houses may smell of rotten wood, the sea will smell of salty breeze, forests may smell dank and earthy, strange gardens of rotting vegetation or the strong, sweet smell of flowers! Smell can be used to quickly indicate the atmosphere of a setting.

4. What can you touch or taste?

Again, touch and taste are not always useful aspects of a setting but they can be in certain circumstances, for example, if the setting is very cold, or very luxurious (in which case they can run their fingers over soft, plump velvet cushions!) Adding in a taste, as a character takes a drink or eats something, also helps to make the writing sound real and can create atmosphere, depending on whether the characters is sipping cool raspberry juice, eating dry, stale bread or drinking rich hot chocolate!

Techniques to create a setting

a. Show the setting through a character's eyes

One useful strategy is to bring the main character to a place and then show it through their eyes, having them 'look round', e.g.

Sally stared at ...

Bill glanced round ...

Gary peered into ...

Frances gazed at ...

This allows the writer to build the description by showing the setting through the main character's eyes so the reader also pictures the image, e.g.

Sally stared at the old oak door. Faded, pink paint peeled back like old scabs and the door creaked as she leant against it.

b. Describe key objects

In a shared session, practise creating noun phrases for significant objects found in a setting. You say an object (or even better – show them one) and ask the children to build up a noun phrase by answering questions:

What is it? *a vase*

What is it like? *an old vase*

More description *an old, cracked vase*

Where is it? *an old cracked vase lay on the table*

Practise using similes to build the description, e.g. *The walls were pink as a flamingo... the carpet looked like a rainbow...*

c. Describe the weather and time of day

Of course, a setting on its own will not be sufficient to build the whole picture. It is also important to think about:

The weather

The time of day

Make the point that the setting, the weather and time of day all conspire to form a mood or effect upon the reader. Discuss the difference between a park on a hot summer's day and the same park on a dark, wintery night.

- Collect and generate phrases to describe different types of weather and think about the different atmospheres created, e.g.

The bright sun blazed...

The west wind swept down the streets...

The snow drifted...

Rain pelted the window...

- Ask the children to imagine their main character in their setting. Tell them to develop one of their phrases describing the character's reaction to the weather, for example, 'The bright sun blazed. Tom tugged off his coat and slipped into the shade.'

- Make lists of sentence openers that introduce the time of day. For example:

The midday sun...

In the afternoon, the snow blew...

Later that evening, the wind stilled...

It was midnight and the streets were empty...

Early in the morning, the balloon sailed over the mountain range...

d. Show where things are in the setting

When writing a description, use prepositional phrases to map out for the reader different aspects of the setting. Try combining this by showing the setting through the character's eyes, e.g.

*Jason stared round Salamander's hall. **On the ceiling**, he could just see a faded light flickering. **In the far corner**, there was what looked like an old suit of rusted armor. **To one side**, a table lay strewn with ancient maps, candlesticks and a silver horn. **Under the table** and poking out from a small box was the very thing that he had been seeking, a miniature dragon.*

e. Settings create atmosphere

If you watch any film with an eye on the setting, you will notice how the editor uses the setting to manipulate how the viewer feels. Though it is a cliché, it is true that stories may well begin in a homely and comfortable setting before launching the characters off into something more dramatic. In the same way, endings often take the main characters home, or put them into a cosy and safe setting with the weather brightening. These are metaphors that make us 'feel' the story. Get the children starting their stories in a comfortable and moving their characters to a more dramatic setting.

Comfortable settings – home, kitchen, bedroom, classroom, gran's house, friend's house, a den, etc.

Dramatic settings – alley, deserted house, wasteland, caves, mountains, distant galaxy, etc.

f. Suspense settings

Get the children to co-construct a suspense toolkit based on scary setting. Can they spot the tools that the writer is using in this passage?

The door to the damp cellar creaked open. Ben crept in and stared at the old, wooden desk. It was smothered in a thousand carvings. He could just make out strange animals, twisted serpents and what looked like dragons with flickering tongues. At that moment, the door slammed shut, leaving him in the shadows. A vague silhouette shifted. Ben spun round and reached out but the door was no longer there. From right behind him, a low whisper hissed his name.

- Put you put character alone in a scary setting
- Describe the setting with unusual and threatening detail –carvings, animals, serpents, dragons
- Use negative adjectives – damp, old, strange, twisted, flickering
- Use ominous sounds, e.g. creaked, hissed, slammed
- Make it dark and cold – damp cellar, shadows
- Show or hint at how the character feels by what they do – crept, stared, spun
- Hide the threat – vague silhouette, low whisper
- The main character hears something – hissed
- The main character catches a glimpse of something – a silhouette

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Use Images for teaching settings

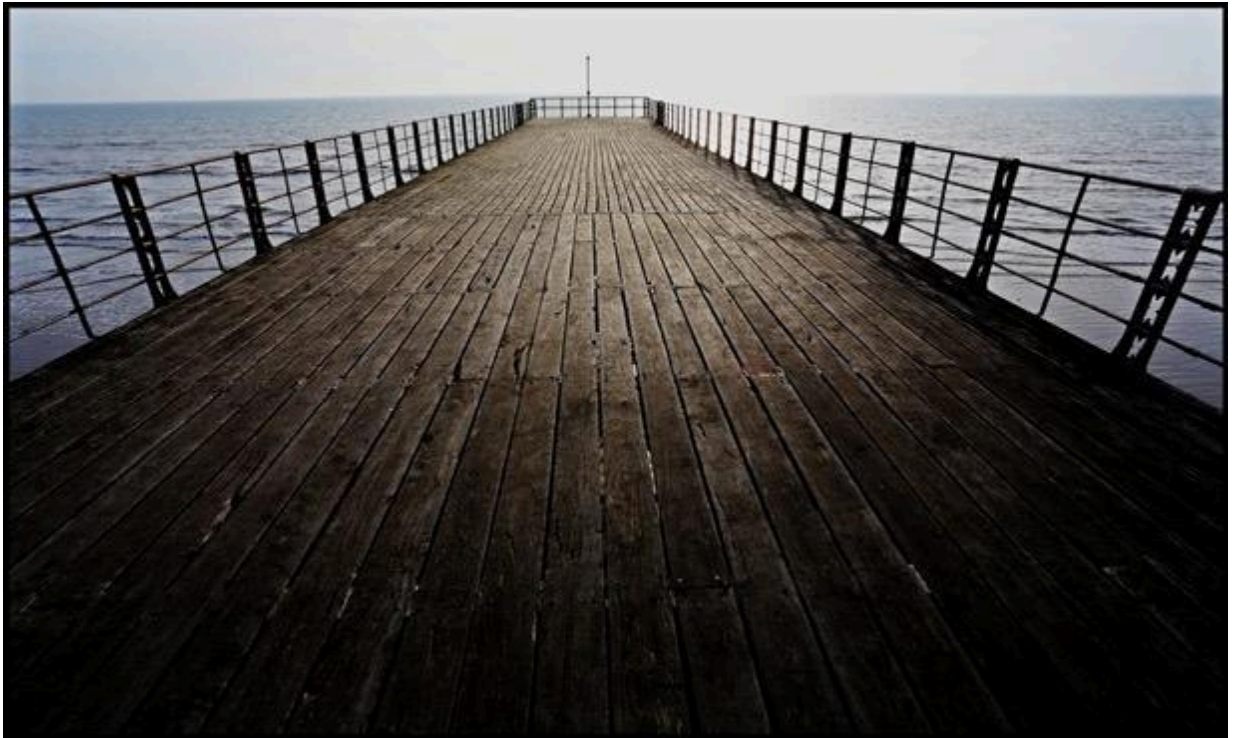
First, choose a photo/ painting to use as the main focus for whole class teaching. Choose something that catches your eye and you personally enjoy – and you think will interest the children. Display the piece of photo or art on the interactive whiteboard. You could spend some time using introductory games so that the children have ‘looked’ carefully at the picture. Identify the main things that can be seen in the painting/photo. Jot these down the centre of the page, leaving space around each word. You only need say 6 – 8 items.

Now take each one and turn it into a descriptive sentence, creating a simple pattern on the page. The idea is to capture something of the essence of the image. Remember to use the basic writing approach:

- *Selecting detail*
- *Avoiding cliché*
- *powerful, well-chosen words;*
- *fresh combinations;*
- *alliteration to make parts memorable;*
- *similes – like/as + metaphor and personification.*

The poem’s pattern can include long/short lines down the page. The children then may write their own poem using the same image – or they might select a different image. Putting out a set of 40/50 postcards from galleries provides everyone with a different painting to write about. Weaker writers benefit from taking an image and brainstorming plenty of words, phrases and ideas which may then be used as a bank for their writing.

Of course, you can also use a painting as a basis for a story paragraph which captures what is happening. A simple way into this is to imagine that a character has suddenly been transported into the world of the picture and is watching what is happening, e.g. *‘Karen stood at the end of the pier and stared out across the sea...’*







Creating settings - Reminder Sheet

Key points

- **Location** - be precise, state where - exactly.
- **Weather** - use this to create atmosphere.
- **Time of day** - alter this to change mood.

Where?

- Choose suggestive name, e.g. Harfang Hall.
- Avoid too many settings.
- Try starting and ending at the same setting.
- See the setting in your mind as you write.

Bring the setting alive through detail and the senses

- Pick out a few details to bring the setting alive.
- Introduce a sound, touch, taste or smell.
- Show the setting through the character's eyes, for example: *Tom stared at...*
- Use details that are unexpected or out of place to create interest.
- Mention other details to paint the picture, such as, clothing, furnishings, background detail, etc.

Other useful writing tips

- Base settings on known places; invent a few details.
- Change settings to alter the atmosphere.

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