

Handout 1: Unit Overview

Settings from Page to Screen

How many times have you entered the fictional world of a book or a film and felt as though you had stepped into a real place and time? You know that the story may not be true, but you find yourself believing that it could be. How do authors and filmmakers create a mood and achieve that sense of authenticity—that “you are there” feeling? How do they let you know when and where a story takes place? How do they use sensory details—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures—to help shape the stories they tell?

In this unit you’ll look at the sensory details in your immediate surroundings, and explore how writers create authentic, believable settings for short stories and films. For the unit project, you will work in teams to design the sets for a movie version of a story you will read. You’ll then choose one setting for which you will write a set description and present your design ideas to the class.

Your work in this unit will revolve around the following questions:

- *What is setting?*
- *How do writers create settings for works of literature and media?*
- *How do authentic details of setting help tell a story?*

What You Will Do in This Unit

Explore settings in real life. *What are some of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of the world around you?*

View a fictional world through an author’s eyes. *Read a literary work rich in details of time and place, and discover how one author brings settings to life.*

Analyze set description in a real script. *What details do screenwriters include, what do they leave out, and how can a set designer fill in what’s missing?*

Design your own movie set. *Investigate where and when the story you read takes place, describe how you would transform details from the book onto the big screen, and create a set for the story, filled with all the sensory details you’d see in a movie.*

Project Discription

For the unit project, your team is responsible for designing settings for a movie version of the story you will read. You will decide how to transform scenes on the page into the magic of stage sets. As a team, you'll choose several scenes to capture in your sets; each team member will then prepare a presentation for one setting.

Your final set design presentation will include the following:

- A written set description for one of the scenes, including time and place, as well as sensory details of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell
- Visual design ideas that may include sketches, magazine cutouts, or pieces of fabric, and an explanation of how each relates to the story's setting
- An oral summary that describes how your setting establishes the story and how it is important to the action that follows

Vocabulary Used in This Unit

Flashback: The insertion of an earlier event into the chronological sequence of a narrative. Writers often use flashback to provide background information about a situation or a character.

Pitch: A concise verbal and/or visual presentation of an idea for a story to potential directors or producers.

Properties: The objects necessary to the action of a finished work other than scenery, costumes, or fixed furnishings. Umbrellas, suitcases, dishes, flower vases, and children's toys are all examples of properties.

Script: The written text of a movie, TV show, or play. A script has certain features, such as character names followed by colons designating character speeches, and instructions about action and setting given as stage directions.

Sensory: Relating to the senses, including sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste.

Set designer: The person responsible for all aspects of creating the setting for a film, TV show, or theatrical production, also known as a *production designer*. Set designers choose filming locations, supervise set construction, advise costume designers, and select properties. They also work with lighting and sound.

Setting: The time, place, and circumstances in which a story occurs or develops.

Studio set: A setting for recording a movie or TV show that is constructed on a stage in a soundproof building or room. Filmmakers may use studio sets instead of filming *on location*—in an already-existing place—because a location with the desired features does not exist or because it is easier or less expensive to build the set than to use or modify that location.

Assessment Checklist: Presenting Set Design

Use this assessment to help you develop your set description and design presentation. Make sure to include all the requirements. Your teacher will use this assessment to evaluate your work.

Requirements	Percentage of Total Grade	Comments	
Written Set Description			
		Student Comments	Teacher Comments
Accurately describes time and place, including essential locations and properties.	15%		
Includes details from the story that evoke all five senses.	15%		
Includes details that establish or develop the story.	20%		
Design Presentation			
Incorporates the written set description and visuals.	20%		
Summarizes how the setting establishes and/or helps to develop the story.	30%		
Total	100%		

Handout 2: Setting Log

Use your Setting Log to collect notes and visuals for each new setting or story segment. Dig out all the information you can find in the story to help create or enhance your movie sets. Use the format below to record what you find. Add inspiration pages to show how you imagine the sets.

Chapter and Pages

Time

(What time of day, day of the week, season, or year is it? What's the date? Where are we in relation to the narrator's life—the past, present, or future?)

Place

(Inside or outside? What kind of building, room, street, neighborhood, school? What city, town, or country?)

Sensory Details

(What sights, sounds, tastes, textures, and smells are evoked by this setting?)

Handout 3: Sample Script Opening

Adapted from the screenplay of *Do the Right Thing* by Spike Lee

TITLES: White on Black

PLACE
Brooklyn, New York

CUT TO:

TIME
Present

CUT TO:

WEATHER
Hot!

CUT TO:

INT: WE LOVE RADIO STATION STOREFRONT—DAY

EXTREME CLOSE UP

WE SEE only big white teeth and big lips.

MISTER SEÑOR LOVE DADDY
Waaaaake up!
Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!
Up ya wake! Up ya wake! Up ya wake!

CAMERA MOVES BACK SLOWLY TO REVEAL MISTER SEÑOR LOVE DADDY,
a DJ, a radio personality, behind a microphone.

MISTER SEÑOR LOVE DADDY
This is Mister Señor Love Daddy.
Your voice of choice. The world's
only twelve-hour strongman, here on
WE LOVE radio, 108 FM. The last on
your dial, but the first in ya
hearts, and that's the truth, Ruth!

The CAMERA, which is STILL PULLING BACK, shows that Mister Señor Love Daddy is actually sitting in a storefront window. The control booth looks directly out onto the street. This is WE LOVE RADIO, a modest station with a loyal following, right in the heart of the neighborhood. The OPENING SHOT will be a TRICK SHOT—the CAMERA PULLING BACK through the storefront window.

MISTER SEÑOR LOVE DADDY

Here I am. Am I here? Y'know it.
It ya know. This is Mister Señor
Love Daddy. I'se
play only da platters dat matter,
da matters dat platter and that's
the truth, Ruth.

He hits the cart machine and we hear a station jingle.

VO

L-O-V-E RADIO.

MISTER SEÑOR LOVE DADDY

Doing da ying and yang da flip and
flop da hippy and hoppy
(he yodels)
Yo da lay he hoo. I have today's
forecast.
(he screams)
HOT!

He laughs like a madman.

INT: DA MAYOR'S BEDROOM—DAY

An old, grizzled man stirs in the bed, his sheets are soaked with sweat. He flings them off his wet body.

DA MAYOR

Damn, it's hot.

INT: JADE'S APARTMENT—DAY

CAMERA MOVES IN ON a young man sitting at the edge of a sofa bed.

CLOSE UP—HIS SMALL HANDS

WE SEE him counting his money. This isn't any ordinary counting of money, he's straightening out all the corners of the bills, arranging them so the bills—actually the “dead presidents”—are facing the same way. This is MOOKIE. Once he's finished with that task, counting his money, he sneaks into his sister's bedroom.

INT: JADE'S BEDROOM—DAY

CLOSE UP—JADE

JADE, Mookie's sister, is fast asleep. Mookie's fingers ENTER THE FRAME and start to play with her lips. Jade pushes his hands away. Mookie waits several beats and he continues. Jade wakes up—mad.

JADE

Don't you have enough sense not to bother people when they're sleeping?

MOOKIE

Wake up!

JADE

Wake up? Saturday is the lone day I get to sleep late.

MOOKIE

It's gonna be hot today.

JADE

Good! Leave me alone when I'm sleeping. I'm gonna get a lock on my door, to keep ya ass outta here.

MOOKIE

Don't ya love ya brother Mookie anymore? I loves ya, Jade.

JADE

Do me a favor. Go to work.

MOOKIE

Later. Gotta get paid.

He plants a big fat juicy on his sister's forehead.

EXT: SAL'S FAMOUS PIZZERIA—DAY

A 1975 El Dorado pulls up in front of the neighborhood pizzeria—Sal's Famous Pizzeria.

From out of the car comes the owner, SAL, a slightly overweight man in his early fifties, and his two sons, PINO, 22, and VITO, 20. It's time for them to go to work at Sal's Famous Pizzeria in the heart of Black Brooklyn. Sal's sits on the corner of The Block. The Block being where this film on the hottest day of the summer takes place.

Pino kicks a beer can in his path into the gutter.

Handout 4: Working in Teams

You are a member of a Set Design Team assigned to create several different set designs for a movie version of the book you are reading. For each setting, your team will consider the following questions:

- What setting information does the story include that we need to include in our set designs?
- What details didn't the writer include that we need to fill in?
- What details can we provide using our own experiences, sense memories, and imaginations? Where else could we go for information?

For every task in the design development process, each team member will have a role to play. These roles may change slightly with different tasks. It is the team's responsibility to make sure that each member makes a productive contribution to the team's efforts.

Below are some possible roles:

1. *Reader*—reads relevant passages or instructions aloud to the team.
2. *Scribe*—records notes from team discussions and responses to questions for the Set Design Team Folder.
3. *Facilitator*—guides team discussions, and ensures that all team members understand the tasks and have an opportunity to participate.
4. *Reporter*—shares the team's findings and decisions in class discussions.
5. *Linguist*—keeps a dictionary handy for looking up and recording definitions of new vocabulary from the story.
6. *Illustrator*—draws pictures or diagrams presenting important information or ideas. For example, the illustrator could sketch setting features or properties, or draw simple maps of the setting location.

Depending on the number of people on your team, you may wish to double up on certain roles or leave others out.

Handout 5: Elements of Set Design

1. **Interior or Exterior.** Is the setting inside (interior) or outside (exterior)? If exterior, what is the role of nature in establishing mood, characterization, or theme?
2. **Realistic or Fantasy.** Is the setting in a realistic style, or is it imagined or dream-like? If realistic, does it represent a specific historical period or architectural style?
3. **Studio Set or Real-Life Location.** Could the movie be filmed in an actual location, or do you think parts would need to be built because they don't exist in the real world (for example, for a science fiction setting in the future)? If you choose a location, how does that location help establish or develop the story?
4. **Set in Time or Timeless.** Does the setting represent a specific date or time, or does it seem timeless? What details will you include to establish the date or time, or the feeling of timelessness?
5. **Cultural and/or Economic Details.** What cultural and/or economic background does your setting represent? What details will you include to establish the cultural and/or economic background of your characters?
6. **Structures and Properties Necessary to the Action.** What objects, furnishings, structures, etc. must you include in your set in order for the story's action to take place there?
7. **Mood.** What overall mood or atmosphere do you want your set to establish? What details will you use to convey that mood or atmosphere?
8. **Color, Texture, or Sound.** What colors, textures, or sounds will dominate the set in order to support this mood? Could you imagine a musical soundtrack for this setting? What would it sound like?

Handout 6: Choosing Settings

Refer to your Setting Logs to list below *all* of the settings for which you have recorded information (using the back of the handout if necessary):

Use the following questions to help you choose the settings from your list that your team will develop into set designs:

- Is there enough information to develop this scene into a detailed set description?
- Has the author provided strong sensory details?
- Can our team fill any gaps in setting detail through our own experiences, sense memories, imaginations, or research?
- How is this setting important to the story?
- Why would this setting be interesting to film?

Remember, each team member will develop a set design, so choose the same number of settings as there are team members.

List the settings you have chosen below:

Handout 7: The Design Presentation

You're now ready to write your movie set description and prepare your design presentation!

Writing the Set Description

Step 1. Assign scenes for set descriptions.

Decide which set description each member will write, from those you selected on Handout 6: Choosing Settings. Decide if all of your settings will share certain characteristics, such as color scheme.

- In what ways will the settings be related, and in what ways will each be distinct?

Step 2. Gather team information for each setting.

With your teams, complete **Handout 8: Setting Detail Round-Up** for each setting. By the end of this information-sharing session, you should have done two things:

- Received all Setting Log details developed by your team for your setting
- Shared all relevant information from your Setting Log with your team members

Step 3. Create a rough sketch of your set.

Before beginning to write, sketch and label your set, including all the details and elements you decided on as a team. Use the following sources:

- Your Setting Log
- Your Set Design Team Folder
- **Handout 8: Setting Detail Round-Up**

As you begin your sketch, imagine that you are behind a camera:

- What about the setting would you notice first?
- What other details would then come into focus?
- What colors, shapes, or patterns would you notice?

This sketch is a working “map” of your set description. Make sure that you have included everything, including properties, necessary to tell the story in your scene.

Step 4. Write your draft description.

Using your sketch as a guide, write a one- to two-page set description. Remember to use precise, descriptive language. Organize your description in one of the ways that you saw settings presented in the movie clip or script:

- Start with the wide camera shot that gives you a “big picture” view of the entire setting, then move inward to focus on close-up details.
- Start with a close-up detail shot, then move outward to show the entire setting in a wider view.

Step 5. Have your description peer-reviewed.

Exchange your set description with another team member, and answer the following questions about your partner's description:

- Which details establish the significant aspects of time for the story? Are any missing? If so, which ones?
- Which details establish the significant aspects of place? Are any missing? If so, which ones?
- Which properties are presented? Are any missing? If so, which ones?
- Which details relate to each of the five senses: sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste? What suggestions do you have for other sensory details?
- How is the description organized? Is information clear? Any suggestions for improvement?
- How does the setting help to establish or develop the story?

Step 6. Revise your set description.

Revise your set description based on your reviewer's comments.

Preparing Your Presentation

You and your teammates will present your set designs together. You are responsible for three things related to your own setting:

- A written set description
- One or two visuals that support the design ideas in your set description
- A short talk summarizing the importance of your setting to the story

Step 1. Decide how you will present your set description.

You may read your set description aloud or describe it to the class. Whichever you choose, practice your delivery with your team members. Be sure to speak clearly and to cover all the information in your description.

Step 2. Identify visuals to support your design ideas.

Choose one or two visuals (or more) that best illustrate your design ideas. These can include your sketch or anything from your team's inspiration pages. Prepare to display your visuals and explain how each fits into your design. For example, you might show a picture of a storefront and explain that it would be a model for a store in a street scene.

You might want to create a poster that includes both a written set description and visuals.

Step 3. Summarize the importance of your setting to the story.

Using information from your Setting Log, team discussions, and peer review notes, identify at least four ways that your setting helps establish or develop the story:

- How does the setting help to introduce the action of the story?
- How does the setting help to introduce characters?
- How does the setting establish mood or general feeling, and what is that feeling?

For example, storm clouds could show that action will take place in bad weather, toys on a front porch could show a character's age, or colorful flowers could set a cheerful mood.

Share ideas with team members and solicit their ideas. Record on index cards the ways that your setting establishes or develops the story. Be specific in explaining how each example affects character, action, mood, or other story elements.

Step 4. Organize your team's presentation.

Meet in your team to decide the order that you'll each present and how you'll coordinate the overall presentation. Here are some ideas:

- Team members present scenes in order of appearance in the book or movie.
- Each member presents his or her written set description and summary, then the whole team presents the visuals together.
- Each team member presents his or her set description and visuals. The team then holds a Q&A, in which team members present their summaries by answering questions from their teammates about how their settings relate to the story.
- Teams create slide shows to present each setting's visuals, and display bullet points during each member's summary presentation.

Step 5. Rehearse.

Rehearse your portion of the presentation with your team, and provide feedback to other team members. Make sure that each presentation is complete (containing all three components that presenters are responsible for) and that presenters are clear and engaging. Suggest to team members ways to make presentations more interesting or entertaining.

Step 6. Ready, set, pitch!

When writers or designers present their ideas to a film director, it's known as a *pitch*. You're now ready to pitch your set designs to the class.

Handout 8: Setting Detail Round-Up

Imagine a movie version of your story that relies entirely on visual settings and sounds:

- What if the story had to be told entirely without dialogue—characters silently moving amidst a backdrop of sights and sounds? What role would the setting play?
- How would you design a set to provide as much information about the story as possible?

Make this your challenge as you complete the following steps with your team:

1. Fill in the Set Design Table below with details from your team's Setting Logs, including story details and inspiration page ideas, and your Set Design Team Folder. (Remember, you can use details from any scenes in the book, as long as they have similar settings to the one you chose for your set description.)
2. Refer to **Handout 5: Elements of Set Design** to make sure that you've covered all the elements a set designer needs to consider.
3. Look over your Set Design Table for any important details that might be missing. For example, do you know the time of day but not the weather, the style of the houses but not their color? Brainstorm with your team to fill in any details appropriate to your setting, given the information the author has provided.

Set Design Table

Setting:	Pages:	
	Details from Setting Log and Set Design Team Folder	Details from Team Brainstorm
Time (for example, time of day, season, day of the week, date)		
Place (for example, country, region, city, address, weather, geography, architecture, inside, outside)		

Sensory Details		
Sight		
Smell		
Sound		
Taste		
Touch		