

Activity 1A: Setting the Stage



Sequence

1A.1: *Introducing the Unit*

Students are introduced to the elements of setting by viewing a video clip from the opening of a film. They preview the unit and unit project—developing set designs for the movie version of a book they will read—and look over the Assessment Checklist.

(Optional) 1A.2: *Exploring Sense Details*

Students explore their own sense memories, using objects from home or the classroom that appeal to different senses. They participate in a “write around” focusing on the sensory details suggested by these objects.

Understandings

- Setting comprises the time, place, and circumstances from which a story arises.
- Every story has a setting that establishes and helps shape the action.
- Setting includes sensory details that appeal to sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste, as well as time of day, year, and historical period.



Materials Needed

- Video clip of the opening shot of a movie (see *Advance Preparation*)
- **Handout 1: Unit Overview**
- **Assessment Checklist: Presenting Set Design**
- (Optional) Items that suggest senses other than sight (for example, a package of ground coffee for smell, a packet of sugar for taste, a bell for sound, a cotton ball for touch)

1A.1: Introducing the Unit

1. Have students analyze the setting of a movie clip.

Tell students that they are beginning a unit on *setting*, an important element in telling stories in any medium—movies, books, TV, or video games. For their unit projects, they will form Set Design Teams to create settings for a movie version of a literary work.

Ask students to imagine that they are moviegoers watching the movie for the first time. Show the video clip and ask students to be prepared to answer the following questions:

- *Where* does the story take place? How do you know?
- *When* does the story take place? How do you know?

If students need to watch a second time to answer the questions, play the clip again.

2. Discuss students' impressions of setting.

Solicit setting details from students by asking questions such as the following:

- *Where* does the story take place? What details tell you that? What else do you know about the location of the story?
- *When* does the story take place? What details give you that information? What else do you know about the *time* of the story?
- What overall *feeling* do you have when watching the movie opening? Are you excited, amused, afraid, or do you feel some other emotion?

As students respond, encourage them to refer to the specific parts of the clip that support their answers.

Teacher's Notes: Setting Analysis for *Stand and Deliver*

Where does the story take place?

The story takes place in a school in East Los Angeles. The opening shows a view of a bridge and highways leading into neighborhoods that would be unmistakable to anyone who knows the area.

When does the story take place?

The story takes place in the late 20th century. The clothing, cars, and music are clues to the exact time period. The story begins in the morning, which we know because school is just starting.

What overall feeling do you have when watching the movie opening?

The crowded nature of the school's offices and hallways, loud voices, and presence of a metal detector all contribute to a feeling of chaos and underlying tension.

Discuss aspects of setting that the filmmaker does not reveal—the day of the week or the exact geographical location of the opening scene, for example.

Explain that students might learn more about where and when a story takes place in later scenes of a movie, or they might not. There might be aspects of setting that the filmmaker never reveals. Each filmmaker must decide which aspects of setting are important in telling a particular story. Tell students that this will be their job as they create set designs for a movie version of a story they will read.

3. Preview the unit and introduce the unit project.

Distribute **Handout 1: Unit Overview**. Have students read the handout, and answer any questions they might have. Point out the vocabulary list. Tell students that they can refer to this list throughout the unit whenever they encounter unfamiliar terms.

4. Familiarize students with assessment criteria.

Distribute **Assessment Checklist: Presenting Set Design**. Have students review the assessment criteria. Tell them that these are the criteria on which their unit projects will be assessed, and that they will use these criteria to assess their work as well.



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 Description

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%		

