SETTING

Setting includes several closely related aspects of a work of fiction. First setting is the physical, sensuous world of the work. Second, it’s the **period** in which the action of the work takes place. And third, it’s the **social environment** of the characters: the **manners, customs, and moral values** that govern the characters’ society. A fourth aspect – **atmosphere** – is largely, but not entirely, an effect of setting. You should get the details of the physical setting clear in your mind.

**Issues to consider** when thinking about the **setting** of a novel:

1. Place:

* Where does the action take place? On what planet, in what country or locale?
* What sensuous qualities does the author give to the setting? That is, what does it look like, sound like, smell like, feel like?
* Do you receive a dominant impression about the setting? What is the impression, and what caused it?
* In some works of fiction, you may need to consider how the geographical location might be of particular importance?

Once you established these elements of setting, what **relationship** does the setting have to **characterization** and theme?

* In what ways does the physical or external setting correspond to or contrast with the psychological or internal landscape?

1. Time:

* First, at what period in **history** does the action take place? *Many stories occur during historical events that affect the characters and themes in important ways.*
* Second, **how** long does it take for the action to occur? How does the author use the passage of time as a thematic and structuring device?
* Third, how is the passage of time perceived? *Time may seem to move very slowly or very quickly, depending on a character’s state of mind. Thus, our recognition of a character’s perception of time helps us understand the character’s internal conflicts and attitudes.*

1. Social Environment:

* What is the social environment portrayed in the work – the manners, customs, mores, rituals, and codes of conduct of a society?
* What does the author seem to think of the social environment? (Approving? Ambivalent? Disapproving?)
* How does the social environment affect the characters?

1. Atmosphere:

* …refers to the emotional reaction that we had and – usually – the characters have to the setting of the work. Sometimes the atmosphere is difficult to define, but it is often found or felt in the sensuous quality of the setting.
* Mark sections that contribute to atmosphere. Underline key words and phrases
* List the traits of the atmosphere.