

# Emergency essay sample

Literature, Russian Literature



“Emergency” is set in the emergency department of a hospital. In this interesting and unique tale, readers are introduced to an unreliable narrator and his equally questionable friend. Both in reality and as a result of drug induced hallucination, Johnson exploits the use of place in both setting up and accentuating the themes of the story.

The narrator has been working in the hospital as a clerk for the last few weeks. He had his friend, Georgie, abuse drugs, and Georgie takes them illegally from the medical supplies in the hospital. The nature of the story lends itself to being set in a hospital as, clearly, this makes the drug use both easier to fashion and more dire as the stoned men are caring for sick and vulnerable people. The concept of an orderly and a clerk being under the influence of drugs while at work in a hospital setting is both unsettling and dark. Although at times amusing, this is a dire situation. The same could be said about the emergency department of a hospital; both unpredictable and surreal, the place literally holds life and death within its grasp.

Through the setting of the emergency department of the hospital, the story verges on the surreal. As the narrator is on drugs it is possible that his account of events is unreliable. It is also feasible that many of the happenings are part of a drug fuelled trip. Johnson uses the place of the emergency department as an appropriate backdrop for the various characters and incidents that he introduces to his readers. The constantly changing environment of his kind of hospital ward serves to accentuate the randomness experienced by the characters throughout the story.

Based on the information in the story itself, it is set in the summer. However, conversation between the two friends moved into winter during the

narrative. Clearly, here is a difference between the reality of the situation and the narrator's hallucination of being close to nature. Moving between such contrasting seasons demonstrates the state of mind of the narrator. If something as fundamental and scientific as the seasons can be interpreted as fluid, it is possible that everything in the story is equally so. In this respect, the author has used setting and place to demonstrate the interior and exterior world of the unreliable narrator.

The story is based upon two hospital staff members which experiment illegally with the drugs used by medical professionals. The nature of this concept allows the author to use place to his advantage in all ways. Firstly, the hospital is an ever changing, unique environment and therefore lends itself to random happenings, and events that could seem surreal even to someone who was not under the influence of drugs. Secondly, however, the hallucinations experienced by the narrator mean that the place can be as fluid as his state of mind.

Johnson has both well-chosen and well-developed the sense of place in this story. The fluid and random nature of an emergency department perfectly reflects the state of mind and the experiences of the narrator. Both on a literal level and a metaphorical one, the hospital setting provides a backdrop for the main themes of the story.

### **“ In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried”**

“ In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried” is an interesting, accessible, and terse perspective of complicated responses to the deaths of close friends. The author uses the setting of the hospital, contrasted with mentions of the wider world, to highlight the physical and emotional situation of the

characters.

The use of the word Cemetery in the title instantly conjures up images for the reader, and provides immediate context to the theme of the story. Cemeteries are powerful places which affect most people in some way. Hempel's use of irony and humour within the friends' conversations highlights the graveness of the circumstances surrounding them. The hospital setting provides both a literal place for the two friends to converse and reflects the nature of their situation. The dying girl is in hospital and is surrounded by healthcare professionals who she appears to have befriended. A hospital is an interesting setting for such relationships as, to the terminally ill person, the ward is their whole world and the people in it take on the importance of family. The narrator is an outsider to her friend's world, especially as a long time has passed since her last visit. This is shown both in dialogue between the two characters and in the events unfolding around them.

Furthermore, through the hospital setting, the author demonstrates the different reactions to a person who is dying. Regarding the hospital staff, the nurse and the doctor in the story both seem close to the dying girl. This makes the narrator feel that she is not so close to her friend as they are. However, the hospital staff, presumably, have homes and families of their own. They are at the hospital to work and to be paid; they are not there to make friends. Despite appearances, medical professionals are encouraged to keep an emotional distance from their patients. In this story, the author shows a closeness between the patient and the staff that is, arguably, artificial.

Littered throughout the story are many references to different places in the United States; some examples are Hollywood, New York, Kansas and Hawaii. The mentions of places so widely apart, in a geographical sense, serves to accentuate the confines of the hospital for the narrator and her sick friend. On a basic level, the friend will never travel to all of these places, nor will their friendship have the chance to grow much more in the future. In the same way that the hospital has become the dying girl's world, the real world is now beyond her reach. Hempel seems to have intentionally referenced the wider world to provide a contrast with the world of the characters in the story, at least at that minute.

This story is thought provoking and, at times, dark. Place is a crucial part of this narrative. The author uses the setting to highlight and extend her desired themes. The use of the hospital as the main setting serves as both a literal and metaphorical place for the characters to reside during the story. References to far off places contrasts with and accentuates the claustrophobia of the hospital and of the world of the dying.