

Purpose of a setting in literature

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What is the purpose of a setting in Literature? The setting is an important component to a story. The tone and mood is established through the setting and it enhances the plot and characters (Hopkins). Authors strategically use the setting to draw the reader in and, through descriptive language, allows the reader to imagine the place and time the story is taking place. The authors of Rip Van Winkle, Road Not Taken, and Araby all use descriptive language to convey a setting which allows the reader to tap into their imagination.

First, Washington Irving cadence writing and descriptive language enables reader's mind to drift off and imagine the serene and pure setting in Rip Van Winkle. The story takes place in an unspecified village in the Catskill Mountains of New York around the 1700s. This story begins in a small village at the foothills of these mountains where the kind and submissive Rip Van Winkle lived. Irving's description, " whose shingle roofs gleam among the trees, just where the blue tints of the upland melt away into the fresh green of the nearer landscape. It is a little village of great antiquity, having been founded by some of the Dutch colonists" (Irving), paints a beautiful picture of the small old-fashioned Dutch style village which allows the reader to tap into their imagination and envision themselves there.

Rip Van Winkle was well liked by all of the town folk, especially children, because he would tell them stories, make them toys, and play with them. The only person who gave him a hard time was his wife who would take advantage of his kindness and constantly nagged him about their farm which was the least profitable and unattractive farm in the area, " To tell the

precise truth, was sadly time-worn and weather beaten” (Irving). Rip Van Winkle would head into the woods to find solitude from his farm and wife.

Irving continues to use descriptive language in order for the readers to imagine a place in the mountains where someone can rest for twenty years. Van Winkle heads into the woods with his gun in his hand and his dog Wolf to go squirrel shooting. When he becomes tired he takes a rest, “ late in the afternoon, on a green knoll, covered with mountain herbage, that crowned the brow of a precipice. From an opening between the trees he could overlook all the lower country for many a mile of rich woodland. He saw at a distance the lordly Hudson, far, far below him, moving on its silent but majestic course, the reflection of a purple cloud, or the sail of a lagging bark, here and there sleeping on its glassy bosom, and at last losing itself in the blue highlands.” (Irving)

When Rip Van Winkle wakes up from his nap the reader learns that the setting has changed. The trail back to the village grew in and he had to scramble his way back to the village. Upon arrival “ He met a number of people, but none whom he knew”. He noticed the towns people dressed differently and that his beard grew a foot long. This change in the setting demonstrates to the reader that a great deal of time had passed. Irving’s use of descriptive language of the mountains gave the readers a peaceful feeling which Robert Frost also captures in his poem *The Road Not Taken*.

Secondly, nature sets the scene in the poem *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost. Frost creatively uses the setting as a metaphor for life, therefore, placing the setting as the speaker’s mind. He tells us, literally, the forest is

yellow, so it can be assumed that it is sometime in early autumn. He describes the two paths the traveler can take both of which are of uncertainty. Metaphorically speaking, in Frost's mind, he sees two options, represented by roads, and he must choose one. The author is faced with a dilemma because he is unsure where each road or option will take him and wants to make the right choice, " And be one traveler, long I stood" (Frost 1026). In the conclusion of the poem, " I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." (Frost 1027). The setting of this poem, both literally and metaphorically, provides readers with a relatable experience just like James Joyce describes in *Araby* of childhood days.

Lastly, the setting of *Araby* by James Joyce takes place in Dublin, Ireland on North Richmond Street which is quiet and " blind" (Joyce 614) and the house was musty and cluttered with papers from the former tenant. The narrator is at the age when he is about to transition out of childhood and into adolescence. The neighborhood setting represents childhood in which Joyce describes using sensory detail, " When the short days of winter came dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes..." (Joyce 615). This setting of the neighborhood creates a nostalgic feeling for the readers bringing back memories of their neighborhood growing up. The young boy has a fascination with his friend's sister and he hopes to win her heart by going to a bazaar and bringing her

back a present. The setting moves to a bazaar across town, in which the narrator arrives late because of his uncle, to find that, “ Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness.” (Joyce 618). The story ends with things not turning out the way the narrator wanted things to turn out, both with the relationship and the Araby.

In conclusion, the setting of a story “ tells the time, place, and duration of a story and is told using techniques like imagery. Authors use descriptive language and imagery in order to allow the reader to envision vivid images in their head. The authors of Rip Van Winkle, The Road Not Taken, and Araby all used this technique to take the readers to another place and imagine they were right there with the characters in the story. From the Catskill Mountains, to a forest on a beautiful autumn day, to the childhood neighborhood these stories and poem brought the reader to wondrous destinations without ever leaving the comforts of home because of the power of a setting in a story.