

Setting and Mood

Setting: the time and place a story takes place

Mood: the feeling created in the reader

Sample Paragraphs on Setting and Mood

The park was abandoned when she saw it. So abandoned that she could hear her head pound, like little hands clamoring to escape prison. On a nearby bench, she saw an afternoon paper—the crossword halfway complete—and she sat next to it, grateful for its lifeless company. The wind blew and sent the leaves swirling and brushing up against her boney, exposed ankles. She tightened the scarf around her neck and pulled it up so that her mouth was covered, looked at her watch, and waited. Waited. Waited. It was evening when she finally saw him through the harsh darkness.



The park was abandoned when she saw it. As the late afternoon sun warmed her back, she breathed in deeply through her nostrils, revitalized by the fresh surge of oxygen. The years of musty cellars and rented out back rooms had constricted her lungs and her life. But this—this was different. As the trees blew in the wind, swaying to some kind of silent spiritual, their branches waved at her, welcoming her to their open space. She sat down on a nearby bench, took in another deep breath, and laughed when the dry, dancing leaves tickled her ankles. She laughed until tears of delight trickled down her prematurely-aged cheeks, and for the first time in her life, she was happy.

Questions to think about:

1. What is the difference between the first and second paragraphs?
 - a. Mood/feeling for Paragraph 1: _____
 - b. Mood/feeling for Paragraph 2: _____
2. What words or phrases in particular lead you to your answer for #1? Underline them.
3. What words or phrases in particular lead you to your answer for #2? Underline them.
4. In 10 words or less, describe how a pattern in word choice impacts the mood.

REMEMBER: How you choose to describe your setting will affect the way your reader feels about your piece. Do you want the reader to feel fear or tension? Or do you want them to feel warm and happy? Determine the mood you want to create before you take on the task of describing your setting.

PRACTICE: Start with this scene: “The waves crashed across the sand, and I knew....” Write the beginning paragraphs of two short stories. Change the mood of each story as you open the story, focusing on setting.