



Day 3: Exploration—Your Favorite Street

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Today's lesson was a high-level view of different ways to make setting feel like an important character in your story. We applied several characterization techniques to setting to see how characters can be of a place, not just from a place. In this way, it's clear that setting is something woven into the fabric of who the characters are and the way they move through the world.

That sounds great, you may be thinking, but how do I write this into my story? Agent/author Donald Maass echoes your sentiment. He writes:

In great fiction, the setting lives from the very first pages. Such places not only *feel* extremely real, they are dynamic. They change. They affect the characters in the story. They become metaphors, possibly even actors in the drama.

Powerfully portrayed settings seem to have a life of their own, but how is that effect achieved? Make your setting a character is a common piece of advice given to fiction writers, yet beyond invoking all five senses when describing the scenery, there's not a lot of info out there about exactly how to do it.

Each tip in today's lesson had an underlying theme of characterization and emotions. All of the story examples highlighted how the location influenced the character's emotions, and vice versa. "In other words," Donald Maass writes, "it is the combination of setting details and the emotions attached to them that, together, make a place a living thing. Setting comes alive partly in its details and partly in the way that the story's characters experience it."

This exploration will help you notice the influence a place has on your characters' emotions. Let's start with you.

Your Favorite Street

Do you have a favorite street in your city? Maybe it's the street where you live or work. Maybe it's the street where you had your first kiss. Maybe it's the street with the loveliest buildings. Or it's possible that your favorite street isn't a street at all but a dirt road leading to a cabin in the woods.

Exploration

Now it's your turn! Go to your favorite street and spend some time there. Try to find a spot where you can sit uninterrupted for fifteen minutes or so. (If the weather is not cooperating, imagine your favorite street in your mind's eye or use the street outside your home or office.) Bring your notebook and give yourself over to freewriting. Use the following questions as a jumping off point, but let your thoughts take you where they want you to go.

1. Record some of the general points, such as time of day, day of the week, weather. Is the street mostly homes, businesses, or mixed? Is there hustle and bustle, or is it quiet? How long is the street? Are there any cars/bicycles/walkers? Any wildlife? Trees? Ponds? What stands out to you? Is there a particular building or tree that captures your attention? What are your senses other than sight telling you?
2. Time to dig a bit deeper. Really consider these questions:
 - What first attracted you to this street?
 - What are some emotions that bubble to the surface? Have your feelings changed over time?
 - What, if anything, has changed since you first discovered this street? How do you feel about the march of progress (whatever that looks like for your street)?

If you're artistically inclined, map the street on a piece of paper. Sketch the buildings, trees, whatever catches your interest. Or, if you're like me and do not have the ability to draw, you can take a few photos of your street for reference later.

Deeper Dive

Now let's go to your WIP. Everything in today's lesson and exploration is designed to bring home the realization that setting is personal (as we discussed yesterday).

First, describe the place your main characters inhabit. Select the overarching location that exerts the most influence on your characters: an ER doctor who spends her days (and nights) in a hospital or the low country Carolinas or the Appalachian Trail. If your story has multiple main locations, you can focus on one for this exploration and come back to the other locations later.

Next, from your main character's perspective, answer the following questions as they apply to your story (adapted from a list by author Dave Hood):

- What is one overriding, remarkable detail the surroundings?
- What is common to see in this place? What is uncommon?
- What is allowed? What is forbidden?
- What is your character's relationship to this place? Why?
- Where does your main character stand in relationship to others (on cultural, political, geographical, and economical levels)?
- How does their position affect his or her evolution and journey throughout the story?
- Does his or her emotional state change in relationship to the place?

As you write your story, infuse these emotions into the narrative through what your character notices, the word choice and types of sensory images.

Forum

You are invited to head over to the [Forum](#) link in the classroom to post your explorations (and artwork/photos too!), get feedback, and ask questions. See you there!