

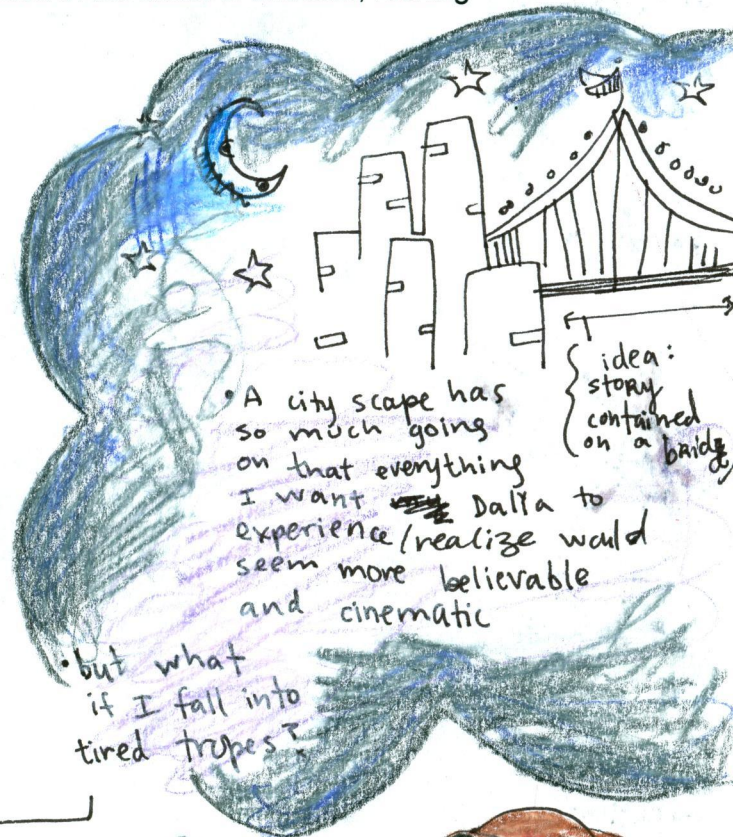
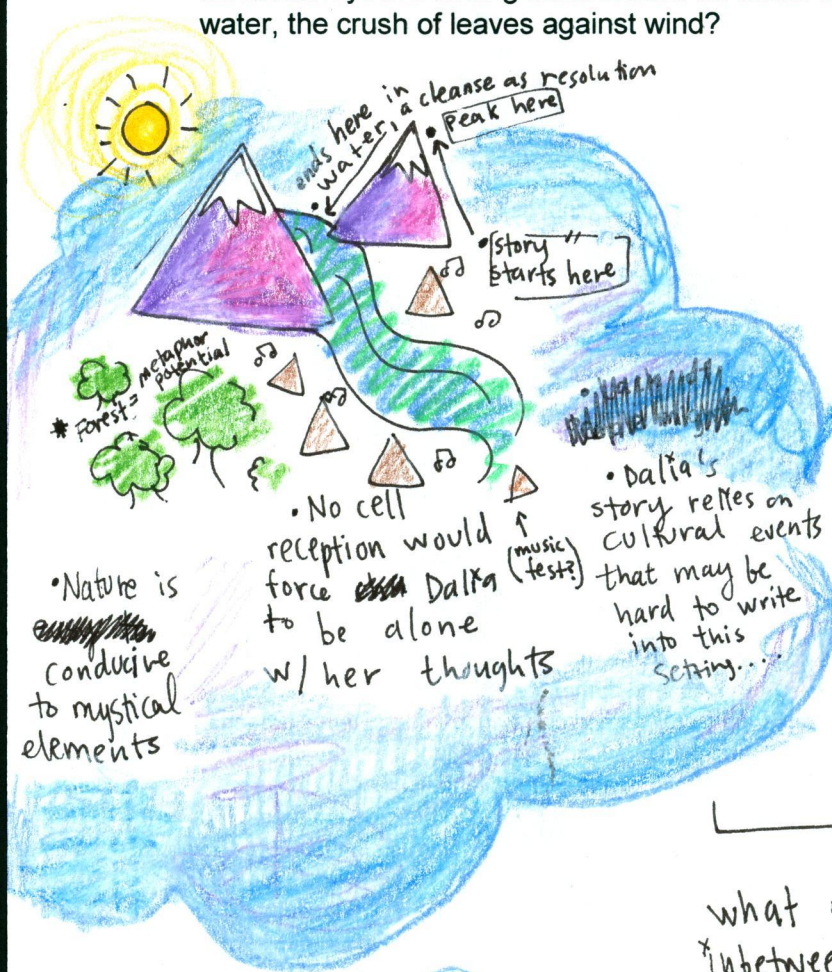


BUILDING a STORY

by jess rizkallah

PART TWO:
LOCATION,
LOCATION,
LOCATION!!!

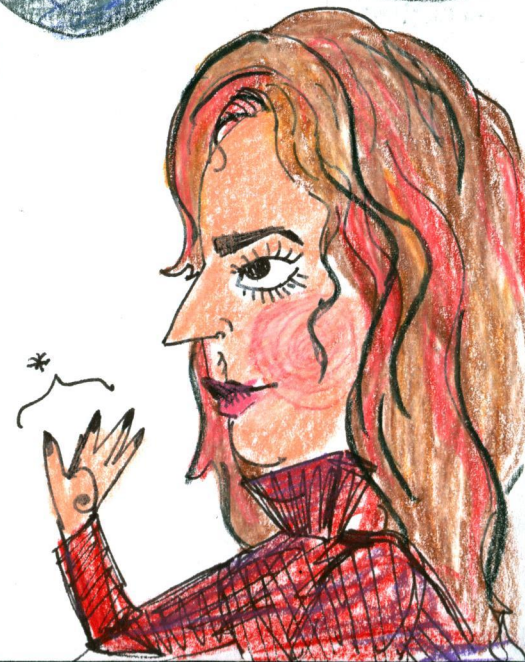
Do you have a setting in mind? If so, feel free to skip this exercise. If you're trying to decide between a few options, try making a pro / con list for each setting, or consider the following questions: what of the geography would serve the conflict, rising action, and resolution of the story best? What would provide obstacles to your characters that would contribute to the story? What obstacles may detract or get in your own way as the writer? Which background characters do you need to have interacting with your protagonist? Where can this supporting cast be found? The same goes for stimuli: what underlying soundtrack should your character have that contributes to their inner thoughts? Would car horns, feet on concrete, chattering students, the hissing of food carts, etc. be best for the momentum of your character's thoughts? Or would the conclusion you're writing them toward be better navigated in the midst of birdcalls, rushing water, the crush of leaves against wind?



what is the
*inbetween & how
do I build that?*

*=(hands are
v. hard 2
draw I'm
afraid to
do anything
else. let's pretend
she's waving
at my ideas)

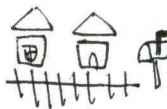
Where's Dalia going to
CONFLICT & DEVELOP as
a CHARACTER ???



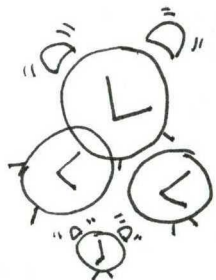


The Fundamental Elements of Setting (via writer's digest)

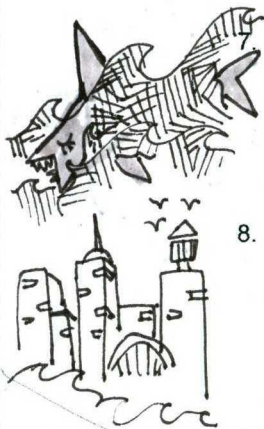
Here is a list of the specific elements that setting encompasses:



1. **Locale.** This relates to broad categories such as a country, state, region, city, and town, as well as to more specific locales, such as a neighborhood, street, house or school. Other locales can include shorelines, islands, farms, rural areas, etc.
2. **Time of year.** The time of year is richly evocative and influential in fiction. Time of year includes the seasons, but also encompasses holidays, such as Hanukkah, Christmas, New Year's Eve, and Halloween. Significant dates can also be used, such as the anniversary of a death of a character or real person, or the anniversary of a battle, such as the attack on Pearl Harbor.
3. **Time of day.** Scenes need to play out during various times or periods during a day or night, such as dawn or dusk. Readers have clear associations with different periods of the day, making an easy way to create a visual orientation in a scene.
4. **Elapsed time.** The minutes, hours, days, weeks, and months a story encompasses must be somehow accounted for or the reader will feel confused and the story will suffer from a lack of authenticity. While scenes unfold moment by moment, there is also time to account for between scenes, when a flashback is inserted, and when a character travels a long distance.
5. **Mood and atmosphere.** Characters and events are influenced by weather, temperature, lighting, and other tangible factors, which in turn influence the emotional timbre, mood, and atmosphere of a scene.
6. **Climate.** Climate is linked to the geography and topography of a place, and, as in our real world, can influence events and people. Ocean currents, prevailing winds and air masses, latitude, altitude, mountains, land masses, and large bodies of water all influence climate. It's especially important when you write about a real setting to understand climatic influences. Harsh climates can make for grim lives, while tropical climates can create more carefree lifestyles.



Geography. This refers to specific aspects of water, landforms, ecosystems, and topography in your setting. Geography also includes climate, soil, plants, trees, rocks and minerals, and soils. Geography can create obvious influences in a story like a mountain a character must climb, a swift-running river he must cross, or a boreal forest he must traverse to reach safety. No matter where a story is set, whether it's a mountain village in the Swiss Alps or an opulent resort on the Florida coast, the natural world with all its geographic variations and influences must permeate the story.



8. **Man-made geography.** There are few corners of the planet that have not been influenced by the hand of humankind. It is in our man-made influences that our creativity and the destructiveness of civilization can be seen. Readers want visual evidence in a story world, and man-made geography is easily included to provide it. With this in mind, make certain that your stories contain proof of the many footprints that people have left in its setting. Use the influences of humankind on geography to lend authenticity to stories set in a real or famous locale. These landmarks include dams, bridges, ports, towns and cities, monuments, burial grounds, cemeteries, and famous buildings. Consider too the influences of mankind using the land, and the effects of mines, deforestation, agriculture, irrigation, vineyards, cattle grazing, and coffee plantations.
9. **Eras of historical importance.** Important events, wars, or historical periods linked to the plot and theme might include the Civil war, World War II, medieval times, the Bubonic Plague, the gold rush in the 1800s, or the era of slavery in the South.
10. **Social/political/cultural environment.** Cultural, political, and social influences can range widely and affect characters in many ways. The social era of a story often influences characters' values, social and family roles, and sensibilities.
11. **Population.** Some places are densely populated, such as Hong Kong, while others are lonely places with only a few hardy souls. Your stories need a specific, yet varied population that accurately reflects the place.
12. **Ancestral influences.** In many regions of the United States, the ancestral influences of European countries such as Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Poland are prominent. The cities and bayous of Louisiana are populated with distinctive groups influenced by their Native American, French-Canadian, and African American forebears. Ancestral influences can be depicted in cuisine, dialogue, values, attitudes, and general outlook.

population:



(or colonial)



Poet, author of
Sharks in the Rivers
& Bright Dead Things



Ada Limón

@adalimon

Follow

I think it's good to just receive the world
sometimes and forget about output.

7:17 AM - 3 Feb 2018

25 Retweets 124 Likes



5

25

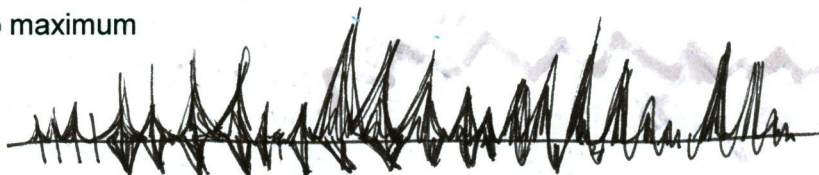
124

FIELD TRIP

Give yourself thirty minutes to an hour (or longer if you want) at any location in the city. Consider choosing a location that matches or alludes to the setting you have chosen, or a scene you have in mind. Find a place you'll be undisturbed (or put on some headphones) Concentrate on every detail of the arrangement of the space. Describe everything objectively. How do the pieces of the space interact with each other, or direct visitors around the space? How are the other visitors using the space? What are they wearing? What are they leaning against? What is their body language? What colors, scents, sounds are around you? What are the textures against your eyes? Against your palms? How is light working in this space? How does light transform this space as time passes?

One page minimum, no maximum

EAVESDROPPING



You can do this in the same location as your fieldtrip, or somewhere else with people that might be more interesting to you. Record snippets of conversations you hear. Direct quotes. Make note of anything you think may be useful for later (tone of voice, body language, behavior). Listen for every day conversations, listen for out of the ordinary conversations, listen for transactional conversations. Collect at least ten bullet points. Then translate each quote / interaction into the context of the setting you have in mind for your story. How might the slang / dialect of your setting alter the speech within the sentence, or even the interaction itself (example: new yorkers generally talk fast, rushed, short – how might someone from the midwest or the south or in another country say this? Would they be more patient? More colloquial? Would they use more words? Less? Would the interaction have gone differently?)



RESEARCH / WRITING HISTORY:

If you've chosen a real place, do this research. Even if you're writing from inside one room that is part of a larger geographical setting, this information may inform the thoughts, conversation, social cues, voices, and even laws of the world your protagonist(s) is living in. Feel free to use this information only as a jumping off point. Generalize/fictionalize any aspect you want. If your setting is somewhere outside conventional reality, you should still establish these nuts and bolts.



- Founded, and by who? What is the general history?
- Population?
- What is the wildlife situation? Birds? Trees? Insects? Parks? Bodies of water?
- What institutions are present?
- What are the urban myths?
- What industry powers the economy?
- 5 positive historical events
- 5 negative historical events
- 5 street names
- What kind of slang or colloquialisms are heard here?
- Political make-up of the setting at the time period you have chosen
- What famous or infamous figures in history originated here? Passed through?
- What are the meeting places? Now, where does everyone in town meet for coffee, food, gossip, strategizing? What is your Double R Diner? Your Luke's Diner? Your JJ's Wafflehouse? Your Digital Bean? Your Central Perk? Your Bronze?
- What else do you find interesting?



For each bulletpoint, come up with a relationship your character(s) might have to this fact of your setting.

AUBURN HILLS, MI

(suburb of Detroit) (kind of RURAL. Best of BOTH Ideas)

• settled: 1821

• pop: 21,412

• founded by automobile "pioneer" John Dodge

(statue of him in town sq. Everyone pees on his foot at night on a dare. ~~and the statue is there~~)

• former home of Detroit pistons (John Salley cuts the ribbons at all the library events)

NATURE: CLINTON RIVER, SKATE PARK, RIVERSIDE PARK

(skinny dipped on a dare)

History: SAWMILL, MAPLE SYRUP FACTORY

(Dalia's sister hangs here)

(music fest part of plot)

Institutions: OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

Volkswagen Headquarters

AUBURN HILLS LIBRARY

(Dalia goes to school here)

(Her strict dad works here)

(Reshelves books for extra cash & sneaks onto roof)

URBAN MYTHS:

• Dodge's farmhouse is HAUNTED.

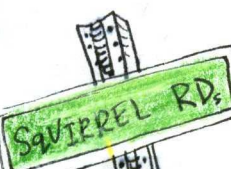
Potential conflict Location

• Saw Mill is interesting entrance to underground tunnels...

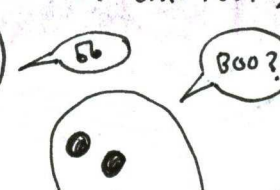
(would that make sense in this region? quirky or distracting?)



Dalia lives on this street which is meaningful to her Lebanese family (B/C ~~she~~)



Totally Real





Use Your 5 Senses to Create a Setting (via thebalance.com)

Next, spend some time thinking about your story's setting. If it's a place you've been to, you might look at old photographs, maps or diary entries and see what jumps out at you. What made you connect to this place? If you have not been to this place, look at some books or check out the place online.

1. Start with sight, which is for many of us the most immediate sense. Write down every image that comes to mind, whether it pertains to your story or not. Free associate. It doesn't have to make sense or be grammatically correct. Just get down as much as you can. For instance, if you've been to the desert in Tucson, Arizona at night, picture the cactus, vast expanse, clay color, brightness from the night sky and mountains in the background.
2. Repeat the above for taste, smell, sound and touch. Again, don't be afraid of unconventional answers. You never know what might end up in your final story.
3. Finally, in one line sum up the feeling you hope to evoke in your readers through your setting. Is it a feeling of loneliness, menace, nostalgia, contentment?

Look at the lists you've compiled. Which elements will contribute to this dominant mood? Which elements will complicate that mood? Which will distract from it?

This exercise can also be used for imaginary settings. In fact, for science fiction and fantasy, it's even more important.

FLASH EXERCISE: using the lists you made above as a spring board, write about the sensory movements of your story's setting. How is it like during the day? How is it like at night? What are the environmental shifts, as well as the demographic, the contextual, and the tonal? What goes to sleep and what wakes up in its place? Early birds vs. night owls, rooster crowing vs. crickets chirping, butterflies orbiting flowers vs. bats obstructing the moon, senior discounts and the kids menu at the diner vs. service industry workers filling the corner booths & teenagers smoking in the parking lot, etc. **BUT WAIT.** Do all of this in the voice of your protagonist.

one page minimum, no maximum.

