

Analyzing Setting

Duration

One 40-minute class session

Resources

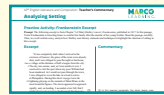
1. Student Handout



2. Study Guide



3. Teacher's Commentary



Objectives of the Lesson

- To explain how the setting functions in a text
- To determine why an author crafts a setting in a specific way
- To analyze how authorial choices add meaning to a text

College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- SET 2: Explain the function of setting.
- SET 2.A: Identify and describe specific textual details that convey or reveal a setting.
- SET 2.B: Explain the function of setting in a narrative.

Student Activities

- Apply Study Guide strategies to analyze and annotate the excerpt from *Frankenstein*.

How to Use This Lesson

This lesson is designed to give students an opportunity to understand setting, find it in a passage, and analyze it using active verbs. It provides students with the tools to discuss the author's purpose (see the side box), and it provides a study guide for students that will help them determine what to look for when analyzing setting. The annotation practice with the Student Handout can happen in class or be sent home for homework. If digital learning is taking place, students can annotate on the Student Handout PDF with a Google Extension like Kami.

Spending time walking students through the Setting Study Guide is the best place to begin. Ensure that students understand what is in the study guide, and have them read the sample analysis at the end of the study guide, as those annotations model what they will be asked to do in the lesson.

- Students need to be able to focus on the author's purpose as they analyze setting. Basically, what did the author intend when he or she wrote the setting in a specific way. In each annotation, encourage students to use active verbs to describe **what** is happening in the section or phrase they are looking at, **how** the author is making it happen, and **why** the author chose to write it in this way. It helps to show students a sample and then offer them some verbs to pull from.
- Sample: In the first sentence of the excerpt, Victor finds that the gates are locked, as if society is saying "no" to Victor and his monstrous acts of science. This detail of setting not only places Victor in the same space, physically, as Monster, but allows Shelley to use the locked gates as a way to parallel both characters as outcasts.
- Some verbs students might include while discussing the author's purpose:
 - Highlights
 - Emphasizes
 - Utilizes
 - Demonstrates
 - Juxtaposes
 - Observes
 - Concedes
 - Emphasizes
 - Minimizes
 - Supports
 - Accentuates

Next, walk students through the prompt at the top of the Student Handout. Then, read the first sentence of the excerpt together. Next, show students the sample analysis in the side box on this lesson plan. It helps if you write the sample sentence and the verbs on the board and have students expand the verb list with words they offer themselves. The words provided are just a jumping-off point; the more words they add, the more ownership they will feel. Next, have students number the functions of setting (from the Setting Study Guide) that they find in the text as they read. The numbering system I use is:

- 1. Setting as a Symbol:** Victor is on the outskirts of the science community, and his actions are considered monstrous by his peers, which is why he built Monster in isolation in his lab. The setting of the woods at the scene of his younger brother's murder sets the symbolism up for the isolation in the woods to represent Victor's isolation in society.
- 2. Setting Enhances Conflict:** If Monster and Victor had met at another place, Victor may not have come to the realization that his own creation had killed his younger brother, so the setting enhances this conflict.
- 3. Setting Reveals Tone:** The stormy weather emphasizes that Victor and Monster are both out of accord with the rules of nature and sets an ominous tone for their meeting in the woods.
- 4. Setting Illuminates Theme:** Since Victor and Monster are both out of accord with nature, it makes sense that the storm would enhance this theme and that Nature would literally have a fit whenever they appear together in a scene, thus emphasizing Shelley's theme even more.

Students will read the excerpt and annotate the text with how Mary Shelley utilizes the functions of setting. **For each annotation, they will analyze what the author is doing, how the author is doing it, and why it is important to the author's intent.** Be certain that students underline or highlight the verbs that explain the author's purpose (it will make it easier to grade later, and it gets students in the habit of intentionally putting them into their analysis).

In the teacher's commentary, you will be given one example for each of the annotation types above. Students may mark different parts of the text for the same element, so encourage their exploration of the text.

As an optional follow-up in the next class session, students could work in small groups to share their annotations and compare where they found evidence of the different functions of setting. Students could then take an excerpt from a text that they find on their own and annotate that excerpt for the function of setting.

NOTES

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Analyzing Setting

Practice Activity: *Frankenstein* Excerpt

Prompt: The following excerpt is from Chapter 7 of Mary Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein*, published in 1817. In this passage, Victor Frankenstein is traveling home to comfort his family after the murder of his young brother. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Shelley uses literary elements and techniques to highlight the function of setting in this excerpt.

Excerpt

“It was completely dark when I arrived in the environs of Geneva; the gates of the town were already shut; and I was obliged to pass the night at Secheron, a village at the distance of half a league from the city.

5 The sky was serene; and, as I was unable to rest, I resolved to visit the spot where my poor William had been murdered. As I could not pass through the town, I was obliged to cross the lake in a boat to arrive at Plainpalais. During this short voyage I saw the
10 lightning playing on the summit of Mont Blanc in the most beautiful figures. The storm appeared to approach rapidly, and, on landing, I ascended a low hill, that I might observe its progress. It advanced; the heavens were clouded, and I soon felt the rain coming slowly in
15 large drops, but its violence quickly increased.

I quitted my seat, and walked on, although the darkness and storm increased every minute, and the thunder burst with a terrific crash over my head. It was echoed from Salève, the Juras, and the Alps of Savoy;
20 vivid flashes of lightning dazzled my eyes, illuminating the lake, making it appear like a vast sheet of fire; then for an instant every thing seemed of a pitchy darkness, until the eye recovered itself from the preceding flash.

The storm, as is often the case in Switzerland, appeared
25 at once in various parts of the heavens. The most violent storm hung exactly north of the town, over the part of the lake which lies between the promontory of Belrive and the village of Copêt. Another storm enlightened Jura with faint flashes; and another
30 darkened and sometimes disclosed the Môle, a peaked mountain to the east of the lake.

While I watched the tempest, so beautiful yet terrific, I wandered on with a hasty step. This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits; I clasped my hands,
35 and exclaimed aloud, “William, dear angel! this is thy funeral, this thy dirge!” As I said these words, I perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me; I stood fixed, gazing intently: I could not be mistaken. A flash of lightning
40 illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy dæmon,

ANNOTATIONS

Write or type in this area.

to whom I had given life. What did he there? Could
45 he be (I shuddered at the conception) the murderer
of my brother? No sooner did that idea cross my
imagination, than I became convinced of its truth; my
teeth chattered, and I was forced to lean against a tree
for support. The figure passed me quickly, and I lost
50 it in the gloom. Nothing in human shape could have
destroyed the fair child. *He* was the murderer! I could
not doubt it. The mere presence of the idea was an
irresistible proof of the fact. I thought of pursuing the
devil; but it would have been in vain, for another flash
55 discovered him to me hanging among the rocks of the
nearly perpendicular ascent of Mont Salêve, a hill that
bounds Plainpalais on the south. He soon reached the
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Commentary

- ① In this opening paragraph, the storm begins once Victor reaches the woods where Monster is hiding and where his brother was murdered. It could be that Mary Shelley created the storm to symbolize that Nature rebels against what Victor has created and also against the actions that Monster took when he killed Victor's innocent younger brother.
- ③ When the storm intensifies, Victor mentions that the lightning comes down “like a vast sheet of fire,” revealing the tone of the passage. This isn't a light summer rain; this is a rain that mimics the torrents of hell, and Shelley is emphasizing the ominous tone of this meeting.
- ④ As soon as Victor begins apostrophizing to his younger brother and dedicating the storm to him, Monster appears. Victor still thinks himself innocent in this scenario and believes that nature is rebelling against his brother's death. He never once considers that his own actions may have played a role in the untimely death of his brother. The “noble” one in this scenario, Victor thinks, is himself. Victor, once he realizes that Monster killed his brother, thinks that HE, Victor, is the noble one who needs to eradicate the “demon” he has created. The “noble war in the sky” is the war against himself and the Monster. And in this moment, Shelley reveals a major theme in the text, that Victor is playing at being a god.

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②

② When Monster seems to fly off into the mountains as he makes his escape, Shelley leads the narrative further into the wilderness, away from civilization and rational thought. The setting practically absorbs Monster, pulling us deeper into the conflict.