

# **Show Don't Tell: Create a Genre Setting (with Some Help from the Masters)**

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# If you want to write, Read!!

I ask my students to read 100 poems for every one they try to write. We learn from every poem we read. Ted Kooser, poet laureate.

*The world may be full of fourth-rate writers but it's also full of fourth-rate readers. Stan Barstow*

Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read. Groucho Marx

There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. Ralph Waldo Emerson

I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book. Groucho Marx

I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke in me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive. Malcolm X

The more that you read, the more things you will know.  
The more that you learn, the more places you'll go. Dr. Seuss

There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island. Walt Disney

When I get a little money I buy books; and if any is left I buy food and clothes.  
Erasmus

Books had instant replay long before televised sports. Bern Williams

## Set the Scene—Create an Information Bank

Think about your setting. Is it inside or outside? Are there any unusual shapes? Is it night or day? What season is it? What is the weather like? The temperature?

Example: Raindrop bubbles popped on the steamy pavement.

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What can the main character see? (objects, people, scenery)

Example: Cracker crumbs covered the car seat like a fine layer of desert sand.

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What can the main character hear? (teenagers screaming, wind whistling, trees crashing)

Example: The lonely trumpet stumbled over a few, solitary notes.

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What can the main character smell? (thick chocolate fudge, burnt steak, wet dog, hot bread)

Example: Even after twenty-five years, Creighton could still smell the spicy hot peppers and Italian beef of his favorite Chicago sandwich shop.

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What can the main character feel? (rough, smooth, sandy, hairy, fuzzy, cold, sticky)

Example: The dry grass crunched like burnt potato chips under Lydia's feet.

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What can the main character taste? (salty chips, spicy salsa, sour apple)

Example: Tart raspberry ice cream swirled around Maity's tongue as she walked toward the beach.

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What colors can the main character see? (gray blue sky, yellowed lace, blackened trees)

Example: Water-washed weeds lay flattened along the creek's edge.

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## Genre Magic

### Example 1- Setting

Original: The cinderblock walls smelled of fresh paint and Ms. Marie's voice echoed back and forth across the cavernous classroom.

Sports: The locker room smelled of dirty gym clothes and wet mud as Coach Marie's voice bounced from one steel locker to another.

Historical: The library smelled of old, dusty books with a faint scent of rosewater as Marianne's hushed voice meandered in and around the olive green upholstered chairs.

Science Fiction: The cockpit smelled of disinfectant and cold steel as Mara's voice recited her instructions back to the computer's instrument panel.

Mystery: The classroom walls smelled faintly like ash as Ms. Marie entered the cavernous classroom. The back door slam shut and footsteps echoed in the cinderblock hallway.

### Example 2- Character

Original: "I can't have broken my wrist! How will I finish my robot for the science fair?" Matthew wailed.

Sports: "No way! My wrist can't be broken!" Matthew glared at the x-ray. The basketball tournament is next week!"

Historical: "My wrist doesn't hurt that much, mother." Matthew bit his lip as he tried to ignore the pain shooting up his limp, gloved hand. "Lieutenant Williams was depending on me getting this message to General Washington!"

Science Fiction/Fantasy: "I can't have broken my wrist!" Matthew turned to his squire. "The jousting tournament is tomorrow."

Mystery: "I know that someone was waiting outside the gym ready to trip me. I saw his shadow but before I knew anything else, I was slam! on my face on the

pavement and I heard something crack.” Matthew turned with angry eyes to the emergency tech who was splinting his arm. “Who tripped me and why?”

### **Example 3- Problem**

Original (Sports): The moment was tense as Billy hurled the ball over the opposing team's reach.

Historical: The moment was tense as William hurled the canon ball over the opposing army's front line.

Science Fiction/Fantasy: Microseconds froze as Quesan launched the purple vibrating disk beyond the reach of his opponents.

Mystery: Crash! Billy looked up just in time to see a small black ball hurl over the fence and into Mrs. Smith's window. A piercing scream froze time.