# Lesson 1: Plot, Setting, and Theme



Name Date

The **plot** is the sequence of events in a story. The **setting** is the time and place in which a story happens. The **theme** is the main idea of the story. By using these elements to help the reader, the writer makes a story interesting and involving.

##### DIRECTIONS: Read the following excerpt from Michael Dorris’s novel Sees Behind Trees, in which the blind character Sees Behind Trees describes the dilemma he faces when he finds himself lost with a baby and must find his way home. Then answer the questions that follow.

* 1. Gray Fire was no longer with me, but in some ways he was. When I became discouraged, when I lost hope, his words echoed in my memory.
  2. “Your body will remember where it has been if you let it,” he had told me. “It recalls what’s familiar—but not as your mind does. With your mind you stand outside the world and look in. With your body you are inside already.”
  3. I remembered the examples he had given to explain what he meant: rain, a mouse, a bird. At the time it had seemed like a game—funny and silly. But there was nothing funny in being alone, lost in the forest in early winter, with bad strangers around and a baby depending on you. Now I needed to *truly* understand what he had been talking about.
  4. “All right,” I said to my body. “I hope you remember better than I do.” I had made a sling of my cloak to carry Checha and he rode high between my shoulder blades. At the sound of my voice he reached out a hand to touch my left ear.
  5. “So you think we should go that way?” I asked him.

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* 1. He made a deep sigh and dropped his head against the back of my neck.
  2. I thought about Gray Fire touching the sides of the trees as we had come through the woods. Why had he done that? Then the idea came to me: moss! It only grew on one side of a tree, didn’t it? And I had touched it as we were leaving the village, which meant that as we returned the nearer sides of the trees and rocks should be bare but the farther sides should be mossy. It wasn’t a lot to go on, but it was something. I knelt beside the nearest boulder and felt all around it until I felt the soft, spongy growth.
  3. “This way,” I said to Checha, and looked for the next big tree. It took a long time to pass through the forest in this manner, but at least I knew we were headed the right direction. And every few steps I would stop, stand perfectly still, and listen for any sound that would call me—or make me run away.

1. Briefly describe the setting of this excerpt. Identify the lines in the passage that let you know the setting.



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1. Briefly list the main events of the plot represented in this excerpt.
2. What point is the writer trying to convey in this excerpt? How does the writer use the setting and the plot to help convey this point?

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# Lesson 2: Narrative Strategies



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When a passage tells a story, it is called **narration**. Writers use narrative strategies to make their stories more vivid. They add **movement** to the story by describing characters doing things and moving from place to place. They use **description**—details that appeal to the five senses—to help the readers see the characters, the setting, and the action. Writers also create uncertainty in the reader’s mind about what will happen next, a technique known as **suspense**.

##### DIRECTIONS: Read the following excerpt from Anzia Yezierska’s novel, The Bread Givers, in which the narrator, Sara, describes what happens when her sister Mashah is jilted by her fiancé, Jacob. Then answer the questions that follow.

* 1. When Jacob didn’t come back that evening, Mashah tried to push it aside and tell us it was so much business about the concert that he couldn’t come back. But we ourselves had heard him tell her at the door that he would be sure back that evening. And we knew it was a bad sign if he didn’t come.
  2. The next evening was the evening of the concert. And Mashah rushed into the house with a frightened, worried look and asked anxiously if Jacob had come. She looked at the clock. From six it went over to seven and then to eight. As the hours passed, she grew more and more excited.
  3. No Jacob. No letter. No message.
  4. I had heard Jacob tell Mashah where he was to give his concert, and I stole out of the house and took the car to the concert hall. At the front door I stopped, shaking with excitement. There was Jacob Novak’s picture, as big as life, and under his picture, his name, in big printed letters.

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* 1. I had no money for the ticket, so I stood at the side of the man who was collecting the tickets, watching the crowd go in. When the first sounds of the music started, I ran from that place as one runs from a house on fire. The hurt of the great wrong burned my flesh. How could that concert go on and Mashah not there!
  2. When I got back home Mashah was still waiting for Novak.
  3. The clock went on ticking the seconds, the minutes, the hours. Everyone went to sleep. But still Mashah waited. At every sound, she listened for him.
  4. It was midnight. But Mashah still sat waiting for Jacob to come. “He will come. He must come,” she kept talking to herself.



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1. Suddenly, when everyone was sound asleep, a terrible cry tore through the air— the cry of somebody murdered with a knife—the choked bleeding wail of a dying, broken heart.
2. In one leap we rushed out of bed. We found Mashah with her head on the window sill, her whole body shaking with sobs—sobs that could not cease—and could not be consoled. Like dumb things, we all cried with her—all through the night.
3. Look for two sections where the writer uses suspense to show us Mashah’s feelings. Identify these two sections in the space below, and explain what each one shows us about Mashah’s feelings.
4. What other narrative strategies does the author use to keep the reader interested in the story? State at least two strategies, and identify where they can be found.
5. Which strategy plays the most important role in making the story interesting and dramatic? Explain your answer.

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