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Literary Elements

All narratives, whether in the form of a story, poem, or play, include characters, events, and a setting. How these elements interact with one another make the story livelier and your reading more interesting.

VOCABULARY

claustrophobic
exemplary
franchise
orion
paraphernalia
subordinates

Elements of a Narrative

Any story will feature **characters**. The ways they think, feel, and respond to one another and to challenges are what move the story forward. An author makes characters seem real through descriptions of the way they look, act, and talk. The talk is called **dialogue**. Sometimes the way a character talks can be as important as what he says. It can tell you where the character comes from, where he fits in his social world, the face he presents to other people, and the face he keeps private.

You can learn about characters in stories by what they do and say. You can also learn about the characters from what other characters and the author say about them.

The events of the story make up the plot. A **plot** unfolds as a series of episodes as characters respond to the events. Episodes usually take place in chronological order, but they are not always told that way. Part of the story may be told in flashback, narrating events that happened earlier.

The element of the plot that makes a story exciting is the **conflict**. Sometimes the conflict is a struggle between two or more characters. It may also be an inner conflict, such as a character choosing whether or not to take a dangerous risk in order to do what he thinks is right. It may be a conflict between a character and the events, such as a person struggling to complete a task despite obstacles. Or, it may involve the setting, as when a character has to cope with life in a new city.

Any plot will have an **inciting incident**, which sets the conflict in motion. In Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, for instance, the inciting incident is Tom and Huck's witnessing of the murder in the graveyard. Most of the plot consists of **rising action**, which continues until you know how the conflict will turn out. That point is called the **climax**. In *Tom Sawyer*, the climax comes when Tom and Becky are rescued from the cave. The **falling action** is made up of the events that follow the climax and that happen as a result of it. It includes a **resolution** explaining what happens to the characters. A resolution may take several chapters to conclude, as in *Tom Sawyer*. Or, it may be as simple as "And they lived happily ever after."

The **setting** is the time and place in which events of the story take place. The time can be past, present, or future. An author uses the setting to create the **tone**, or feeling of the story, and to provide a background against which the characters interact. Often, the events of the plot change the setting, as when a character is forced by sudden circumstances to leave her country home and seek a job in a strange city. The setting and the way characters respond to it can be an important part of the story's outcome.

The setting helps shape the characters and determine the choices they make. Sometimes the setting almost becomes a character in itself. And the events of the plot and the way characters respond to them can change the setting.

Review the first part of the story "I'll Die Screaming" on pages 58 and 59 before reading the next passage, from later in the story. Use what you learn from both parts of the story to answer the questions.

Guided Practice

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

from **I'll Die Screaming** (continued)
by Karen Stamfil

1 Tommy's basement *was* creepy. It made my skin itch just to be there, and with eight people and all the equipment crammed in, I was feeling claustrophobic. Michael and his A-team had obviously been busy while the rest of us were sleeping. I don't know how much of the effect was natural to the place and how much was due to the stuff that Michael had placed there among the rough, low beams, pipes, bare light bulbs, cobwebs, and tools. A three-foot-long saw leaned against one wall, its fangs bared menacingly. Rickety shelves held dusty bottles of interestingly colored liquids. An unmade cot rested in one corner. The wall beside it was pasted with newspaper clippings that looked old but that someone had mocked up on a computer. Then there was the movie paraphernalia Michael had rented: bright lights in black metal cabinets, a microphone at the end of a long pole, and the professional-model camera. And mirrors. Every movable mirror from our house was there, including the one from my bedroom. For some reason, the script they had written had a lot to do with mirrors. Maybe Michael thought they were scary. At one point I was supposed to fall against a mirror and shatter it with my forehead—not for real; Michael was going to do something tricky to make it look authentic—and then he would stop the camera, and out would come the fake blood.

2 "I want to block the fight scene first," Michael said. "That's going to be the hardest to film because of the different angles. Then we'll rehearse the other scenes, and hopefully we'll start shooting after lunch." He looked at his watch and then at Tommy. "You hear from Ron?"

claustrophobic
afraid of being in an
enclosed space

paraphernalia
equipment



- 3 “Negative,” Tommy said. “I’ve been leaving messages for him all morning.”
- 4 Michael muttered something. “Ron’s not a flake. He wouldn’t have left his sound equipment here if he wasn’t coming back.”
- 5 I cleared my throat. “I think I might know what happened to him.”
- 6 Everyone looked at me. “Isabel, what would you know about it?” Michael said.
- 7 I told him about the call from Ron’s mom. “She thought he was with you all night. I think she was mad that he wasn’t.”
- 8 “Uh-oh,” Tommy said.
- 9 “He said he was going to that party on the east side,” Monica said.
- 10 Michael stomped around a little and rubbed his head. “Isabel, why didn’t you tell me this before?”
- 11 “When was I supposed to do that? While you were in here doing your set-up?”
- 12 “Ten bucks says his parents grounded him,” Tommy said.
- 13 “But why wouldn’t he *call*?” Michael said. “He’s the only one who can do sound.”
- 14 “I might be able to handle it if he doesn’t show,” Tommy said. “That board isn’t much different than what I use with my guitar.”
- 15 “You can’t do sound and operate the camera at the same time,” Michael said.
- 16 Me, I wanted to tell him; I can operate the camera; you showed me, remember? However, that wasn’t why I was there. My role was to scream.
- 17 “All right, let’s rehearse,” Michael said. “Paxton, we’ll take it from where you come through the door. I’ll worry about Ron later,” he said, sounding worried.

Use information from *both* excerpts to answer these questions.

What is the main challenge facing the characters in this story?

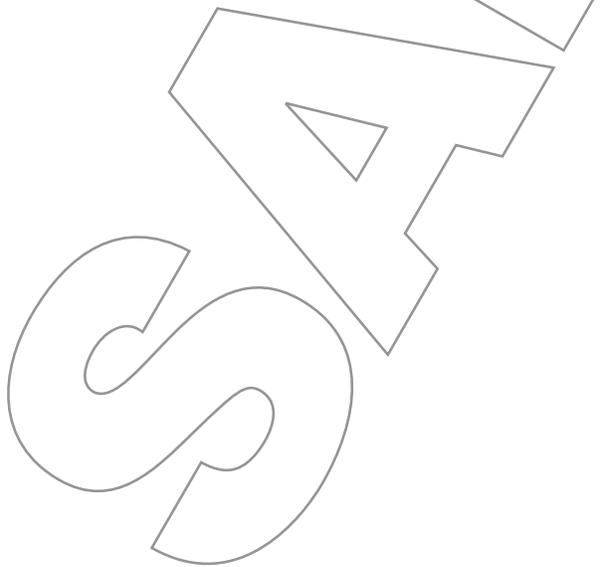
- A Will Isabel play her part well?
- B Will Michael get his movie made?
- C Will Michael recognize Isabel's worth?
- D Will Isabel be harmed during the making of the movie?

This question is about how the characters and events interact. You know Isabel wants to do more to help than just playing the victim, and you can predict that events will happen that way. Whatever Isabel does, however, it will be in support of Michael and his movie.

Which of these sentences best describes Michael in this story?

- A He thinks that he has to do everything himself.
- B He doesn't care much about other people's feelings.
- C His attention is totally focused on making his movie.
- D He doesn't really know anything about making movies.

Did you notice how Michael changes between the first part of the story and the second? In the first part, he's laughing with his friends. In the second part, he's all business. He knows how to control a movie set. He knows what jobs need to be done, and he assigns people to do them.



What is the role of Tommy's basement in the story?

Can a setting “play a role”? Yes, if it affects the characters and events of the story. You learned in the first part of the story why Michael wanted to film a horror movie there. Isabel's description of the setting and her feelings about it may make you appreciate Michael's choice. Here is a sample answer:

The basement is a gloomy, cramped space, and the characters are going to spend most of the next two days there. Some of them may end up feeling like Isabel does, uncomfortable and a little scared. On the other hand, it may make for a really good scary movie. “On the set,” Michael seems transformed from a teen to a movie director.

In the first part of the story, how does the author use flashback?

The story begins with Michael telling Isabel, “We got horror.” This doesn't make sense until you learn something about the 48-Hour Film Project (a real event, by the way).



How might Isabel affect the events of the story?

This question asks you to **make a prediction** based on the characters, the events so far, and the setting. There are many ways that you could answer the question.

Elements of Drama

Authors have been writing **dramatic literature** to be performed by actors on a stage since the ancient Greeks. In recent times, dramas (like Michael's horror movie) have also been written for radio, film, and video performance. Drama has the same elements of characters, events, and setting as any other story. Dramatic writing, however, uses special features that give instructions to directors and actors for making the story come alive.

A **play** is a story that is performed by actors. A play for the stage is usually divided into **acts** and **scenes**. A scene is part of the action that takes place in one setting.

Characters take part in the play's action. A list of the characters is called the **cast**. It usually appears at the beginning of the play.

The **setting** is the time and place where the action happens. Sometimes the setting is described in a brief introduction that gives the background information about the characters and events in the play.

Dialogue is the words that characters speak. In a **script**, or printed version of a play, dialogue directly follows the character's name.

Stage directions advise actors how to move and speak. In a script, the characters' names, dialogue, and stage directions are printed in different styles of type so that readers can easily spot which is which.

Props are objects that are used by the characters on a stage, such as a book or a pen. **Scenery** is the backgrounds and larger objects that create the setting of the play. **Lighting** refers to the types of lights used on stage and how bright they are. The props, scenery, and lighting are usually described in the stage directions.

Guided Practice

Read the play. Then answer the questions.

For the Crime of Voting

a play by Jan Kelter

What really happened?
With a group, research
and report on the career
of Susan B. Anthony and
her arrest for voting in
1872.

CHARACTERS:

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| A barber | Mary |
| Beverly Jones (male) | Daniel Warner |
| Edwin Marsh | Newsboys |
| William Hall | Henry Seldon, a lawyer |
| Susan B. Anthony | E. J. Keeney, a federal marshal |
| Guelma | William Storrs |
| Hannah | Judge Ward Hunt |

Women, court officials, and courtroom spectators

ACT 1, Scene 1

A barbershop in Rochester, New York, the morning of November 1, 1872. A window looks out onto a busy street, where a barber pole stands by the door. A sign in the window, reads REGISTER TO VOTE HERE.

The Barber is shaving a customer. Beverly Jones, Edwin Marsh, and William Hall, election officials, are grouped around a desk. Marsh is the youngest of the three.

BARBER: So, you've already forgotten his service in the late war?

JONES: Sir, I stand second to none in my admiration for General Grant as a soldier. I believe he's been a poor excuse for a president, and I intend on Tuesday to vote for Mr. Greeley.

MARSH: You'll be throwing your vote away, Mr. Jones. Greeley hasn't got a chance, either in this state or in the country at large.

JONES: Mr. Marsh, I don't believe any man in our republic throws his vote away. I know as well as you do that my fellow veterans will turn out in droves in their blue suits, and the general will win in a landslide. I served proudly in the 18th New York Regiment—and I'd enlist again if the rebels were ever to raise the stars and bars of treason. However, I hold the ballot to be sacred, and on Election Day, I intend to cast mine for Mr. Greeley.

BARBER: Nice speech, Jones. Tell me, what office are you running for?

There is laughter among the men, except for Hall, who is looking out the window.

HALL: Gentlemen, here comes trouble.

The door opens and four middle-aged women enter the shop: Susan B. Anthony and her sisters, Guelma, Hannah, and Mary. The three registrars move to confront them; Marsh lagging behind the others.

SUSAN: Good morning, sirs. My sisters and I wish to register to vote.

JONES: Miss Anthony, I don't believe I can register your name.

SUSAN: On what grounds?

JONES: Well, ma'am, as you well know, the Constitution of the State of New York gives the right of franchise only to male citizens.

SUSAN: Mr. Jones, I assume you are acquainted with the 14th amendment to the United States Constitution?

JONES: I am.

Susan produces a small pamphlet from her handbag and reads from it. The Barber has stopped shaving his customer and is enjoying the spectacle.

SUSAN: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States"—All persons, Mr. Jones. Show me where it says anything about male or female.

JONES: Miss Anthony, you know that the 14th amendment was adopted to secure the franchise for the former Negro slaves.

HALL: Male slaves.

SUSAN: I know this, Mr. Jones. If you refuse us our rights as citizens, I will bring charges against you in criminal court, and I will sue each of you personally for large, exemplary damages!

There is a brief pause as the men, stunned, look at each other.

MARSH: Miss Anthony, you place us in an awkward position. You're asking us to violate state law.

SUSAN: I am asking you, Edwin—no, demanding—that you honor our rights as citizens of the United States.

JONES: Miss Anthony, this is not our decision to make. This is a question that divides some of the best minds of our country.

HALL (*with relief*): Here's Warner. He'll decide.

Daniel Warner, the registrars' supervisor, enters from the street. When he sees the assemblage, he stops short for a moment, sizing up the situation.

WARNER (*warily*): Gentlemen. Ladies.

JONES: Daniel, a word with you?

franchise
the right to vote

exemplary
serving as a warning
to others

The men consult. Susan stands with her sisters.

GUELMA: Can they really have us arrested?

SUSAN: *They can do what they please. That is precisely the issue. America will never be a free country as long as half its citizens do not have equal rights.*

WARNER (*stepping toward them*): Miss Anthony. Ladies. I have instructed my subordinates to allow you to register to vote.

SUSAN (*surprised*): You have?

WARNER (*beckoning them to the registration desk*): Indeed. That will place the onus of the situation squarely on you, won't it?

The women, led by Susan, line up at the desk and begin to sign their names. Lights begin to fade on the scene.

WARNER (*aside*): I'll be hanged if I'll be cowed by that woman!

SUSAN: My name is Susan Brownell Anthony. I live at—

MARSH: I know your address, Ma'am.

The stage is dark. As scenery is being changed for Scene 2, two Newsboys cross the stage in opposite directions hawking newspapers.

NEWSBOY 1: Extra, extra! Susan B. Anthony registers to vote!

NEWSBOY 2: Extra, extra! Forty-seven Rochester women register to vote!

subordinates
people subject to
another's orders or
supervision

onus
burden

Analyze the play. How does the character of Susan influence the events of the plot?

You know this scene is based on an actual incident. However, an author may use **dramatic license** with the facts to make a more interesting story. You need to answer the question based on the play, not on history.

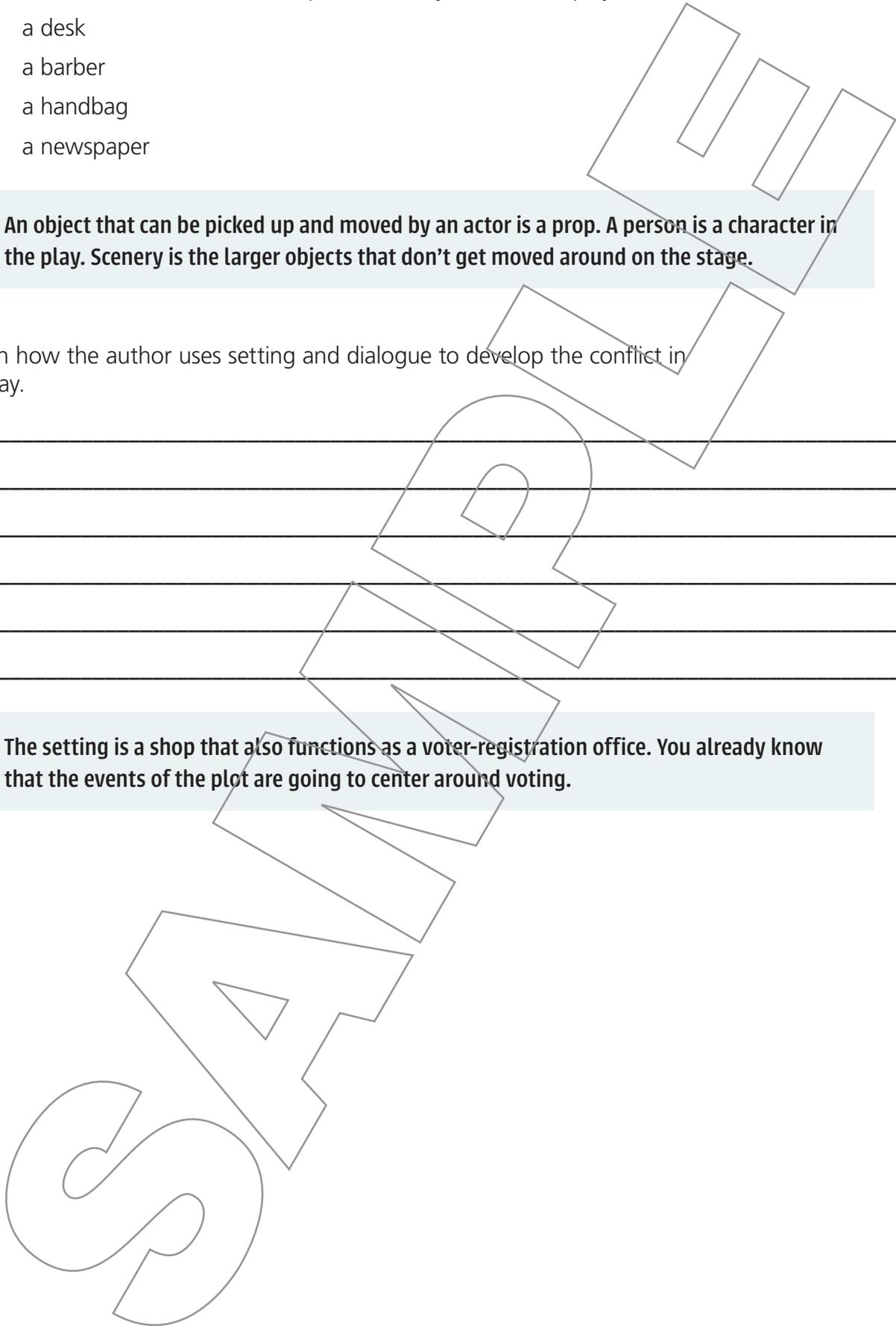
Determine which of these is an example of scenery used in this play.

- A a desk
- B a barber
- C a handbag
- D a newspaper

An object that can be picked up and moved by an actor is a prop. A person is a character in the play. Scenery is the larger objects that don't get moved around on the stage.

Explain how the author uses setting and dialogue to develop the conflict in this play.

The setting is a shop that also functions as a voter-registration office. You already know that the events of the plot are going to center around voting.



Test Yourself

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

The 50-Cent Piece

a traditional ghost story

1 There was a couple from Saratoga who were returning home from visiting relatives. They were driving in their carriage, hoping to pass the night at the inn north of Schenectady. But it was a warm afternoon and their little bay horse could go only so fast and no faster. As night was falling, they found themselves in deep woods. They were still at some distance from the inn, and they knew they would have to seek shelter for the night.

2 The man saw a light through the trees and turned their horse into a narrow lane leading up a hill. At the top stood a small, neat house. An elderly couple met them at the door. They were nightclothes and were obviously about to go to bed, but they gave the travelers welcome. They introduced themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Bruin. The old woman gave the travelers refreshment, and her husband showed them to a room where they could spend the night.

3 “This is most kind of you,” said the man. “Please, let us pay you for your hospitality.”

4 “I wouldn’t hear of it!” said old Mr. Bruin. “I’d do the same for anybody, and I’m sure you’d do the same for me.”

5 The next morning the travelers awoke early and got ready to leave without waking their hosts. But they still felt bad about imposing on the old couple, so the man left a half-dollar coin in the middle of the kitchen table. Then he hitched up their horse, and soon he and his wife were on their way.

6 Some time later, they reached the inn where they had hoped to stay the night and stopped for breakfast. As the innkeeper served them, they related their story of the previous night. When the woman described the kindly old couple who had sheltered them, the innkeeper turned pale and began to tremble.

7 “Five miles back, you say?” said the innkeeper. “Up a little hill on the right?”

8 “That’s it exactly,” said the man. “A Mr. and Mrs. Bruin. A fine old couple.”

9 “It can’t be,” said the innkeeper. “The Bruins were killed three years ago in a fire that destroyed their house!”

10 “Nonsense!” laughed the man. “They were certainly alive and well last night!”

11 After discussing the matter a moment longer, the innkeeper shut up his house and got into the carriage with the travelers. Together they drove back out of town and turned into the lane. It was overgrown with weeds and brambles. At the top they found—not a house, but a burned-out shell of one with ivy growing thickly among the ruins.

12 “Well, obviously,” said the man, “*this* house has not sheltered anyone for a long time. I must have been mistaken. Is there another such place farther back up the road?”

13 Just then his wife screamed. Wordlessly, she pointed into the ruin. There stood a burnt and charred table. Lying in the middle was a shiny 50-cent piece.

1 What is the inciting incident in this story?

- A** It begins to grow dark.
- B** The man sees a light through the trees.
- C** Mr. and Mrs. Bruin welcome the travelers.
- D** The man leaves the 50-cent piece on the table.

2 How does the innkeeper help to move the events of the story along?

- A** He tells the couple that the Bruins died three years ago.
- B** He provides lodging for the couple while they are traveling.
- C** He steals a 50-cent piece from the couple.
- D** He serves breakfast to the couple.

3 How does the setting affect the story?

4 How does the tone of the story change from the beginning to the end?

5 Explain the resolution of the story.

SAMPLE