



Setting and Meaning

People exist in a particular time and place. Where we live may contribute not only to our personality, but also to our values, attitudes, and even our problems. In literature, setting (time and place) can also influence characters and what they do.

Time

We need to consider four kinds of time that may carry particular associations with them:

- **Clock time:** this can be used to provide suspense or create certain moods or feelings.
- **Calendar time:** the day, month, year, or more generally a day of the week or time of the month may provide an understanding of what takes place in a piece of literature.
- **Seasonal time:** the seasons or a span of time associated with a particular activity may be important.
- **Historical or futuristic time:** this can establish a psychological or sociological understanding of behaviors and attitudes.

Place

We may find significance in the actual location where the action occurs, but *we need to pay attention to the nonphysical as well as the physical environment.*

The **physical environment**, including weather conditions, may be specifically described.

The **nonphysical environment** includes cultural influences such as education, social standing, economic class, and religious belief. These may be revealed by physical properties in the scene or through the characters' dialogue, thoughts, statements, and behaviors.