



1 Learn the Skill

A story's **setting** is the place and the time in which events happen. Authors may create a setting through details such as scenery, items found in a room, or characters' clothing and ways of speaking. The setting adds depth and complexity to a story, often driving or foreshadowing events. A story that takes place in the middle of the night in an isolated place, for example, is likely to have a different feel to it than a story set in a high-school cafeteria.

2 Practice the Skill

By practicing the skill of analyzing setting, you will improve your study and test-taking abilities, especially as they relate to the GED® Reasoning Through Language Arts Test. Read the passage below. Then answer the question that follows.

A FULL MOON

Up from the skeleton stone walls, up from the rotting floor boards and the solid hand-hewn beams of oak of the pre-war cotton factory, dusk came up. Up from the dusk the full moon came. Glowing like a fired pine-knot it illuminated the great door and soft showered the Negro shanties aligned along the single street of factory town. The full moon in the great door was an omen. Negro women improvised songs against its spell. ...

The slow rhythm of her [Louisa's] song grew agitant and restless. Rusty black and tan spotted hounds, lying in the dark corners of porches or prowling around back yards, put their noses in the air and caught its tremor. They began to plaintively yelp and howl. Chickens woke up, and cackled. Intermittently, all over the countryside dogs barked and roosters crowed as if heralding a weird dawn or some ungodly awakening.

From BLOOD-BURNING MOON by Jean Toomer, © 1923

a Details in the setting affect the feeling of a story. Here the glowing full moon, howling dogs, and crowing roosters create a mood of restlessness, even agitation.

b Details about setting can provide clues about a character. Here, the skeleton of the factory and the glowing full moon describe the setting and help explain the woman's reaction to it.

MAKING ASSUMPTIONS

Authors sometimes describe a setting from a character's point of view. In these instances, the setting can help you understand the character's feelings and state of mind.

- In the second paragraph, Louisa begins singing. The details help clarify her state of mind by suggesting that she believes
 - singing is a good way to bring sleep.
 - the cotton factory will burn.
 - animals grow restless at dusk.
 - some misfortune is about to occur.

★ Spotlighted Item: **FILL-IN-THE-BLANK**

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage. Then fill in your answer in the box below.

HOOK LEAVES THE NEST

- 1 Hook, the hawks' child, was hatched in a dry spring among the oaks beside the seasonal river, and was struck from the nest early. In the drought his single-willed parents had to extend their hunting ground by more than twice for the ground creatures upon which they fed died and dried by the hundreds. The range became too great for them to wish to return and feed Hook, and when they had lost interest in each other they drove Hook down into the sand and brush and went back to solitary courses over the bleaching hills.

From HOOK by Walter Van Tilburg Clark, © 1940

2. What key feature of the setting leads Hook to be struck from the nest early?

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

HOOK SURVIVES ALONE

- 1 Unable to fly yet, Hook crept over the ground, challenging all large movements with recoiled head, erected, rudimentary wings, and the small rasp of his clattering beak. It was during this time of abysmal ignorance and continual fear that his eyes took on the first quality of a hawk, that of being wide, alert and challenging. He dwelt, because of his helplessness, among the rattling brush which grew between the oaks and the river. Even in his thickets and near the water, the white sun was the dominant presence. Except in the dawn, when the land wind stirred, or in the late afternoon, when the sea wind became strong enough to penetrate the half-mile inland to this turn in the river, the sun was the major force, and everything was dry and motionless under it. ...

- 2 The two spacious sounds of his life environed Hook at this time. One was the great rustle of the slopes of yellowed wild wheat, with over it the chattering rustle of the leaves of the California oaks, already as harsh and individually tremulous as in autumn. The other was the distant whisper of the foaming edge of the Pacific, punctuated by the hollow shoring of the waves. But these Hook did not yet hear for he was attuned by fear and hunger to the small, spasmodic rustlings of live things. Dry, shrunken, and nearly starved, and with his plumage delayed, he snatched at beetles, dragging in the

sand to catch them. When swifter and stronger birds and animals did not reach them first, which was seldom, he ate the small, silver fish left in the mud by the failing river.

From HOOK by Walter Van Tilburg Clark, © 1940

3. According to the details in the passage, where does the hawk live?
- on the beach
 - on an island
 - in the high prairie
 - near the Pacific Ocean
4. The narrator describes the "small, spasmodic rustlings of live things" and the "swifter and stronger birds and animals." The narrator **most** likely mentions these details about the setting to
- describe the beauty of nature.
 - explain that nature has many sights and sounds.
 - emphasize Hook's keen eyesight and hearing.
 - create a feeling of impending danger to Hook.

1 Review the Skill

An author constructs a **setting** through the details that describe a place and time. The plants that grow in a particular spot or the ways in which characters speak, for example, help readers imagine where the story takes place. A setting can affect the way characters think and behave. Some characters are at ease in a setting, while others are not. A setting also affects a story's feeling, or mood. For instance, a place that appears barren or difficult to live in creates a different feeling from a setting that is lush and fertile.

2 Refine the Skill

By refining the skill of analyzing setting, you will improve your study and test-taking abilities, especially as they relate to the GED® Reasoning Through Language Arts Test. Read the passage below. Then answer the questions that follow.

SUGAR CANE LANDSCAPE

Up from the deep dusk of a cleared spot on the edge of the forest a mellow glow arose and spread fan-wise into the low-hanging heavens. And all around the air was heavy with the scent of boiling cane. A large pile of cane-stalks lay like ribboned shadows upon the ground. A mule, harnessed to a pole, trudged lazily round and round the pivot of the grinder. Beneath a swaying oil lamp, a Negro alternately whipped out at the mule, and fed cane-stalks to the grinder. A fat boy waddled pails of fresh ground juice between the grinder and the boiling stove. Steam came from the copperboiling pan. The scent of cane came from the copper pan and drenched the forest and the hill that sloped to factory town, beneath its fragrance. It drenched the men ... seated around the stove.

From BLOOD-BURNING MOON by Jean Toomer, © 1923

a The underlined sentence and phrases show the author's use of sensory details—details that appeal to the five human senses—to create the setting.

b During the 1800s and early 1900s, sugarcane plantations around the world relied on forced and cheap labor. Here the description contrasts the sweetness of the cane with the poverty of the workers.

USING LOGIC

Note the author's use of phrases with similar connotations or reader associations: "low-hanging heavens," "air was heavy," and "ribboned shadows." These words provide clues about the setting.

- The details of the setting reveal
 - an oppressive environment.
 - a modern farming operation.
 - the sweetness of the land.
 - the narrator's love of agriculture.
- The description of the setting helps explain why the
 - mule gets whipped.
 - boy carries the pails.
 - men feel trapped.
 - mule trudges lazily.

3 Master the Skill

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

LIFE ON THE DIVIDE

- 1 Near Rattlesnake Creek, on the side of a little draw, stood Canute's shanty. North, east, south, stretched the level Nebraska plain of long rust-red grass that undulated constantly in the wind. To the west the ground was broken and rough, and a narrow strip of timber wound along the ... muddy little stream that had scarcely ambition enough to crawl over its black bottom. If it had not been for the few stunted cottonwoods and elms that grew along its banks, Canute would have shot himself years ago. The Norwegians are a timber-loving people, and if there is even a turtle pond with a few plum bushes around it they seem irresistibly drawn toward it. ...
- 2 As to the shanty itself, Canute had built it without aid of any kind, for when he first squatted along the banks of Rattlesnake Creek there was not a human being within twenty miles. It was built of logs split in halves, the chinks stopped with mud and plaster. The roof was covered with earth and was supported by one gigantic beam curved in the shape of a round arch.
- From ON THE DIVIDE by Willa Cather, © 1910
3. Which statement **best** describes the view from Canute's house?
- A. The house looks out on grassy plains.
 - B. Nothing but mud surrounds the house.
 - C. Canute can see the river on the eastern side.
 - D. The view in one direction is different from the others.
4. Which statement **best** describes the effect of the setting on Canute?
- A. Everything but the trees makes him deeply depressed.
 - B. He enjoys living a rugged outdoor life despite the wind.
 - C. His house gives him a sense of comfort and accomplishment.
 - D. The bare, treeless landscape makes him miss city life.

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

A CHILDHOOD REMEMBERED

- 1 A wigwam of weather-stained canvas stood at the base of some irregularly ascending hills. A footpath wound its way gently down the sloping land till it reached the broad river bottom; creeping through the long swamp grasses that bent over it on either side, it came out on the edge of the Missouri.
- 2 Here, morning, noon, and evening, my mother came to draw water from the muddy stream for our household use. Always, when my mother started for the river, I stopped my play to run along with her. ...
- 3 I was a wild little girl of seven. Loosely clad in a slip of brown buckskin, and light-footed with a pair of soft moccasins on my feet, I was as free as the wind that blew my hair, and no less spirited than a bounding deer. These were my mother's pride—my wild freedom and overflowing spirits. She taught me no fear save that of intruding myself upon others.
- From IMPRESSIONS OF AN INDIAN CHILDHOOD by Zitkala-Sa, © 1900
5. Which description **best** reflects the landscape?
- A. hilly on the edge of a river
 - B. dry and flat with little water
 - C. rich, cultivated farmland
 - D. dense forests untouched by humans
6. The girl's home and clothing reveal that she most likely lives
- A. in a small river town in Missouri.
 - B. near a big midwestern city in the 1880s.
 - C. in a rural Native American community.
 - D. in a windy area heavily populated by deer.
7. How does the girl's behavior reflect the setting?
- A. The girl has no interest in the outdoors and prefers reading.
 - B. The mother is worried that the girl is too free to wander in the woods.
 - C. The girl is a free spirit, like the wind and the deer.
 - D. The girl's actions reflect the gentle flow of the river.

3 Master the Skill

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

THE BREAD LINE

1 The street was very dark and absolutely deserted. It was a district on the "South Side," not far from the Chicago River, given up largely to wholesale stores, and after nightfall was empty of all life. The echoes slept but lightly hereabouts, and the slightest footfall, the faintest noise, woke them upon the instant and sent them clamoring up and down the length of the pavement between the iron-shuttered fronts. The only light visible came from the side door of a certain "Vienna" bakery, where at one o'clock in the morning loaves of bread were given away to any who should ask. Every evening about nine o'clock the outcasts began to gather about the side door. The stragglers came in rapidly, and the line—the "bread line" as it was called—began to form. By midnight it was usually some hundred yards in length, stretching almost the entire length of the block.

2 Toward ten in the evening, his collar turned up against the fine drizzle that pervaded the air, his hands in his pockets, his elbows gripping his sides, Sam Lewiston came up and silently took his place at the end of the line.

3 He stood now in the enfolding drizzle, sodden, stupefied with fatigue. Before and behind stretched the line. There was no talking. There was no sound. The street was empty. It was so still that the passing of a cable-car in the adjoining thoroughfare grated like prolonged rolling explosions, beginning and ending at immeasurable distances. The drizzle descended incessantly. After a long time midnight struck.

4 There was something ominous and gravely impressive in this interminable line of dark figures, close-packed, soundless; a crowd, yet absolutely still; a close-packed, silent file, waiting, waiting in the vast deserted night-ridden street; waiting without a word, without a movement, there under the night and under the slow-moving mists of rain.

From A DEAL IN WHEAT by Frank Norris, © 1902

8. Which phrase **best** describes the setting in this passage?
- A. poor and rural
 - B. poor and urban
 - C. wealthy and cosmopolitan
 - D. middle-class and residential
9. In this passage, how does the setting affect the feeling, or mood, of the story? The setting makes the mood
- A. active and purposeful.
 - B. warm and inviting.
 - C. distant and other-worldly
 - D. gloomy and forbidding
10. To which location would a man in Sam Lewiston's condition be **most** likely to go?
- A. a shelter
 - B. a park bench
 - C. a restaurant
 - D. another bakery
11. What can you conclude from the details about the South Side? The neighborhood is probably
- A. a gritty business district.
 - B. an upscale warehouse district.
 - C. a suburban destination.
 - D. a performing arts district.
12. How does the description of the weather add to the overall effect of the passage?
- A. It shows the gratitude of the men in line.
 - B. It heightens the difficulty of making the bread.
 - C. It emphasizes the discomfort of the characters.
 - D. It contrasts with the gloominess of the street.

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

A SALESMAN GETS HELP WITH HIS CAR

- 1 "I done got your car out, mister," said Sonny's voice in the dark. "She's settin' a-waitin' in the road, turned to go back where she come from."
- 2 "Fine!" said Bowman, projecting his own voice to loudness. "I'm surely much obliged—I could never have done it myself—I was sick ..."
- 3 "I could do it easy," said Sonny.
- 4 Bowman could feel them both waiting in the dark, and he could hear the dogs panting out in the yard, waiting to bark when he should go. He felt strangely helpless and resentful. Now that he could go, he longed to stay. From what was he being deprived? His chest was rudely shaken by the violence of his heart. These people cherished something here that he could not see, they withheld some ancient promise of food and warmth and light. Between them they had a conspiracy. He thought of the way she had moved away from him and gone to Sonny, she had flowed toward him. He was shaking with cold, he was tired, and it was not fair. Humbly and yet angrily he stuck his hand into his pocket.
- 5 "Of course I'm going to pay you for everything—"
- 6 "We don't take money for such," said Sonny's voice belligerently.
- 7 "I want to pay. But do something more. ... Let me stay—tonight ..." He took another step toward them. If only they could see him, they would know his sincerity, his real need! His voice went on, "I'm not very strong yet, I'm not able to walk far, even back to my car, maybe, I don't know—I don't know exactly where I am. ..."
- 8 "You ain't no revenuer [tax collector] come sneakin' here, mister, ain't got no gun?"
- 9 To this end of nowhere! And yet he had come. He made a grave answer, "No."
- 10 "You can stay."

From *THE DEATH OF A TRAVELING SALESMAN* by Eudora Welty,
© 1936

13. Sonny says that Bowman's car is "settin' a-waitin' in the road" (paragraph 1). Sonny's statement reveals that the story **most** likely takes place
- at a shopping mall.
 - in a foreign country.
 - in a big city.
 - in the country.
14. What does Bowman's reaction to the setting reveal about his presence there (paragraph 4)?
- Sonny has given Bowman travel directions.
 - Bowman is vacationing in the area.
 - Bowman is not there by choice.
 - Sonny has invited Bowman to the region.
15. The narrator says that Bowman could hear "the dogs panting out in the yard," waiting to bark at him. How is this detail about the setting significant?
- It suggests that Bowman is in immediate danger.
 - It contributes to the unwelcome feeling that Bowman has.
 - It gives the image of a typical family's home and pets.
 - It adds to the feeling of the isolation of the location.
16. Bowman describes the setting as "this end of nowhere" (paragraph 9). What does this description reveal about Bowman's reaction to the setting?
- Bowman finds the setting charming and relaxing.
 - The setting is remote and completely foreign to Bowman.
 - Bowman thinks his arrival in the setting is a fine adventure.
 - The setting reminds Bowman of the place in which he was raised.