Setting

Remember those old Looney Toon shows when Bugs Bunny would secretly start controlling the pencil, erasing different parts of the scene little by little so that Daffy Duck would have to jump from one place to another, even erasing parts of Daffy himself. Eventually, Daffy would be standing all alone on a blank page, unsure of what to do or where to go. That’s sort of what a story is like without a good sense of setting. The reader will not know what to do with it. They will feel stuck.

What is it?

Setting is generally the time and place of the story. This works hand in hand with the detail you use. No good writer will just come out and casually state, “In Kaysville, Utah, right around Main street, there lived a boy. It was the year 1985, springtime.” That’s boring. Add it in the detail. Describe the terrible scrunchies or the teased bangs, the hair band music or the smell of flowers in the air. Now you’ve got a setting. It should surround the story like a warm blanket. Aah. Much better.

Setting becomes a character

Often, your setting can be a character itself. If you didn’t read “There Will Come Soft Rains” last year (by Ray Bradbury), DO IT! You will see what I mean. The house IS a character. It takes over, it lives. The setting can be an integral part of the story, and when that happens, it is more than just a place. If the setting is acting as a character, it pushes the story on, propels the action.

Setting to build emotion

Use the setting to build the emotion you want the reader to feel. If it’s scary, don’t set it in a sunny, quiet meadow. If it’s happy, don’t take your characters to a haunted mansion. These kinds of settings build on what is already going on in the story, so they need to be used wisely. If the mood is intense, make it rain. The weather can be a great tool to advance the theme and mood of your story. It can even be a metaphor for how people are feeling. Maybe the sad and lonely guy is symbolized by his beaten down truck.

When setting is ALL OVER THE STORY, surrounding the characters, in everything, it has the chance to enhance a story. It might even bring your story to life.