

Create Your Character's World

Optional materials:

Art supplies (whatever medium you enjoy)

World Building

Setting is where your story (or scene) takes place. But setting is more than a physical location in time and space.

Creating a setting is often called “world building” because that’s exactly what you’re doing—building the world in which your characters live.

As the architect of your character’s world, you have lots of decisions to make: What grows in your character’s world? What do people wear? Who’s in charge?

These questions are just as important to ask for a contemporary piece as they are for a fantasy or historical fiction. Think about it: the plants, weather, cost of living, and way of speaking vary across the world, country, and even within states. You want your character’s setting to feel realistic—whether it’s on Mars or the local public high school.

Exercise #1

Write about your own “world,” using some (or all) of the questions below. If you think of other questions not on this list, feel free to explore those, too. Your world might be your state, your neighborhood, your school, your place of business, etc. Describe each aspect of your world in as much detail as possible.

Next—write about your character’s world by answering the same questions, again with as much sensory detail as possible.

World Building Questions:

1. What kinds of plants or trees grow here?
2. What kinds of animals live in the wild?
3. What is the infrastructure (roads, highways, building landscape) of your world?
4. What is the common style of dress? This question may need to be explored for different types/classes/groups of people.
5. What’s the weather like?
6. What type of currency is used and what are (if any) the issues associated with it? (i.e. Is there a lot of it? Not enough to go around?)
7. Does magic exist here? If so, what kind and who yields it?

8. What are the rules or laws of this world? Who makes them? Who follows them? Who doesn't?
9. What is a typical level of education in this world? How are people educated? Are there any issues associated with access to education?

Exercise #2

Think of your character's favorite place. Number a page 1-10 and set a timer for one minute. Before the timer goes off, try to list as many items as possible that would be found in this place.

The catch—one of these items is something your character doesn't want anyone else to see.

Exercise #3

Create your character's world (or one small section of it) using the art supplies of your choice. Maybe you want to sketch out the country your character lives in so you can decide how people travel from place to place or get a sense of various settings that might show up in your story.

Maybe you want to make a collage out of images that reflect your character's country, city, or bedroom.

Maybe you want to build the whole thing out of Legos.

Whatever medium you choose, let your creativity run the show. Sometimes exploring different creative media can inspire your writing practice in new ways.