

Analyzing the Interaction of Story Elements

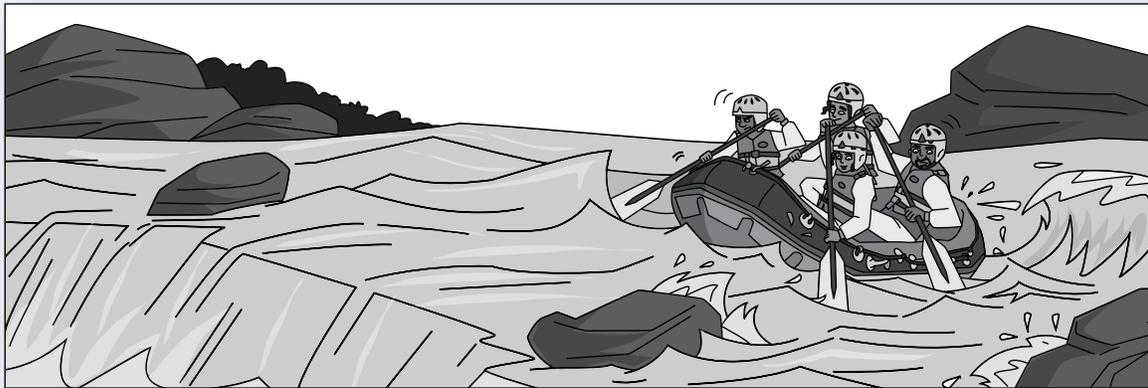
 **MS CCRS RL.7.3:** Analyze how particular elements of a literary text interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

Theme: *Imagination and Ingenuity*

A bicycle without wheels, pedals, and brakes wouldn't be complete or possible to ride. Similarly, a story wouldn't be complete or interesting to read without all of its parts working together. These parts, called **story elements**, include its characters, settings, and plot.

Analyzing a story means figuring out how its elements interact with each other. For example, you can analyze how the setting of a story shapes its plot. A story's plot includes a **conflict**, or a problem the characters must respond to, and a **resolution**, in which the problem is solved.

Look at the picture below. It shows the moment of conflict in an adventure story. Consider the importance of this setting to the story's conflict.



What is the setting? It is a river with rocks, whitewater rapids, and a waterfall.

What is the relationship between the setting and the story's conflict?

How do you think the characters will resolve the conflict? _____

Just as a bicycle can't move forward without all of its parts working together, stories don't go anywhere without the interactions of their characters, settings, and plots. By analyzing a story, you're figuring out how its parts relate to each other—and you might be learning a new way to enjoy the stories you read.



Read the first three paragraphs of this story.

Genre: Historical Fiction

Black Sunday *by Taryn Trina*

It was April 14—one day before Cora’s sixteenth birthday—and she felt the air change as she took the laundry down from the clothesline. The sky darkened over the Oklahoma plains and the wind threatened to blow the laundry away. Cora froze for a moment and then shouted “Dust storm!” loudly enough for everyone inside to hear.

Cora held the cellar door open for her mother and the younger children as they descended into the cool darkness. Cora’s mother called for her to join them, but Cora was determined to find her father and brothers.

Cora saddled the old mare and rode across the fields, calling for her father until she finally spotted him. He was already riding back with her brothers, the storm creeping up the horizon nearly fast enough to overcome them. They tethered the animals in the barn stalls and sealed the doors to keep the precious livestock safe.

(continued)

Explore how to answer this question: *“What is the relationship between the setting and the conflict in this story?”*

Before you can analyze the relationship between setting and conflict, you need to be certain what the setting and conflict actually *are*. First, identify each of these elements on the lines below.

What is the setting of this story? _____

What is the conflict in this story? _____

Now that you’ve identified the setting and the conflict, start thinking about how they are related. Ask questions such as, “Does the conflict somehow change the setting?” Or, “Is the setting the cause of the conflict?” Asking these questions will help you analyze the relationship between story elements.

On the lines below, describe the relationship between the setting and the conflict in this story. Use details from the story to support your answer.



Close Reading

Find and **underline** the sentence that best shows Cora taking charge to solve the problem.

Hint

Which choice shows Cora taking charge and suggests a happy ending to the story?

Continue reading “Black Sunday.” Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

(continued from page 54)

“What about your mother and the other children?” her father shouted over the increasing roar of the wind, clearly alarmed.

“They’re already in the cellar,” Cora answered. “Follow me, everyone. We can make it, but we have to move *now!*”

Soon they were all together, huddled around a lamp as the storm rattled the boards of the house overhead. That day would later become known as Black Sunday because of the epic storm that blew over the plains. But Cora would remember it best as the day before her sixteenth birthday, when she helped lead her family to safety.

Circle the correct answer.

Which sentence from the passage best shows that Cora’s ability to take charge in a dangerous situation will lead to a happy resolution?

- A** “Cora froze for a moment and then shouted ‘Dust storm!’ loudly enough for everyone inside to hear.”
- B** “Cora held the cellar door open for her mother and the younger children as they descended into the cool darkness.”
- C** “‘Follow me, everyone. We can make it, but we have to move *now!*’”
- D** “That day would later be known as Black Sunday because of the epic storm that blew over the plains.”



Show Your Thinking

Explain how the sentence you chose demonstrates Cora taking charge and a happy ending.



With a partner, discuss how Cora’s actions and the plot events, including the resolution, help reveal her character.



Read the scene below, in which a beggar boy sets off a surprising chain of events at a London castle in the year 1547. Use the Study Buddy and the Close Reading to guide your reading.

Genre: Historical Fiction



As I read, I'm going to think about how the setting, characters, and plot interact. I'll note details that help me understand how the characters' actions move the plot forward.

Close Reading

What event causes the prince to behave as he does? **Draw a box** around details that explain his actions.

How is the setting of the guarded gate important to the events? **Underline** any details that show the importance of the setting to the events.

from *The Prince and the Pauper*

by Mark Twain

- 1 Poor little Tom, in his rags, approached, and was moving slowly and timidly past the guards, with a beating heart and a rising hope, when all at once he caught sight through the golden bars of a spectacle that almost made him shout for joy. Within was a comely boy, tanned and brown with sturdy outdoor sports and exercises, whose clothing was all of lovely silks and satins, shining with jewels; at his hip a little jewelled sword and dagger; dainty buskins on his feet, with red heels; and on his head a jaunty crimson cap, with drooping plumes. . . .
- 2 Tom's breath came quick and short with excitement, and his eyes grew big with wonder and delight. Everything gave way in his mind instantly to one desire: that was to get close to the prince, and have a good, devouring look at him. Before he knew what he was about, he had his face against the gate-bars. The next instant one of the soldiers snatched him rudely away, and sent him spinning among the gaping crowd of country gawks and London idlers. The soldier said,—“Mind thy manners, thou young beggar!”
- 3 The crowd jeered and laughed; but the young prince sprang to the gate with his face flushed, and his eyes flashing with indignation, and cried out,—
- 4 “How dar'st thou use a poor lad like that? How dar'st thou use the King my father's meanest subject so? Open the gates, and let him in!”
- 5 You should have seen that fickle crowd snatch off their hats then. You should have heard them cheer, and shout, “Long live the Prince of Wales!”
- 6 The soldiers presented arms with their halberds, opened the gates, and presented again as the little Prince of Poverty passed in, in his fluttering rags, to join hands with the Prince of Limitless Plenty.



Hints

Think about what Tom wants and how his attempt to achieve his goal causes trouble.

Which choice describes why a main character acts to change another's situation?

What problem does the guarded gate pose for Tom? What details show this problem? And how is the problem resolved?

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- 1 Which sentence best shows how one character can set the events of a story in motion?
 - A "Tom's breath came quick and short with excitement, and his eyes grew big with wonder and delight."
 - B "Everything gave way in his mind instantly to one desire: that was to get close to the prince . . ."
 - C "The soldier said,—'Mind thy manners, thou young beggar!'"
 - D "Within was a comely boy, tanned and brown with sturdy outdoor sports and exercises . . ."

- 2 Which sentence best describes how story events influence a main character's actions?
 - A The prince sees Tom being mistreated by the soldier and takes pity on him.
 - B At first the crowd jeers and laughs, but then they snatch off their hats and begin to cheer for the prince.
 - C The soldiers make certain that Tom and the prince remain separated by the gate.
 - D The country gawkers and London idlers shame the prince into doing something to help Tom.

- 3 In this passage, the setting of the guarded gate is an important cause of the main conflict. Write a paragraph supporting this idea. Use at least two details from the passage to support your response.



Read the story. Then answer the questions that follow.

Scarborough Fair Fantasy

by Stu Darnell

1 “Come on, Lacey, we’re going to be late,” said Eric, annoyed that his little sister kept stopping to look at the vendors’ carts when he was due at the meadow to sing with his school chorus. The trip to Scarborough Renaissance Festival in Waxahachie, Texas, each April was a tradition at Eric’s school. Families traveled to the fair to watch their children perform and to enjoy medieval food, entertainment, and crafts.

2 Eric looked over his shoulder just in time to see Lacey disappear into a tent unlike any he had ever seen. Most artisans had open stalls, but this was a tent with ornate walls fringed with gold tassels.

3 Sighing in frustration, Eric followed Lacey into the tent, where he found his sister sitting cross-legged on a pile of cushions, listening with rapt attention to a woman wearing the medieval costume of a merchant. He knew from his social studies class that most of the people who lived in the medieval times were peasants who wore patched clothing of rough cloth, while the nobility often wore fine clothes of silk or velvet richly embroidered with beads or jewels. This woman’s dress was something in between the two—fine embroidered silk, but shabby. She probably had gotten it from the costume rack at the local thrift store just like me, Eric thought, glancing down at his long, silk-lined cape.

4 The mysterious woman held a book illustrated with richly detailed, ancient-looking illustrations as she told a story about a young silversmith’s apprentice. Eric started to grab Lacey’s arm but suddenly felt very weary. After all, he had risen at five in the morning for the long drive to Waxahachie, and he had just devoured a huge turkey leg. As he listened to the storyteller, Eric’s eyes grew heavier and heavier.

5 Eric awoke with a start to find Lacey practically dragging him to his feet, whispering, “Come on, Eric—the Sheriff’s after you!”

6 “What are you talking about?” asked Eric. As he emerged from the tent, he rubbed his eyes hard to make sure he was really awake. What was going on?

7 Before, the people at the fair had been wearing shorts and T-shirts, but now everyone seemed to be in full costume. Instead of pushing strollers, they were pushing crude carts and dodging farm animals in the square. And the air, which before had been filled with the scent of popcorn, now smelled of horses and smoke.

8 “Hear ye, hear ye!” boomed a loud voice.

9 Eric whirled around to see a man in a brown leather vest reading from a scroll: “Eric, a boy apprenticed to Randolph the silversmith, has fled from the neighboring town. He has stolen silver from his master. A reward is offered for his capture.”

10 Eric felt two hands seize his arms from behind. “Here’s the thief!” cried the burly owner of the hands.

11 “Wait, you’re making a mistake!” cried Eric.



- 12 “Then what’s this?” cried a woman in a green, woolen dress, snatching up the small, silver-colored MP3 player Eric had clipped to his costume. The player’s ear buds flew out of Eric’s ears, and the man holding his arms let go and started batting at the flying ear buds as if they were giant mosquitoes.
- 13 “Come on, Eric—run!” Lacey ran toward the largest building in the square, which Eric realized was a church. Close on his sister’s heels, Eric rushed through its heavy doors and slammed them shut.
- 14 “Are you seeking sanctuary, a safe harbor, freedom from persecution, my children?” asked a man in a long, brown robe. Eric and Lacey nodded their heads, too stunned at first to speak.
- 15 “Are you going to turn me in?” stammered Eric fearfully.
- 16 The parish priest shook his head. “Anyone seeking sanctuary has protection in this church for forty days. Besides, the apprentice whom the constable seeks is here. He has already made his confession. Now, you wear the clothing of a noble, yet I can see that you are not.”
- 17 “I’m just a kid!” Eric said, confused.
- 18 “You think you are the child of a goat? Poor boy. Even so, you will need peasants’ clothing. You are violating the law by wearing the garb of the noble class.” The man left and then came back with brown homespun leggings and a tunic. Eric bundled them under his arm.
- 19 “Um—thanks, but what are we going to do for forty days?” Before he got an answer, Eric yawned, feeling his eyes grow heavy again. He lay down on a bed of straw in the corner and watched sleepily while Lacey chased a mouse along the stone wall of the church.
- 20 When he awoke, Eric was back in the cozy tent. The storyteller was gone, but Lacey was curled up on a pillow next to him, snoring lightly. A pair of sneakers poked under the tent flap; it was their mother. “Eric, I’ve been looking everywhere—you’ll be late for your performance!”
- 21 Eric got up groggily. Looking down, he noticed that he was still wearing his thrift-store costume, but later, when he patted his vest to feel for his MP3 player, it had disappeared.

1

Which sentence from the passage **best** shows how a change of setting leads to the main conflict?

- A** “‘Come on, Lacey, we’re going to be late,’ said Eric, annoyed that his little sister kept stopping to look at the vendor’s carts when he was due at the meadow to sing with his school chorus.”
- B** “Most artisans had open stalls, but this was a tent with ornate walls fringed with gold tassels.”
- C** “Eric whirled around to see a man in a brown leather vest reading from a scroll: ‘Eric, a boy apprenticed to Randolph the silversmith, has fled from the neighboring town.’”
- D** “Close on his sister’s heels, Eric rushed through its heavy doors and slammed them shut.”



2 This question has two parts. Answer Part A, and then answer Part B.

Part A

How does the setting of the story affect the events in the church?

- A** The priest knows that Eric is a time traveler from the future.
- B** The priest misinterprets Eric’s modern language.
- C** The priest wrongly assumes that Eric is a thief because he has run to the church.
- D** The priest thinks Eric is a runaway apprentice.

Part B

Select **one** sentence from the story that supports the answer in Part A. Underline the sentence you select.

“I’m just a kid!” Eric said, confused.

“You think you are the child of a goat? Poor boy. Even so, you will need peasants’ clothing. You are violating the law by wearing the garb of the noble class.” The man left and then came back with brown homespun leggings and a tunic. Eric bundled them under his arm.

3 Explain how the setting changes the first time Eric falls asleep. Describe how this change affects the series of events that follows. Use at least **two** details from the text in your response.

 **Self Check** Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 44.