

Developing Narrative Settings

Nurture students' creativity—and their grasp on setting—with a fiction writing activity about a historical moment in the White House.

Objective

Students will write narratives, focusing on setting, and apply the writing process (planning, revising, and editing) to their work.

Standards

CCSS ELA, Grs. 6–8

CCRA.W.3

Write narratives about imagined events with details and well-structured sequences

CCRA.W.5

Develop writing by planning, revising, editing, and rewriting

CCRA.W.7

Conduct short research projects with focused questions

Time

120 minutes

Materials

- Access to the internet (alternately, library time for students to research)
- Craft a White House Story activity sheet
- The Places and Spaces of the White House resource sheet

1 ★ **Ask:** *What makes a story interesting?* Have students brainstorm and collect answers on the board (examples: characters who seem real, intriguing settings, colorful details, humor, compelling conflict, etc). Focus on setting (where and when a story takes place), and prompt students to explain what it is. Come up with a definition based on student answers and write it on the board.

2 ★ **Discuss** why setting impacts a story. Have students consider how a favorite novel would have gone differently if it had taken place in another room, country, or time period. For example, how might Hansel and Gretel's story be different if they had gotten lost in a castle...or in 2019 with GPS phones? How does the dialogue in a story about a fight with a friend play out if it happens during class versus the cafeteria; or in 1930 versus today?

3 ★ **Tell** students they will be writing a story, and using a room of the White House during a historic time period as their setting. As they plan their story, they should consider how setting, character, and plot intertwine and impact one another.

4 ★ **Research:** Students will research a few White House rooms—and what they were like in a different historical time period—to gather details for their story setting. To kick off, show the classroom poster and discuss the floor plan.

- **For students over 13**, direct them to bit.ly/WH-Rooms to see individual rooms (click on a photo to see a room's details).

• For students of any age:

- » Print and distribute The Places and Spaces of the White House resource sheet as a cheat sheet.
- » Alternately, print photos and descriptions of each room and post around the classroom for students to choose from.

5 ★ **Hand out** the Craft a White House Story activity sheet to guide students in brainstorming and planning specific story elements. Students may need to conduct additional research on their room's setting and time period.

6 ★ **Assign** students to draft and revise in class or at home (set a length guideline). Once their narratives are finalized, create a class book or invite other classes to "visit the White House" for a read-aloud publishing party in your classroom.

★ ★ ★

Supporting All Learners

To increase the challenge:

Instruct students to write two possible endings, basing them on two different decisions a character could make at the turning point of the story. Increase the challenge further by having students introduce a second White House room.

To decrease the challenge:

Have students "write what they know" using a conflict from their own lives and tweaking it for a White House setting. They can base characters on people in their own lives who don't live or work at the White House.

Name _____

Craft a White House Story

On a separate piece of paper, plan out the important elements of your story, like setting, character, and plot. Once you've outlined everything, start writing.

<p>1</p> <p>Story genre Choose mystery, fantasy, historical fiction, humor, etc.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Main characters Write down a couple of words or images to describe their character traits.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Plot summary Use the plot arc stages: exposition, rising action, conflict, turning point, and resolution.</p>
<p>2</p> <p>Setting Describe the specific room in the White House by considering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room purpose, such as public state dinners, private meetings, playroom, workers working, etc. • Room details, such as size, decorations, color, history, artifacts displayed there, etc. • Time period details, such as what technology was available, how people dressed, etc. 	<p>4</p> <p>Conflict You can expand on one of these problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between characters (example: one person wants power over another) • Inside one character (example: the protagonist can't decide whether to do the right thing) • External event that the character must deal with (example: something was stolen) 	<p>6</p> <p>Resolution How does the main character fix the problem?</p> <p>★ Extra details you want to include:</p>

WRITING TIP ★ *Be sure to blend your story elements by having the characters interact with the setting and making the surroundings part of the plot.*