How Setting, Character, and Plot Interact

Name: _____	Date: _____	Score: _____ / 10

Quick Review

Story elements pull on each other. Setting shapes what a character is allowed to do; character choices push the plot in one direction or another; the plot, in turn, reveals new sides of the characters. Read each scene and ask: which element is doing the most work right now, and what is it doing to the others?

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

The Greenhouse on the Hill

The greenhouse on the hill behind the community center had been locked since the previous September, when its owner — a retired botanist named Mr. Avelar — had broken his hip on the icy driveway and moved to live with his daughter. The plants inside had not been watered, properly, in six months. By the time the seventh-grade environmental club was given keys in March, the place looked the way Yolanda's grandmother's lungs sounded on a bad day — humid, struggling, and uneven. There were forty-three pots, a cracked irrigation hose, and a thermostat that read either eighty-eight degrees or nothing, depending on whether you touched the wall.

The faculty advisor, Ms. Beake, divided the seven club members into three teams: one for the plants that could be saved, one for the plants that could not, and one for the building itself. She did not, however, assign the teams. "You decide," she said. "I'll be in my classroom grading papers if you need me." Yolanda watched her walk back down the hill and understood, in the quiet that followed, that the room had just become harder than she had expected. Without an adult to point at the answers, the seven of them stood in a loose half-circle and waited for someone else to start.

Daniel, who was usually quiet, surprised everyone — Yolanda most of all — by saying, "I'll take the ones we can't save." He did not explain. Yolanda, who had been hoping someone would assign her to the easier living-plant team, suddenly heard her own voice say, "I'll do the building." The building, she had already noticed, had a missing window pane, two broken thermometers, a thirty-foot hose that was cracked in at least four places, and a thermostat that was honestly a hazard. She had not known until she heard herself volunteer that she had been waiting for someone harder than herself to choose first. Daniel had cleared the path. She had walked onto it.

By the end of April, the greenhouse looked different in three specific ways. The seventeen plants Daniel had ruled "could not be saved" had been emptied, their pots washed, their soil composted, and their labels filed in a small green notebook so that Mr. Avelar — when he came back to visit, which he did in May — could see exactly which seedlings he had lost. The eighteen plants the living-plant team had kept alive were thriving, two of them flowering for the first time in years. And the building itself had been quietly, stubbornly repaired by Yolanda — new pane, new hose, a new thermostat that actually told the truth. Mr. Avelar walked through it slowly with his cane, said nothing for a long time, and then asked Yolanda where she had learned to caulk a window. "My grandmother," she said, which was, technically, true. He nodded as though he had expected that answer all along.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use the passage to answer each question. Pay attention to how the setting, the characters, and the plot affect each other.

1. How does the SETTING in paragraph 1 most directly SHAPE what the characters will have to do?

A. The setting is so safe and well-maintained that the students will have almost no real work to do.

B. The setting's specific damage — unwatered plants, a cracked hose, an unreliable thermostat — defines the exact problems the students must solve.

C. The setting is a generic schoolyard and could have been any location without changing the story.

D. The setting is dangerous in a way that will force the students to leave before anything is fixed.

2. What does Ms. Beake's CHOICE not to assign teams do to the PLOT of the story?

A. It moves the plot forward smoothly because the students immediately know what to do.

B. It removes the easy structure of adult assignment, which forces the students to choose for themselves — and that choice IS the next event.

C. It ends the plot, because nothing else happens after she walks away.

D. It introduces a brand-new setting that the students must now travel to.

3. Which sentence BEST shows that Daniel's CHOICE in paragraph 3 directly affects Yolanda's choice?

A. "Daniel, who was usually quiet, surprised everyone — Yolanda most of all — by saying, 'I'll take the ones we can't save.'"

B. "She had not known until she heard herself volunteer that she had been waiting for someone harder than herself to choose first. Daniel had cleared the path. She had walked onto it."

C. "The faculty advisor, Ms. Beake, divided the seven club members into three teams."

D. "There were forty-three pots, a cracked irrigation hose, and a thermostat that read either eighty-eight degrees or nothing."

4. How does the SETTING help reveal something about Yolanda's CHARACTER?

A. The locked, damaged greenhouse is an obstacle she does not engage with.

B. The building's specific problems — a missing pane, a cracked hose, a thermostat that lies — let Yolanda show a side of herself (quiet, practical competence) that she had not known she was waiting to use.

C. The building is empty, so there is nothing for Yolanda to do that reveals anything about her.

D. Yolanda dislikes the greenhouse and tries to leave whenever she enters.

5. Which detail from paragraph 4 BEST shows that the plot has BEEN RESOLVED in a way that respects all three story elements (setting, character, plot)?

A. Mr. Avelar walks through the greenhouse slowly with his cane.

B. Three specific changes — emptied pots with filed labels, thriving plants, and a building that has been honestly repaired — match the three teams' work AND the original damage.

C. Mr. Avelar broke his hip on an icy driveway the previous September.

D. Yolanda's grandmother had taught her how to caulk a window.

6. Which sentence BEST captures the way SETTING and CHARACTER interact in this story?

A. The setting is hostile to every character and ends up hurting them physically.

B. The setting is a neutral backdrop that does not affect the characters at all.

C. The setting provides specific, concrete problems that allow each character to choose what kind of person they will be, and the characters' choices in turn restore the setting.

D. The setting changes the characters' names and ages by the end of the story.

7. Why is it MEANINGFUL that the seventeen plants Daniel ruled "could not be saved" have their LABELS FILED in a small green notebook for Mr. Avelar?

A. It shows that Daniel is not really doing his job and is keeping the dead plants instead.

B. It shows that even the "can't be saved" team handled the work with care — the loss is recorded, named, and offered back to the owner.

C. It shows that Mr. Avelar plans to bring all seventeen plants back from the dead.

D. It shows that the notebook is the most important object in the greenhouse.

8. Mr. Avelar's question — "Where did you learn to caulk a window?" — and Yolanda's answer — "My grandmother" — interact with the EARLIER detail that the greenhouse "looked the way Yolanda's grandmother's lungs sounded on a bad day." This connection MOST CLEARLY does what?

A. It proves that Yolanda's grandmother and Mr. Avelar are the same person.

B. It ties the setting (a struggling, humid building) to the character (a girl whose grandmother also struggled) and closes a small private loop the reader has been carrying since paragraph 1.

C. It shows that Yolanda has been lying to Mr. Avelar throughout the story.

D. It explains why thermostats are unreliable in old buildings.

9. Choose ONE character — Yolanda, Daniel, or Ms. Beake — and explain how the SETTING (the damaged greenhouse) lets us see something about that character we would not otherwise see. Use one specific detail from the passage.

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_____

10. Explain in 3-4 sentences how the PLOT of the story would be DIFFERENT if Ms. Beake had assigned the three teams herself instead of letting the students choose. Use details from the passage to support your answer.

_____

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Answer Keys

1	A	**B**	C	D	6	A	B	**C**	D
2	A	**B**	C	D	7	A	**B**	C	D
3	A	**B**	C	D	8	A	**B**	C	D
4	A	**B**	C	D	9	See below			
5	A	**B**	C	D	10	See below			

Explanations

1. B	Forty-three pots, a cracked hose, and a faulty thermostat are not background — they are the to-do list. A reverses the damage; C ignores the very specific details; D contradicts the actual resolution.
2. B	Without an assignment, the silence in paragraph 2 becomes the engine for paragraph 3 — Daniel's volunteer, then Yolanda's. A misreads the awkward pause; C contradicts the rest of the story; D invents a setting change.
3. B	The narrator names the cause-and-effect explicitly: he cleared the path, she walked on it. A only shows Daniel's choice; C is the setup before any choice; D is setting, not character interaction.
4. B	Setting offers the chance; character takes it. The exact damage matches a skill (caulking, fixing) she learned from her grandmother — that match is how setting reveals character. A and D contradict her actions; C reverses the damage.
5. B	Three specific changes, three teams, three kinds of damage from paragraph 1 — the resolution is structurally answering every problem. A is one detail; C is backstory; D is one piece of character history.
6. C	Damage offers chances; characters take them; the building is restored. A overstates harm; B ignores the obvious interaction; D is nonsense.
7. B	Filing the labels keeps the work respectful — the lost plants are not dumped, they are named. That detail develops Daniel's character INSIDE the plot's resolution. A reverses Daniel's responsibility; C is impossible; D overclaims about an ordinary notebook.
8. B	The lungs-comparison plants the link in paragraph 1; the grandmother-answer pays it off in paragraph 4. A is impossible; C contradicts "which was, technically, true"; D is a literal off-topic answer.
9.	**Answer:** Strong answers tie a specific bit of setting to a specific revelation. Examples: (a) Yolanda — the missing pane, the cracked hose, and the lying thermostat let her show a quiet, practical competence she had learned from her grandmother, which we see when Mr. Avelar asks where she learned to caulk; (b) Daniel — the seventeen plants that cannot be saved let his usually-quiet care show, in the way he files their labels in the notebook; (c) Ms. Beake — the greenhouse's lack of an obvious system lets her show a trust in the students by NOT assigning teams and walking back down the hill. NOT acceptable: a character trait with no setting tied to it; setting without a character revealed; vague answers like "the greenhouse changes everyone." Pick one character. Name one piece of setting. Then say what that setting LETS that character do or show.

10.	**Answer:** Strong answers explain that assignment would have removed the silence in paragraph 2, which is the space in which Daniel and Yolanda make their choices — so the plot would have lost the specific revelation that Yolanda "had been waiting for someone harder than herself to choose first" AND the moment Daniel "cleared the path." Without those choices, the same physical work might still get done, but the plot would not develop the characters at all. Acceptable variations: any answer that names the lost silence AND ties it to a specific character moment. NOT acceptable: "the plot would be exactly the same" with no analysis; answers that change the setting instead of the plot; answers with no quoted or paraphrased detail. Without the silence, what happens to Yolanda's realization? Without the realization, what happens to the plot?

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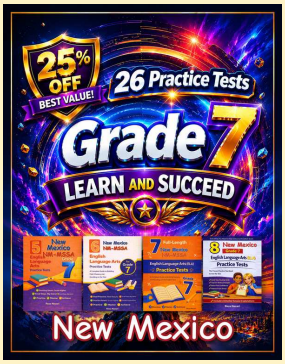

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