SAMPLE Setting (and character) Essay
A More Subtle Element

When looking for elements of a good style, writers often look at descriptions, plot, characters, point of view and theme. A more subtle element that is often overlooked is setting. Setting can be used to expand our view and knowledge of a character, such as in A Study in Scarlet by A. C. Doyle. Through the characters’ reaction to the setting, Doyle gives insight into their true nature. The correlation between their reaction and who they really are can be seen in Dr. Watson's human reaction, Sherlock Holmes' analytical reaction, and Lestrade's prideful reaction.

Dr. Watson’s reaction to setting allows one to see his normal human nature. When he walks into the scene of the crime, he gives a good description of the room, and then says, “All these details I observed afterward. At present my attention was centered upon the single grim, motionless figure which lay stretched upon the boards” (Chapter 3). His horrified reaction reveals his human tendencies and thought patterns, noticing the body before looking for clues. His behavior may not seem strange, but in the light of his other companions, it is worth noting.

Although completely opposite of the doctor’s reaction, Holmes’ analytical reaction to the setting shows that his mind works in a completely different channel than most; a channel in which strong emotion has no place. The setting brings this lackadaisical and slightly cold nature forward. Upon arriving on the scene he did not rush in to see the place where the crime was committed, but instead he “lounged up and down the pavement, and gazed vacantly at the ground, the sky, the opposite house, and the line of railings... he proceeded slowly down the path, or, down the fringe of grass which flanked the path, keeping his eyes riveted upon the ground” (chapter 3). This shows not only his relaxed and unhurried nature, but also how his analytical nature wouldn’t allow him to miss any clues. In spite of his many talents, he does not act proud, unlike one of his fellow detectives.
Lestrade’s use of the setting to lift up his reputation allows us to see his prideful nature more clearly. Though he is working for Scotland Yard with other detectives, he is constantly trying to outdo them and get all of the credit. While Sherlock Holmes and another detective are standing around the body, he comes up, overjoyed because he has found a clue that his colleagues haven’t found; “the little man’s eyes sparkled as he spoke, and he was evidently in a state of suppressed exultation at having scored a point against his colleague” (Chapter 3). Though he wants the crime solved, his main motive is to bring glory to himself, which is revealed through his reaction to setting. Thus through setting his inner nature is revealed.

Setting can serve many different functions, but in this case, it is used to test the characters. Setting is used to reveal their traits, mannerisms, and nature through their reaction to it. This is clearly seen in Dr. Watson's human reaction, Sherlock Holmes' analytical reaction, and Lestrade's prideful reaction. Though setting is one of the more subtle elements, it is just as important as the rest. Through the use of setting to further our understanding of his characters, A. C. Doyle writes a masterful story.