

ROANOKE REGIONAL WRITERS CONFERENCE 2019

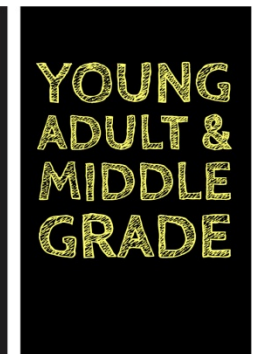
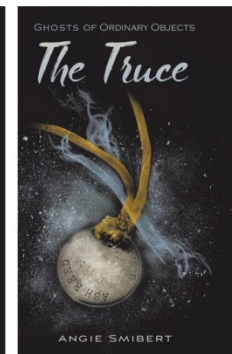
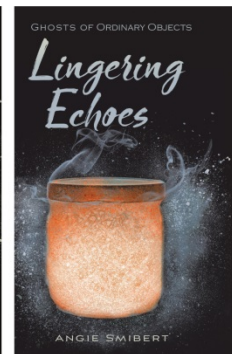
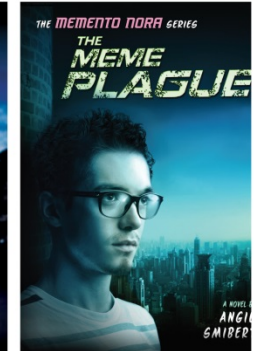
Sense of Place

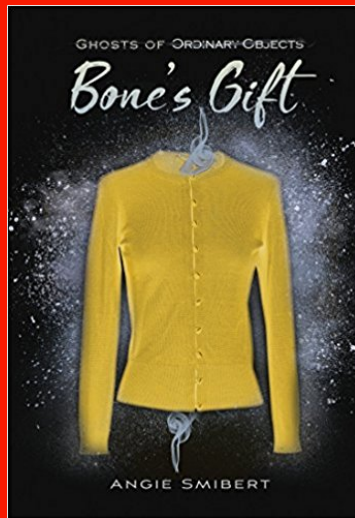
CREATING IT IN YOUR FICTION

Angie Smibert

Angie Smibert

www.angiesmibert.com





”Setting and storytelling are the focus of this historical, paranormal mystery set in southern Appalachia during WWII. ...This well-researched novel has a **strong sense of place...**”

- ***Booklist***



Sense of place

What is it?

Some places hold
special meaning.

Neighborhood, coffee shop, university,
city of millions...



Coal mining camp



Placeless Place

“There’s no there there.” – Getrude Stein



Maycomb, Alabama

To Kill a Mockingbird





Fiction depends for its
life on place...

Eudora Welty





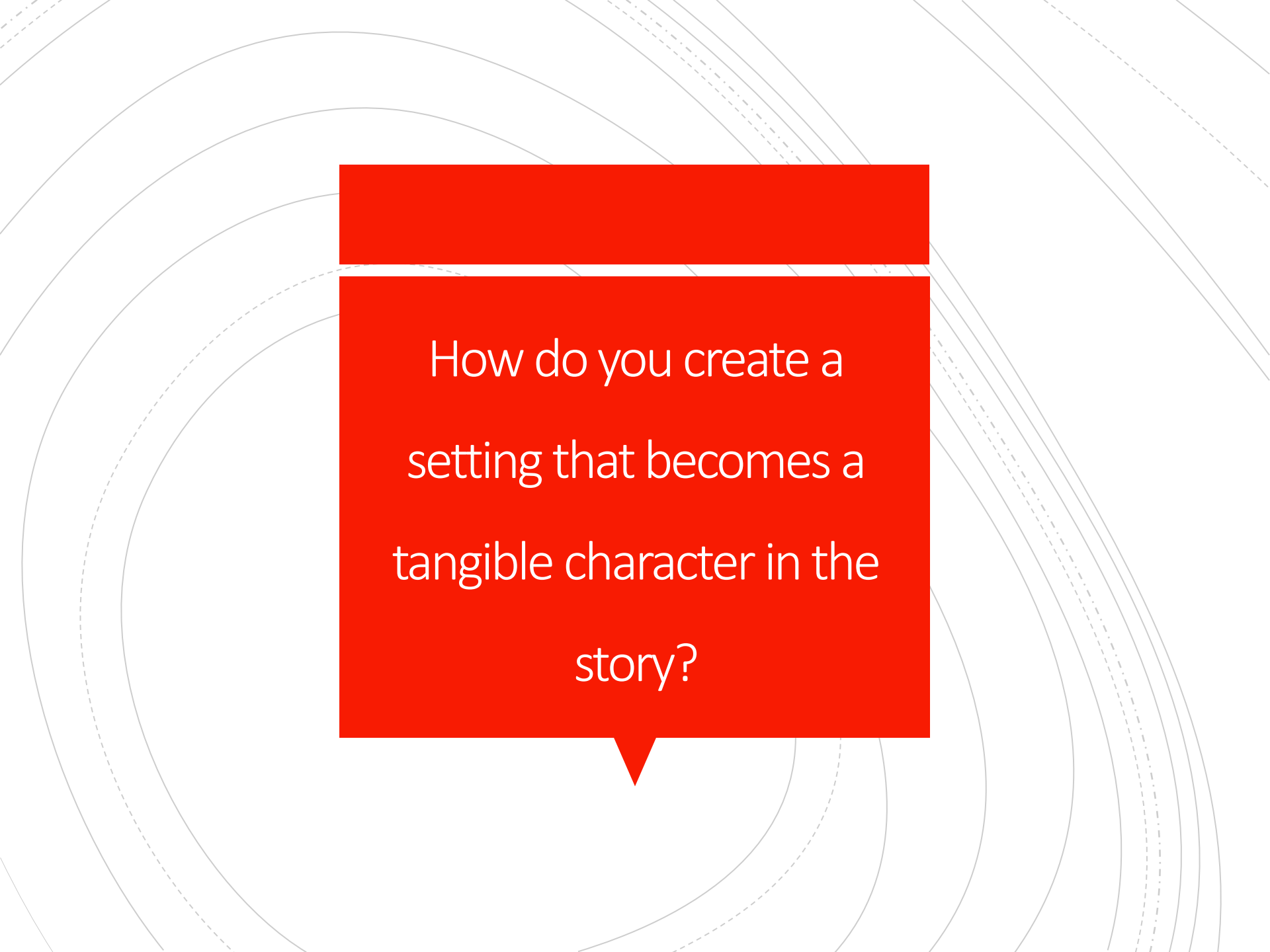
Fargo

“Minnesota Nice”



Hogwarts



The background features several concentric circles of varying radii, some solid and some dashed, creating a ripple effect. A prominent red speech bubble is centered on the page, containing white text. The speech bubble has a rectangular body and a triangular tail pointing downwards.

How do you create a
setting that becomes a
tangible character in the
story?



Creating Place in Fiction

1. BUILDING THE WORLD

- Checklist
- Iceberg
- POV

2. CASTING THE SPELL

- Engage senses
- Use vivid details
- Mimic speech
- Avoid exposition
- Pull double duty

The background features several concentric circles of varying radii, some solid and some dashed, creating a ripple effect. A large red speech bubble is centered on the page, containing the main text.

Step 1: Building the World

(aka, the fun part)



Brief Checklist

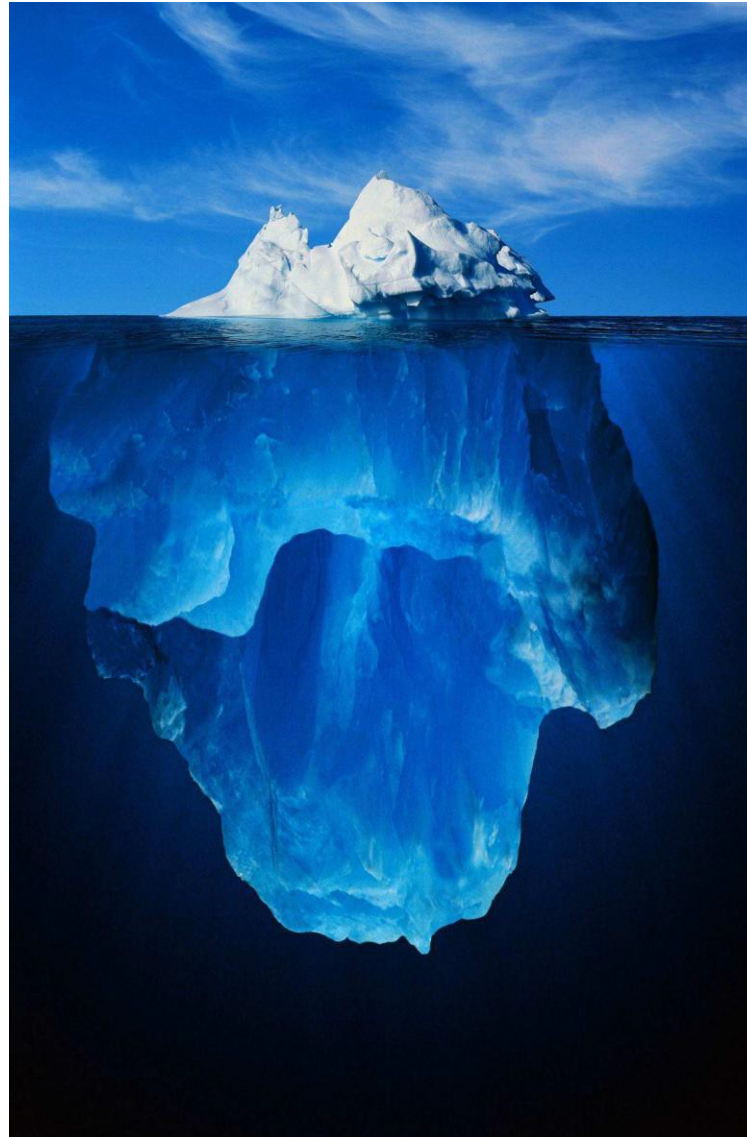
- Rules
- Power
- Environment
- Culture
- People

**What makes this
place distinct?**

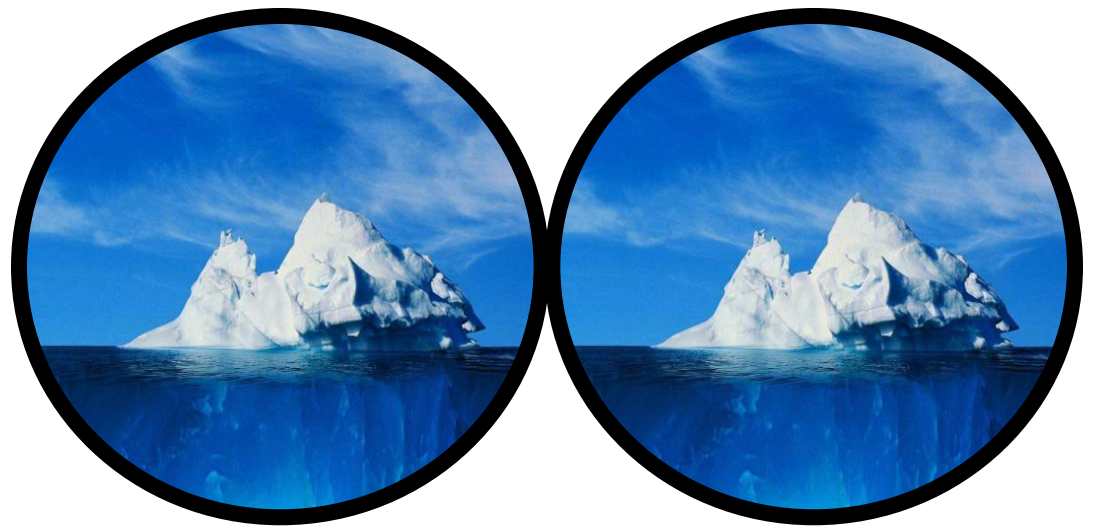


What you show the reader

**The rest of your
world**




Point of View





Step 2: Casting the Spell.

(aka, the hard part)



Engage the senses

- Sounds
- Touch / feel
- Smells
- Taste
- Sight

What are the distinct sensory details that define the place?



Use
concrete,
evocative
language

VAGUE

- Red dress
- Dirty hands
- Garden

VIVID

- Stewed cherry dress
- Ash gray nail beds no amount of soap could clean
- Herbs and dark leafy kale greened the earth



Mimic speech patterns

- Sounds
- Words
- Sentence structure

Spreading the Word
John McWhorter



Appalachian Accent

- **Glide reduction.**
my becomes mah
- **Unstressing –ing.**
graduating becomes graduatin’
- **Consonant cluster simplifications**
kept becomes kep.

Appalachia n Slang

- *Airish*: chilly or cool.
- *Biddable*: obedient or docile
- *Chancy*: doubtful, dangerous
- *Contrary*: to oppose, vex, or anger
- *Discomfit*: to inconvenience
- *Haint*: ghost
- *Poke*: a paper bag

Appalachian Grammar

FEATURE

- A-prefixing
- Perfective Done
- Demonstrative Them
- Leveled *Was*

EXAMPLE

- She was a'washing the clothes.
- She done washed the dishes.
- How do you like them apples?
- They was going to the movies.



Conveying dialect

- Create the *illusion* of dialect.
- Use dialect as seasoning.
- Do it with respect and understanding.
- Be cognizant of codeswitching.

What are the distinct details that define the speech patterns of your characters?



Avoid Exposition

DON'T

- Dump paragraphs of info.
- Use “As you know, Bob” dialogue
- Explain too much.

DO

- Sprinkle clues throughout action and dialogue.
- Use small amounts of expo to slow pace.
- Make words pull double-duty.



Ship Breaker

Nailer clambered through a service duct, tugging at copper wire and yanking it free. **Ancient asbestos** fibers and mouse grit puffed up around him as the wire tore loose. He scrambled deeper into the duct, jerking more wire from its aluminum staples. The staples pinged about the cramped metal passage like **coins offered to the Scavenge God**, and **Nailer felt after them eagerly**, hunting for their dull gleam and collecting them in a leather bag he kept at his waist. He yanked again at the wiring. A meter's worth of **precious copper** tore loose in his hands and dust clouds enveloped him.

Bacigalupi, Paolo. *Ship Breaker*. New York: Little, Brown, 2011. Print



Uses of Setting

- Create the world
- Orient reader
- Show characterization
- Adjust pacing and tension
- Relate backstory
- Set or reflect mood
- Foreshadow events
- Add imagery / symbolism...



Tips

- Create a complete world.
 - Pick out key elements that make the place distinct.
 - Don't forget speech!
 - Think about how the POV character sees the world.
 - Use concrete / vivid details.
 - Make your words work hard for you
-
- But don't over do it!
 - Balance details and distraction.
 - Avoid exposition.
 - Beware overwriting.
 - Avoid cliches and well-worn tropes.



One place understood
helps us understand all
places better.

Eudora Welty



A red speech bubble graphic with a white outline, containing the text 'Books on World Building'. The bubble has a tail pointing downwards and to the right.

Books on World Building

- *Wonderbook: The Illustrated Guide to Creating Imaginative Fiction* by Jeff Vandermeer
- *Aliens & Alien Societies: A Writer's Guide to Creating Extraterrestrial Life-Forms* by Stanley Schmidt
- *World Building* by Stephen Gillette

Web Resources

- Kate Messner's TED talk on World Building
(<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-to-build-a-fictional-world-kate-messner>)
- Fantasy World Building Questions by Patricia Wrede
(<http://www.sfwa.org/2009/08/fantasy-worldbuilding-questions/>)
- Five Foundations of World Building by Malinda Lo
(<http://www.malindalo.com/2012/10/five-foundations-of-world-building/>)
- Fantasy World Builder Guide
(<http://www.webwriter.net/fantasy/days/days/01.html>)



Questions

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