Worksheet 1

Cell 13
Describing a Setting

'Chisholm Prison was an imposing structure of granite. It was surrounded by a wall 10 metres high. Atop this fence was a fence of steel rods. The yard was 8 metres wide. At all times of the clock there were armed guards in the yard. By night the yard was almost as brilliantly lighted as by day. On each of the four sides was a great arc light. The lights brightly illuminated the spiked top of the wall.'

The author of *Cell 13* introduces Part II of the text using a detailed description of the story's main setting – Chisholm Prison. This description reflects the importance of how the setting plays a major role in establishing the *emotional life* of a text. This means that the way a setting is described can reflect how the characters are feeling about where they are. In the example above, Chisholm Prison is described as '*imposing*', securely enclosed and well guarded. The author is 'setting the scene' that the prison would be almost impossible to escape from – the primary aim of the main character.

Top Tips for writing an effective setting:

◊ use vivid descriptions with plenty of adjectives and adverbs. How do we know the prison was bright at nighttime? Because the author uses specific vocabulary like '*great arc light*' and '*brilliantly illuminated*'.

◊ use figurative language e.g. similes (*as brilliantly lighted as by day*) and personification (describing the prison as *imposing*).

◊ vary your sentence beginnings (e.g. *Atop this fence…By night…*)

◊ employ the five senses (What can you see/hear/smell/taste/feel?)

Task 1: Select one or more of the following places to use as a story setting. Write a descriptive paragraph about this setting using the top tips outlined above.

a dense forest	the beach at night	a decrepit house
small country town	an abandoned farm	an opulent mansion
a futuristic school	a war zone	an arid desert
an ancient burial ground	an undiscovered world	a busy city

Task 2: Use one of the settings you have described as an introduction for an imaginary narrative text.

Task 3: Write your imaginative narrative using as much descriptive language as you can.

Extension Activities:

• Locate examples of effectively described settings in the books you have read. Write a review about why these settings are successful in helping to establish the emotional life of the text.

• Research a well-known prison escape. What happened? How did the prisoner(s) escape? Were they recaptured? What were the repercussions of the escape?