

# What is setting? Why do we need it?

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All story (or memoir or narrative non-fiction) happens somewhere — in a setting — from an epic fantasy world, to a one-room literary novel, to a globe-trotting thriller, to a personal travel memoir

A scene has a character (or characters) in a setting performing some kind of action toward a specific goal.





# What is a setting? What is a world?

A particular place — the hobbit hole — in the larger world, Tolkien's Middle Earth

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

*The Hobbit* — J.R.R. Tolkien

(Interestingly, this is a 'negative' description of a setting!)



# Why do we need to write better settings and inspire a sense of place?

Your job as a writer is to manipulate the reader — make them think what you want them to think, and to feel the emotions you want to evoke.

Your setting will influence their experience of the book.

Not too much.

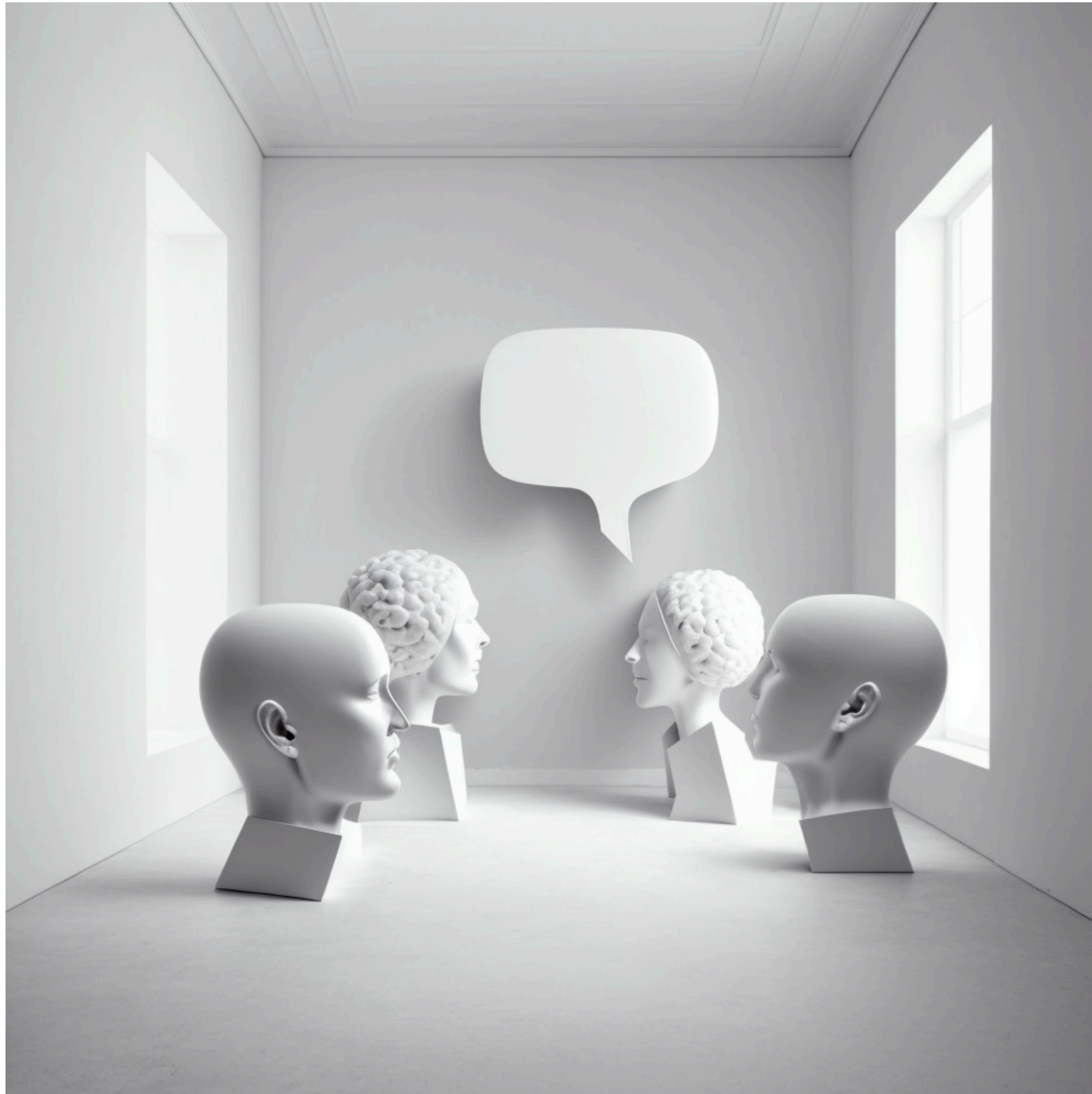
Not too little.

Vary the techniques.





# Avoid ‘talking heads in an empty white room.’



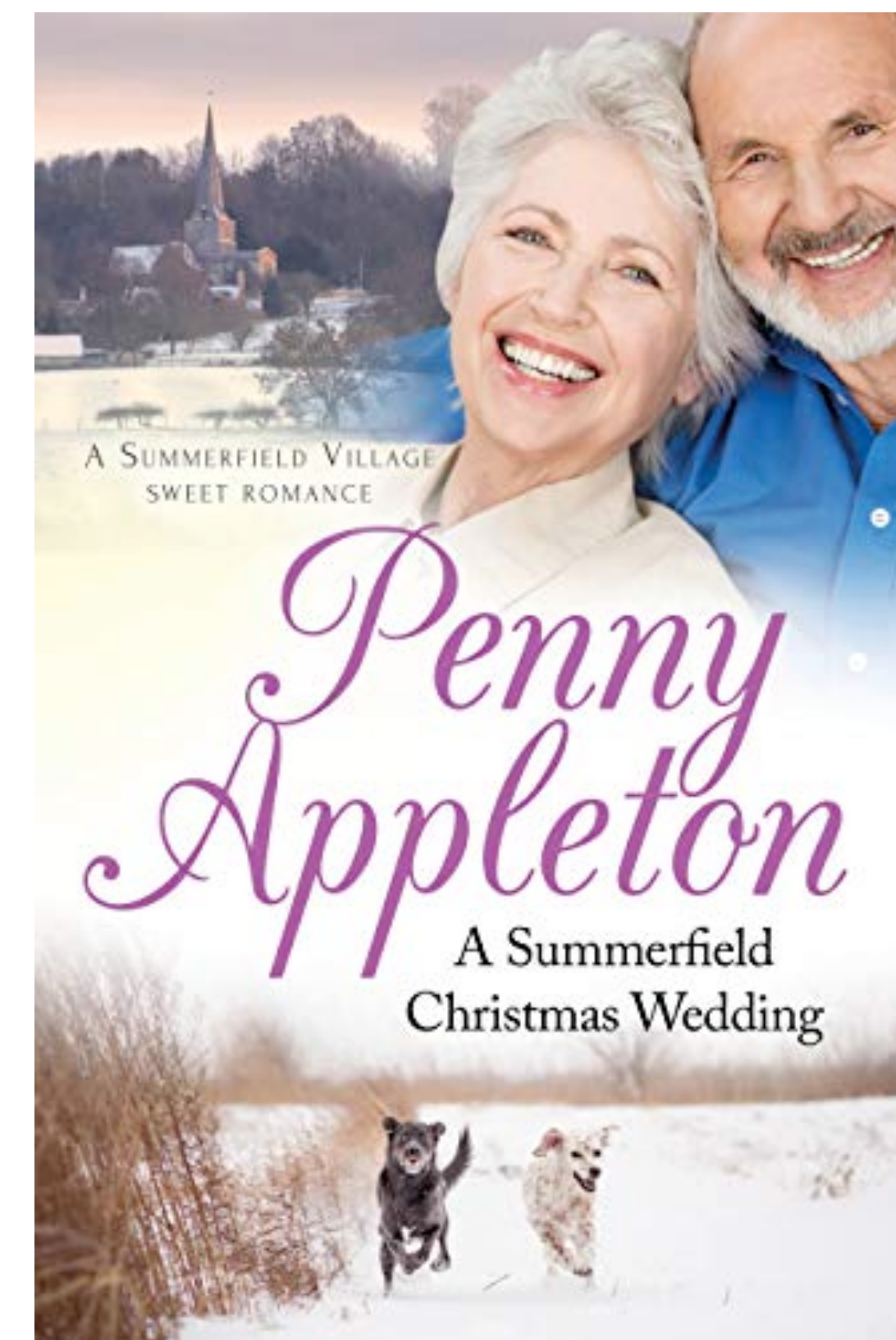
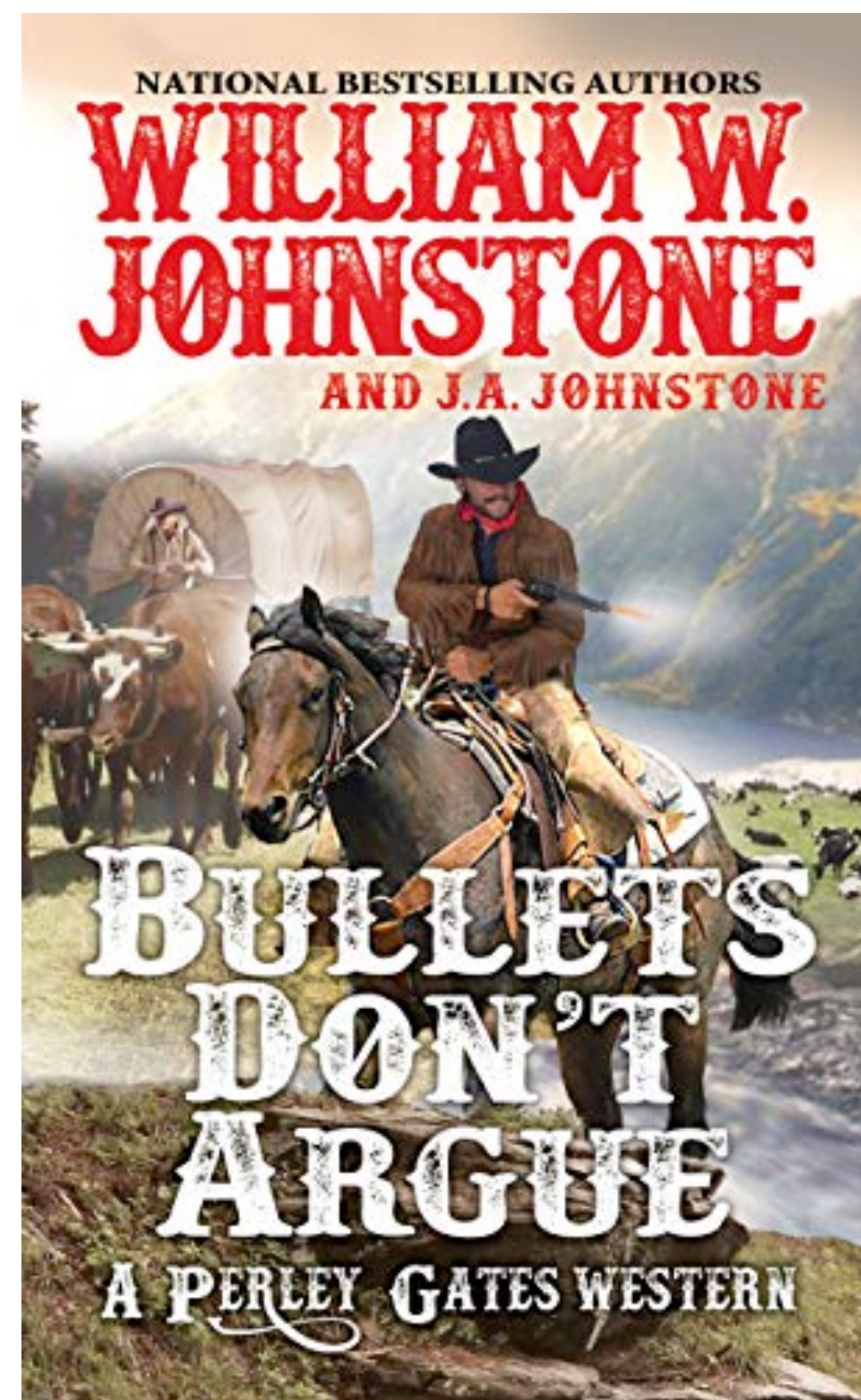
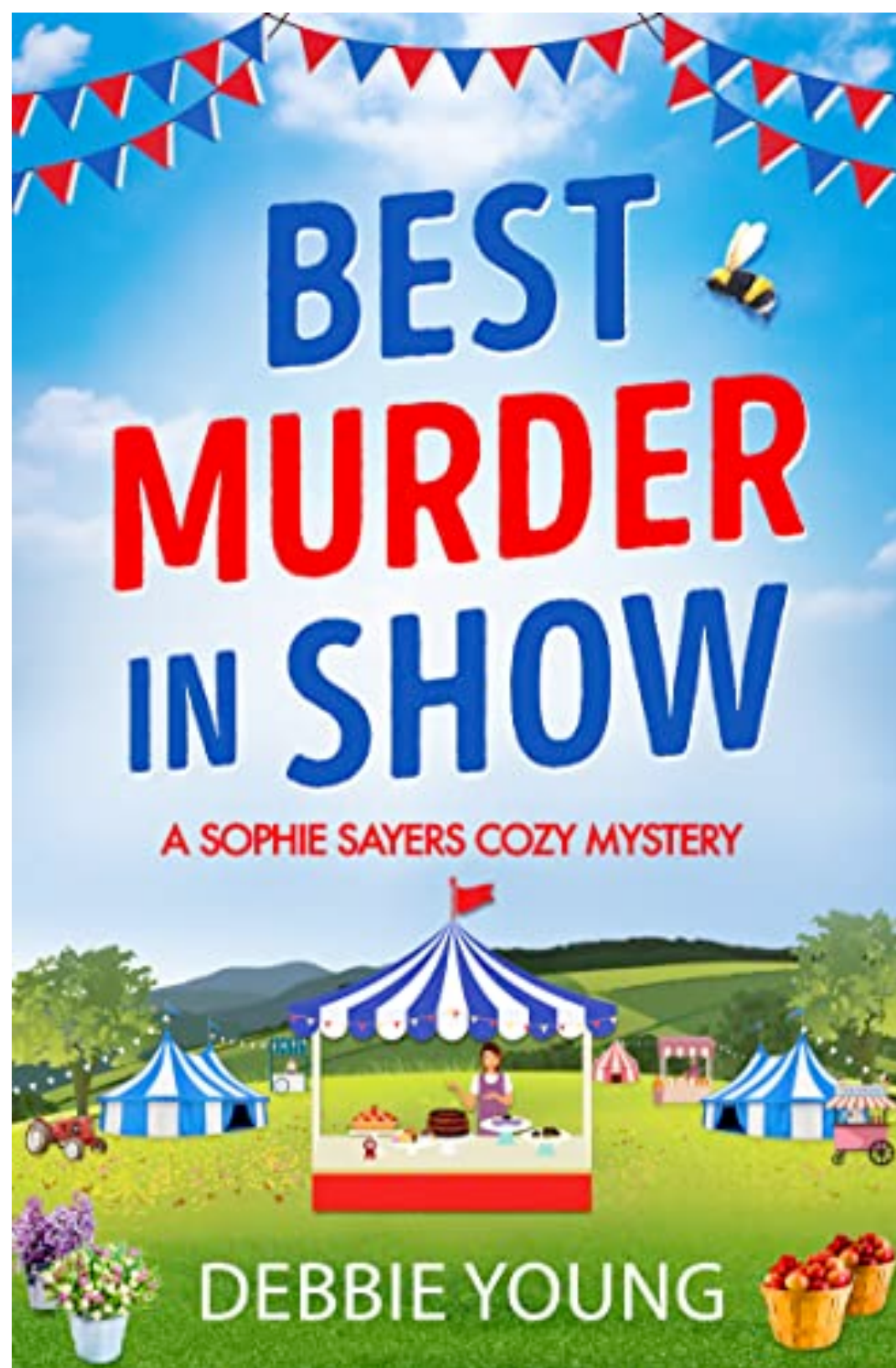
We all have our writing strengths and weaknesses — **what are yours?**

I've done this workshop live and 75% of people in the room said their strength was Dialogue. They wrote pages of discussion but couldn't 'see' where it took place.

Use tools to help you where you are weak. (I'll show you some!)



# Use appropriate settings per genre



Settings can be genre tropes — they telegraph aspects of plot



1. A small, charming town with a tight-knit community and a picturesque downtown area.
2. A cozy, inviting café with warm lighting, comfortable seating, and delicious pastries and coffee.
3. A beautiful, sprawling garden filled with colorful flowers and secret nooks and crannies.
4. A charming bed and breakfast with cozy rooms and a warm, welcoming atmosphere.
5. A serene, peaceful beach with soft sand, calm waters, and a stunning sunset.
6. A quaint bookstore filled with books of all genres, cozy reading nooks, and a friendly staff.
7. A romantic, candlelit restaurant with soft music, excellent food, and impeccable service.
8. A vibrant, bustling farmer's market with fresh produce, homemade goods, and a lively atmosphere.
9. A picturesque, snow-covered mountain resort with skiing, snowboarding, and a cozy fireplace.
10. A picturesque, tranquil vineyard with rows of grapevines, a rustic tasting room, and scenic views.

Examples of  
settings for  
a sweet  
romance  
with a  
happy  
ending



## Examples of settings for dark horror thriller

1. A creepy, abandoned hospital with flickering lights, peeling paint, and eerie equipment left behind.
2. A desolate, foggy graveyard with shadowy figures lurking in the mist and ominous whispers on the wind.
3. An isolated, snow-covered cabin in the woods with no electricity and strange noises in the night.
4. A haunted, dilapidated mansion with creaking doors, flickering candles, and a malevolent presence.
5. A dark, labyrinthine maze of underground tunnels with strange markings on the walls and sinister figures lurking in the shadows.
6. An eerie, abandoned amusement park with rusted rides, twisted clowns, and a pervasive sense of danger.
7. A cursed, forgotten village with ancient ruins, strange rituals, and a dark history of bloodshed.
8. A sinister, isolated island with a hostile environment, hostile inhabitants, and a history of horrific events.
9. An ominous, deserted ship in the middle of the ocean with strange noises, flickering lights, and a ghostly crew.
10. A dystopian, post-apocalyptic wasteland with limited resources, dangerous mutants, and ruthless scavengers.



Pick an image from a magazine, or search out an image online. (Or use the one included).

**Set a timer: 10 mins**

Describe the setting to the best of your current ability.  
This is first draft writing!





Use this if you can't decide on one





What is setting? What is a world?

Why is setting important for your particular story / book?

What are some examples of settings appropriate to your genre?

Examine some of your existing scenes. Do you have 'talking heads in an empty white room'?

