



The Tree House

Kayla counted each wooden rung of the ladder as she climbed upward: *one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten*. When she got to ten, she found herself in her favorite place on earth: her tree house. Kayla pushed open the creaky door and climbed inside. She took a deep breath. *Mmmmm, the clean, woody smell of pine planks*. Then she looked down. Down at her mom, watering the flowerbed. Down at her big sister, riding off on her purple bike in a huff. Down at her neighbors' tiled roofs and over at the velvety mountains on the outskirts of town.

How Kayla loved this cozy, wooden box nestled snugly in the strong branches of a 100-year-old oak. She glanced at her watch: 3:00 PM. *She could spend two whole hours up here before dinner. Two whole hours of blissful privacy*. Down on the ground, there were frustrations: homework, chores, and bossy big sisters who thought they knew everything. But up here, even on a bad day, life was pretty good. Kayla plopped onto the comfy pink beanbag chair and listened to the gentle May breeze whoosh through the tree's thick, green leaves. On the floor, was a happy-face rug and an old black radio that belonged to her dad when he was a boy. Kayla flipped on a station. A Michael Jackson song wafted through the air. She leaned back and sang along.

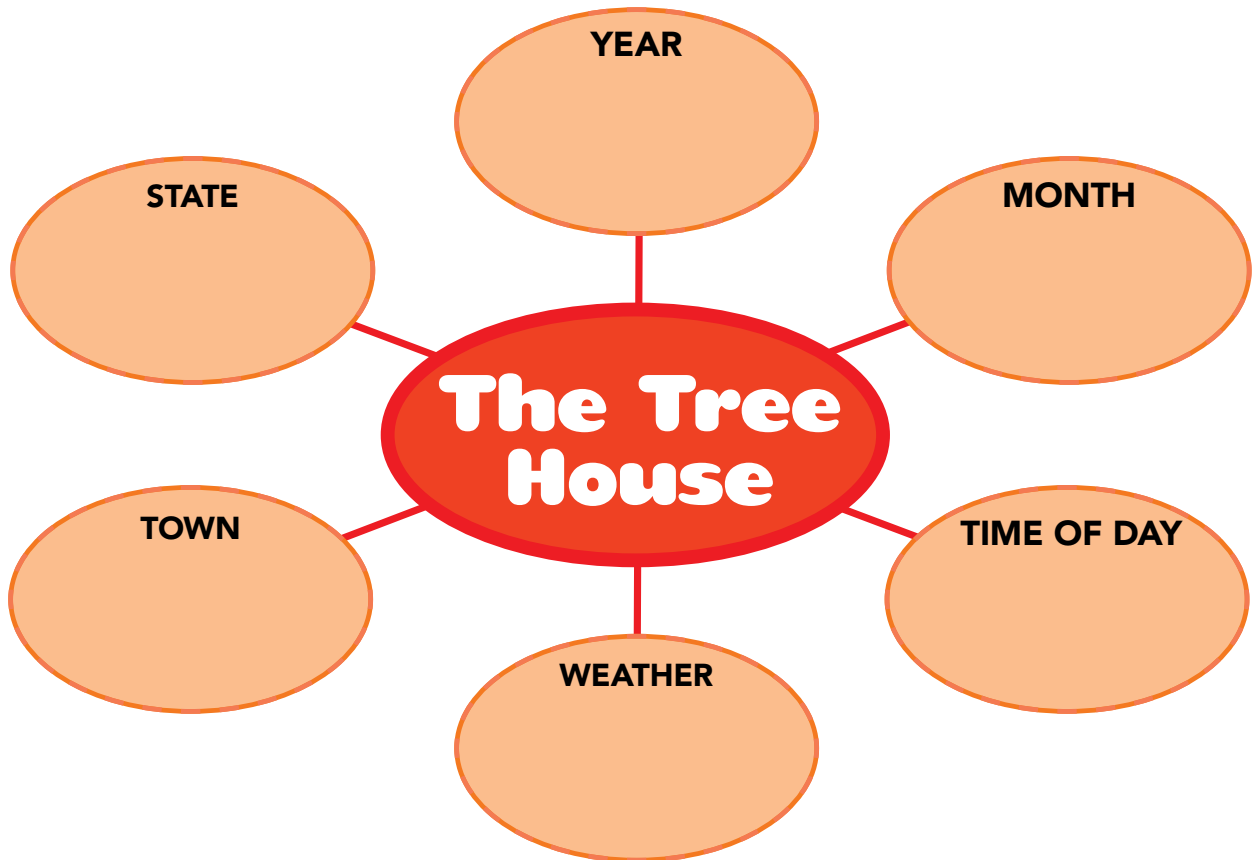
Kayla smiled contently. Across the room was a rickety table she dubbed her "entertainment center." It held a stack of old magazines (for reading), a deck of battered cards (for playing), and a bowl of fresh fruit (for eating). Kayla walked over and grabbed a shiny apple. She took a sweet, crunchy bite. Then, she looked to the right. Hanging on the wooden wall, was her personal art gallery: four horse sketches and a flower painting that her teacher deemed a "true work of art." On the crooked shelf beside it, stood a long row of gleaming soccer trophies. One, dated 1987, showed a girl kicking a ball high into the air followed by a golden trail of stars. Kayla smiled. She'd won it last year when she was named the most valuable player on the entire team.

Kayla turned toward the open window, framed by a set of crisp, polka-dot curtains that were lovingly sewn by her grandmother. Buttery yellow light streamed in and warmed Kayla's face. Then she saw it! There, among the rustling leaves—a tidy nest woven from sticks, grass, and tiny bits of string. And the nest wasn't empty. She squinted her eyes and counted: *one, two, three, four*. Four squawking baby robins! Swoop! A mother bird flew down with a fat pink worm dangling from her beak. Kayla clapped her hands together with excitement and trained her eyes on the amazing scene unfolding outside her tree house window. Life on the ground in Littleton, Maine, could be frustrating. But up here, in her favorite place on earth, it was always magical.



SETTING: The place and time in which a story happens. The details of a setting help readers see the story in their mind's eye. Settings can be realistic (such as a boy's room in the year 2013) or fantastical (such as an alien planet in the year 6000).

Be setting detectives. Investigate the story to fill in each oval of the setting web.



Key Questions

1. Is this setting realistic or fantastical? Does the story take place in the past, present, or future?
2. Sensory words tell how things look, feel, sound, smell, and taste. What sensory words brought this setting to life? Investigate the text and underline those words.
3. What does this setting reveal about the character of Kayla? How does she feel about the tree house?
4. What settings from other books are particularly memorable? Make a list and talk about them.

S-t-r-e-t-c-h Question: Choose a favorite setting from another story. How is it similar to and different from the setting in *The Tree House*?

The Write Stuff

What is your favorite place on earth? Your room? The beach? A mountaintop? Use this story as a model for writing about your favorite setting in the real world. Be sure to include lots of sensory details to bring it to life.



Answer Key



SETTING: The Tree House

Setting Web: Year: 1988 (one year after the date on the soccer trophy); Month: *May*; Time of Day: *3:00 PM*; Weather: *warm, sunny, breezy*; Town: *Littleton*; State: *Maine*.

Key Questions: **1.** realistic, past; **2.** Answers will vary, but could include: *wooden box nestled snugly in the strong branches of a 100-year-old oak* (looks); *creaky door* (sounds); *the buttery sun streamed in and warmed Kayla's face* (feels); *the clean, woody smell of pine planks* (smells); *sweet, crunchy bite* (tastes).

3. Answers will vary, but should approximate: Kayla loves her tree house, she likes to be alone, she likes art, she is good at soccer, etc.

4. Answers will vary.

S-t-r-e-t-c-h Question: Answers will vary.

TIP: No two readers interpret a story—including its characters, plot, setting, tone, or imagery—exactly the same way.

For that reason, it's wise to invite differing opinions and healthy debate in the context of your literacy lessons.

Common Core State Standards Correlation

This lesson and activity will help you meet many of the reading and language arts standards recommended in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Listed below are the specific CCSS Reading Standards for Literature (RL) addressed in this lesson at each grade level. For more information about the CCSS, visit www.corestandards.org.

Literary Element



SETTING

RL.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

RL.4.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL.4.3: Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

RL.5.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL.6.5: Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of a theme, setting, or plot.