

# New York vs. Willow Springs in Mama Day

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## New York vs. Willow Springs in Mama Day

The soft island breeze blows across the sound and the smell of the sea fills the air in Willow Springs. Meanwhile, a thousand miles away in Lower Manhattan the smell of garbage and street vendors' hotdogs hangs in the air. These two settings are key to Gloria Naylor's 1988 novel [Mama](#) Day where the freedom and consistency of the Sea Islands is poised against the confinement of the ever-changing city, two settings that not only changes characters' personalities but also their perceptions. On the surface the two places seem to share no similarities and represent different aspects. There are, however, some similarities, among which is the effect of the setting on the characters. Naylor demonstrates through the characters Cocoa Day and George Andrews that a person's surroundings affect the way they behave and either allows or permits them to believe in certain aspects of life, especially in respect to believing in magic or logic.

The first setting introduced in *Mama Day* that affects significantly George and Cocoa is the island of Manhattan. This society separated from the mainland represents a plethora of opportunity. It is only in a city like New [York](#) where a child like George who was left with nothing on the doorstep of an orphanage could become a successful, disciplined engineer.

It is also in the city where we are first introduced to Cocoa looking for her opportunity for success. While waiting to be interviewed by George for a job, Cocoa observes a variety of people in the waiting area, which was representative of the diversity of the city: “one very very gay Oriental...Cherry Vanilla” (Naylor 20). In addition to diversity, the city is a place of constant change, wher...

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...Perhaps if we focus more on the impact of the setting on character’s behavior and ideals in novels such as Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*, we can develop a better understanding of the true essence of a novel. Through analysis it is evident that the setting impacts not only the characters, but also affects the behavior of the characters. Unfamiliar locations cause Cocoa to turn to racism as a defense mechanism for protecting herself from the unknown of New York City; George turns to logic to protect himself from the unknown and magic of Willow Springs. These two completely different settings are actually very similar, having a similar affect on the characters and values learned in each location. Who would have thought that a place where the [smell](#) of the sea filled the air could be compared or even is similar to a place where the stench of garbage and hotdogs lingered?

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