

Personality of Place. Scott Smoot, 7th grade English teacher, shares his lesson: Prose like Poetry in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. A writer may borrow tricks from a poet to show personality of a place, as Harper Lee does in a passage early in chapter one of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. To highlight the poetic elements, the teacher has re-formatted the lines:

Maycomb was an old town

but it was a tired old town
when I first knew it.

In rainy weather
the streets **turned** to red slop;
grass **grew** on the sidewalks,
the courthouse **sagged** in the square.

Somehow, it was hotter then;
a black dog **suffered** on a summer's day;
bony mules hitched to Hoover carts **flicked** flies
in the sweltering shade
of the live oaks
on the square.

Men's stiff collars
wilted by nine in the morning.

Ladies
bathed before noon,
after their three-o'clock naps,
and by nightfall
were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum

People **moved** slowly then. They
ambled across the square,
shuffled in and out of the stores around it,
took their time about everything.

A day was twenty-four hours long
but seemed longer.

There was
no hurry,
for there was
nowhere to go,
nothing to buy and
no money to buy it with,
nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County.

But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people:
Maycomb County had recently been told that it had
nothing to fear but fear itself.



KMWP Leslie Walker Writers of Promise Writing Contest – Writing About Place

Smoot’s Lessons:

Style lesson: The teacher has highlighted several strong verbs that conjure images and feelings without using “was,” or loading up on adjectives and adverbs.

Parallel phrasing for series: Do you see why some series of phrases here are called “parallel?”

Indenting: How do the indentations work for you?

Grammar challenge: What do the sentences with highlighted verbs have in common? Any exceptions? Any verbs missed by your teacher?

Other ideas for student writing:

- Use the found poem from the lines of *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a mentor text. Follow the same form and structure to create a poem about place.
- Find the description of setting for a book you are reading and create a found poem.
- Use poetry as a tool for writing prose. Begin with a poem about a place. Using the poem as a springboard, develop a narrative inspired by the place in the poem.

Find other ideas for writing with your students and learn more about the Leslie Walker Writers of Promise Contest @ www.kmwp.org