

**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](http://www.kmwp.org)