

# **From Yoknapatawpha to Coshocton and Back**

## **Articulating a Sense of Place**

### **Introduction**

American Literature is replete with works that evoke a rich sense of place; to read many of these works is to travel to another place and time completely. In my junior American Literature classes we typically read a variety of such works throughout the year: stories by Bret Harte, Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner stand out in my mind in particular. Near the end of the year, and just after having read several stories by Faulkner, I ask my students to think what marks home for them, to say how one would go about authentically creating that same sense of place for their home that we have talked about as a class in connection with places such as Twain's mining camps or Faulkner's Mississippi. This lesson, then, is an extension of that question, one that will ask each student to consider his or her own home in Coshocton County, Ohio, in relation to the Mississippi Faulkner created in his fiction.

### **Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- articulate the importance of a sense of place in fiction.
- identify and describe seven things that create for them a sense of their hometown or county.
- describe how Faulkner evokes a sense of place in his fiction.

### **Background, Audience, Time Frame and Resources**

This activity should be appropriate for most junior-level American Literature classes and will probably require at least two days in the computer lab bookended by at least two days in the classroom. It also requires students to begin collecting digital images of their home county beginning three or four weeks before the actual activity. Necessary resources include digital cameras or cell phones equipped with cameras and/or access to Facebook or online photo-sharing sites. Students will have read at least two of the following Faulkner stories before we begin this activity: "Race at Morning," "A Rose for Emily," and "Barn Burning."

### **Procedures**

I. Beginning three or four weeks prior to this activity, students will begin collecting digital images of people, places, things, events, etc. that seem to define their hometown or home county. For my students such images might include the county courthouse, Roscoe Village, Lake Park, remnants of the old canals and locks, representations of the three county high schools and so on.

2. To begin the activity, each student will briefly describe the images they have collected and explain how they seem to be good representations of Coshocton County. As each new person, place, etc. is described it can be listed on the blackboard. In this way the class will create a master list of images that describe Coshocton County; the actual images can be shared among students via Facebook or photo-sharing sites, allowing each student to choose seven images that he or she feels best describes Coshocton County.
3. After each student has picked seven images, he or she will write a caption and a brief rationale for each image they have chosen. Then, in brochure or booklet form, students will print each image along with its caption and rationale. This portion of the assignment will be completed in the computer lab and will probably take at least two days.
4. On the last page (or two) of the brochure or booklet, students will explain in their own words how fiction benefits from an authentically created sense of place and explain three specific means by which Faulkner successfully creates a sense of place in the stories we have read. To that end each student should make specific references to events in the stories or to techniques they have observed Faulkner using.
5. After students have created their booklets, a class period will be used to discuss the aspects of Coshocton County that students feel best represent the county and serve to create a sense of place. An interesting question that may or may not arise is this: Are the fictional representations of particular places more interesting than the place itself? That is, is a place like Yoknapatawpha County inherently more interesting, more "real," than Coshocton County or is it only that Coshocton County has yet to be skillfully described in either fiction or nonfiction?

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation of this activity will focus on the degree to which students are successful in identifying and explaining images they feel are representative of Coshocton County and serve to create a sense of place. Students will also be evaluated on how well they are able to articulate the importance of place in fiction and their ability to name specific details from our Faulkner readings that serve to create a sense of place.