

Faulkner, the New South, and Modernism
Digital Yoknapatawpha
“Barn Burning”

PURPOSE: To lead students to new discoveries of textual meaning and to introduce students to digital humanities so that they are exposed to twenty-first-century job market skills.

Skills: Build a foundational knowledge of the text and story’s era
Develop close reading skills
Engage in research
Apply the information through interpretation, analysis, and problem solving
Evaluate the work of art
Create new interpretations

Knowledge: This assignment will also introduce important content knowledge in this discipline:

1. Faulkner’s common themes connected to modernization of the South and the South’s tendency to live in the past;
2. How to connect the ideas of historians and social theorists to works of literature;
3. A deeper understanding of the south’s condition as a representation of the human condition.

TASKS:

- Go to the Digital Yoknapatawpha website: <http://faulkner.iath.virginia.edu/>
- Scroll through the book images (the small squares at the bottom of the page) and click on “Barn Burning.”
- Explore the maps to answer the following questions.

GRADING:

Excellent work demonstrates that the student read the story carefully and actively engaged with the site. Answers will include quoted and cited passages, critical thought and analysis while interpreting the significance of events.

1. Under “Map Controls: Show Characters,” select “All.” Run your cursor over the character representations on the map. Click on the names and read the biographies.
 - What character description most surprises you or helps you better understand the story? (Explain)
2. Find Snopes’ Farm and read the description.
 - What does this tell us about Snopes’ socioeconomic status? His struggles?

3. Go to “Show Characters” and select “Major Characters.” Find Ab Snopes, click on the representation, and read the biography.
 - What ironies do you see in Ab’s naming his son “Sarty” (after Colonel John Sartoris)?
 - What may Sarty’s name imply about the way Ab may have regarded his son from the moment of Sarty’s birth?
4. Historian David R. Goldfield states that the New South “marched forward to modernity, while looking to the past for its inspiration.” Play the events timeline movement and watch the time bar.
 - Why does the story extend back to 1865? What does this backward movement have to do with the story?
 - Find “Colonel John Sartoris” and read the biography. What southern inspirations and myths are embodied in the figure of Colonel John Sartoris?
5. Find “Sarty Snopes” and read the biography. Compare and contrast Sarty’s description with that of Colonel John Sartoris.
 - To outsiders, what may Sarty’s name suggest about Ab’s possible motivations or hopes he had for his son when he named his son after Colonel John Sartoris?
6. Many literary critics have argued that Faulkner’s black characters are simply props that form the southern backdrop for Faulkner’s stories. In response, Thadious Davis claims that Faulkner “is not so interested in blacks as individual characters as he is in formulating his aesthetic image and sense of ‘Negro’” (*Faulkner’s “Negro”: Art and the Southern Context*).

Think about the black characters in “Barn Burning.” Go to “Map Controls: Show Characters” and select “All.” The black characters appear in black on the map. Click on the black characters and read their biographies.

- In your opinion, why does Faulkner leave his black characters unnamed?
- What other unnamed characters are present?
- Which unnamed characters drive the plot and what is their racial identity? And does the racial identity of the unnamed characters who contribute to or drive the plot matter to the significance of the events? Explain.

7. Thadious Davis also argues that Faulkner does not use the “Negro” to create a mystique. She says, “All of the ingredients of a mystique are already entrenched in southern history and popular culture.” What does she mean by that statement, and how does “Barn Burning” illustrate the veracity of it? (Draw your clues from the story and number 6. You will need to Google “Black Representation in the Media 1920 and research the topic.)

8. As whites regained their political power after the Reconstruction, a “New South” emerged. The New South thought they could “Out yankee the Yankee” by doing business like the North, but maintaining pastoral values (the idealized version of country life). As the New South underwent industrialization, it restored Old South hegemonic and hierarchical ideas. **Google “Hegemony” and “Hierarchy” and write the meaning here:**
 - Go to DY and play the events. Notice that the events move from south to north. Click on “North Road” (marked by a star). Read the information. Judging from the information provided in statement 8, what is the significance of Snopes’ destructive movement north?

9. Historian James C. Cobb claims “the New South would make southern society essentially impervious to Yankee interference in the conduct of its affairs while forcing northern whites to acknowledge the just and honorable nature of the white South’s position in 1861” (*Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*)
 - Now study the above quote in relationship to the acts of Ab Snopes. What similarities can you draw between a fallen and defeated south and Ab Snopes?
 - Study the quote again. Replace “northern whites” with “plantations owners” or “southern land owners” and “the south” with “poor whites.” Now, why would Ab Snopes burn the barns of land owners?
 - What symbolism may be found in the barn burning?
 - How may one argue that Snopes’ action symbolically prepares a way for the south to modernize?

Works Cited:

Cobb, James C. *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*. Oxford UP. 2005.

Davis, Thadious. *Faulkner’s “Negro”*: Art and the Southern Context. Louisiana State UP. 1983.

Goldfield, David, R. *Still Fighting*, 21; quoted in Cobb’s *Away Down South*, 68.