Understanding Faulkner’s South
DY and The Sound and the Fury

Objective: 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. Students should increase their computer skills, gain a better historical knowledge of the story’s context, and arrive at a new (or solid) understanding of the story and Faulkner’s South.

Directions:
- Go to the Digital Yoknapatawpha website: http://faulkner.iath.virginia.edu/
- Scroll through the squares at the bottom of the page and click on The Sound and the Fury.
- Explore the map to answer the following questions.

Background Information: James C. Cobb notes that as early as 1842 the South was a romanticized place that symbolized “a society rooted in the past” and “sinking into stagnation and decline” (26 Away Down South). As the nation moved toward modernization after the Civil War, the South was left in a state of defeat and decline. Like the region itself, old Aristocratic-planter families were left destitute and defeated. The image of decaying splendor continued to typify portrayals of the South well into the twentieth century.

Google search “Decaying Southern Plantation Homes,” select “Images” (at the top). View the images.

1. Return to the Digital Yoknapatawpha website. Click on The Sound and the Fury. Click on “Locations.” Find the “Compson Place” insert on the map. Move your cursor over the locations until you find “The Compson House.” Read the description of the house.
   - Using the description of the house as an indirect reflection of the Compson family, what details may we know about the Compson family?
   - How may understanding the Compson’s as a declining southern aristocratic family be an important detail to understanding the novel?
2. Go to “Locations,” and move your cursor over the town of Jefferson. Find the “Old Opera House.” Read the description.
   ● What do the Opera House and the Compson Home have in common?

   ● What may we infer about modernization changing the dynamics of small southern towns?

   ● Why do you suppose the Compsons and the Opera House were left behind as the town modernized?

3. Move your cursor over the town of Jefferson until you find “Negro Hollow.” Read the description.
   ● How is “Negro Hollow” described? Compare the racialized space to the way you imagined the small town of Jefferson, according to Faulkner’s descriptions.

   ● In your opinion, why does Faulkner include a description of “Negro Hollow” as a distinct and separate place?

4. Go to “Characters.” In the Map Controls, select “Major Characters.” Character icons will appear to the right. Move your cursor until you find Quentin Compson. Read the description.
   ● What does it mean to have a haunted consciousness?
• Does the South have a haunted consciousness (an obsession, an obsessive, self-conscious awareness)? In your opinion, what haunts Quentin? Compare Quentin’s haunted consciousness to the South’s haunted consciousness.

• The family sold Benjy’s pasture so that the eldest son Quentin could attend Harvard. In your opinion, why did they do that? What did they hope to gain by such “an investment.” What did they lose in this investment? What does that loss symbolize?

5. 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).

• Go to characters, run your cursor over the black icons representing black characters. Look at the visual representation of whites and blacks. Read the descriptions of several black characters, named and unnamed. How do blacks, especially Dilsey, formulate the aesthetic image of this novel? (How is the sense and essence of “Negro” represented and what purpose does this sense or essence serve?)