



WHAT IN THE WORLD DOES COALWOOD LOOK LIKE?

Using Rocket Boys to Teach Descriptive Writing



Materials:

- Picture or poster of the White House <http://ali.apple.com/events/coalwood>
- Chart paper
- Drawing paper, art paper
- Pencils, colored pencils, markers, paint
- Attachment 3 (K-3rd)
- Attachment 4 (4th-12th)
- Attachment 5 (picture of Homer's house)

Procedure:

- Teacher will ask students to draw a picture of the White House. Most students will not have trouble with this drawing because they have seen many pictures of the White House. **(Engagement)**
- Teacher will explain that authors often have to use words to describe the pictures that are in their heads. In the book Rocket Boys, Homer Hickam uses words to describe his house and his town. Before the class begins to read (or be read) the book, the teacher will use this description to “set the stage” and to emphasize the importance of descriptive writing. **(Explanation)**
- Students will read or listen to a description of Homer Hickam's house/town. (Attachments #3 and #4) **(Exploration)**
- After discussion with class, the teacher will chart details of the description on chart paper, calling attention to words that describe color, shape, size, etc. **(Exploration)**
- Students will then choose a medium to create the setting for the story based upon the description of Homer Hickam's house. **(Exploration)**
- Students will then draw/paint a picture of their own houses. Each student will write a paragraph describing the picture. **(Extension)**
- Each student will then give the picture of his/her house to a partner. The partner will write a descriptive paragraph about the picture. **(Evaluation)**



ATTACHMENT #3?
Excerpt from Rocket Boys
By Homer Hickam



K-3rd Description (Modified)

When Homer Hickam was a little boy, he lived in a two-story house. It also had a front porch and a basement. All of the houses were painted white.

(Sometimes the blowing coal dust made the houses look gray.)

Homer's yard was fenced-off in a square. Homer's mother had a large yard, and she planted a rose garden. She took very good care of the garden making sure that the plants had enough fertilizer and were trimmed to look nice. During the spring and summer, the roses bloomed. They were blood-red blossoms. There were also some blossoms that were dainty pink and yellow. The flowers looked very bright up against the dark green of the heavy forests in the background of the house.

Homer's house was on a corner. One road led to the coal mine. The other paved road led to the center of the town.



ATTACHMENT #4?
Excerpt from Rocket Boys
By Homer Hickam



4th-12th Grade Description

Our house, like every house in Coalwood, was company-owned. The company charged a small monthly rent, automatically deducted from the miner's pay. Some of the houses were tiny and single-storied, with only one or two bedrooms. Others were big, two-story duplexes built as boardinghouses for bachelor miners in the booming 1920's and later sectioned off as individual family dwellings during the Depression. (*Homer's house was a two-story house with a front porch and a basement.*) Every five years, all the houses in Coalwood were painted a company white, which the blowing coal soon tinged gray. Usually in the spring, each family took it upon themselves to scrub the exterior of their house with hoses and brushes.

Each house in Coalwood had a fenced-off square yard. My mother having a larger yard than most to work with, planted a rose garden. She hauled in dirt from the mountains by the sackful, slung over her shoulder, and fertilized, watered, and manicured each bush with exceeding care. During the spring and summer, she was rewarded with bushes filled with great blood-red blossoms as well as dainty pink and yellow buds, spatters of brave color against the dense green of the heavy forest that surrounded us and the gloom of the black and gray mine just up the road.

Our house was on the corner where the state highway turned east toward the mine. A company-paved road went the other way to the center of town. Main Street, as it was called, ran down a valley so narrow in places that a boy with a good arm could throw a rock from one side of it to the other.



ATTACHMENT #4?
Excerpt from Rocket Boys
By Homer Hickam



Apple Learning Interchange
Quick Time TV

<http://ali.apple.com/events/coalwood/>



The memoirs of Homer Hickam were first told in his best-selling novel The Rocket Boys. The movie October Sky resulted, making Homer Hickam and his peers, his family, and the small mining town of Coalwood, West Virginia well known to many. The story is a beacon for education, illustrating the importance of learning and the impact of teachers on their students' lives. Both the movie and the book have quickly become a favorite of the education community, which has embraced Homer's story as their own. The Apple Learning Interchange attended October Sky Festival in Coalwood and would like to share with you the real people and places that have touched the lives of all who have participated in The Coalwood Way.

Website also has video interviews with the Rocket Boys and community members.