Of Mice and Men
Sentence Fluency and Imitation Writing

In those very first two paragraphs of John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men, a picture is painted through words:

A few miles south of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank and runs deep and green. The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight before reaching the narrow pool. On one side of the river the golden foothill slopes curve up to the strong and rocky Gabilan mountains, but on the valley side the water is lined with trees—willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of the winter's flooding; and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool. On the sandy bank under the trees the leaves lie deep and so crisp that a lizard makes a great skittering if he runs among them. Rabbits come out of the brush to sit on the sand in the evening, and the damp flats are covered with the night tracks of 'coons, and with the spread pads of dogs from the ranches, and with the split-wedge tracks of deer that come to drink in the dark.

There is a path through the willows and among the sycamores, a path beaten hard by boys coming down from the ranches to swim in the deep pool, and beaten hard by tramps who come wearily down from the highway in the evening to jungle-up near water. In front of the low horizontal limb of a giant sycamore there is an ash pile made by many fires; the limb is worn smooth by men who have sat on it.

The words that Steinbeck chooses: the adjectives, excellent and thoughtful; the nouns, precise; the color words; the texture words; the fact that we not only see, but hear this setting make these paragraphs stand out as an example of classic writing.

Let’s make a list in the chart of the words Steinbeck uses to bring the story to life.
Assignment:
You may work alone or with a partner. Write an impersonation of the entire first paragraph (or at least the first few sentences of it). Borrow the sentence structure and some of the verbs, but change the images and adjectives by describing a completely different place. You may choose your room at home (only if working alone), the school cafeteria, the gym, or any other place you are familiar with.

MODEL:
A few blocks away from my house, a lonely highway drops too close to one of my neighbor's fences and runs black and yellow, black and yellow. The asphalt is warm to the touch, for it has baked and twinkled under the summer sun before creeping so close to my neighbor's yard. On one side of the highway the various litter piles thrown from cars march towards to the strong and lonely fence, but on the opposite side of the road the bushes are lined with blossoms... (etc)

After you write your paragraph, you will share your impersonation with us while we follow along with the original Steinbeck text.

After you share, we will discuss what we thought the best original image was in your impersonation. I will keep a list for us.

Assignment 2 Challenge (Exit Slip):
You will now--without using Steinbeck as a guide--describe one of the places described by another group or person with their impersonation paragraph. You will not be allowed to look at either Steinbeck or the group's impersonation paragraph as you write. Your task is NOT to remember the exact sentence structures used; instead, your task is to remember some of the most powerful images and to put those images in a paragraph that a) paints a picture of a place with words while it b) maintains flowing and original sentence structures.