

**San José State University**  
**Humanities and the Arts/ Department of English**  
**English 167, Steinbeck, Fall 2018**

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**Office Hours:** T/TH: 11-11:45; T, 3-3:45  
**Class Days/Time:** T/TH 12:00-1:15  
**Classroom:** BBC 221

### **Course Description**

John Steinbeck, Californian, was intimately connected with the region of his birth. Born in Salinas in 1902, he grew up in the fertile Salinas Valley, later called the “Salad Bowl of the Nation.” On the shores of the nearby Pacific his family had a summer retreat in Pacific Grove, and throughout his life he yearned to be near the sea. In his fiction, Steinbeck made Central California his own territory--“Steinbeck Country” today.

Steinbeck knew he wanted to be a writer by age 14, and he spent a lifetime writing about humans living in place-- about the connections between and among humans, animals, environment, and region. His vision was profoundly ecological, a tribute to humans living in nature, not dominating it.

This class will begin by considering Steinbeck’s finely honed sense of place, discussing two books about the Salinas Valley--*To a God Unknown* (1933) and the short stories collected in *The Long Valley* (1938)--and one about Monterey, *Tortilla Flat* (1935). We will then turn to Steinbeck’s stance as socially engaged writer, reading two novels that many consider his greatest, *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). We will then examine Steinbeck’s ecological vision, which was enriched by his

friendship with marine biologist Edward F. Ricketts, reading passages from *Sea of Cortez* [PDFs] as well as *Cannery Row*. We will finish the semester with *East of Eden* (1952) and *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), the latter a novel that critiques what Steinbeck saw as the moral decline of America in the 1960s.

As well as considering Steinbeck and region, we will also discuss Steinbeck's abiding popularity and his continuing relevance as ecologist, social critic, and engaged writer--both in the U.S. and around the world.

### Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will demonstrate the ability to:

**read** closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, and/or rhetoric;

**show familiarity** with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American and World Literature;

**write** clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject;

**develop and carry out research projects**, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively;

**articulate** the relations among culture, history, and texts.

### Required Texts/Readings

*To a God Unknown* (1933)

*The Long Valley* (1938)

*Tortilla Flat* (1935)

*Of Mice and Men* (1937)

*The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)

*Cannery Row* (1945)

*East of Eden* (1952)

*The Winter of Our Discontent* (1962)

Recommended: *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*

**Optional:** *On Reading The Grapes of Wrath*, Shillinglaw (2014)

Other readings: PDFs sent to class as noted on syllabus

### **Course Requirements and Assignments**

Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend 5-9 hours per week preparing for classes and completing course assignments. During the semester, students are also expected to watch at least 3 Steinbeck films, analyzing the connections between film and text (or historical context) and including these 2-3 page entries in your Steinbeck Notebook. This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:

Three additional notebook essays considering 3 films viewed outside of class: *Of Mice and Men* (1939); *Tortilla Flat* (1942); *The Forgotten Village* (1940); *Cannery Row* (1982); *Viva Zapata!* (1952); *East of Eden* (1955) These films can be viewed in the Steinbeck Center on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of MLK Library or online.

Optional but highly recommended field trip to Steinbeck Country, Saturday November 17.

Optional but highly recommended, reading all of *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden letters*.

**I. Book groups: 20% for reading/presenting/essay on *The Grapes of Wrath*.** The class will be divided into 5 book groups. Each group will read, discuss, present orally, and write an analytical essay on *The Grapes of Wrath*. Book groups will be given class time to discuss the book (30 minutes on days indicated), although each group will need to meet outside class to complete class presentations.

**a. Close reading in groups:** For each book group session, students will pose thoughtful, probing questions.

**b. Group presentations:** After carefully reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, each group will give a 15-minute (firm) class presentation that considers close reading of the text + relevant historical/cultural background (no biography).

These presentations may be powerpoint, readers' theater, artistic creations, a film created by the group, a group panel, a news feature, interviews, etc..

**c. Essay—due one week after each group presents:** A 4-5-page comparative essay is due one week after presentations (include at the end of your Reading Notebook). The essay will compare issues/characters/scenes in the chapters you presented with episodes/character development/scenes in another part of the book. For example, Groups 1-3 will compare early chapters with the second ½ half of the book. Groups 4-5 will focus on a scene/character/theme from later chapters and compare with scene/character/theme in the first ½ of the book. Be specific. Cite passages.

**Each student will receive a book group grade based on the two parts of this assignment: Group participation + presentation accounts for ½ the final grade:** participation in each scheduled group meeting; creativity/depth of analysis of group presentation; individual participation on day of presentation. And the **essay accounts for ½ of grade.** Both grades will be attached to the essay, with a final grade the average of the two.

**II. Reading Notebook, 14 entries, 500-600 words each (50%).** I will check reading notebooks as indicated in the syllabus. Your final notebook will include the following:

**a. Reading log, (5 entries)—close reading from 5 *different* texts in the class (LV counts as one).** These entries focus on issues in the texts that puzzle or intrigue you or cause you to think in a new way. Don't try to discuss a major character in two pages, for example, but you might consider that character's actions in one scene. Or discuss the importance of a minor character. Or a setting. Or the ending. Or select an image that you noticed. You might focus on word choice, or sentence structure or style—or gender, race, class, ecology. Write about what interests you. But remember to narrow, narrow, narrow.

Please do not discuss the same scenes we covered in class discussions—thus echoing those discussions in your notebook. But come up with related ideas, perhaps, or expand an idea from discussion—comparing to other scenes, texts.

b. **Relevance (2 entries)** Consider Steinbeck's cultural relevance and explain why you feel it is important to read Steinbeck today. Please connect to specific issues in discussing Steinbeck as a relevant and timely writer, whose ideas address contemporary issues such as group identity, empathy, race, ethnicity, gender, politics, leadership, etc. Draw from specific examples that are significant to your lives as Americans and residents of California.

c. **Enrichment (4 entries)** Certainly the value of a single author course is the time to focus on one writer's career. Please examine materials in the Center for Steinbeck Studies, which is open Monday-Saturday (best to call ahead for an appointment). Select from the following:

--20 pp of *Working Days*, the *Grapes* journal

--20 pp of *Journal of a Novel*, the *East of Eden* journal. Note: Extra credit for reading and commenting on all of the Journal in your notebook.

--20 pp of *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*

--20 pp of Benson's or Parini's biography.

d. **Films (3 entries from list)**. Please select three films based on Steinbeck's works from the list below, view outside class, and compare book to film in your entries. Select among the following: *Of Mice and Men* (1939 version); *The Red Pony*, *Tortilla Flat*, *The Forgotten Village*, *Cannery Row*, *East of Eden*,

### III. Quizzes (10%) and Final Exam (20%).

Reading quizzes will be given throughout the semester (5 questions based on close reading of texts) and each is graded on a 1-10 scale. At the end of the semester, reading quizzes will be averaged and will count 10% of the final grade.

The final exam includes both short answer responses (3-5 sentences) and one essay.

### Grading information

**Essay, notebook, and final exam** are graded on clarity, originality, specificity (do not include long quoted passages, but refer to specific scenes in texts), and precision. Major grammatical errors will lower your final grade (comma splices, incomplete sentences, misuse of subordination, subject/verb agreement).

A and A-: A superior piece of writing. The topic focused, the language sharp, and the writing free of grammatical errors. The piece has originality and style, is elegant, thoughtful and persuasive. If research is included, it is relevant and clearly cited.

B+ and B: A good piece of writing, solid and clear. But it may lack the innovation and sharpness of the top category. The point is clear but could be supported with additional details. There may be minor spelling, typographic, and/or grammatical errors. But it is interesting enough to hold a reader's attention. If research is included, it is mostly solid and the paper draws from the research.

B- and C+: This response may be too broad or unsupported. Examples may be general rather than specific. There may be grammatical errors. The central idea may not be fresh. The writing may be wordy and vague. If research is included, scholarship might not be relevant, fresh or focused on the topic and hand. Citations may be infrequent, general.

C and below: These essays are unfocused, without a sharp thesis. Examples are general or the essay lacks examples. Research is not thorough. There may be serious grammatical errors. If research is included, sources may be general, unfocused, not cited properly.

**Late essays/notebooks receive lower grades—1/3 lower per day.**

**Determination of final grade** includes completion of work noted under "Course Requirements and Assignments"—ie, reading group projects, notebook, quizzes and final. Failure to complete any of the assignments will result in a 0 earned for that part of the course, thus significantly lowering the final grade.

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. *Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of*

*a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.*

### **Classroom Protocol**

Students are expected to attend each class and engage actively in discussions and to read assigned texts carefully. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, and students arriving late will miss quizzes. Use of computers is permitted only when students are reading Steinbeck's books electronically, and I ask that those students sit in the front. Otherwise, no computers or cell phones in class.

### **University Policies**

Please see syllabus information web page at  
<http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo>

## SCHEDULE, FALL 2018

### WEEK 1

Aug. 21: Introduction to course, to JS; introduction of students.

Aug. 23: *To a God Unknown*, Chapters 1-13.

### WEEK 2

Aug. 28: *To a God Unknown*, Chapters 14-20.

August 30. *To a God Unknown*, complete.

### WEEK 3

Sept. 4: Steinbeck and the short story: "The Kittens and the Curtain" (PDF). *The Long Valley*, "The Chrysanthemums" "The White Quail."

*"I am writing many stories now. Because I should like to sell some of them, I am making my characters as nearly as I can in the likeness of men. The stream underneath and the meanings I am interested in can be ignored"*(LL 94)

Sept. 6: *The Long Valley*, "The Snake" "The Murder" "Johnny Bear," "The Harness"

### WEEK 4

Sept. 11: *The Long Valley*: "The Vigilante" and "Flight," Film clips.

Sept. 13: *The Long Valley*: *The Red Pony*: "The Gift" and "The Great Mountains"

### WEEK 5

Sept. 18: *The Long Valley*: *The Red Pony*, last two stories + film of Red Pony.

**Notebooks due #1: Four entries** (one on *TAGU*; one on *LV*; two on film and enrichment).

Sept. 20: Film of *Red Pony*

### WEEK 6

Sept. 25: *Tortilla Flat*, 1/2.

Sept. 27: *Tortilla Flat*, complete. 1<sup>st</sup> thirty minutes of class, **BOOKGROUPS on *The Grapes of Wrath***, ch 1-6.

## WEEK 7

Oct. 2: *Of Mice and Men*, chapter 1-2. 1<sup>st</sup> thirty minutes of class, **BOOKGROUPS on *The Grapes of Wrath***, 7-12.

Oct 4: *Of Mice and Men*, chapters 3-4 and film clips. 1<sup>st</sup> thirty minutes of class **BOOKGROUPS on *The Grapes of Wrath***, 13-18.

## WEEK 8

Oct. 9: *Of Mice and Men*, complete." "Supreme Court to Consider Legal Standard Drawn from 'Of Mice and Men'

<http://nyti.ms/2bzukPZ>.

Oct. 11: **Group 1 presentation: *Grapes*, chapters 1-6; Group 2 presentation: *Grapes*, Chapters 7-12. (Groups 4-5 will pose questions to the group concerning selected passages from text).**

*"Throughout I've tried to make the reader participate in the actuality, what he takes from it will be scaled entirely on his own depth or hollowness. There are 5 layers in this book, a reader will find as many as he can and he won't find more than he has in himself."* (JS).

## WEEK 9

Oct. 16: **Group 3 presentation: *Grapes*, 13-18.** 1<sup>st</sup> thirty minutes of class, **BOOKGROUPS on *The Grapes of Wrath***, 19-25: (Groups 1-3 will continue to will select passages from later in the book to discuss with groups 4-5).

Oct. 18: **Group 4 presentation, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 19-25.** 1<sup>st</sup> 30 minutes of class, **BOOKGROUPS on *The Grapes of Wrath***, complete.

**Notebooks due #2, seven entries + *Grapes* paper** from groups 1-2: (one on *Mice*, or *TF*, one enrichments, one relevance or film)

## WEEK 10

Oct. 23: **Group 5 presentation: *The Grapes of Wrath*, complete.**

**Notebooks due from group 3, Seven entries + paper on *Grapes*.**

*"For it is through struggle and sorrow that people are able to participate in one another--the heartlessness of the healthy, well-fed, and unsorrowful person has in it an infinite smugness."* (JS, *Sea of Cortez*.)

PDF: "Tom Collins reports"

Oct. 25: **Notebooks due #2, seven entries + *Grapes* paper** from group 4. Film in class, John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

## WEEK 11

Oct. 30: *Sea of Cortez* excerpts. PDF. "About Ed Ricketts" and SOC Chapters 1-2. **Notebooks due #2, seven entries + *Grapes* paper** from group 5.

Nov. 1: *Sea of Cortez* excerpts

<http://www.gulfspecimen.org/about-us/the-steinbeck-papers/>

## WEEK 12

Nov. 6: *Cannery Row*, ½.

Nov. 8: *Cannery Row*, complete.

## WEEK 13

Nov. 13: *East of Eden* Part I *"I have purged myself of the bitterness that made me suspicious of the self, the "I"; you see before you the composite of a real past (a history of limited, imaginative Hamiltons) and a fictional present (fable of Trasks). I am whole and free and know that art and life depend on the lonely, anguished, solitary effort."*

Nov. 15: *East of Eden*, Part II. **Notebooks due #3, 10 entries.**

Nov. 17, **SATURDAY. FIELD TRIP TO STEINBECK COUNTRY:** Red Pony ranch, National Steinbeck Center, Steinbeck house, Ricketts's lab on Cannery Row.

**WEEK 14**

Nov. 20: *East of Eden*, Part III.

Nov. 22: Thanksgiving

**WEEK 15**

Nov. 27: *East of Eden*, Part IV.

Nov. 29: *The Winter of Our Discontent*

**WEEK 16**

Dec. 4: *The Winter of Our Discontent* **Notebooks due #4, 14 entries.**

Dec. 6: *The Winter of our Discontent*

**Dec. 14: Friday, 9:45-12:00, FINAL EXAM.**