

San José State University
Humanities and the Arts/ Department of English
English 167, Steinbeck, Fall 2016

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Office Hours: T/TH: 1:30-2:45
Class Days/Time: Tues/Thurs 12:00-1:15
Classroom: Clark 306

Course Description

John Steinbeck, Californian, was intimately connected with the region of his birth. Born in Salinas in 1902, he grew up loving the broad Salinas Valley, “Salad Bowl of the Nation.” On the shores of the nearby Pacific his family had a summer retreat, and throughout his life he yearned to be near the sea. At age 14, Steinbeck knew he wanted to be a writer, and he spent a lifetime writing about humans living in place, about the connections between and among human, animals, environment, region. Long after he had left California for the east coast, John Steinbeck admitted that he kept “the tone of Salinas in my head like a remembered symphony.”

This class will begin by considering Steinbeck’s finely honed sense of place, considering 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, with class reports on *In Dubious Battle* (1936, read in book groups), and consideration of *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Next we will consider 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 book group reports on *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961).

As well as considering Steinbeck and region, we will also discuss Steinbeck's national and international appeal.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

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

1. **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;
2. **show familiarity** with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American and World Literature;
3. **write** clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject;
4. **develop and carry out research projects**, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively;
5. **articulate** the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Required Texts/Readings

To a God Unknown (1933)
The Long Valley (1938)
Tortilla Flat (1935)
In Dubious Battle (1936)
Of Mice and Men (1937)
The Grapes of Wrath (1939)
Cannery Row (1945)
East of Eden (1952)
The Winter of Our Discontent (1961)

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

Other readings: PDFs sent to class as noted on syllabus

Course Requirements and Assignments

I. Book groups: 50% (25% each text. CLO 1,3,4) The class will be divided into book groups of 5-6 people, and each group will read, discuss, present orally, and write about 2 books: *In Dubious Battle* during the first part of the semester and *The Winter of Our Discontent* in the second part. Book groups will be given class time to discuss the books (30 minutes on days indicated), although each group will need to meet outside class to complete oral presentations/projects.

a. Close reading: For book group sessions, members of book groups will have bookmarks that will guide discussions and chart progress.

b. Group projects/presentations: After reading each book carefully, each group will create and present a project that is primarily analytical/historical/biographical *or* primarily creative (you will switch for the second book—ie, creative for *IDB*, then analytical/historical/biographical for *Winter*). For each type of class presentation, groups may consider any creative/factual medium: powerpoint, readers' theater, artistic creations, film, panels, journalistic-style presentations, interviews, etc. (15% each book; percentage includes participation in each scheduled book group, noted on book marks.)

c. Essay: Finally, a 3 page essay is due *AFTER* the group presentation on date noted on syllabus; each member of the group will write a separate essay and connect one character, one central scene, *or* one major theme from *In Dubious Battle/Winter* to one other character /scene/theme discussed in class texts. Be specific and select only one option: character/scene/theme. As you write, consider why the comparative approach helps deepen your understanding Steinbeck's work and relevance. (10% each book)

For each book, two grades will be given: One will be for the group participation/presentation (Participation in each scheduled group meeting; creativity/depth of analysis of group presentation; individual participation on day of presentation—individual grades for each member of the group). A second grade will be given for individual papers.

II. Reading Notebook, 9 entries (25% CLO 1,3). I will check reading notebooks mid-semester (at least 5 entries due by week of October 24) and at the end of the semester.

a. Reading log (4 entries, 2 pp each—close reading from 4 different texts. *The Long Valley* is ONE text). 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 also 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 one character, issue, theme or image that is most relevant to your experience and explain why that is so. These are personal entries, specific and focused. Use examples from your experience.

c. Enrichment (3 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. Select from the following:
 --20 pp of *Working Days*, the *Grapes* journal
 --20 pp of *Journal of a Novel*, the *East of Eden* journal
 --20 pp of *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*
 --20 pp of Benson's or Parini's biography.

III. Quizzes (10%) and Final Exam (15% CLO 1, 3, 4, 5).

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

a. Essays, notebook entries, and the 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.

b. Late essays receive lower grades, 1/3 grade per day assignment is late.

Determination of final grade will depend on 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>

English 167, Steinbeck, Fall 2016 COURSE SCHEDULE

August

25: Introduction to course, to JS; introduction of students.

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

September

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

6: *To a God Unknown*, complete. Steinbeck and the short story: "The Kittens and the Curtain" (PDF)

8: *The Long Valley*, "The Chrysanthemums" "The White Quail." "The Snake,"
"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)

13: *The Long Valley*, "The Murder" "Johnny Bear," "The Harness"

15: *The Long Valley*: "The Vigilante" and "Flight" Film clips and story; "The Gift"

20: *The Long Valley*: "The Red Pony"

22: *Tortilla Flat*, 1-6 and BOOKGROUPS on *In Dubious Battle*, chapters 1-4.

- 27: *Tortilla Flat* 7-13 and BOOKGROUPS on *In Dubious Battle*, chapters 5-7.
 29: *Tortilla Flat*, complete. BOOKGROUPS on *In Dubious Battle*, chapter 8-12.

October

- 4: BOOKGROUPS on *In Dubious Battle*, complete. *Of Mice and Men*, chapters 1, 2 and film clips.
 6: *In Dubious Battle* presentations, 10 minutes each. Note: **All** *In Dubious Battle* 3-page essays due by **October 18**. *Of Mice and Men*, chapter 3. Readers' theater.
 11: *In Dubious Battle* presentations, 10 minutes each. *Of Mice and Men*, complete. PDF, "Of *Mice and Men*: Steinbeck's Speculations in Manhood."
 13: *The Grapes of Wrath* Chapters 1-6. PDFs: "The Author, On 'Grapes of Wrath'"
 18: *The Grapes of Wrath*, 7-14 (unhomed). "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).
 20: *The Grapes of Wrath*, 15-20 (on the road)
 25: *The Grapes of Wrath*. 20-24. PDF: "Tom Collins reports" "Tom Collins" "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*.) (SLO 1,2,5)
 27: *The Grapes of Wrath*, complete.

November

- 1: **NOTEBOOKS COLLECTED THIS WEEK—at least 5 entries.** *Cannery Row*, film clips. Read through chapter 9.
 3: *Cannery Row*, complete.
 8: *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."

10: *East of Eden*, Part II.

15: *East of Eden*, Part III.

17: *East of Eden*, Part IV. Film of *East of Eden*.

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

22: Film of *East of Eden*, *Winter* bookgroups, chapters 1-3.

24: THANKSGIVING

29: Film of *East of Eden*, *Winter* bookgroups, chapter 4-7

December

1: *Winter* bookgroups, chapters 8-12.

6: *Winter* bookgroups, complete. *Winter* presentations.

8: **NOTEBOOKS DUE.** *Winter* presentations. Note: All papers on *Winter* are due by Monday December 12.

19: Final Exam: 9:45-12:00.