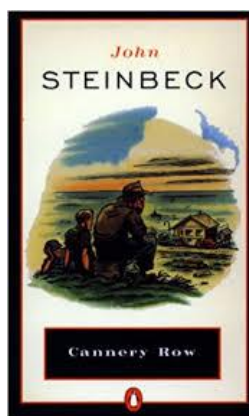


Cannery Row



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Author Steinbeck, John

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Genre Slice of Life

Synopsis The adventures and misadventures of cannery workers living in the run-down waterfront section of Monterey, California, are recounted and exposed. California author.

Themes Role of nature

Protagonist Male, Cannery Worker

Note Over the years, these books have been published in multiple editions. The page numbers in your book may be different than the ones on the lesson plan.

More Information www.scu.edu/character



Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 1

"Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, 'whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches,' by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, 'Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men,' and he would have meant the same thing" (p. 1).

Writing Prompt

Lee Chong's grocery is an important part of the community in Cannery Row. Many customers rely on his generous credit to buy groceries.

Write 1-2 argumentative paragraphs about Lee Chong's role in Cannery Row. Do you agree or disagree with his policy? Why do you think Lee Chong is so willing to let people pay on credit? Do you think you would be as generous as Lee Chong if you were in his position? Why or why not? Conclude with a reiteration of your stance.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 15

“Our Father who art in nature, who has given the gift of survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the house fly and the moth, must have a great and overwhelming love for no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums, and Mack and the boys. Virtues and graces and laziness and zest. Our Father who art in nature” (p. 15).

Writing Prompt

So far in the novel, Steinbeck introduces the audience to a certain type of person that inhabits Cannery Row. From what you have read so far, what kind of people live on Cannery Row? Is Steinbeck focusing on mainstream society, or is he focusing on a different part of society?

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that the characters in *Cannery Row*, because of their status as marginalized members of the community, are more interesting and unique than if they were a part of mainstream society. What do their eccentricities – that is, their unusual and unexpected traits and actions – tell you about their lifestyle? Would the story be as entertaining if the characters belonged to a higher, more affluent social status? Use evidence from the text to support your ideas. Conclude with a reiteration of your claims.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 28-29

“Doc would listen to any kind of nonsense and change it for you to a kind of wisdom. His mind had no horizon—and his sympathy had no warp. He could talk to children, telling them very profound things so that they understood. He lived in a world of wonders, of excitement. He was concupiscent as a rabbit and gentle as hell. Everyone who knew him was indebted to him. And everyone who thought of him thought next, ‘I really must do something nice for Doc’” (p. 28-29).

Writing Prompt

Steinbeck spends a lot of time describing the characters and setting in this novel. As a reader, do you find these descriptions important? Are the descriptions interesting, or could the novel do without them? What do these details reveal about the characters and the setting?

Write an argumentative paragraph either in favor of or against Steinbeck’s descriptive style. Do you think that this style is an effective one? Why or why not? Would you write this book differently? Use evidence from the text to support your claims; include a counterargument, but be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your stance.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 31

“Then the creeping murderer, the octopus, steals out, slowly, softly, moving like a great mist, pretending now to be a bit of weed, now a rock, now a lump of decaying meat while its evil goat eyes watch coldly. It oozes and flows toward a feeding crab, and as it comes close its yellow eyes burn and its body turns rosy with the pulsing color of anticipation and rage. Then suddenly it runs lightly on the tops of its arms, as ferociously as a charging cat. It leaps savagely on the crab, there is a puff of black fluid, and the struggling mass is obscured in the sepia cloud while the octopus murders the crab” (p. 31).

Writing Prompt

Steinbeck provides several paragraphs describing the tide pool habitat. Many different species are represented (hermit crabs, anemones, and the octopus) as well as their unique role in the ecosystem. In many ways, these aquatic animals represent the different people who make up our human societies.

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you explain the significance of the ‘octopus’ character, both in the marine ecosystem, and – symbolically – in our society. Who is this character? Why is it important for the octopus to exist? Persuade your audience to see the value in this creature, but also provide a short counter-argument. Use evidence from the text as well as outside research to support your claims and conclude with a statement that summarizes your views.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 41-42

"With the great stove came pride, and with pride, the Palace became home. Eddie planted morning glories to run over the door and Hazel acquired some rather rare fuchsia bushes planted in five-gallon cans which made the entrance formal and a little cluttered. Mack and the boys loved the Palace and they even cleaned it a little sometimes. In their minds they sneered at unsettled people who had no house to go to and occasionally in their pride they brought a guest home for a day or two" (p. 41-42).

Writing Prompt

After they begin furnishing the Palace Flophouse, the men begin to feel a certain sense of pride. The more effort they put into their home, the more value it has for them.

Pretend you are one of the men who lives at the Palace Flophouse, but have been corresponding with a friend who wants you to move in with him. **Write a 1-2 paragraph argumentative letter to your friend, claiming why you prefer to live at the Palace Flophouse. Be descriptive; use evidence from the text to support your stance. Also, use language and words that are appropriate for the situation and audience you are addressing. Conclude with a reiteration of your claims.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 58

“And he came to the laboratory every day. It was an association without much talk. Doc by a telephone call established that what Frankie said was true. They didn’t want him in school. He couldn’t learn and there was something a little wrong with his coordination. There was no place for him. He wasn’t an idiot, he wasn’t dangerous, his parents, or parent, would not pay for his keep in an institution. Frankie didn’t often sleep at the laboratory but he spent his days there. And sometimes he crawled in the excelsior crate and slept. That was probably when there was a crisis at home” (p. 58).

Writing Prompt

In this section of the novel, we see Doc helping out Frankie. Doc seems to offer assistance to many people in the novel without receiving anything in return.

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you argue either for or against Doc’s tendency to help others. Are his actions good for the community? Are his actions ultimately hurting or helping himself? Support your claims with evidence from the text. Provide a counterargument and conclude with a reiteration of your stance.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 7



Key Paragraph p. 67-68

“Someone should write an erudite essay on the moral, physical, and esthetic effect of the Model T Ford on the American nation. Two generations of Americans knew more about the Ford coil than the clitoris, about the planetary system of gears than the solar system of stars. With the Model T, part of the concept of private property disappeared. Pliers ceased to be privately owned and a tire pump belonged to the last man who had picked it up. Most of the babies of the period were conceived in Model T Fords and not a few were born in them. The theory of the Anglo Saxon home became so warped that it never quite recovered” (p. 67-68).

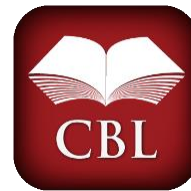
Writing Prompt

Do you agree that “fate” didn’t allow Gay to get back to fix the truck or should the blame be placed on Gay? Why does Steinbeck attribute Gay’s actions to fate? Are Gay’s actions his own responsibility or can it all be assigned to fate?

Write an argumentative paragraph claiming either a) that Gay’s inability to join the men on their expedition was due to ‘fate’ or b) that Gay’s choices – and their consequences – prevented him from going on the trip. How does personal responsibility differ from fate? Research the meaning and origins of the word ‘fate’ to help support your argument. Also, use relevant evidence and details from the novel to further your claims. Conclude with a reiteration of your stance.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 73

“The Model T Ford truck of Lee Chong had a dignified history. In 1923 it had been a passenger car belonging to Dr. W. T. Walters...The body of the car was so battered that its next owner cut it in two and added a little truck bed...Lee Chong got the truck in payment of a grocery bill” (p. 73).

Writing Prompt

Lee Chong’s truck has experienced a variety of owners and additions. By describing the truck in precise detail, Steinbeck draws attention to its unique history and appearance. How is the truck representative of the people of Cannery Row?

Pretend that you are Lee Chong. Someone has approached you, offering to buy your truck from you. **Write an argumentative paragraph to the prospective buyer, claiming that you will not sell the truck, even at a very generous price. Explain why it is valuable to you, even though it is old and has been altered. Use details from the text to support your opinions.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 85

“Early morning is a time of magic in Cannery Row. In the gray time after the light has come and before the sun has risen, the Row seems to hang suspended out of time in a silvery light. The streetlights go out, and the weeds are a brilliant green. The corrugated iron of the canneries glows with the pearly lucence of platinum or old pewter. No automobiles are running then. The street is silent of progress and business. And the rush and drag of the waves can be heard as they splash in among the piles of the canneries. It is a time of great peace, a deserted time, a little era of rest” (p. 85).

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading, Steinbeck describes Cannery Row in the morning. **In 1-2 paragraph, create a claim arguing in favor of the statement “Cannery Row is at its best in the morning.” How does nature take the center stage? What role do humans play in this scene? Use evidence in the text as well as personal opinion to produce a concise and believable argument. Conclude with a reiteration of your stance.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 94-95

“He wanted to go to live with them in the Palace Flophouse. He decided that his wife would like Mack and the boys if she only knew them. Finally he went to sleep on the floor with his head among the puppies” (p. 94-95).

Writing Prompt

So far in the novel, Steinbeck does not introduce many female characters. Why do you think Steinbeck focuses mainly on male characters? Do you think that he should have included more women in this novel?

Write 2 argumentative paragraphs explaining why you believe why there should/should not be more women in the novel. Provide support for your ideas and feel free to conduct outside research to further claims. In a second paragraph, argue whether or not you think women are portrayed in a positive light or a negative light. Why is this so?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 104

“Because he loved true things, he tried to explain. He said he was nervous and besides he wanted to see the country, smell that ground and look at grass and birds and trees, to savor the country, and there was no other way to do it save on foot. And people didn’t like him for telling the truth. They scowled, or shook and tapped their heads, they laughed as though they knew it was a lie and they appreciated a liar. And some, afraid for their daughters or their pigs, told him to move on, to get going, just not to stop near their place if he knew what was good for him” (p. 104).

Writing Prompt

In this section of the reading, we see that Doc sometimes sacrifices his love of the truth in order to seem less eccentric. Have you ever had to lie in order to save your reputation or avoid unwanted questions?

Write an argumentative paragraph explaining why you believe/do not believe that the truth is always the best answer to give someone. Are white lies (harmless or trivial lies) more harmful than they are helpful? Support your claims with evidence from the text. Feel free to draw on personal information to aid your stance and provide an appropriate counterargument.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 109-110

“And the girl’s head went ahead of him. He sat down on the beach in the coarse dry sand and pulled off his boots. In the jar the little octopi were huddled up, each keeping as far as possible from the others. Music sounded in Doc’s ears, a high thin piercingly sweet flute carrying a melody he could never remember, and against this, a pounding surf-like wood-wind section. The flute went up into regions beyond the hearing range and even there it carried its unbelievable melody. Goose pimples came out on Doc’s arms. He shivered and his eyes were wet the way they get in the focus of great beauty. The girl’s eyes had been gray and clear and the dark hair floated, drifting lightly over the face. The picture was set for all time” (p. 109-110).

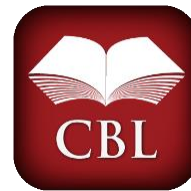
Writing Prompt

Doc finds a dead girl in the water while he collects octopi. Why do you think that Doc is so haunted by the girl? Is she real or is she just a creation of his imagination? How do you think you would react if you saw a dead girl in the water?

Pretend you are Doc. **Write a letter to the man you met by the sea in which you support your stance to refrain from collecting a bounty. Use words, phrases and logic you would expect Doc to use in order to make your argument clear and convincing; provide a counterargument, but make sure you conclude with a reiteration of your stance.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 119

“The poison of greed was already creeping into the innocent and laudable merchandising agreement. Bitterness was piling up. But in Lee’s packing case the frogs were piling up too.

Financial bitterness could not eat too deeply into Mack and the boys, for they were not mercantile men. They did not measure their joy in goods sold, their egos in bank balances, nor their lives in what they cost” (p. 119).

Writing Prompt

Why don’t Mack and the boys get upset when Lee Chong starts to charge them more and more? Why are Mack and the boys unsusceptible to the bitterness caused by these financial transactions?

Write 2 paragraphs; in the first describe what you believe Mack and the boys truly value. In the second, argue either against or in favor of these values. How do they differ from your own? What do you believe is really valuable and worthwhile in life? Support your opinions with evidence from the book, but also use your own personal experience to create a convincing argument.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 132

“No you won’t, Mack,” said Doc. ‘You’ll think about it and it’ll worry you for quite a long time, but you won’t pay for it. There’s maybe three hundred dollars in broken museum glass. Don’t say you’ll pay for it. That will just keep you uneasy. It might be two or three years before you forgot about it and felt entirely easy again. And you wouldn’t pay it anyway” (p. 132).

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading, Doc shatters the illusion that Mack presents him by telling him that, even though he intends to pay him back, he never will.

In a paragraph, argue either for or against self-honesty. Is it better to be honest with yourself? Or is it better to say what you think others want to hear? Back up your claims with evidence from *Cannery Row*, but also use personal experience to support your opinions. Be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your stance.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 143

“It has always been strange to me,’ said Doc. ‘The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second’” (p. 143).

Writing Prompt

In this passage, Doc comments on the admirable traits that Mack and the boys possess; in spite of their sometimes careless and ill-planned actions, Doc realizes that they have pure hearts and mean well.

Write 1-2 paragraphs arguing whether or not Mack and the boys deserve to be punished for their actions. Should they be given another chance? Support your claims with evidence from the text as well as your own personal experience. If you were Doc, would you forgive Mack?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 16



Key Paragraph, p. 152

“She could do that. She could infect a whole house with gaiety and she used her gift as a weapon against their despondency that lurked always around outside the house waiting to get in at Tom. That was Mary’s job as she saw it—to keep the despondency away from Tom because everyone knew he was going to be a great success some time. Mostly she was successful in keeping the dark things out of the house but sometimes they got in at Tom and laid him out. Then he would sit and brood for hours while Mary frantically built up a backfire of gaiety” (p. 152).

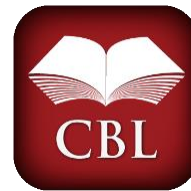
Writing Prompt

How is marriage represented in this novel? Think about Gay, the captain, and the Talbots. How do Mack and the boys feel about marriage? Does the relationship between Mary and Tom Talbot differ from previous portrayals of marriage in the novel?

Write a paragraph arguing in favor or against Steinbeck’s view of marriage? Do you believe that Steinbeck’s approach is correct? How do you view marriage? Use examples from the book as well as your own personal experience to inform your stance. Be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your claims.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 17



Key Paragraph, p. 161

“When Mack left, Doc wondered casually what the build-up was. For he had recognized it as a lead. He knew Mack’s technique, his method. He recognized his style. And he wondered to what purpose Mack could put the information. It was only later when rumors began to creep in that Doc added the whole thing up. Now he felt slightly relieved, for he had expected Mack to put the bite on him” (p. 161).

Writing Prompt

What do you think is better: to have good intentions that get clouded by carelessness and tactlessness (think Mack and the boy’s first attempt at Doc’s party); or to have selfish motivations for good deeds?

Write an argumentative paragraph that claims which approach is best and support your opinions with relevant passages from the text as well as personal experience. Be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your stance.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 18



Key Paragraph p. 170-171

“Doc ordered fifteen pounds of steaks, ten pounds of tomatoes, twelve heads of lettuce, six loaves of bread, a big jar of peanut butter and one of strawberry jam, five gallons of wine and four quarts of a good substantial but not distinguished whiskey. He knew he would have trouble at the bank the first of the month. Three or four such parties, he thought, and he would lose the laboratory” (p. 170-171).

Writing Prompt

Why does Doc end up buying most of the things for his party? Why doesn't he tell Mack and the boys that he doesn't want the party? What would you do if you were in Doc's position? **Write a paragraph about Doc's motivation for spending so much money on a party for himself. Will this affect the ability of Mack and the boys to repay their debt to Doc? Is Doc going along with the party for the benefit of himself or for the benefit of Mack and the boys? Be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your claims.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 19



Key Paragraph, p. 189

“The fresh contingent raged in full of hell. And then the party really got going. The cops came back, looked in, clicked their tongues and joined it. Mack and the boys used the squad car to go to Jimmy Brucia’s for more wine and Jimmy came back with them. You could hear the roar of the party from the end of Cannery Row. The party had all the best qualities of a riot and a night on the barricades” (p. 189).

Writing Prompt

In this part of the novel, Mack and the boys throw Doc a significantly more successful party than the first one.

Pretend you are Doc. **Write an argumentative letter from his perspective, claiming that this party was much better than the first. Use evidence from the text to support this claim and be sure to use words and phrases that you believe Doc would use. Be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your stance.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Cannery Row, Day 20



Key Paragraph, p. 196

“Even now,
I know that I have savored the hot taste of life
Lifting green cups and gold at the great feast.
Just for a small and forgotten time
I have had full in my eyes from off my girl
The whitest pouring of eternal light” (p. 196).

Writing Prompt

How is success defined in this novel? Which characters are successful? Which characters are unsuccessful? Do you agree with the standards for success outlined in this novel?

Write a paragraph arguing either for or against the vision of success that is present in the novel. Do you think that this is a valid definition of what makes a person successful? Why or why not? Does success always depend on money? If not, what does success depend on? Use specific examples from the text, but also support your claims with personal opinions. Be sure to reiterate your claims in your conclusion.