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## Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



### Cannery Row

by John Steinbeck

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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# Cannery Row

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. answer objective questions on the literal meaning of the story in terms of plot
2. identify who or what the following characters or places symbolize:
  - Lee Chong
  - Mack and the boys
  - Doc
  - Dora Flood
  - Frankie
  - Cannery Row
3. understand the development of the following concepts in the novel:
  - Can a utopia exist in a lower socioeconomic environment?
  - What is the correlation between the appearances of the characters and their personalities?
  - What are some of the characteristics of “local color” or regional writing?
4. recognize multiple meanings in *Cannery Row* and be able to find similarities between them.
5. define and give examples from the text of the following literary terms:
  - allusion
  - anecdote
  - digression
  - idealism
  - irony
  - local color
  - metaphor
  - mood
  - paradox
  - personification
  - realism
  - simile
  - symbol
  - theme
  - tone
  - utopia
  - vignette

# Cannery Row

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In this novel, how could collecting be a metaphor for writing? What is symbolic about collecting? Include examples of various vignettes.
2. What is significant about the animal references in the novel? When do these occur and why are they used? What might the animals symbolize?
3. Explain the role of violence in the novel. What is Steinbeck's reasoning for including so many suicides and other deaths in the story? How would the story be different if the violence were less prevalent?
4. Explain how this novel could be categorized as regional writing, or "local color" writing. Find specific references that support your answer.
5. Choose a character you think is the most successful in this novel and explain why you chose that character. Think of how success can be defined for these people in Cannery Row (monetarily, sense of pride, etc.) and argue your point using specific examples from the book.
6. Doc responds peculiarly when he finds the dead girl in the water. Explain how his reaction is integral to his character, and discuss what the dead girl may symbolize.
7. Compare aspects of Frankie's character with those of Mack and the boys. How are they similar? Find examples that illustrate their good intentions which accidentally hurt others.
8. Compare the behavior of Mrs. Malloy and her boiler curtains with Mrs. Mary Talbot, the party organizer for the neighborhood cats. What are the qualities that both women share? Discuss how these women characterize the contrast of realism versus idealism.
9. How does Doc's reaction after the first disastrous party differ from the second, successful one? Describe in your own words how Doc feels after each party.
10. Explain how Cannery Row itself is a character in the novel. Comment on how individually, each character may appear weak, but the solidarity of all combined creates a strong, indivisible whole.
11. What qualities do the characters of Cannery Row exhibit that supports the argument that this book is a utopian novel? What are some qualities or events that contrast that point and suggest that this book is actually a realistic novel? Could this work be best viewed as a realistic utopian novel?
12. Why does Steinbeck include the story of the gopher at almost the end of the novel? What does the gopher symbolize? Speculate on why Steinbeck uses the gopher vignette, rather than any other familiar character, to make one of the strongest statements of this book.

# Cannery Row

## Introduction

### Vocabulary

**canneries** – factories where food is packaged in cans  
**nostalgia** – a mixed feeling of happiness, sadness, and longing when recalling a person, place, or event from the past, or feelings of the past in general  
**purse-seiners** – large commercial fishing nets

1. Steinbeck poetically describes Cannery Row in the opening sentence of this novel. What literary device does he use in its description?

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2. How are the inhabitants of Cannery Row first described? What does this description imply about these people?

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3. Find an example of personification in this introduction.

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4. The last paragraph of the introduction is key in understanding Steinbeck's approach to writing this book. How does his analogy of collecting marine animals give the reader a sense of this technique?

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## Chapter 6

### Vocabulary

**caustic** – bitter, causing bad emotions  
**protean** – showing great variety or diversity

1. In this chapter, Doc and Hazel, one of the boys from the Palace Flophouse, are collecting marine animals. The life of the sea is richly described in terms of both beauty and violence. Find a passage or phrase that encapsulates this paradox of the natural world.

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2. How does Hazel get his name? What does this tell the reader about his family or the quality of life in Cannery Row?

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3. Another literary device Steinbeck uses is simile to enhance his story telling style. Find two examples of the many similes from this chapter.

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4. Hazel fails to understand Doc's responses about both Henri the painter and the stinkbugs. What does the reader learn about these characters from this exchange?

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**Chapter 13**

Vocabulary

**magnanimously** – nobly, generously  
**poultice** – a preparation used to ease pain

1. How does Mack's position on lying change with different circumstances?

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2. What is the agreement that Mack and the Captain come to in their exchange?

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