



Picturing Words

Descriptive Writing, Grades 4-8

John Steinbeck Summer Institute

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Illustrate:

Using a variety of selected passages from the works of John Steinbeck, students will illustrate one of the following randomly assigned passages using pencil and watercolors.

“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... and sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the pool.”

Of Mice And Men – John Steinbeck

“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 raccoons, 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.”

Of Mice And Men – John Steinbeck

“And then it was one eye – one huge brown eye as big as a church door. Andy looked through the shiny transparent brown door and through it he saw a lonely countryside, flat for miles but ending against a row of fantastic mountains shaped like cows’ and dogs’ heads and tents and mushrooms. There was low coarse grass on the plain and here and there a little mound. And a small animal like a woodchuck sat on each mound. And the loneliness – the desolate cold aloneness of the landscape made Andy whimper because there wasn’t anyone in the world and he was left.”

Cannery Row – John Steinbeck

“...at about three-thirty pm [we] rowed ashore toward a sand and rubble beach on the southeastern part of the bay. Here the beach was piled with debris: the huge vertebrae of whales scattered about and piles of broken weed and skeletons of fishes and birds. On top of some low bushes which edged the beach there were great nests three to four feet in diameter, pelican nests perhaps, for there were pieces of fish bone in them, but all the nests were deserted...”

The Log From The Sea Of Cortez – John Steinbeck

“Jody continued on through the large vegetable patch where the green corn was higher than his head. The cow pumpkins were green and small yet. He went on to the sagebrush line where the cold spring ran out of its pipe and fell into a round wooden tub. He leaned over and drank close to the green mossy wood where the water tasted best. Then he turned and looked back on the ranch, on the low whitewashed house girded with red geraniums, and on the long bunkhouse by the cypress tree...”

The Red Pony – John Steinbeck

“A small wooden house dominated the camp ground, and on the porch of the house a gasoline lantern hissed and threw its white glare in a great circle. Half a dozen tents were pitched near the house and cars stood beside the tents. Cooking for the night was over, but the coals of the campfires still glowed on the ground near the camping places.”

The Grapes Of Wrath – John Steinbeck

“They drove through Tehachapi in the morning glow, and the sun came up behind them, and then – suddenly they saw the great valley below them...The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses...The distant cities, the little towns in the orchard land, and the morning sun, golden on the valley...The grain fields golden in the morning, and the willow lines, the eucalyptus trees in rows...The peach trees and the walnut groves, and the dark red patches of oranges. And red roofs among the trees...The distance was thinned with haze and the land grew softer and softer in the distance.”

The Grapes Of Wrath – John Steinbeck

Analyze:

Students will discuss the W.H. Auden poem “Musée Des Beaux Arts” and compare it to *Landscape with the fall of Icarus*, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, on which the poem is based.

Musée des Beaux Arts

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters; how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

W.H. Auden



Landscape with the fall of Icarus by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Write:

Students will write a short descriptive paragraph based on a photograph from John Steinbeck country.





































Draw and write from experience:

On a field trip to the local Community Garden students will frame an “image” in the garden, write a descriptive paragraph about it and create a botanical illustration to accompany it.



