

TEACHING CANNERY ROW ACROSS DISCIPLINES

This is an inter-disciplinary unit designed by Kevin Kearney, scholar in the 2018 Steinbeck Institute and English teacher at St. Joseph's Preparatory School in Philadelphia, in collaboration with his colleague, Scott Murphy, Science teacher at St. Joseph's Preparatory School.

This unit was designed to facilitate collaboration between English and Science faculty, as well as English and Science students. The plans listed below are aimed at integrating a regular-level 9th grade English I class with a 12th grade Engineering elective, but we believe that the general structure and much of the content can be used for other English and Science courses.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What is a community?

What is the purpose of a community?

How have technological advancements changed communities?

How should engineers consider the impact of technology on a community?

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Engineering students will gain an understanding of the social impact of civil engineering projects.

English I students will gain an understanding of how communities can shift based on available technology.

TEXTS

John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*

Aldo Leopold, excerpts from *Sand County Almanac*

Henry David Thoreau, excerpts from *Walden*

Robinson Jeffers, "Carmel Point"

ASSESSMENT

English I: Consider your present day community. How has it changed since the time of *Cannery Row* (meaning the 1930s) or since Steinbeck was writing the novel (1945, post WWII)? How have changes in technology led to some of these changes?

Engineering: Identify an engineering accomplishment in your community. How does this structure affect the way the community interacts? How have changes in society led to a need for different types of engineering?

COLLABORATIVE PERIODS:

DAY 1:

Kearney introduces Ricketts's 5 layers of observation, applied by Steinbeck to his writing in 1938:

- 1) habits
- 2) bonding
- 3) life histories
- 4) universals
- 5) emergence or "breaking through" to a larger understanding

Students then re-read the opening of *Cannery Row*, focusing on how Steinbeck attempts to objectively catalog the behavior of his community.

Next, group students by location, i.e., students (both Seniors and Freshman) from South Philly will be in one group. Ideally, there will be one Senior for every two Freshman in a group.

Based on the opening of *Cannery Row* and Ricketts's 5 levels, ask the groups: What's a defining social characteristic of your community? How do people in your community bond?

Murphy briefly defines "civil engineering" and its purpose.

Ask the groups: What's an example of civil engineering that is unique to your community? Why do you think this was needed for this particular community?

Teachers then ask students to prepare a response to the following prompts for the next collaborative class:

English I: Consider your present day community. How has it changed since the time of *Cannery Row* (meaning the 1930s) or since Steinbeck was writing the novel (1945, post WWII)?

Engineering: Identify an engineering accomplishment in your community. How does this structure affect the way the community interacts? How have changes in society led to a need for different types of engineering?

DAY 2:

Kearney and Murphy present briefly on Aldo Leopold, defining his "[Land Ethic](#)." Students then read "[Thinking Like a Mountain](#)" as a group. Murphy (presents/leads discussion) on how this needs to be a consideration in civil engineering.

Students take out their responses to prompt from last class and break back into their groups.

They are posed additional questions for their writing assignment:

English I: How have changes in technology led to some of these changes?

Engineering: Describe the logistics needed to create the engineering feat. What are the scientific principles involved in the construction? Create a 3D model of the structure.

Groups will work together to teach one another content, with seniors acting as specialists on the civil engineering of the community and freshmen acting as specialists on the social transformation of that same community.

After students have had some time to work together, Kearney and Murphy pose a question for larger-group discussion

1. Recall the events of Ch. 15, when the Mack and the boys go frog hunting. What are the ethics of this situation?

➔ If time allows, make a connection to Jeffers's "Carmel Point" and the theory of "unhumaniz[ing]" one's perspective. Connect to Leopold's "Thinking Like a Mountain."

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2. Would you prefer to live now, with all of our technological innovations, or in Steinbeck's time, when things are less technologically sophisticated?