At the NSC, summer is the time to catch up. For the second year in a row, the NSC was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Big Read grant. As Eric Mora notes in his column, Citizen is a meditation on race in the 21st century. Please check www.steinbeck.org for a full schedule of events. Books are available at local libraries, bookstores, and at the NSC.

Congressman Jimmy Panetta graciously permitted me to print his moving speech from the first annual Cannery Row Banquet, co-sponsored by the National Steinbeck Center and the Cannery Row Foundation, held at the InterContinental The Clement Monterey on May 5. Congressman Panetta reflected on the theme of the 2017 Festival, “Migrations.” In addition, Western Flyer owner John Gregg discussed the progress of reconstructing the purse seiner that Ricketts and Steinbeck chartered to the Sea of Cortez in 1940, and Taelen Thomas (as Steinbeck) and Steve Mortensen (as himself) entertained. My warm thanks to each, as well as to John Turner, General Manager of The Clement, and the NSC board for their collective high spirits and full-throttle support; to Steve Palumbi, Director of Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station, for generously opening Boatworks for afternoon seminars; to the Cannery Row Foundation board and president, Greg Cailliet, for embracing the event with gusto; and to Dennis Copeland and Claire Rygg of the City of Monterey for throwing open the doors of Ricketts's Lab for tours and a humdinger of a reception—beer milkshakes were flowing freely.

The spirits of Doc and the boys raised a glass—or one of the specially designed tin cups—I'm sure.

Join us for the May 2018 Festival and Cannery Row Banquet. The theme is the “The Women of Steinbeck's World.” Maybe Flora Woods's expansive spirit will swoop through Cannery Row.

Call 831.775.4721 or visit www.steinbeck.org for more information on our upcoming events.

August 28 to October 18 Big Read, Citizen

November 4, 2 pm at NSC
Performing Arts Series The Listening Place presents “Over the River and Through the Woods” by Joe DiPietro. Starring Philip Pearce and Michael Robbins. Four Italian grandparents in Hoboken, NJ respond hilariously to their grandson's announcement that he will move to the west coast. $10, NSC members $7.

December 9, 2 pm at NSC
Performing Arts Series The Listening Place presents “Yuletide Jewels,” a collection of holiday stories, poems, and songs. $10, NSC members $7.

October 29–November 5
Day of the Dead

December 15–17
Salinas Valley Comic Con, “WE ARE NOT ALONE.” Hartnell College

March 5 & 7, 2018
Steinbeck Young Authors Days of Writing

May 4–6, 2018
The Steinbeck Festival, “The Women of Steinbeck's World”
The National Steinbeck Center’s BIG READ of “Citizen” by Claudia Rankine

Eric Mora, Marketing Director

I am happy to report that the National Endowment for the Arts has awarded a 2017 Big Read grant to the National Steinbeck Center; the book selected is Claudia Rankine’s Citizen: An American Lyric. This is the second consecutive year that the National Steinbeck Center has received an NEA Big Read grant and the fourth time overall.

Why Citizen: An American Lyric?

As we reviewed the list of books approved by the National Endowment for the Arts for the Big Read program, I was pleased to see that the NEA had added many new titles. In the past, the NEA Big Read books list read like a syllabus for a high school English class and was comprised primarily of classics: To Kill A Mockingbird, The Great Gatsby, Fahrenheit 451, The Grapes of Wrath. A few years ago, the NEA began to phase out some of those books in favor of works by living authors such as Julia Alvarez (In The Time of the Butterflies), Jhumpa Lahiri (The Namesake), Emily St. John Mandel (Station Eleven), Ursula K. Le Guin (A Wizard of Earthsea). This year’s list represents the most drastic shift in that direction, with nearly every book by a living author.

Citizen: An American Lyric stood out for me, in particular, because it presented the perfect opportunity to encourage frank discussions about race and, more broadly, about the way we treat one another. At 160 pages, Citizen is a quick but enthralling read. For me, no other book on the list conveyed the sense of purpose and urgency that Citizen does.

Around the time that we were considering which book to select, I read an article by Walter Ryce in the Monterey County Weekly, “Even when an encounter between police and a man of color ends well, fear is in the air.” Walter recounted an incident that happened to him at work: the alarm at his office was accidentally triggered while he was still working, and the police arrived on scene. Though the interaction between him and the officers was amicable, Walter describes the tension that surrounded the incident and how very differently it could have ended had only a few factors been changed.

Citizen is filled with similar stories that deal with the complexity of race in everyday settings.

We hope that the book will bring Monterey County together to hold difficult—but necessary—conversations about the varied lived experiences of members of our community.

Ways to get involved:

1. Read Citizen: An American Lyric

Though Citizen is a little under 170 pages, you’ll be amazed by how much ground is covered in the book. Copies of Citizen will be available at the Salinas Public Library, Monterey County Free Libraries, Hartnell College Library, Monterey Library, CSUMB Library and of course at the National Steinbeck Center bookstore.

2. Attend NEA Big Read Events. By August, a full schedule will be on the NSC website and sent to members.

3. Join one of the Big Read book groups.

4. Attend free screenings of films that deal with race at Maya Cinemas.

As a community based program, the success of the NEA Big Read depends on participation. Don’t just join us—bring a friend (or three). Share information about the NEA Big Read events on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram!

NEA Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.
The National Steinbeck Center presents

NEA BIG READ FILM FESTIVAL
AUG 28–OCT 16
Maya Cinemas, Salinas
All shows Mondays at 6 PM

AUGUST 28  Lifeboat
(1944) Introduction by Susan Shillinglaw, Director, National Steinbeck Center. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Survivors of a ship torpedoed during WWII face challenges of cooperation and survival.

SEPTEMBER 4  Lady Sings the Blues

SEPTEMBER 11  A Raisin in the Sun

SEPTEMBER 18  In the Heat of the Night
(1967) Introduction by Luis Camara, Associate Professor in Cinematic Arts and Technology, CSUMB. Directed by Norman Jewison. While investigating the murder of a white businessman, a black homicide detective gets caught up in the racial tension of a Southern town.

SEPTEMBER 25  To Kill a Mockingbird
(1962) Introduction by Yhashika Lee, Lecturer in Cinema Arts and Photography, CSUMB. Directed by Robert Mulligan. A white lawyer and father defends a young black man accused of rape, while navigating his children through the issues of prejudice and growing up. Shown during Banned Book Week.

OCTOBER 2  The Jackie Robinson Story
(1950) Introduction by Mel Mason, Co-Founder, Executive Director and Clinical Director of The Village Project, Inc. Directed by Alfred E. Green. Traces the life and career of Jackie Robinson through the Negro leagues to the major leagues.

OCTOBER 9  Fruitvale Station
(2013) Introduction by Steven Goings, NAACP at CSUMB and National Coalition Building Institute, CSUMB. Post film discussion with Salinas police and community leaders. Directed by Ryan Coogler. The last day in the life of Oscar Grant, showing the events leading up to his death at the Fruitvale district station at the hands of BART police officers.

OCTOBER 16  Do the Right Thing

FREE!

A PROVOCATIVE MEDITATION ON RACE
John Steinbeck and Race in America

Susan Shillinglaw, Director

In 1869, the population of Salinas was 600, and three were African Americans, notes the Federal Writers’ Project guide to California, published in 1939 (a text that Steinbeck’s wife, Carol, helped edit). By the time Steinbeck was born in 1902, the town’s African American population had increased, and among the new residents were the Coopers. Strother Alex Cooper supported his family with a shoe shine business in front of the Abbott House (Steinbeck, however, says he ran a trucking business—perhaps a later endeavor). Steinbeck knew and liked Strother’s three sons, all about his age, and he wrote about the Cooper family with evident nostalgia in Travels with Charley. “If there was any color prejudice in Salinas, I never heard or felt a breath of it,” he asserts. Childhood memories of the admirable Coopers make him “a failure as a racist.”

“I hope that you did not mind my mentioning you and your family in Travels,” Steinbeck wrote to Ignacio Cooper on November 8, 1962. “I remembered them and you with great warmth and respect.”

Of course, it’s easier to sidestep racial antipathy when one meets only a few admirable people of color. But it’s also true that John Steinbeck spent a career extending his sympathies—imaginatively wearing others’ shoes. His empathy is palpable in the range of ethnic, racial, and marginalized characters he created—and in those characters’ own fictional struggles to understand. In 1938, a graduate student writing her thesis on John Steinbeck (the first Master’s thesis on the author), sent him a biographical questionnaire, and he responded tersely to most questions—but tried to articulate, roughly, his “philosophy of life”: “what my philosophy is—I haven’t the least idea…. I don’t like people to be hurt or hungry or unnecessarily sad. It’s about as simple as that.”

Hurt, hungry and sad African Americans appear in Steinbeck’s writing, each suggesting chasms between races, black and white.

Of the six acts/chapters in the play/novelette Of Mice and Men, two are set by the Salinas River, two in the bunkhouse, two in the barn. One barn scene belongs to Crooks, the “negro stable buck.” Bent by abuse, keenly aware of his subordinate status, dignified, intelligent and guarded, Crooks is housed like an animal, his bed a long box filled with straw, his room a stall. Isolated. “A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody,” Crooks moans to Lennie, who ventures into his room. When Curley’s wife joins Lennie and Candy in Crooks’ space, Crooks momentarily finds his voice, buttressed by Lennie and Candy: “You got no rights comin’ in a colored man’s room,” he “coldly” tells Curley’s wife. While his assertion of rights is valid, a white woman’s right to privacy and dignity—and she understands that. Curley’s wife snarls at Crooks, the only person on the ranch she can subdue: “You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?” Embedded in that exchange is a long, sad history of power and abuse.

During World War II, two confident, capable African Americans are featured in propaganda pieces Steinbeck wrote: one a returning African American soldier in the radio drama, “With Your Wings” (1943), a story read aloud in the U.S. on an Orson Welles radio show and overseas as part of the Office of War Information. Steinbeck sent a draft to Burgess Meredith, urging him to read it like a “pure mood” piece “delivered like soft music”—perhaps to emphasize the poignancy of Second Lieutenant William Thatcher’s return home after he has received his gold wings as a pilot. Only at the story’s end does the reader realize that Thatcher is black: “…his father said softly, ‘Son, every black man in the world is going to fly with your wings.’”

Thatcher would have earned his flight wings in Tuskegee, Alabama, where all African American pilots were trained during World War II. “To have gone through the schools they must be very good, very intelligent and alert,” Steinbeck writes in Bombs Away, another propaganda piece written on assignment for the war department, which lucidly explains the training of bomber pilots.

During World War II, Steinbeck also wrote a story treatment for Alfred Hitchcock’s 1944 film Lifeboat, about survivors on a lifeboat after a Nazi attack. When the film was released, Steinbeck objected to the bowdlerization of his material: “While it is certainly true that I wrote a script for Lifeboat, it is not true that in that script as in the film there were any slurs against organized labor nor was there a stock comedy Negro. On the contrary there was an intelligent and thoughtful seaman who knew realistically what he was about. And instead of the usual colored travesty of the half comic and half pathetic Negro there was a Negro of dignity, purpose and personality.”

Throughout the 1960s, Steinbeck considered, again and again, America’s racial stain. In “Atoue Vale,” published in the July 1960 edition of the Saturday Review, he begins: “I am constantly amazed at the qualities we expect in Negroes.” Whites expect blacks to act with greater restraint and dignity than whites: “… our greatest expectation is that they will be honest, honorable, and decent. This is the most profound compliment we can pay any man or group.” Black children’s courage at the steps of Little Rock schools is, of course,
superior to mobs “spitting venom at children.” His own children and other white children, he suggests, might not have the “guts, the dignity, and the responsibility to go to school in Little Rock knowing they would be insulted, shoved, hated, sneered at, even spat upon day after day....” For Steinbeck, African American fortitude and “superiority” is “rooted in having a cause and an unanswerable method composed of courage, restraint, and a sense of direction.”

As Steinbeck measured the pulse of his country during the 1960s, he responded to the struggles of African Americans as he had responded to the displacement of Oklahoma migrants in the 1930s. Oppression brings forth qualities he admired in humans, be it King Arthur, Ma Joad or African American school children in Little Rock: courage, dignity, responsibility. To him, these were the strains of chivalry, a word he used again and again in the 1960s. And strength of purpose measured any species’ “survivability”—an idea rooted in his studies of marine ecology with Edward F. Ricketts.

Dignity when assaulted is the basis of his response to the Civil Rights movement, to Martin Luther King Jr. (to whom he wrote long letters about civil rights), and to school desegregation.

In Travels with Charley, he also admits his limitations—a white man, a Northerner can’t comprehend racism and the legacy of slavery. But he acknowledges slavery’s deep stain. As he heads toward Louisiana, he “faced the South with dread. Here, I knew, were pain and confusion and all the manic results of bewilderment and fear. And the South being a limb of the nation, its pain spreads out to all America.”

What Steinbeck wrote 57 years ago is no less true today.

“Museum Assistant” at the NSC, Summer 2017
Jenna Garden, Stanford University Class of 2020

“I’ll want to hear; Samuel said. ‘I eat stories like grapes.’” — John Steinbeck, East of Eden

My first day at the NSC was—in a word—sweet. I walked into the break room to find several boxes of beautiful strawberries. Yessena had brought them in to share. It isn’t summer until I am able to enjoy strawberries, and as I met my co-workers for the next ten weeks I finally had an opportunity to do so. Being away from my hometown at college has made me treasure these small gifts, these gemlike offerings of the agricultural gold mine we call home.

I am like Sam Hamilton—except I eat stories like strawberries.

I just completed my first year on an English major track at Stanford, and it was certainly a year of stories. Some of the works I encountered felt far away; attempting to read Chaucer in Middle English made me feel like a foreigner in a distant land. Yet others felt closer to home—particularly the works by John Steinbeck. I took a class with the wonderful Gavin Jones, who spoke at this year’s Steinbeck Festival, that focused specifically on Steinbeck.

I realized that Steinbeck’s works operated on multiple dimensions for me. In a small way, they brought me home. I was able to wade in the tide pools of Cannery Row, walk along the Salinas River and overlook the Salinas Valley from Fremont Peak without ever leaving the university library. Yet also, on a larger scale, they took me places I had never expected to go. The quality of universality that they possess made for engaging class discussions in which every person was able to tie their own thoughts and experiences to the larger themes presented in the texts. Steinbeck gave us a means of understanding each other.

I believe in the relevance, timelessness, and importance of Steinbeck, which is why I chose to spend my summer at the NSC. Through storytelling, I believe the NSC can bridge the divisions between people in the surrounding communities. My hope is that in some small way during my short time here I can further that mission.
John Steinbeck and me: “The Moon Was Down”
Exhibit and Story Collection

David Douglas Lee

About ten years ago I found myself looking through the stacks of a used bookstore in my adopted hometown of Amsterdam when I came across a thin, hardbound volume, a first edition of *The Moon Is Down* (1942) from London, and its first page bore the name of an RAF pilot. I bought and read the book immediately, but cannot say I thought it very good. Compared to the power of the writing of John Steinbeck’s early books—the social consciousness of *In Dubious Battle* or the masterful vision of *East of Eden*—I found it wanting. The characters seemed wooden and thin. The plot seemed heavy-handed, as propaganda often is. But I was intrigued by the RAF pilot’s name and it inspired me. I imagined a British airman flying across the Channel and over the Netherlands to bomb Hitler’s war machine, escaping the terror of anti-aircraft fire and enemy fighters by reading Steinbeck’s novella. It occurred to me that there must have been thousands, perhaps many tens of thousands of people across occupied Europe, in Allied nations, or waiting out the outcome of the war in neutral countries who had also read it and taken comfort in the inevitability of victory and the inviolability of the human spirit. I thought in particular about those who might have read it while living under Nazi rule—resistance fighters, people in hiding, collaborators, people just trying to survive—and how it might have given them hope or convinced them that fascism was indeed evil. And most of all I felt pride that even before the U.S. entered World War II, when people looked to the United States as the final hope against what appeared to be the unstoppable Germans, there was someone who understood and assured them that they were not alone, that we would come and help them regain their freedom.

While *The Moon Is Down* never generated the kind of literary or academic interest of Steinbeck’s other, greater works, it has attracted the attention of a few scholars. Outside of Steinbeck’s biographies, Donald Coers’ 1991 book is the only serious treatment of this story and its impact outside the U.S. He documented the novella’s wartime impact in America, Norway, Denmark, Holland and France, noting the importance of the book to the resistance movement. But he only briefly related the background and origin of the Italian, Swedish, Swiss, Soviet and Chinese editions, and had little to say about British, Canadian, Australian, Swedish and Egyptian editions. The book was popular worldwide.

I decided I could and should write a set of short stories, each set in one of the nations where his book appeared, or the play was performed, or the film shown, to demonstrate how his story impacted the lives of very different people during the War.

So I got started writing. My historical training necessitated research to discover whether there were other editions Coers might have missed. I quickly discovered many other translations: Hungarian, Romanian, Greek, Icelandic, Turkish, South African, Argentinean, Uruguayan, Cuban, Brazilian, New Zealand, and Indian editions or performances had also taken place.

Clearly I’d stumbled upon a gap in Steinbeck scholarship and decided not only to use these for my short stories, but also to begin to find these editions. As I wrote my stories, I examined each copy carefully and used it as inspiration.
Additional archival research in New York, Texas and California, including the National Steinbeck Center, brought new material to light regarding Steinbeck’s story and its fate both at home and abroad, such as an attempt to have it translated into Japanese in 1942 by a Hawaii-based publisher (which was thwarted).

Last year, Susan Shillinglaw proposed an exhibition on *The Moon Is Down* based on my collection of first edition translations for this year’s Steinbeck Festival. The exhibition, entitled *The Moon Was Down*, documents the origin, creation, fate and contemporary relevance of Steinbeck’s story and will be available for viewing until late summer in the NSC’s museum gallery. I also put together a video which presents for the first time a wartime radio recording of the play cast reading a scene, one of the two song versions of *The Moon Is Down*, and a small extract from the Faroese audio book (along with the text in English and Faroese). I hope these will enhance the experience for visitors, bringing to life a book which is now exactly seventy-five years old.

My book of short stories, entitled *The Moon Was Down: Possible Pasts*, is on sale at the NSC with all proceeds going to the Center. I hope the stories are fun to read and that, perhaps, they might inspire someone else to creative work as Steinbeck inspired me. I feel certain it’s what he would’ve wanted.

Changes coming to museum exhibits

David Butler, Director of Finance and Administration

**Working College Students**

We have had great success hiring part-time college students as guest associates to work the kiosk for admissions and bookstore. Three of our kiosk personnel are enrolled in junior colleges. Yessenia and Ariana are enrolled at Hartnell Community College and Taylor is enrolled at Monterey Peninsula College.

**Changes coming to museum exhibits**

Over the next few months the Center will be refurbishing portions of the John Steinbeck exhibit. The nineteen-year-old exhibit is still very relevant today. We consistently receive favorable reviews from our visitors.

The refurbishing will include repainting, repairs, plus upgrades to the sound and lighting systems.

The Arts and Culture gallery in the middle of the museum is currently completing a major refurbishing with a dropped ceiling and LED lights. This is our changing exhibit gallery.

The current exhibit is David Lee’s curated collection of books and explanatory posters, *The Moon Was Down*: John Steinbeck’s *The Moon is Down*, 1942-45.

**“WE ARE NOT ALONE”: Salinas Valley Comic Con, December 16 & 17**

Lisa Josephs, Archivist

**Hartnell College Student Center**

**Co-Sponsored by the Salinas Public Library**

Comics create communities. The Salinas Valley Comic Con, now in its fourth year, is about bringing people together. This year, the programming will highlight the wonderful, unpredictable, and beautiful nature of comic communities.

The connections that comics create are innumerable. From artists and writers to editors and critics, to the fans and movie-goers, the possibilities are endless. The theme of this year’s comic con encapsulates this idea: despite the normally solitary nature of reading (or binge-watching Netflix), comic books, movies, and TV shows create connections.

This year, we are encouraging potential panelists to explore the ways in which comics create connections and understanding between groups of people. Social media, undoubtedly, has had a huge role in connecting communities of fans and creators. However, we are asking panelists to think outside of the box and bring their experiences in all kinds of communities to the table.

Our theme also lends itself to thoughts of extra-terrestrials and space. With the opening of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* on December 15 and Hartnell’s Planetarium next door, we’re looking forward to exploring the final frontier, both in science and fiction.

We’re also pleased to welcome back several vendors who have enjoyed other Salinas Valley Comic Con: 8Bitbytes, Wayward Heart Jewelry, Artisan T-Shirt printing, and the artist Rob Gardner.

More information posted at www.steinbeck.org
Migrations: What Monterey was and is all about
Cannery Row Banquet speech, May 5, 2017

Congressman Jimmy Panetta

It’s great to be home on the central coast of California. With the traveling that I do, back and forth each week between home and Washington, D.C., perhaps it’s appropriate that I address you tonight based on this theme, “Migrations.”

I recently read a Letter to the Editor in the Monterey Herald from a man who lives in Salinas. It reads:

“I was curious, so I did an impromptu survey in a public place. I asked people, ‘What are you?’ The answers I got, all proudly, ‘100 percent Italian,’ ‘Half Swiss, half Italian.’ No offense, but I didn’t know there were so many Italians on the Central Coast.

‘German,’ ‘Filipino,’ ‘Hmong,’ ‘Vietnamese,’ ‘I think I am part Italian and part Bulgarian, believe it or not,’ ‘Mexican,’ ‘Czechoslovakian.’ Were you born there? ‘Oh no, I was born in Chicago.’ Well, you know what I mean. Not one person said, ‘I am American.’ Hmm, I guess we just take that for granted. By the way, I am Japanese. But in my mind, I feel American.”

I understand and appreciate the answers given to that author during that impromptu survey. Like America, Monterey County was founded by, and still thrives because of, immigrants. Like America, Monterey County has families very proud of not only their deep roots in this area, but their cultural identities. In Monterey County, we are encouraged to be proud of our connection to our cultures, for that bond is too sacred and too strong to be put out of our hearts. Places like the Steinbeck Center and Cannery Row connect us with our past, and remind us that Monterey County is the place where our past came to obtain a future.

For me, my grandfather is a great example of this. He took a risk and left Italy in 1921 to move to the unfamiliar but promised land, the United States. In fact, just this last December I took my daughters to Ellis Island to see a copy of the ship’s ledger that brought him to this country. There were over 2,000 passengers aboard the ship, the Providence. Of the passengers, 150 of them were in First Class, 200 in Second Class, and 1,800 people, my grandfather included, were in steerage. Coming through Ellis Island with only five dollars in his pocket, he was recorded in the books as “Peasant.”

From New York, he continued West. He moved to Wyoming to work in the gold mines, and continued on to California.

My grandfather settled in Monterey in the early 1930s. He would have described Monterey back then similarly to Steinbeck, raucous and crowded, diverse but tight-knit. Monterey was where he and my grandmother raised two boys, my father, Leon, and uncle, Joe. They ran their restaurant, Carmelo’s Café, during the War years, and it was a whole family affair. My grandfather cooked, my grandmother ran the cash register, Uncle Joe was the bus boy and my dad was the dish washer. My grandparents eventually sold that restaurant and bought land in Carmel Valley, where my brothers and I grew up. My wife and I now raise our daughters in the same town.

Growing up we were always told about where we come from, why my grandfather came here, and all of the hard work and sacrifice it took to get here to give his children and grandchildren a better life. This place allowed my grandfather to find and fulfill his dream – the American Dream.
We are working on getting more items in the gift shop for the summer. I’ve ordered some banned books socks and they have been a hit. Also new in the store is a beautiful turquoise shirt with a quote by Ma Joad from The Grapes of Wrath. The shirt is about women’s empowerment. I can definitely tell it is summer; it has been a busy few weeks, particularly during our popular 19th anniversary week, when admission was 19 cents. Many local residents visited that week. I love when it is busy. It is very comforting to know that people love this museum and John Steinbeck and that we have visitors all year long. Another good note I can share about the bookstore is that books are selling. It amazes me how fast certain titles sell, and I constantly have to put in a double or triple order of that certain title. Travels with Charley, The Moon is Down, East of Eden and The Grapes of Wrath sell quickly. I love the idea that people still enjoy that feeling of holding a book and turning the page versus using a Kindle. I personally do not like reading a book on a Kindle.

Volunteers
The museum is in need of a few volunteers, for the most part to cover the docent’s desk. And we can always use some help in the archives or as an administrative assistant with the NSC staff. I really admire our volunteers for their dedication to this museum.

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Tours
The Steinbeck Center has 8 to 12 tours a month. Teachers, seniors, young children and high school students are visiting the museum. I would like to see more tours, so please spread the word!
The Archives and the Prison

Lisa Josephs, Archivist

I had the honor of joining Palma High School on their spring program at Soledad Prison, reading *The Pearl*. Like so many others who’ve gone on this trip, I was blown away by the insight and enthusiasm of the group.

While the inmates thanked us for each visit and expressed effusive appreciation, I felt and continue to feel that the program is one of reciprocity. I have read hundreds of books, alone and in groups, but the insights of my reading group “family” in the prison stand in a category of their own.

Prisoners’ insights are unique because incarceration deprives them of experiences that I did not even know I was taking for granted. For example, one of the other participants in the program told me that someone in his reading group family missed the scent of gasoline. Going home from each meeting, I tried to think of the things that I take for granted, such as something as ordinary as the scent of gasoline.

Driving back from the prison one day, I asked myself, “Wouldn’t it be amazing to show the inmates some of the things in the archive?”

It does not require a trip to Soledad Prison to know that my position as Archivist gives me unparalleled access to amazing objects. Sharing these items as much as is possible is one of the most satisfying parts of the job. Unlike any other school group, tour, or individual I encountered before, the inmates at Soledad, of course, do not have the freedom to visit the museum.

So, after securing permission from Susan Shillinglaw, Lieutenant Romero, and the Warden at Soledad State Prison, I brought a few of Steinbeck’s personal effects and a page from *The Pearl* manuscript to the prison on the last day of reading. Small group by small group—family by family—I showed the inmates the loving inscription Olive Steinbeck wrote in the etiquette book, discussed the Steinbeck collection, and fielded questions. One of the other participants told me that an inmate in his family had never seen a book as old as the two volume copy of the etiquette book that Olive Steinbeck gave to John. Several stopped to read a few words of the manuscript page that I brought in. Some commented on the difficulty of reading Steinbeck’s handwriting.

In the fall, the NSC, Palma School, and the Soledad group will read *East of Eden*. I’m already planning what archival items I can bring to the prison.

Updates to the Museum for our 20th Anniversary

In early June, I went to Chicago to see the newly-opened American Writers Museum. I was inspired by their children’s section, where children and adults are encouraged to read books together. I decided to change the NSC’s Steinbeck’s bedroom exhibit into a reading nook. We purchased pillows, Lisa found an old quilt for the bed, and we have placed a box of classic children’s books near the bed. We will also encourage museum visitors to write a brief note about their favorite childhood stories: Steinbeck’s favorite were the King Arthur tales, as noted on the wall of that exhibit. SS

The NSC is seeing donations of old, working typewriters to place in the museum’s octagonal Sag Harbor writing room. That space will become a writing room with 3-4 typewriters. Museum visitors will be encouraged to type stories, a new prompt given each day. We’ll put daily stories on the writing room wall. Another idea borrowed from the American Writers Museum! SS
East of Eden in Soledad Prison
Jim Micheletti, NSC Education Associate

Somewhere east of Eden’s gate
We ran a light at love and hate
It’s tired and we’re getting late
The world is turning, turning, turning

--Billy Thorpe, “East of Eden’s Gate” CBS Records, 1982

I spun this song on my turntable when I was a sophomore at Bellarmine College Preparatory in San Jose. I remember writing an essay relating these words to the threat of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Times change but threats continue.

The lyrics are speaking to me again. This time the “gate,” “hate,” and “late” of the song ring with new meaning for me because of the work I’m involved in—yes, still to keep missiles in their silos—but also to help rehabilitate men. In the “It’s tired and we’re getting late” of the song, I hear millions of people locked up and an urgency for restorative justice as an answer to mass incarceration.

Palma School and the National Steinbeck Center have been reading Steinbeck novels with inmates at the Soledad Prison. This fall will mark our fourth year of partnership. Together we’ve read and written about—with concomitant sketches, drawings, and paintings—The Grapes of Wrath, Of Mice and Men, and The Pearl. This fall our goal is a close reading of East of Eden. At the final session of our study of The Pearl last spring, we asked inmates what they would like to read next.

“I heard East of Eden is Steinbeck’s big book on good vs. evil. You can’t get any further east of Eden than being down for life in a prison. This one is ours. You gotta read about evil with people who’ve done it and are struggling to be done with it.”

“If East of Eden is about being or not being our brother’s keeper, count me in. Look around. There’s over 5,000 of us in here carrying the mark of Cain.”

“This prison sits on the land where Steinbeck situated this story. Walking the yard, we’re already with this author because, like him, we’re in the valley looking up at ranges of mountains and wondering what’s on the other side of them. Steinbeck must have been looking up, too. It’s important to look up and then down into some paper to read and write about it.”

At the end of the 2017 school year, Palma seniors gave Capstone presentations for the first time. Tasked with interpreting and evaluating peak experiences while at Palma, many students reported on these prison visits as “most meaningful” for their moral development. “Men do change,” writes Steinbeck in East of Eden, and the students witnessed this possibility. Steinbeck’s stories provided a mirror and a measure for inmates and students to commit to benevolence over violence. Rather than seeing men as selfish and aggressive, a truer definition of manhood emerged—the man of empathy, best defined as carrying “your pain in my heart.” The friendships in Steinbeck’s stories, Jim and Tom in The Grapes of Wrath and Lennie and George in Of Mice and Men, inspired students and inmates to create some of their own.

Inmate Johnny Howe says these visits from Palma and the Steinbeck Center are crucial, especially for those serving “Buck Roger’s time,” meaning “sentences so long that an inmate has to draw deep or else die in despair like an astronaut floating alone in outer space.” Johnny is part of The Phoenix Alliance, a special group of inmates who are seeking to provide a scholarship for a student to attend Palma in the fall. Impressed by the competence and character of Palma students, they want more young men to have this opportunity. They have already raised thousands of dollars inside to provide a young man the education they didn’t get. In a fallen world, this Palma education, too, is somewhere east of Eden, but it’s also true of mankind and “your pain in my heart.”
BIG READ EVENTS
PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE
Check www.steinbeck.org for complete schedule.

CITIZEN BOOK GROUPS

Aug 22, 2017, 4-5 pm
Monterey County Office of Education, 900 Blanco Circle, Salinas. Room G-H. Facilitator: Dr. Jennifer Elemen
Register online at www.Monterey.k12.ca.us

Sept 5, 7-9 pm Anti-Racist Video and Discussion
Unitarian Universalist Church of Monterey Peninsula, 490 Aguajito Road, Carmel, Fireplace Room

Sept 8, 4 pm. National Steinbeck Center, 1 Main St, Salinas
Facilitator: Susan Shillinglaw

Sept 21, 7-9 pm Anti-Racism Book Group and Discussion
Unitarian Universalist Church of Monterey Peninsula

Sept 26, 2017, 4-5 pm Monterey County Office of Education. Facilitator: Dr. Jennifer Elemen
Register online at www.Monterey.k12.ca.us

PRESENTATIONS AT THE NSC

Sept 7, 6-8 pm Jose G. Ortiz/Painter and Educator, “que estoy pintado en la pared? am I painted on the wall?” ARTS HABITAT presents Arts in Progress

Sept 13, 5:30 pm “A Conversation on Justice in Communities of Color.” Claudia Melendez and Julia Reynolds

Sept 20, 5:30 pm Discussing Combined Destinies, Ann Todd Jealous and Caroline Haskell

Oct 11, 5:30 pm Sriya Shrestha, Lecturer in the School of Humanities & Communication: “Policing the Imagination: Race, gender, and representation.”

ART, MUSIC, DRAMA & MORE

Sept 8, 5:30 pm Kick Off Celebration: Poetry Slam with prizes and more. NSC

Saturday, September 9 First Annual Salinas Book Fair
Cesar Chavez Library, 615 Williams Rd, Salinas, CA

Oct 30 and Nov 1, 10 am – 5 pm Monterey County Open Artists’ Studio. Hijos del Sol and Citizen. NSC Rotunda

2017 BIG READ SPONSORED BY

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MATCHING FUNDS

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