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**NEH Steinbeck Institute 2013**

**Exploring Warps**

During the institute, I found myself drawn to Ricketts and Steinbeck's idea of "warps." After discussing warps as a class during week one, I started noticing Steinbeck's emphasis on the idea popping up in every Steinbeck text we read, especially *Cannery Row*.

In this lesson, students will explore themes, develop thematic statements, take a critical look at the characters of *Cannery Row,*and examine one specific character's thoughts and motivations.

**Materials**:

*Cannery Row*by John Steinbeck

Shoebox

Art supplies

**Objectives**:

* Develop a sense of perspective
* Better understand the characters Steinbeck is developing over the course of the novel
* Identify theme and how characters relate to and exemplify theme
* Practice writing thematic statements
* Identify and employ literary devices

**Procedures**:

I start *Cannery Row*by talking about how each of us has our own warp in life and then call attention to Steinbeck's emphasis on perspective in the first paragraph of the opening chapter of the novel. Throughout the whole first reading, I remind students to consider our narrator's perspective and how situations might seem different from the point of view of a different character.

After finishing *Cannery Row,*students will brainstorm a list of subjects and main ideas in the text. I will write these on the SmartBoard as the class develops a list of one-word ideas such as "loneliness," "violence," "success," or "community."

Each student will choose one of the main ideas developed as a class. More than one student may choose the same topic. From this word, students will develop thematic statements.

After developing strong, precise thematic statements, students will choose a character from the text who exemplifies the ideas presented in their crafted statement. It's okay for students to go back and tweak their statements to better fit a character whom they find particularly compelling.

Students may choose a main character (Doc) or a minor character who appears to be in narrative solely to reinforce their selected theme (Mary Talbot), and they will select a scene from the text in which their character is most closely associated with or personifying their theme (if the student chooses loneliness, for example, the opening section of chapter 17 or last scene in the novel for Doc *or*the tea party scene in chapter 24 for Mary Talbot). On the AP English Literature and Composition Exam, specifically the free response essay, it will help students tremendously to be able to identify themes in a literary work and then discuss “how they contribute to the meaning of the work as a whole.”

Students will analyze their selected scene and begin to re-write it in a first-person point of view from the perspective of their chosen character. Because at the senior level I spend a lot of time concentrating on literary devices, I require that students analyze all devices Steinbeck uses and include the same number of literary devices in their rewritten scene. By employing these devices, students will better understand how authors use them, why authors use them, and what they contribute to the text as a whole. My emphasis is more on examining perspective and character motivations than mimicking Steinbeck's writing style, but this exercise could be adapted to focus more on imitating style.

This next part was inspired by Maria's description of the memory box she did in one of her classes (thanks, Maria!). Students will begin a character analysis of their chosen character by making a character focus box from a shoe box (or any box of similar size). The inside of the box should be decorated to reflect the character's personality, appearance, beliefs, values, and motivations. Students should include a quotation or description from the original text that reveals the character, at least three symbols, an identification of the character's conflicts, an explanation of the character's motivations and values, and an artifact representative of the character. On the outside of the box, students will glue or tape a printed copy of their rewritten scene. These will be displayed around the room.

**Sources**:

John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*