This course offers an introduction to the work of an American writer, beloved by general readers, often reviled by critics, whose career spans from the Great Depression through World War II to the social upheavals of the 1960s. We will focus on the social and political contexts of John Steinbeck’s major works; his concern with race, class, poverty, and migrant labor; his fascination with California and Mexico; his interdisciplinary interest in marine biology and in ecology; his diverse experiments with literary form, including drama and film.

Requirements: You can take this class for 3, 4 or 5 units. You will be placed in sections as soon as possible. Attendance is mandatory for all students, in lecture and section. Lecture attendance will be noted by your section leaders. Participation in section will count as 25% of final grade. There is no end-quarter examination. In addition:

For 5 units
- Midterm Paper of around 5-6 pp. (approx. 1500-1800 words): 30% of final grade; due by 11:59pm on Friday May 12
- Final Paper of around 8-10 pp. (approx. 2400-3000 words): 45% of final grade; due by 11:59pm on Sunday June 11

For 4 units:
- Midterm Paper of around 5-6 pp. (approx. 1500-1800 words): 40% of final grade; due by 11:59pm on Friday May 12
- Final Paper of around 5-6 pp. (approx. 1500-1800 words): 45% of final grade; due by 11:59pm on Sunday June 11

For 3 units
- Final Paper of around 8 pp. (approx. 2400 words): 75% of final grade; due by 11:59pm on Sunday June 11

Texts: In addition to short stories and excerpts on Canvas (see below), we will be reading these books by Steinbeck, all available at the Stanford Bookstore: The Red Pony (Penguin,

Schedule of Readings:

Week 1
April 4: “Breakfast” (1936): Handout in class (and on Canvas)
April 6: “Tularecito” (1932): on Canvas

Week 2
April 11: The Red Pony (1933, 1936)

Week 3
April 20: Of Mice and Men (1937)

Week 4
April 25: The Grapes of Wrath (1939), Chapter 1
April 27: The Grapes of Wrath, Chapters 2-11

Week 5
May 2: The Grapes of Wrath, Chapters 12-21
May 4: The Grapes of Wrath, Chapter 22 to the end

Week 6
May 9: Cannery Row (1945): Read as much as you can for today
May 11: Cannery Row (finish reading), Chapter 14 from Sea of Cortez (1941) and “The Snake” (1935): on Canvas

Week 7
May 16: Sea of Cortez (1941), Introduction, Chapters 1, 8, 10, 21, 28, 29: on Canvas
May 18: Tortilla Flat (1935), Chapters 8, 9, 10: on Canvas. Prior to lecture, watch The Forgotten Village (film, 67 mins; 1941). Link to YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqgjjNGhNJo

Week 8
May 23: The Pearl (novella; 1947), Chapters 1-3. Prior to lecture, watch John Steinbeck’s “The Pearl” (film, 85 mins; 1947). Link to YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUSf9M0PZ8g
May 25: The Pearl (novella; 1947), Chapters 4-6

Week 9
May 30: Travels with Charley in Search of America (1962), Parts 1 & 2
June 1: Travels with Charley, Parts 3 & 4

Week 10
June 6: TBD; no lecture