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Quicklet on John Steinbeck's Travels with Charley in Search of America (CliffNotes-like Summary)

David Shook

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Quicklets: Your Reading Sidekick!

ABOUT THE BOOK

I came to John Steinbecks work through his novella The Pearl, a diminutive but dark allegory about a Native American pearl diver whose discovery of an enormous pearl hurls him and his family into a world of greed and its disastrous consequences. From The Pearl, I found Cannery Row, my favorite Steinbeck novel.

From its first sentence, Steinbecks descriptions vibrate with the same energy and poetry that his eclectic cast of outcasts embody as they throw unauthorized parties and philosophize with Doc, based on Steinbecks real-life friend Ed Ricketts, on 1920s Monterey Bay, the American sardine capital at that time. Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream.

I turned next to Steinbecks nonfiction, attracted to Travels with Charley: In Search of America because of my own experiences on Routes 10 and 40, mostly heading west towards California, or back to Oklahoma or Texas to wait until I could go again. Like Steinbeck with his standard poodle Charley, I drove with my steadfast companion, Okie Doke, a considerably smaller pooch.

MEET THE AUTHOR

David Shook studied endangered languages in Oklahoma and poetry at Oxford. He's published essays about dancing with the President of Burundi and being detained in Equatorial Guinea, and his poetry, translations, and book reviews regularly appear in magazines like Ambit, Poetry, and World Literature Today. His most recent translations include Mario Bellatins novella Shiki Nagaoka: A Nose for Fiction, Roberto Bolanos 1976 manifesto Leave Everything, Again, and the selected love poems of Isthmus Zapotec poet Victor Teran. His current writing projects include Kilometer Zero, a covertly filmed documentary about lost Equatoguinean poets, a miniature encyclopedia, and a collection of travel essays. Shook lives with his wife and chihuahua in Los Angeles, where he edits Molossus. Hes a competitive foosballer, miniature book collector, banjolele picker, and aspiring rapper. His moustache is sponsored by Oregon Wild Hair Moustache Wax, the most literary moustache wax in the world.

EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, two years after his driving tour across the continent and just months after the publication of Travels with Charley. His winning propelled Travels with Charley to the number one spot on the New York Times Best Seller List. In his acceptance speech he lauded mans proven capacity for greatness, and challenged all writers to celebrate that greatness in their written work.

For Steinbeck, that was literatures ultimate purpose, and he compellingly articulated his opinion throughout

his speech: I hold that the writer who does not believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature.

Born in Salinas, California on 27 February 1902, John Steinbeck witnessed mans capacity for greatness in the fertile farmlands surrounding the agricultural hub town. While working those fields himselfnotably in the company town of Spreckels, which boasted the worlds largest beet sugar processing planthe witnessed many of mans less noble attributes, including corporate and individual greed, the poor treatment of migrant workers, and the degradation of the physical environment, all themes he explored in his work.

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CHAPTER OUTLINE

Quicklet On John Steinbeck's Travels with Charley in Search of America
+ Travels with Okie Doke: Letting Trips Take Us
+ John Steinbeck: From Salinas to Stockholm
+ About Travels with Charley: In Search of America
+ Overall Summary for Travels with Charley: In Search of America
+ ...and much more

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