



## ***Cannery Row:*** **Depression? So What?**

Thank you to Mary Marks for leading the discussion in February for *Cannery Row* by John Steinbeck. As someone who grew up near the novel's setting, Mary could relate to the love of Monterey, California exhibited in Steinbeck's prose.

Steinbeck won the 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature six years before he passed away at the age of 66. His most notable works are *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath* (Pulitzer Prize winner), and *East of Eden*. The discussion revealed Steinbeck wrote *Cannery Row* as a serviceman in hopes of keeping his colleagues in good spirits. Set in the Great Depression, the story details many hardships, but in a light-hearted manner that often leads to many humorous moments. Maybe someone will suggest the club read Steinbeck's 1954 sequel titled *Sweet Thursday* for the

upcoming book nominations?

The club discussed their favorite comedic parts: Frogs? Mixed drinks? What was the role of women in the story? Was this a fair treatment of Chinese people? And what do you make of a chapter about a gopher? Drinking alcohol seemed to be a central activity to the residents of *Cannery Row* of which the group could not identify a character with evil intent.

Most agreed the characters were resourceful folk. And many noted how the writing was extremely evocative: you could hear the footsteps, smell the seawater, and feel the frogs! For some the plot was disappointing because the story lacked a true arc and seemed to be a series of vignettes. The novel presented an opportunity to extend our knowledge of the repertoire of a renowned writer.