

National Steinbeck Center, Steinbeck Young Authors Program

Origin and History

The Steinbeck Young Authors program was created in 2003 to provide an opportunity for students across Monterey County to explore the excitement of writing, enhance their writing skills, and learn about the works of John Steinbeck, a Salinas native who won a Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath* and, in 1962, the Nobel Prize for Literature. John Steinbeck himself was inspired by a good book and strong teachers, who served as his mentors—a combination intended to motivate students to discover the power of the written word.

Sylvia Panetta, National Steinbeck Center past Board member, believed that an effective way to motivate middle school student writers and to give them the advantage of being part of a well-planned and delivered writing curriculum would be to focus on a single work of John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*. The NSC's *Red Pony* curriculum was designed to offer rigorous and engaging writing opportunities students. The National Steinbeck Center invited the Central California Writing Project to develop the curricular materials, which have been prepared and taught by teachers and compiled into the Steinbeck Young Authors Middle School Writing Program. A Pilot Steinbeck Young Authors Program launched in 2003-2004 and currently is in its 15th year of full activities.

The curriculum has been updated to meet Common Core State Standards.

For the past fourteen years, students from around Monterey County have come to the National Steinbeck Center in the spring to participate in the Day of Writing, having studied *The Red Pony* in the classroom. On that day, students meet with adult mentors from the community and discuss the essay drafts that they have composed that morning; after lunch students revise their essays based on feedback from coaches.

Mission Statement

The Steinbeck Young Authors Program provides middle school students an opportunity to explore the excitement of writing and enhance their writing skills by reading and discussing John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*.

Process Statement

After reading *The Red Pony* and participating in curriculum activities from the materials and resources developed by teachers around the novel, students are nominated by their teacher to participate in the Day of Writing and to work one-on-one with a draft of the student's writing with a Coach from the community. Coaches discuss the importance of writing and provide guidance in the revision process before students prepare a final essay.