

Mrs. Harrington

Travels with Charley REDO

Do the questions at the end of the story on page 358. If a question has more than one letter, you need more than one answer! You will also need to show me the worksheet over this story. One side dealt with facts and opinions about the story, and the other side was over the John Steinbeck video! 😊



from **Travels with**
Charley

J O H N

My plan was clear, concise, and reasonable, I think. For many years I have traveled in many parts of the world. In America I live in New York, or dip into Chicago or San Francisco. But New York is no more America than Paris is France or London is England. Thus I discovered that I did not know my own country. I, an American writer, writing about America, was working from memory, and the memory is at best a faulty, warpy reservoir. I had not heard the speech of America, smelled the grass and trees and sewage, seen its hills and water, its color and quality of light. I knew the changes only from books and newspapers. But more than this, I had not felt the country for twenty-five years. In short, I was writing of something I did not know about, and it seems to me that in a so-called writer this is criminal. My memories were distorted by twenty-five intervening years.

Once I traveled about in an old bakery wagon, double-doored rattler with a mattress on its floor. I stopped where people stopped or gathered, I listened and looked and felt, and in the process had a picture of my country the accuracy of which was impaired only by my own shortcomings.

▲ Critical Viewing

What impression of traveling does this picture give? **[Analyze]**

STEINBECK

So it was that I determined to look again, to try to rediscover this monster land. Otherwise, in writing, I could not tell the small diagnostic truths which are the foundations of the larger truth. One sharp difficulty presented itself. In the intervening twenty-five years my name had become reasonably well known. And it has been my experience that when people have heard of you, favorably or not, they change; they become, through shyness or the other qualities that publicity inspires, something they are not under ordinary circumstances. This being so, my trip demanded that I leave my name and my identity at home. I had to be peripatetic eyes and ears, a kind of moving gelatin plate.¹ I could not sign hotel registers, meet people I knew, interview others, or even ask searching questions. Furthermore, two or more people disturb the ecologic complex of an area. I had to go alone and I had to be self-contained, a kind of casual turtle carrying his house on his back.

With all this in mind I wrote to the head office of a great corporation which manufactures trucks. I specified my purpose and my

1. gelatin plate sensitive glass plate used to reproduce pictures.

diagnostic (dī' əg nās' tīk)
adj. providing evidence about the nature of something

peripatetic (per' i pə tet' ik)
adj. moving from place to place

✓ Reading Check

What is the narrator's plan?

needs. I wanted a three-quarter-ton pick-up truck, capable of going anywhere under possibly rigorous conditions, and on this truck I wanted a little house built like the cabin of a small boat. A trailer is difficult to maneuver on mountain roads, is impossible and often illegal to park, and is subject to many restrictions. In due time, specifications came through, for a tough, fast, comfortable vehicle, mounting a camper top—a little house with double bed, a four-burner stove, a heater, refrigerator and lights operating on butane, a chemical toilet, closet space, storage space, windows screened against insects—exactly what I wanted. It was delivered in the summer to my little fishing place at Sag Harbor near the end of Long Island. Although I didn't want to start before Labor Day, when the nation settles back to normal living, I did want to get used to my turtle shell, to equip it and learn it. It arrived in August, a beautiful thing, powerful and yet lithe. It was almost as easy to handle as a passenger car. And because my planned trip had aroused some satiric remarks among my friends, I named it Rocinante, which you will remember was the name of Don Quixote's² horse.

Since I made no secret of my project, a number of controversies arose among my friends and advisers. (A projected journey spawns advisers in schools.) I was told that since my photograph was as widely distributed as my publisher could make it, I would find it impossible to move about without being recognized. Let me say in advance that in over ten thousand miles, in thirty-four states, I was not recognized even once. I believe that people identify things only in context. Even those people who might have known me against a background I am supposed to have, in no case identified me in Rocinante.

I was advised that the name Rocinante painted on the side of my truck in sixteenth-century Spanish script would cause curiosity and inquiry in some places. I do not know how many people recognized the name, but surely no one ever asked about it.

Next, I was told that a stranger's purpose in moving about the country might cause inquiry or even suspicion. For this reason I racked a shotgun, two rifles, and a couple of fishing rods in my truck, for it is my experience that if a man is going hunting or fishing his purpose is understood and even applauded. Actually, my hunting days are over. I no longer kill or catch anything I cannot

2. Don Quixote (dān' kē hōt' ē) hero of an early 17th-century satirical romance by Cervantes, who tries in a chivalrous but unrealistic way to rescue the oppressed and fight evil.

rigorous (rig' er əs) adj.
very strict or harsh

Literary Analysis

Figurative Language What metaphor does Steinbeck use to emphasize qualities of the truck?

get into a frying pan; I am too old for sport killing. This stage setting turned out to be unnecessary.

It was said that my New York license plates would arouse interest and perhaps questions, since they were the only outward identifying marks I had. And so they did—perhaps twenty or thirty times in the whole trip. But such contacts followed an invariable pattern, somewhat as follows:

Local man: "New York, huh?"

Me: "Yep."

Local man: "I was there in nineteen thirty-eight—or was it thirty-nine? Alice, was it thirty-eight or thirty-nine we went to New York?"

Alice: "It was thirty-six. I remember because it was the year Alfred died."

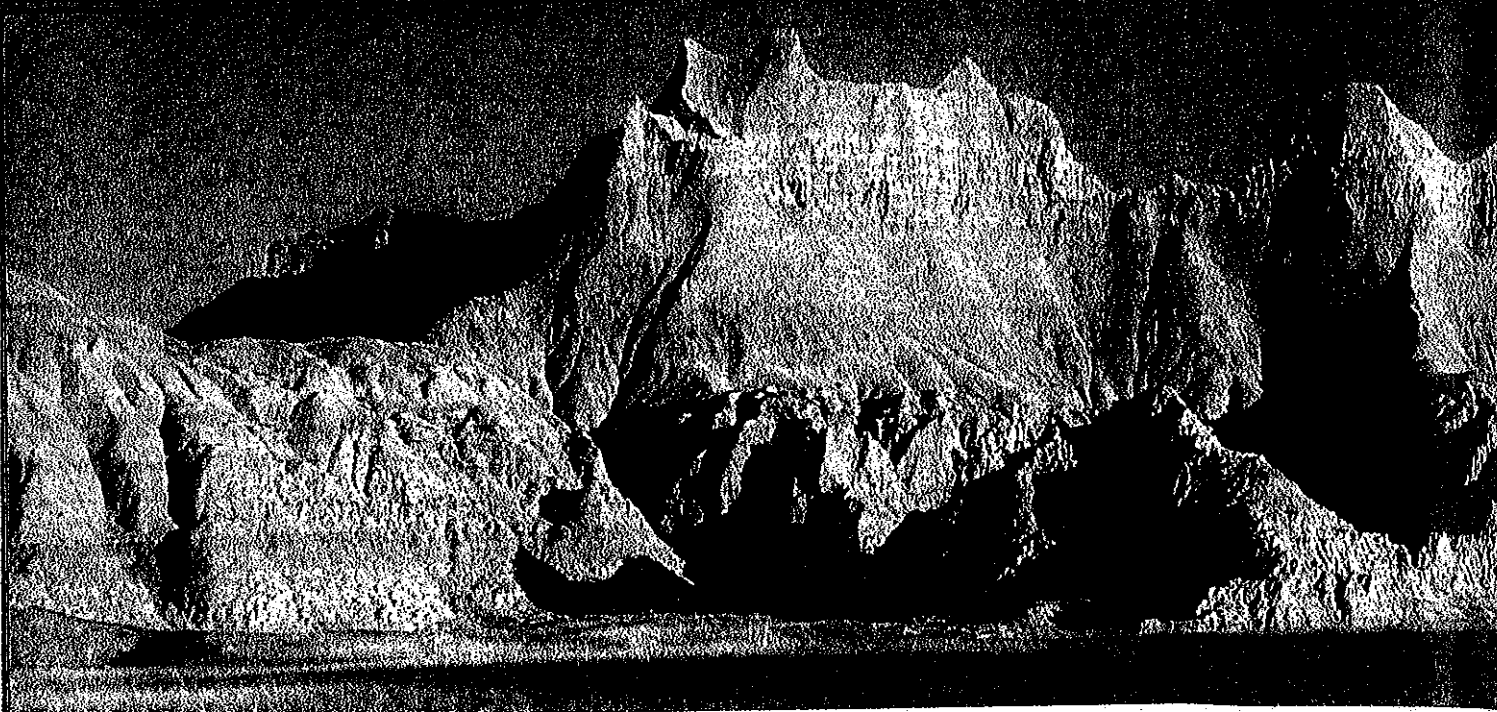
Local man: "Anyway, I hated it. Wouldn't live there if you paid me."

There was some genuine worry about my traveling alone, open to attack, robbery, assault. It is well known that our roads are dangerous. And here I admit I had senseless qualms. It is some years since I have been alone, nameless, friendless, without any of the safety one gets from family, friends, and accomplices. There is no reality in the danger. It's just a very lonely, helpless feeling at first—a kind of desolate feeling. For this reason I took one companion on my journey—an old French gentleman poodle known as Charley. Actually his name is Charles le Chien.³ He was born in Bercy on the outskirts of Paris and trained in France, and while he knows a little poodle-English, he responds quickly only to commands in French. Otherwise he has to translate, and that slows him down. He is a very big poodle, of a color called *bleu*, and he is blue when he is clean. Charley is a born diplomat. He prefers negotiation to fighting, and properly so, since he is very bad at fighting. Only once in his ten years has he been in trouble—when he met a dog who refused to negotiate. Charley lost a piece of his right ear that time. But he is a good watch dog—has a roar like a lion, designed to conceal from night-wandering strangers the fact that he couldn't bite his

3. Charles le Chien (shär' le shē un') French for "Charles the dog."

 Reading Check

Who accompanies the author?



way out of a *cornet de papier*.⁴ He is a good friend and traveling companion, and would rather travel about than anything he can imagine. If he occurs at length in this account, it is because he contributed much to the trip. A dog, particularly an exotic like Charley, is a bond between strangers. Many conversations en route began with "What degree of a dog is that?"

The techniques of opening conversation are universal. I knew long ago and rediscovered that the best way to attract attention, help, and conversation is to be lost.

* * *

The night was loaded with omens. The grieving sky turned the little water to a dangerous metal and then the wind got up—not the gusty, rabby wind of the seacoasts I know but a great bursting sweep of wind with nothing to inhibit it for a thousand miles in any direction. Because it was a wind strange to me, and therefore mysterious, it set up mysterious responses in me. In terms of reason, it was strange only because I found it so. But a goodly part of our experience which we find *inexplicable* must be like that. To my certain knowledge, many people conceal experiences for fear of ridicule. How many people have seen or heard or felt something which so outraged their sense of what should be that the whole thing was brushed quickly away like dirt under a rug?

For myself, I try to keep the line open even for things I can't understand or explain, but it is difficult in this frightened time.

4. *cornet de papier* (kôr nā' de pâ pyā') French for "paper bag."

▲ Critical Viewing

Why is the name "Badlands" appropriate for the region pictured here? [Analyze]


Literary Analysis

Figurative Language

How is the sky personified in the phrase "grieving sky"?

inexplicable

(in eks' pli kə bəl) *adj.* not possible to explain



At this moment in North Dakota I had a reluctance to drive on that amounted to fear. At the same time, Charley wanted to go—in fact, made such a commotion about going that I tried to reason with him.

“Listen to me, dog. I have a strong impulse to stay amounting to celestial command. If I should overcome it and go and a great snow should close in on us, I would recognize it as a warning disregarded. If we stay and a big snow should come I would be certain I had a pipeline to prophecy.”

Charley sneezed and paced restlessly. “All right, *mon cur*,⁵ let’s take your side of it. You want to go on. Suppose we do, and in the night a tree should crash down right where we are presently standing. It would be you who have the attention of the gods. And there is always that chance. I could tell you many stories about faithful animals who saved their masters, but I think you are just bored and I’m not going to flatter you.” Charley leveled at me his most cynical eye. I think he is neither a romantic nor a mystic. “I know what you mean. If we go, and no tree crashes down, or stay and no snow falls—what then? I’ll tell you what then. We forget the whole episode and the field of prophecy is in no way injured. I vote to stay. You vote to go. But being nearer the pinnacle of creation than you, and also president, I cast the deciding vote.”

We stayed and it didn’t snow and no tree fell, so naturally we forgot the whole thing and are wide open for more mystic feelings when they come. And in the early morning swept clean of clouds

celestial (se les’ chəl) *adj.*
of the heavens; divine

 **Reading Check**

With whom does the narrator discuss his decision?

5. *mon cur* (mōn kur’) French slang for “my dear mutt.”

and telescopically clear, we crunched around on the thick white ground cover of frost and got under way. The caravan of the arts was dark but the dog barked as we ground up to the highway.

Someone must have told me about the Missouri River at Bismarck, North Dakota, or I must have read about it. In either case, I hadn't paid attention. I came on it in amazement. Here is where the map should fold. Here is the boundary between east and west. On the Bismarck side it is eastern landscape, eastern grass, with the look and smell of eastern America. Across the Missouri on the Mandan side, it is pure west, with brown grass and water scorings and small outcrops. The two sides of the river might well be a thousand miles apart. As I was not prepared for the Missouri boundary, so I was not prepared for the Bad Lands. They deserve this name. They are like the work of an evil child. Such a place the Fallen Angels might have built as a spite to Heaven, dry and sharp, desolate and dangerous, and for me filled with foreboding. A sense comes from it that it does not like or welcome humans. But humans being what they are, and I being human, I turned off the highway on a shaley road and headed in among the buttes, but with a shyness as though I crashed a party. The road surface tore viciously at my tires and made Rocinante's overloaded springs cry with anguish. What a place for a colony of troglodytes, or better, of trolls. And here's an odd thing. Just as I felt unwanted in this land, so do I feel a reluctance in writing about it.

Presently I saw a man leaning on a two-strand barbed-wire fence, the wires fixed not to posts but to crooked tree limbs stuck in the ground. The man wore a dark hat, and jeans and long jacket washed palest blue with lighter places at knees and elbows. His pale eyes were frosted with sun glare and his lips scaly as snake-skin. A .22 rifle leaned against the fence beside him and on the ground lay a little heap of fur and feathers—rabbits and small birds. I pulled up to speak to him, saw his eyes wash over Rocinante, sweep up the details, and then retire into their sockets. And I found I had nothing to say to him. The "Looks like an early winter," or "Any good fishing hereabouts?" didn't seem to apply. And so we simply brooded at each other.

"Afternoon!"

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Any place nearby where I can buy some eggs?"

"Not real close by 'less you want to go as far as Galva or up to Beach."⁶

"I was set for some scratch-hen eggs."

"Powdered," he said. "My Mrs. gets powdered."

6. Galva . . . Beach cities in western North Dakota near the border of Montana.

Literary Analysis

Travel Essay What factual information about the place does Steinbeck provide here? What impressions does he describe?

"Lived here long?"

"Yep."

I waited for him to ask something or to say something so we could go on, but he didn't. And as the silence continued, it became more and more impossible to think of something to say. I made one more try. "Does it get very cold here winters?"

"Fairly."

"You talk too much."

He grinned. "That's what my Mrs. says."

"So long," I said, and put the car in gear and moved along. And in my rear-view mirror I couldn't see that he looked after me. He may not be a typical Badlander, but he's one of the few I caught.

A little farther along I stopped at a small house, a section of war-surplus barracks, it looked, but painted white with yellow trim, and with the dying vestiges of a garden, frosted-down geraniums and a few clusters of chrysanthemums, little button things yellow and red-brown. I walked up the path with the certainty that I was being regarded from behind the white window curtains. An old woman answered my knock and gave me the drink of water I asked for and nearly talked my arm off. She was hungry to talk, frantic to talk, about her relatives, her friends, and how she wasn't used to this. For she was not a native and she didn't rightly belong here. Her native clime was a land of milk and honey and had its share of apes and ivory and peacocks. Her voice rattled on as though she was terrified of the silence that would settle when I was gone. As she talked it came to me that she was afraid of this place and, further, that so was I. I felt I wouldn't like to have the night catch me here.

I went into a state of flight, running to get away from the unearthly landscape. And then the late afternoon changed everything. As the sun angled, the buttes and coulees, the cliffs and sculptured hills and ravines lost their burned and dreadful look and glowed with yellow and rich browns and a hundred variations of red and silver gray, all picked out by streaks of coal black. It was so beautiful that I stopped near a thicket of dwarfed and wind-warped cedars and junipers, and once stopped I was caught, trapped in color and dazzled by the clarity of the light. Against the descending sun the battlements were dark and clean-lined, while to the east, where the uninhibited light poured slantwise, the strange landscape shouted with color. And the night, far from being frightful, was lovely beyond thought, for the stars were close, and although there was no moon the starlight made a silver glow in the sky. The air cut the nostrils with dry frost. And for pure pleasure I collected a pile of dry dead cedar branches and built a small fire just to smell the perfume of the burning wood and to hear the excited crackle of the branches. My fire made a dome of

Literary Analysis

Figurative Language

What type of figurative language does Steinbeck use to describe the woman's native land?

Reading Check

What are the "Badlands"?

yellow light over me, and nearby I heard a screech owl hunting and a barking of coyotes, not howling but the short chuckling bark of the dark of the moon. This is one of the few places I have ever seen where the night was friendlier than the day. And I can easily see how people are driven back to the Bad Lands.

Before I slept I spread a map on my bed, a Charley-tromped map. Beach was not far away, and that would be the end of North Dakota. And coming up would be Montana, where I had never been. That night was so cold that I put on my insulated underwear for pajamas, and when Charley had done his duties and had his biscuits and consumed his usual gallon of water and finally curled up in his place under the bed, I dug out an extra blanket and covered him—all except the tip of his nose—and he sighed and wriggled and gave a great groan of pure ecstatic comfort. And I thought how every safe generality I gathered in my travels was canceled by another. In the night the Bad Lands had become Good Lands. I can't explain it. That's how it was.

John Steinbeck

(1902–1968)



John Steinbeck's long and successful career made him one of America's best-loved authors. Drawing on his own upbringing in southern California, he often wrote with sympathy and humor about "ordinary" working Americans, such as fishermen and farm workers. *The Grapes of Wrath*, a dramatic story of people uprooted by the Great Depression, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940. Several Steinbeck stories, including *East of Eden*, were made into films. He also wrote film scripts, including the one for his own book *The Red Pony*. Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962.

Review and Assess

Thinking About the Selection

1. **Respond:** Would you have liked to join Steinbeck on his travels? Explain.
2. (a) **Recall:** Why does Steinbeck decide to make this trip? (b) **Interpret:** Explain what Steinbeck means when he says he "had not felt the country for twenty-five years." (c) **Synthesize:** What does Steinbeck hope to gain or learn from his trip?
3. (a) **Recall:** Who is Charley? (b) **Analyze:** What are Steinbeck's reasons for bringing Charley on the trip?
4. (a) **Recall:** What are Steinbeck's initial reactions to the Badlands? (b) **Contrast:** How do his feelings change as night falls?
5. (a) **Recall:** Identify two different people that Steinbeck meets on his journey. (b) **Compare and Contrast:** In what ways is each person similar to and different from Steinbeck? (c) **Generalize:** What generalization can you make about people in the United States based on Steinbeck's experience?
6. (a) **Compare and Contrast:** What can you learn from visiting a place that you cannot learn from reading about it? (b) **Make a Judgment:** Do you agree with Steinbeck that traveling around the country is the best way to learn about it? Explain. (c) **Assess:** In your opinion, does Steinbeck succeed in his aim to get reacquainted with America?

Name _____

Date _____

from *Travels with Charley* by John Steinbeck

Literary Analysis: Travel Essay

An **essay** is a short nonfiction work about a particular subject. A **travel essay** focuses on a trip or a journey that the author has made. Usually it presents factual information along with the author's personal thoughts and impressions. For example, notice the combination of factual information and personal impressions in this passage from Steinbeck's essay:

Once I traveled about in an old bakery wagon, a double-doored rattler with a mattress on its floor. I stopped where people stopped or gathered, I listened and looked and felt, and in the process had a picture of my country the accuracy of which was impaired only by my own shortcomings.

DIRECTIONS: On the diagram below, list the factual information and personal impressions that Steinbeck combines to portray North Dakota in the last three pages of his essay.

Factual Information	Place: North Dakota	Personal Impressions
_____	<i>5 things on each side</i>	_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
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_____		_____
_____		_____

Unit 4: From Sea to Shining Sea

John Steinbeck Video

1. John Steinbeck was the winner of the _____ Prize in _____.
2. John gave voice to _____ America.
3. His writing stresses the _____ condition that we all share.
4. John _____ Steinbeck was born on _____, _____
in _____, _____, a region that would later be the setting
for many of his most famous works.
5. Steinbeck enrolled in _____ University in _____ but eventually
_____.
6. In _____, he received his first critical success, _____. It sold
_____ copies in its first year.
7. In _____, Steinbeck's novella _____ became an immediate best
seller. It dealt realistically with the _____ situation of the _____ and the
_____ of people to find _____. It also struck a
strong _____ chord because of the _____
between _____ and _____.
8. Steinbeck reported on _____ for the San Francisco Chronicle
in _____, providing the basis for his _____ Prize-winning
work was The _____. It was an immediate _____
and remained on the list for more than _____. It put a _____ on the harsh
truths that were occurring at the time in this country.
9. Steinbeck died following a _____ on _____
_____ but left a legacy of _____ books.