The Grapes of Wrath

teacher resource
The Grapes of Wrath

John Steinbeck

Curriculum Unit
Rita M. Yeasted
Curriculum Unit Author
Rita M. Yeasted earned her Ph.D. at Duquesne University. She has many years of experience teaching at the middle school, secondary, and college levels.

Editors
Mary Anne Kovacs, M.A.
Tammy Sanderell, B.A.

Cover Design
Amy Giannell, B.S.
Cover image of an old truck © iStockphoto.com/Mark Buxton

About the Cover
For the Joads, as for other tenant farmers fleeing the Dust Bowl, home became their truck as they headed west on Route 66, hoping for a better life in California.
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In April 1939, Viking Press published what most critics regard as John Steinbeck's masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Although the novel's earthy language shocked many readers, by May it had moved to the top of the best-seller list and was selling at the rate of nearly 10,000 copies a week. It became the top-selling book of 1939 and remained one of the ten best sellers of 1940. Unlike many other American novels, *The Grapes of Wrath* has never gone out of print.

Critics have called it propaganda, sentimental, and obscene—but well over half a century later, we are still moved by the story of the Joads and the thousands like them who lost their land in the midst of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl of the mid-thirties.

Like many American authors, Steinbeck was a journalist as well as a writer of fiction. He went into the fields with a photographer from *Life* but would accept only travel expenses because of people’s suffering. When George West of the *San Francisco News* approached him in 1936 to write a series of articles on the agricultural conditions of the San Joaquin Valley, he immediately set out for the squatters’ camp in the company of the director in charge of management of migrant camp programs, Eric H. Thomsen. The series he wrote contained poignant stories of individuals he met on his journey, but Steinbeck needed a larger outlet for the anger he felt over the conditions he experienced in his native California.

For two years, he worked on a 60,000-word manuscript entitled “L’Affaire Lettuceberg,” a biting satire that he decided to burn. He completed *The Grapes of Wrath* in six months. Banned and burned in cities across the country, the novel remains long after the names of its critics.

In an age of concern over the plight of America’s farmlands, the earth’s fragile environment, and the growing problem of pollution, *The Grapes of Wrath* is still relevant. In an age when Third World peoples are the “new Okies,” when people step over the sleeping homeless in our major cities, and the gap between rich and poor widens, *The Grapes of Wrath* is still relevant. The movement from “I” to “we,” this novel’s major theme, challenges every new generation of readers.

John Steinbeck, in a January 16, 1939, letter to his editor, Pascal Covici, wrote that there are five layers to this novel and that readers will find as many as they can and won’t find any more than they have in themselves. Use of this curriculum unit will enable teacher and students to uncover the layers of this unforgettable American classic and, in the process, learn something of America.
The Grapes of Wrath endorses the following important values:

- an appreciation for our common humanity
- the need to work together to achieve a common goal
- the need for compassion and justice for the oppressed
- the importance of avoiding stereotypes and labels
- the need to share what we have with others, especially the poor
- the importance of commitment to our beliefs
- a respect for our religious heritage and the beliefs of others
- the realization that change is part of the human condition
- the importance of caring about the earth and our environment
- an understanding of the role of technology in society
Teacher Notes

Because comprehending this long and complex novel requires a certain maturity, *The Grapes of Wrath* should probably be taught only to juniors or seniors and is ideal for Advanced Placement classes. This unit provides sequential lessons involving individual and group work, class discussion questions, and ideas for enrichment. The exercises discuss style, structure, image patterns, characterization, philosophy, and history.

While some teachers may assign a quick reading of the novel before this unit is used, and this approach is highly recommended, students can also begin the novel with Lesson 1. The early lessons closely examine the first chapters of the book because a comprehension of the beginning of this novel will make reading the remaining chapters, if not easy, less difficult. The ending of the novel harks back to the beginning at so many levels that the careful reader should not be surprised at Rose of Sharon’s action. Lessons 6–10 assume that the novel has been completed.

You may choose any or all of the lessons and/or handouts in teaching this landmark novel. The time devoted to each lesson is at your discretion.

Answers to handouts will vary unless otherwise indicated. Students may need additional paper to complete some handouts.

The 1940 movie adaptation, directed by John Ford, received seven Oscar nominations. It stars Henry Fonda in one of his most memorable performances, and it won the Academy Awards for best supporting actress and best director. Today’s students sometimes find it hard to appreciate black-and-white movies, but you may find clips from the film useful. More information about the film can be found in Supplementary Materials.
Lesson 1

Getting into the Novel: Themes, Language, and Character

Objectives

- To pay special attention to John Steinbeck’s use of color, sound, and image patterns
- To start developing an appreciation of the novel’s themes and character development
- To explore the person/machine/animal relationships in the novel

Notes to the Teacher

Steinbeck’s use of language is one of the noteworthy qualities of this novel. Handouts 1–3, covering the first four chapters of the novel, demand a close reading of the text. This lesson in close textual study will be valuable even if students have already read the novel—and will provide a methodology for the students to read other novels in the future.

Procedure

1. Introduce the novel by having a student or students read chapter 1 aloud. Distribute Handout 1, and divide the class into small groups to answer the questions. You may decide to form groups that will remain together for the duration of the study of this novel.

Suggested Responses

1. Sharp sun struck day after day; wheels milled the ground; horses’ hooves beat the ground; sun flared; wind softly clashed the drying corn; wind grew strong and hard; wind carried dust away; wind grew stronger; wind raced faster, dug cunningly among the rootlets of the corn; wind cried and whimpered over the fallen corn; sun was as red and ripe as new blood

2. a. red, gray, pink, white, green, brown
   b. bleached by the sun, becoming lifeless

3. Wind softly clashed the drying corn; wind cried and whimpered over the fallen corn; corn threshed by the wind and made a dry, rushing sound; dust-filled air muffled sound more completely than fog does; roosters crowed and their voices were muffled
4. Assign chapters 2–4 in the novel. Distribute Handout 2 to prepare for discussion. You may want to explain image patterns and symbols if terms are unfamiliar to students. For the purposes of studying this novel, simply define image patterns as sensory experiences captured in words, especially visual pictures. Symbols are any words, objects, actions, or characters that embody and evoke a range of additional meanings and significance.

3. Use Handout 2 for discussion.

Suggested Responses

1. a. truck and driver’s face
   b. Tom’s cap and suit
2. radio, truck’s motor and tires
3. • Tom sees himself as a poor person who believes that other people like him would have more heart than the bosses.
   • Tom has a great deal of family pride, even though his folks are not highly educated.
   • Tom essentially wants to avoid trouble.
4. animals/insects—flies, bees, grasshopper
   comparisons to animals—my dogs (feet), cat (Caterpillar tractor), driver chewed like a cow, elephant’s proboscis, whale’s whanger, just done it for ducks, sling the bull, nose goin’ over me like a sheep in a vegetable patch
5. crushes it

4. Distribute Handout 3, use it as a group project in class, and then discuss it. Handouts 2 and 3 should help students with character analysis in this novel.

Suggested Responses

1. The woman tries to avoid hitting it by swerving her car. The man tries to hit it by swerving his truck at it.
2. persevering, courageous, frantic
3. someone who plods along but arrives at a goal
4. Turtle—horny head; hard legs; yellow-nailed feet; horny beak; fierce, humorous eyes; brows like fingernails
   Jim Casy—long, bony head; high forehead; tight of skin; stringy, muscular neck; protruding eyes; lids stretched to cover the eyes; brown, shiny, hairless cheeks; mouth full, humorous or sensual; beaked nose; hard, bare feet
5. alike in their heads, feet, noses, general appearance
5. Assign students to read chapters 5 through 7.

Optional Activity

If students are familiar with *Cry, the Beloved Country*, another way to introduce this novel could be to have one student read the first paragraph of the first chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath* and another the first chapter of Alan Paton’s novel. The image patterns and use of color are remarkably similar. The land is a major character in each novel.
The Land at War

Directions: Use the following questions to study chapter 1 of The Grapes of Wrath.

1. In the first paragraph, John Steinbeck describes the earth, the ears of corn, and the weeds. What phrases describing the wind, sun, or dust indicate that the land is at war with harsh natural events?

2. a. Steinbeck uses colors in this chapter to paint a picture of Oklahoma during the drought of the 1930s. What colors does he choose?

   b. What does his progression of color (e.g., from red to pink) tell us about what is happening to the land?

3. Chapter 1 is filled with the sounds of nature. What descriptions of sound can you find in the chapter?

4. In the last paragraph of chapter 1, Steinbeck describes the women looking at the men. What important quality needs to remain?

5. What happens to the men’s faces?
The Story Begins

Directions: Use the following questions to focus on the artistry in the early chapters of the novel.

1. a. The colors red and gray, which dominate chapter 1, play an important part in chapter 2 as well. The red sun wins in the natural world’s war in chapter 1. What is colored red in chapter 2?

   b. The land lost to wind and sun in the first chapter, ending up a pale gray. What is colored gray in John Steinbeck’s second chapter?

2. The sounds of chapter 1 are of nature. In chapter 2, where does music come from?

3. Some of Tom Joad’s first lines tell us a great deal about him. Find examples, and explain what they reveal.
4. Throughout the novel, Steinbeck tells of people, machines, and animals. Chapter 2 (like most) contains examples of all three: the red truck; the driver, Tom, and the waitress; and numerous examples of insect/animal life. List first the animal/insect life that you find in this chapter, and then list the things that are compared to or called by animal names.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal/Insect</th>
<th>Comparisons to Animals</th>
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</table>

5. What does Tom do to the grasshopper?
Tale of the Turtle

Directions: Examine John Steinbeck’s use of the turtle.

1. In chapter 3, a diversion from the Joad story, we again have the people/machine/animal triad. The turtle, carrying its house on its back, gets to the other side slowly but surely, but the two drivers react to the animal very differently. Explain.

2. Having read chapter 3 very carefully, list the adjectives you would use to describe this turtle in its journey to the other side of the road.

3. If a symbol is an action or thing that points beyond its concrete, literal meaning, what might the turtle symbolize?
4. List the words or phrases that describe the turtle and Jim Casy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turtle</th>
<th>Jim Casy</th>
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</table>

5. In the middle of chapter 4, Casy describes himself as being like the turtle. In what ways do the turtle and the preacher resemble each other?
Lesson 2

Everything Connects: Examining the Novel’s Parts

Objectives

• To examine John Steinbeck’s use of intercalary chapters
• To continue to explore the people/machine/animal imagery
• To see the novel as a whole

Notes to the Teacher

Steinbeck insisted that *The Grapes of Wrath* is carefully structured. Early critics of the novel did not agree, but no serious student of this novel can ignore the connecting links among the chapters. Sometimes an anonymous character echoes (or foretells) actions of one of the novel’s main characters. Sometimes a small occurrence in one chapter is explored in depth in a succeeding chapter. In order to help students to see these links, *Handouts 4* and *5* provide exercises that show the relationships in these early chapters. Part B of *Handout 5* provides an opportunity to note the links in the remaining chapters of the book. In addition, students can work on tracing machine and animal image patterns through the novel. This activity may be revisited in Lesson 9.

Procedure

1. As a way of introducing intercalary chapters, show the relationship between chapters 1 and 2 and between chapters 3 and 4, as discussed in Lesson 1.
2. Distribute *Handout 4*, and allow students, who have now read chapter 5 of the novel, to prepare answers through group work. Discuss their answers as a class.

Suggested Responses

Answers are likely to contain some of the following points:

1.  
   a. Bank/Company
      - needs, wants, insists, must have had thought and feeling
      - ensnared owners, cold and powerful masters
      - does not breathe air or eat side meat; breathes profits and eats interest on money
• has to have profits
• cannot wait—will die without money; keeps growing sicker
• is more than the men who work there; is out of control
• can make men do what it wants

b. Owners
• proud to be slaves
• owned cars
• told farmers to go West

c. Tractors
• great crawlers
• move like insects
• strong as insects
• snub-nosed monsters with snouts

d. Man driving tractors
• did not look like man
• gloved, goggled, rubber dust mask over nose and mouth
• part of the monster (a robot)
• perception muzzled
• speech muzzled
• protest muzzled
• could not see or smell land

2. They are all concerned with profit and care little for the land or the people on it. They lack humanity.

3. $3 a day to feed his kids
4. “crushed like a bug”
5. Tom Joad crushes the grasshopper in his fingers in chapter 2.

3. Distribute Handout 5, which allows you again to look closely at Steinbeck’s use of language. You may wish to elicit various ways he uses language in the first five chapters. Chapter 7 allows you to provide comparisons of Steinbeck’s style with other American writers. You may want to read aloud passages from Sandburg’s The People, Yes, newsreel passages from John Dos Passos’s USA, (e.g., Newsreel S9, “The Stranger First Coming to Detroit”), or a passage from Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” (stanza 6 may be a good choice).

You may also want to use chapter 7 as a way of discussing characterization in the novel. The migrants’ naivete can be contrasted with the salesmen’s unscrupulousness.
Suggested Responses

Part A.

1. corner of house smashed in
2. southwest
3. It makes the story more human, keeps evil from being totally abstract.
4. It captures the fast-talking salesmen’s speeches.
5. The Joads have made a bad deal on a Hudson 6 truck.

Part B.

Because the links are many, there are numerous acceptable answers for this exercise. Here are some suggested responses:

Chapter 9—The Joad family is preparing to leave in chapter 8; junk dealers buy the goods (lives) of Okies in chapter 9.

Chapter 10—Anonymous migrants sell goods at a loss in chapter 9; the Joads get only $18 for all their belongings in chapter 10.

Chapter 11—The Joads pack up and leave their land in chapter 10; the abandoned farms are described in chapter 11.

Chapter 12—Chapter 11 describes the country the migrants leave; chapter 12 (another intercalary) begins the journey section of the novel and captures the nation in flight (Highway 66 chapter).

Chapter 13—Highway 66 (chapter 12) becomes the road the Joads travel (chapter 13).

Chapter 14—The changes in the lives of the Joads (chapter 13) reflect the changes and restlessness of the nation on the move (chapter 14). The Wilsons join the Joads; Grampa dies. Family becomes extended family.

Chapter 15—This is another Highway 66 chapter, linking it with the previous two chapters; the destitute man buys bread, a link with the Wilsons, who have no money.

Chapter 16—Tom’s encounter with the used car salesman (chapter 16) is a link with the man buying bread (chapter 15). Casy’s comments on perceived nervousness link with the past few chapters.

Chapter 17—Migrant camp life described (chapter 17) links with Joads and Wilsons now traveling together.

Chapter 18—This section details the arrival in California; Noah breaks up the family (chapter 18); prophecy of man returning from California (chapter 17) begins to prove true; this is the end of the second part of novel.

Chapter 19—Part 3 begins with chapter 19; early history of California is linked to new settlers (Okies).
Chapter 20—The Joads are in the first Hooverville (chapter 20); Connie abandons wife; Casy goes to jail for Tom. Abstract problems of Okies (chapter 19) become Joads’ problems (chapter 20).

Chapter 21—Chapter 21 outlines the anger of the migrants over their treatment by the landowners. We have just seen this in the Joad family (chapter 20).

Chapter 22—In contrast to the dismal scenario (chapter 21), chapter 22 brings the first hope of humanity for the Joads. They arrive at the government camp and begin to feel human again.

Chapter 23—Chapter 23 describes the simple pleasures of the migrants relegated to the government camps such as Weedpatch (chapter 22).

Chapter 24—The general dancing (chapter 23) leads to the incident at the Weedpatch dance (chapter 24).

Chapter 25—This is another transition chapter. The Weedpatch idyll is about to end; chapter 25 contrasts the bountiful harvest and the injustice to the farm workers.

Chapter 26—The Joads leave (chapter 26) because there is no work; life gets hard again—as prophesied (chapter 25). The Joads’ fortunes begin to dive: Casy is killed; Tom kills Casy’s assailant and goes into hiding. The family shares a boxcar with the Wainwrights.

Chapter 27—The hard times of the cotton pickers (chapter 27) reflect on the previous hardships of the Joads (chapter 26).

Chapter 28—The end of chapter 27 (small income buying side meat) is a link with the relatively optimistic situation of the Joads at the beginning of chapter 28. They at least have a boxcar shelter. The rainy season begins (in contrast to the drought at the novel’s beginning). The chapter ends with Tom leaving and the utter poverty of the family.

Chapter 29—This section details the bleak conditions of migrants: no work, no food, steady rain; it links with the previous chapter’s story of the Joads.

Chapter 30—The flood of chapter 30 was foreshadowed in chapter 29; Rose of Sharon’s baby is stillborn; Al goes with Agnes. The final plight of the Joads seems hopeless.

4. Instruct students to write some brief notes about machine and animal references they find in the novel, beginning with chapter 9. See the Teacher Resource Page for information pertaining to this imagery.

5. Assign students to read through chapter 10 in preparation for the next lesson.
## Machine and Animal Imagery

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Machines</th>
<th>Animals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Selling their farm machinery at a loss</td>
<td>Sell horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Truck becomes “living principle” of family</td>
<td>Al compared to a goat, Three pet dogs; leave two with Muley and take other one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ode to tractors</td>
<td>Comparison of horses and plows, Cats, mice, and weasels take over farm after Okies leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Trucks and cars fill Highway 66, Car problems reflect migrants’ precarious position on road, Sedan picks up destitute family (contrast to heartlessness of others in first chapters)</td>
<td>Gila monster comparison, Dog gets killed by car, Dog howls at the end of chapter, Field mice scamper about mattresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hudson begins chapter—Al has become “soul of the car”</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Black bombers, Bank wants tractors not families on land, Tractors turn multiple furrows in the vacant land</td>
<td>Western states nervous compared to horses, Prisoners are compared to pigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Dialogue in diner about cars: Cords, LaSalle, Cadillac, Zephyr, Buick, Ford contrast between the big car of wealthy couple and 1926 Nash, Juke box, slot machine, Cars whiz</td>
<td>Waitresses screech like a peacock, Big Bill the Rat, References to fish, frog, chipmunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Touring car and truck—problem with car takes up much of the action of chapter</td>
<td>Family compared to cows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Machines</td>
<td>Animals</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Cars crawled onto great highway</td>
<td>Migrants like bugs</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Rattlesnake scares horses, and harrow kills farmer</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Hudson Super Six sounds like a threshing machine</td>
<td>Flies buzz over Granma</td>
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<td>Prayers’ voices like screams of hyena, howl of a wolf, feral howling</td>
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<td>Whining like that of a litter of puppies; a food dish</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>More tractors and machines bought by owners</td>
<td>Noise of crickets and hum of flies</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boy squirmed into the water like a muskrat</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tom kills rattler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man must crawl like a bug between rows of lettuce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Cars in camp identified by name</td>
<td>People like trapped birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Industrial life</td>
<td>The people moved like ants</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hunting cats on the road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Flush toilets, cars and used car lots discussed</td>
<td>Connie compared to both jackrabbit and fox</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sandry howls like an animal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ma sees ducks and birds fly south (early winter coming)</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Car holds troublemakers and deputies</td>
<td>Preacher paced like a tiger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dream of a little truck [farm] and a “couple pigs and some chickens”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dance to “Chicken Reel”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wasps, flies, and yellow jackets eat fruit too cheap to pick</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pigs killed rather than given to hungry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Machines</td>
<td>Animals</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 26      | - Al gets truck ready again  
         | - Flush toilets again       | - People compared to gophers  
         |                                      | - Al kills gopher snake (harmless) |
|         |          | - Store manager has nose like a bird’s beak |
|         |          | - Friendly cat identified with man who shows kindness over sugar sale |
| 27      |          | - Reference to a skunk |
| 28      | - In boxcar (train stopped) | - Tom compared to a rabbit  
         |                                      | - Al like a rooster  
         |                                      | - The children like crabs |
| 29      | - Coroner’s wagons | - Starving men steal chickens |
| 30      | - Men worked jerkily, like machines | - Children ask for pets in new house |
Finding the Links

Directions: Read the information, and answer the questions.

Of the thirty chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath*, sixteen are considered intercalary (i.e., they do not deal with the story of the Joads specifically, but they provide a broader social and historic background for the story). Beginning with chapter 1, which establishes themes and sets the mood and setting for the story, the novel's plot is interrupted by the odd-numbered chapters, except midway through the novel, when they occur at chapters 11, 12, 14, and 15. While early critics believed these chapters were mere distractions, more recent critics have discovered important links among the chapters.

In preceding handouts, you explored the color and sound images that connect chapters 1 and 2, as well as the physical similarities between the turtle and Jim Casy. In chapter 5, John Steinbeck fuses these three into the image of the “monster,” his word for the bank/company or tractors which drive the farmers from their land.

1. List words or phrases from the novel which describe the following:
   a. Bank/Company
   b. Owners
   c. Tractors
   d. Man driving tractor
2. What link seems to connect the bank, the owners, the tractors, and the driver?

3. What motivates Joe Davis's son to perform such an unpopular task?

4. In the last paragraph of chapter 5, when the tractor crumbles the tenant's house, what four words describe its final fall?

5. Where have we seen this image before?
What’s That Again?

Part A.

Directions: Answer the following questions.

1. Chapter 6 opens with an obvious link to something that happens in chapter 5. Identify the connection.

2. When Tom releases the turtle (chapter 6), in which direction does it crawl?

3. Can you think of a reason why John Steinbeck gives names to the young men whose tractors destroy the tenants’ homes and to the used car salesmen?

4. Examine the style of chapter 7. Can you think of a reason why Steinbeck may have written this chapter on selling used cars in this hectic prose?

5. Chapter 7 tells of people buying used cars from unscrupulous salesmen. What link exists between chapters 7 and 8?

Part B.

Directions: As you continue to read, make a note of links between chapters, and notice Steinbeck’s use throughout succeeding chapters of the image patterns of people/machines/animals.
Lesson 3
Identification of Characters and Their Philosophies

Objectives

- To explore values of the characters through their dialogue
- To examine personal values
- To understand the novel’s characterization
- To develop writing skills

Notes to the Teacher

The exercises in this lesson will enable students to identify with the Joads and to better understand the main characters in the novel before beginning the second part. For this lesson, students need to have read through chapter 10.

Handout 9 allows creative students to blossom. By giving this exercise as an out-of-class assignment, you will provide your class a fresh way of looking at the novel. Class discussion on the day that the assignment is due will allow students to share in the creativity of their classmates.

Procedure

1. Distribute Handout 6. Assign students to complete it out of class, or have students do it in class. It is a good way to discuss the values of the novel.

Suggested Responses

1. Casy is not a religiously orthodox man. He is outside of organized religion and its precepts.
2. The Davis boy is selfish and rationalizes his insensitivity to other Okies.
3. Muley Graves is an unselfish, good person—one of John Steinbeck’s speakers in the novel.
4. Casy strongly identifies with nature.
5. Grampa is somewhat of a hedonist, toned down as he got older.
6. Ma Joad has strong opinions and much family pride, basically a generous and good character.
2. Distribute Handout 7. Have students complete part A and share their responses.

3. Assign the essay in part B as an out-of-class composition.

4. Distribute Handout 8, which works well as a group project. Allow students to use their texts to find phrases that describe characters. This exercise reviews the first part of the novel.

**Suggested Responses**

1. *Grampa*—lean, bright-eyed, earthy, mean
2. *Granma*—mean as Grampa
3. *Uncle John*—a loner, older than Pa, unhappy
4. *Noah*—firstborn, tall and strange, always calm and puzzled, never angry
5. *Tom*—not over thirty, very dark brown eyes, high wide cheekbones, kept lips closed, dressed in new clothes that don’t fit, minds his own business
6. *Rose of Sharon*—braided, blond hair; round, soft face; self-sufficient smile; plump body
7. *Ruthie*—serious, young girl
8. *Winfield*—a kid
9. *Connie*—hard worker, proud, frightened and bewildered at Rose of Sharon, sharp-faced, lean, pale blue eyes
10. *Jim Casy*—thin, tenor voice; long, bony head

5. Distribute Handout 9, and review the directions. Make clarifications as needed. Set a due date.

6. Assign students to read chapters 11 through 16.
The Language of the Heart

**Directions:** Answer the following questions.

1. In chapter 4, what does Casy say about sin and virtue? What does that show about him?

2. In chapter 5, what does the Davis boy say about responsibility? What values does he hold?

3. In chapter 6, what does Muley believe about sharing?

4. In chapter 8, how is Casy like Christ?

5. In chapter 8, what do Grampa’s comments about oranges and grapes reveal?

6. In chapter 10, what do Ma’s comments about taking Casy with them show?
Losses: The Thousand Pictures

Part A.

Directions: In chapter 9, John Steinbeck pictures the migrants about to leave for California as they sort through their possessions and decide what to take on the journey. Although each object brought with it a host of memories and an identity, the migrants had little room to carry beloved treasures. Use the following steps to put yourself in that situation.

1. Make a quick inventory of the items that identify you, whether they be recent acquisitions or things you have had since childhood.

2. What three things in the above list are your favorites?

3. If you could save only one object should fire or flood strike, what would it be?

Part B.

Directions: In a brief essay, explain your responses to part A. What is your rationale for those choices?
A Family Photo

**Directions:** By chapter 10, we have met the entire Joad clan, from Grandfather William James Joad to the as yet unborn child of Rose of Sharon Joad Rivers. Throughout the first part of this novel, John Steinbeck has taken great pains to describe the land of Oklahoma: once red as blood, then depleted by poor farming practices, now dry and lifeless. In the same way, the author has produced sharp verbal images of the novel’s main characters, from their physical features to their mannerisms and, in a few cases, their eccentricities. Before the Joads leave for California, take a group photograph in words, capturing as best you can each of the following characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Physical Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Grampa</td>
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<td>2. Granma</td>
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<td>3. Uncle John</td>
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<td>Character</td>
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<td>5. Tom</td>
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<td>6. Rose of Sharon</td>
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<td>7. Ruthie</td>
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<td>8. Winfield</td>
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<td>9. Connie</td>
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<td>10. Jim Casy</td>
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A Going Away Gift

Directions: Having reviewed the novel’s characters and studied their actions, try your hand at a creative departure gift for the Joads. Since John Steinbeck uses color imagery so effectively in the novel, try to choose a color that expresses to you the essence of each of the characters, and give a brief rationale for your choice. A second possibility is to choose a sound (e.g., of a musical instrument) that represents a particular character for you, the composite of which would create a symphonic gift for the Joads. A third possibility might be particular flowers that symbolize for you each of the novel’s characters to form a bouquet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Color, Sound, or Flower</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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<td>7. Tom</td>
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<td>9. Rose of Sharon</td>
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<td>12. Connie</td>
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<td>13. Jim Casy</td>
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Lesson 4

A Time to Change: Motifs in the Novel

Objectives

• To explore the question of what it means to be human in a world of machines
• To identify and discuss several types of prejudice in the novel
• To reflect upon stereotypes and labels
• To see the relevance of John Steinbeck’s story today

Notes to the Teacher

This unit provides a good opportunity for students to explore the role of technology in their lives. For today’s high school student, technology is a given—but they seldom question the ramifications of technology in the world of manufacturing, medicine, or information accessibility. Steinbeck wrote this novel before the computer revolution, but he was never an anti-machine agrarian purist. He saw machines, rightly, as offering possibilities for a better life for all people. Students will have an opportunity with this unit to explore a major theme of the novel: the consequences of excluding the poor from the power that machine ownership brings.

Handout 12 is one of the most important activities of this unit for “bringing the novel home.” Steinbeck’s portrayal of the poor in this book wins our sympathy, and it is important to have students see that the Joads we now know (and identify with) are seen as dirty and uncivilized by the people still rooted to their lands or towns. Helping students to connect the Okies with the poor they may encounter is the goal of this lesson.

Procedure

1. Have students share responses to Handout 9 (Lesson 3) and use them as a basis for class discussion.

2. Distribute Handout 10, and allow students (preferably in small groups) to answer the questions. (The machine man has lost a sense of wonder and tends to be contemptuous.)
3. Distribute **Handout 11**, and have students complete it.

**Suggested Responses**

1. The Joads have had to leave their farm and Oklahoma; they have added Casy and the Wilsons to their extended family; Grampa dies; their dog is hit by a car.

2. Ma seems to be opening her concept of family (allowing Casy and the Wilsons in); Tom seems to be reflecting on Casy’s message of universal compassion for fellow human beings.

3. Our only way to survive as a human race is to shift from total independence to interdependence.

4. Yes. Answers will vary for the second part. As the number of migrants gets larger, the residents tend to get more hard-hearted, not less—as a means of survival.

4. Distribute **Handout 12**, and use it as a basis for class discussion.

**Suggested Responses**

2. Yes, usually.

3. People hate the influx of migrants to their states and tend to use derogatory names for them.

4. Because *red* meant “troublemaker,” owners or bosses would call people who asked for a fair wage by that name.

5. Americans still tend to be apprehensive about communism.

7. The labels all put down the person who is called the name.

8. Yes. It is hoped that students see the Joads as human beings deserving of respect and consideration.

9. Reading can enlighten people by providing insights and experience not available in everyday life; reading, then, can alter perspectives.

5. Assign students to read chapters 17 through 22. Suggest that students continue to take notes about links between chapters and about Steinbeck’s use of imagery related to machines and animals.
The Machine Age Comes to Oklahoma

Directions: Read the commentary, and answer the questions.

The novel begins with a poetic tribute to the land and its people. In chapter 2, the red, living earth is replaced by a roaring, huge red truck. Every chapter but chapter 4 contains references to cars, trucks, or tractors. Yet, in chapter 10, the beat-up truck replaces the house as an effective center of family life.

John Steinbeck’s ambivalence toward machines (and America’s future in 1939) is captured by the passage in chapter 11, paragraph 1, in which he ponders the old question: What does it mean to be human in a world that is becoming increasingly mechanized?

1. Read the opening paragraphs of chapter 11, and summarize the major points the narrator makes about the new machine man.

2. Do you agree with this analysis?
From “I” to “We”

Directions: Read the information, and answer the questions.

From the first pages of this novel, the reader senses that a change has come over the land. The red earth is turned to gray dust. The tenant farmers are pushed off their land and onto Highway 66 by debts and greedy owners. We see characters change, such as the service station owner of chapter 13, who begins as a whining worrier and ends up showing compassion when the Joads’ dog is run over.

One of the biggest changes is in the family unit itself. For Ma, this is the one constant in a world of change, but the changes in the family have already begun—and will continue.

1. List a few changes you have seen in the Joads’ circumstances and family structure from the time the novel opens.

2. List changes you have noted in the attitudes of any members of the Joad family.

3. A major theme in the novel is the movement from “I” to “we.” What does this mean?

4. Does Mae have a change of heart in chapter 15? In the future, will she treat poor people who enter the restaurant any differently? Why or why not?
Sticks and Stones: Looking at Ourselves and Others

Directions: Review the attitudes toward Okies in chapters 18 to 22, and answer the questions.

1. Many people grow up chanting the nursery rhyme that ends, “Names will never hurt me,” but experience often proves that words can hurt every bit as much as sticks and stones. Can you remember a time when someone called you a name and it truly hurt?

2. Does it hurt more when the name-calling is done by persons you know (or love) rather than by strangers?

3. How and when did the term Okie become derisive?

4. In chapter 22, an owner named Hines attempts to define reds for a curious young man. Explain what his definition means.
5. Do Americans today have a common understanding of communism?

6. Can you think of derogatory labels that are often in use today?

7. What do the labels have in common?

8. In your experience, do people often believe that poor people are somehow subhuman, unfeeling, stupid creatures?

Lesson 5
The History of America According to Steinbeck

Objectives
- To correlate the Dust Bowl with present ecological concerns
- To develop an understanding of the American Dream
- To recognize the theme of the American Dream in *The Grapes of Wrath*

Notes to the Teacher
There are few things more difficult than trying to write history while it is happening, before the outcome is evident. Chapter 19 of the novel attempts to link California’s past with the present as Steinbeck was experiencing it. This novel affords the opportunity to make history come alive and to illustrate the connections between the past and the present.

This lesson also enables students to study the literary concept of the American Dream. For some, it will be yet another example, but for others, this may be the first time they have encountered the term. You will want to adjust the presentation of the lesson to the particular class’s background. This portion of the lesson enables students to examine America’s dream of unlimited resources and the reality of a fragile earth, polluted and abused by exploitation and thoughtlessness.

Procedure
1. Briefly review the barbarian invasions of Europe as a way of understanding Steinbeck’s reference to “new barbarians” in chapter 19. It might also be beneficial to use this point to discuss the advantages of a strong historical background to help students comprehend novels and world events. Educated readers usually appreciate and enjoy more of what they read.
2. Distribute Handout 13, which may be done individually or as a group assignment and will provide fruitful discussion.

Suggested Responses
1. The migrants see that some people own more land than they need; the new arrivals have none. Whether or not students agree should provide a spirited discussion.
2. The barbarians disrupted the civilizations they invaded. They also started a new one. The Okies threaten the landowners because they are desperate.

3. The people need land and food.

4. Any time people are hungry, landless, and at the bottom of the social ladder, they have the potential to rise up and take what has not been shared with them.

5. When the people stop relying on God to change the hearts of the rich and take matters into their own hands, the end of the status quo will arrive, bringing violence and social upheaval in its wake.

3. **Handout 14** should not be an excuse to see the Joads as totally responsible for their own catastrophe, but it is a chance to discuss our sometimes thoughtless or selfish use of the earth’s resources, with little vision of the long-term consequences of our actions. Discuss current ecological concerns and students’ attitudes toward the environment before distributing **Handout 14**. Questions can be considered in whole-class discussion.

**Suggested Responses**

1. Cotton depletes soil.

2. Cotton was a fast cash crop; they were tenants, and the owners wanted profit.

3. The poor see war (and violent death of others) as a way out of death by starvation. They fail to see an alternative between two modes of violence.

4. People who own munitions factories or aircraft companies prosper, as do those who work overtime. The ones who are killed, injured, or left homeless lose.

4. Review the concept of the American Dream by recalling other stories that students may have studied (e.g., *The Great Gatsby*). Emphasize that, as in all dreams, sometimes the thing that we think will bring us the most pleasure turns out to be a nightmare. The romantic quest for a piece of land to call one’s own lies at the heart of the early American frontier experience. In *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath* in particular, Steinbeck’s portrayal is that of the American Dream gone awry.

5. Distribute **Handout 15**. Ask students to read the information and complete an essay in response.

6. Assign students to read the rest of the novel.
Links with the Past and the Future

Directions: Chapter 19 of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* tells the story of California from the days when it belonged to Mexico, through the invasion of the early settlers in the Gold Rush days, through the era of cheap foreign workers, to the twentieth century when the Joads arrive. Use the following questions to reflect on Steinbeck's purposes.

1. Why do the dispossessed migrants believe that they have as much right to the land as the earlier settlers? Do you agree? Why or why not?

2. Steinbeck describes the migrants as dangerous “new barbarians.” What does he mean?

3. What two things do the Okies want?

4. The author compares the people to African Americans in the South. What is the significance of the comparison?

5. Chapter 19 ends with a prayer by the narrator of the novel and an ominous final two sentences. Explain Steinbeck's meaning.
The Dust Bowl of the Thirties

Directions: Read the information, and answer the questions.

We tend to think that America was always the way it is now—and that it will always be this way. But a study of history shows that early American maps included in the “Great American Desert” the plains in the western parts of Nebraska, Kansas, and Texas. With increased rainfall, settlers believed that the land could be cultivated, but serious widespread drought in the middle of the 1880s culminated in the great drought of 1894 and 1895. The “wet years” from 1905 to 1915 brought false confidence. By the 1930s, farmers were once again caught up in the Dust Bowl, which provides the catalyst for the Joads’ journey westward to California, “the land flowing with milk and honey,” the Promised Land.

No one can read John Steinbeck’s novel without feeling sympathy for the farmers who lost their farms to the great drought, but a close reading of the novel reveals that the Joads and their neighbors sometimes were not good stewards of their farmland.

1. How does Steinbeck describe what cotton does to the soil?

2. Why did the farmers turn from growing grain to cotton?

3. Discuss the irony of the passage describing the people’s hopes about cotton in chapter 5.

   The squatting men raised their eyes to understand. Can’t we just hang on? Maybe the next year will be a good year. God knows how much cotton next year. And with all the wars—God knows what price cotton will bring. Don’t they make explosives out of cotton? And uniforms? Get enough wars and cotton’ll hit the ceiling. Next year, maybe.

4. Do people sometimes prosper in wartime? Who prospered in World War II? Who did not?
The American Dream Reconsidered

**Directions:** Read the information, and write an essay about people's responsibilities as stewards of the earth.

From earliest times, American settlers were lured westward. The promise of land ownership and independence inspired Eastern families to pack all their belongings into covered wagons and head out to the Midwest and eventually California. Most of the early settlers were small farmers. They cleared the land, built cabins, and raised their families in near isolation. The American Dream of land and freedom, however, was elusive from the start.

Many settlers died on the journey, particularly women and small children. Loneliness gnawed at the heart; hunger and disease stalked their cabins. But Americans never gave up the dream that if only they could go a little further west, life would be better. Thus, it is no surprise that the Joads and their neighbors pack up their belongings and head for California, where the handbills promise jobs, plenty of fruit, and a chance to escape foreclosure and dispossession.

When the Joads reach California, however, the promise of a new life is short-lived. California is lush and beautiful, but it is never theirs. Just as the banks took over the farms back home, the California farms are owned by corporations, which, like the banks, have no faces.

And now there is no more “West” to go to. California is the last frontier, the end of the journey, the last hope for the Joads and the other migrants—or is it?

Is it possible that there is a new dream of commitment to the land and to one another? The Joads learn that family is not enough. The land of Oklahoma has been destroyed, and now the dispossessed migrants must travel to a new land and a new understanding of the relationship between land and humankind. It is a lesson we still must learn.

What is the connection between John Steinbeck’s story of the drought of the 1930s and the plight of the world today?
Lesson 6
Steinbeck’s Characters: A Sharp Ear and a Good Eye for People

Objectives
• To make inferences from textual clues
• To explore the roles of women and men in *The Grapes of Wrath*

Notes to the Teacher
This lesson focuses on characters and considers gender roles. From the beginning of the novel, it is clear that the men dominate the culture. If the men lose their spirit and will to live, everyone else is in danger. Certainly, Tom and Casy are the two most dominant male characters, and together they voice many of the novel’s themes. It is interesting, though, that as Pa’s strength ebbs, Ma becomes increasingly the moral center of the family.

In this lesson, students begin by focusing on female characters. They note that Rose of Sharon, although present from beginning to end, shows no signs of strength until the very end, and they recognize Ma’s unifying role. Students then consider the male roles, including the startling fact that, of all the men, Al has the most chance of success in their new life in California.

Procedure
1. Point out that, in discussing many novels, people consider characters whose places they would like to claim, at least for a little while. For example, it would be fun to join Huck and Jim on the raft, at least for a day or two. Few readers, however, would want to change places with characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*. We can admire Ma or Tom, but we sure are glad not to be in their shoes.
2. Distribute **Handout 16**. Discuss individual quotations from the novel, and have students complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses
1. Ma keeps the family together; she is the heart and soul of the family. She supplants Pa as head of the family as it begins to disintegrate.
2. Rose of Sharon does not exhibit any leadership or strength until the novel’s end when she feeds the dying man with her breast.
3. Students may disagree about Mae. She is vain, flirtatious, and snobbish. Yet she does show compassion to the children of the poor man trying to buy a loaf of bread.
4. Mrs. Wilson, although dying of cancer, is compassionate at Grampa’s death, offering shelter and a blanket to bury him.

5. Mrs. Wainwright, like Ma Joad, seems to be the center of her family. She assists at the birth of Rose of Sharon’s stillborn.

6. Lisbeth Sandry may not get many votes for compassion or sensitivity, but some may see her at least as a moral character. John Steinbeck, however, seems to provide her as a type of the aggressive, self-righteous bigot.

3. Distribute **Handout 17**. Students may answer questions individually or within a group. This handout may be used as an evaluation tool to determine how well students comprehend the novel. Completed handouts may be collected or used as a vehicle for discussion.

**Suggested Responses**

1. Uncle John is, in some ways, a link with the outsiders to the Joads’ immediate family. At another level, his preoccupation with sin and guilt provides a philosophical contrast to Casy’s relativism about sin.

2. Grampa represents the earthy life force of the Joads. He is so much a part of the land that he dies when he is uprooted.

3. Answers will vary. Although stubborn, Pa seems to become weaker as each chapter progresses. Not until he rallies the men to build the dike in the final chapter does he seem to shake off his lethargy.

4. Tom carries Casy’s philosophy into the world of the migrants after Casy’s death. He provides hope that the movement from “I” to “we” may become a reality. He changes more than any other character in the novel.

5. Critics disagree on this one. Casy is real at many levels, but sometimes he seems to be more a walking philosophy textbook than a flesh-and-blood character. On the other hand, he is central to the theme of the novel, provides links with many of the novel’s characters and events, and dies for what he believes.

6. Al understands machines (cars and trucks). When the war comes, it is men like Al who will benefit from their mechanical ability. After 1940, with more automobiles on the highway, the need for mechanics grew. Of all the characters, Al is the most employable.

4. Suggest that students add information to their lists of links between chapters and of machine and animal imagery.
A Closer Look at John Steinbeck’s Female Characters

**Directions:** While the women in this novel by custom of the time are considered socially inferior to the men, they are remarkably well drawn, with Ma Joad being perhaps the most memorable of all Steinbeck’s characters. Steinbeck’s main women characters are dependent but a source of strength and endurance for their men. In the space provided, list the ways you see the following characters (if you do) as exhibiting strength, leadership, or a moral center for other characters in the novel.

1. Ma Joad

2. Rose of Sharon

3. Mae

4. Mrs. Wilson

5. Mrs. Wainwright

6. Lisbeth Sandry
John Steinbeck’s Male Characters:  
Saints, Sinners, and In-Betweens

Directions: If Ma Joad is perhaps the character one most remembers from this novel, the male characters are no less essential to its plot. Tom and Jim Casy are prominent in the novel’s opening chapters, playing the roles of prophet and tribal leader before the story ends. Answer the following questions.

1. What role does Uncle John play in this story? Can you justify his inclusion in the journey to California?

2. What role does Grampa play in this novel? Is it fitting that he never makes it to California? Explain.

3. In your opinion, is Pa Joad a weak or a strong character? Explain.

4. Tom, having killed a man, is paroled from prison in the novel’s first chapters. How is he crucial to the story line? Could you justify calling Tom the main character of the novel? Explain.

5. Jim Casy, although not one of the Joads, joins the family in its travels westward. What role does Casy play in the story? Is he a realistic character? Why or why not?

6. Many critics see Al, Tom’s younger brother, as a minor, significant character. Of all the characters in the story, Al has the best chance of success in California—or anywhere else in America of the 1940s (and beyond). Explain why he, even more than Ruthie and Winfield, represents the future.
Lesson 7

Religious Connections: Biblical and Mythic Roots of *The Grapes of Wrath*

Objectives

- To understand the biblical references in the novel
- To examine the novel’s title and discuss implications
- To explore the novel’s mythic roots

Notes to the Teacher

While this may be one of the most difficult lessons in this unit, it should prove to be one of the most rewarding. Critics have argued about the significance of the biblical allusions and structure of John Steinbeck’s novel since its publication. For purposes of classroom use, this lesson avoids some of the more controversial questions (e.g., Casy and Tom as Christ figures, Steinbeck’s attack on organized religion, etc.), but no understanding of the novel can avoid the interweaving of biblical themes, allusions in the title, and names of characters. Steinbeck’s own religious orientation is not germane to the argument.

Since some comprehension of the Bible as literary reference is crucial to interpretation of many works of literature, past and present, **Handout 18** will enable students to have some framework for interpretation.

Procedure

1. Steinbeck wanted the music and all the verses of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” printed in the first edition. One way to introduce this lesson is to play a recording of the piece and distribute the lyrics, which are easily available on the Internet. Discuss the song as an American hymn. Explain why it was a favorite of civil rights marchers during the sixties.

2. Discuss how grapes have a dual symbolism in the Bible. Sometimes they represent plenty (e.g., *Numbers 13:23*), and sometimes they represent suffering because they are crushed in the winepress. This winepress image is central to the paradoxical Christian message: out of death, life; out of suffering, joy. Crushed grapes become wine, biblical symbol of joy and salvation. The Israelites, living in a land where water was scarce, treasured wine with their meals, shared it with guests and travelers, and always included it in their celebrations.
3. Distribute **Handout 18**, and use the first portion for continued discussion of the theme. The remainder of the questions should be completed in small groups prior to whole-class discussion.

**Suggested Responses**

1. Instead of peace and prosperity, the Joads are met with hunger and violence in California. They never get the promised land.
2. Rose of Sharon truly gives of herself to bring life to the man, who would die without the nourishment.
3. Moses was the baby in the basket, and the irony is that he saved his people, but the infant cannot tell them because he is dead. Only the sensitive hearts will see the connection between the actions that caused the infant’s death and people’s selfishness.
4. The law protects the rights to privacy and free choice. The Ten Commandments prohibit theft, adultery, and murder, but the New Testament law of love covers many of the other “rights.”
5. The correlation is, on the surface, obvious, but students may not be aware that the Bible’s chosen people often suffered greatly. That correlation should be shown as well.
6. The devil took the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden account of Genesis. The snake here is an omen that California will not be a paradise for them.

4. Discuss the nature of myths, which are not just fanciful stories but are rooted in folklore and convey deep truths about humankind and life’s realities. Point out that hero myths are part of all ancient cultures. Typically, the hero is a larger-than-life person who faces trials that require exceptional courage. The hero usually embarks on some kind of journey which leads ultimately to insight and a capacity to be a source of renewal for others. Distribute and assign **Handout 19**.

**Suggested Responses**

1. Students may disagree here. One could justifiably argue that taking up the cause of the strikers and risking one’s life for others requires superhuman courage.
2. The Joads survive trial by fire (blistering sun, threat of being burnt out of camps), drought, and flood. They undergo death of loved ones and a stillborn child. They suffer hunger and cold, discomfort, and a nearly hopeless life through most of the novel.
3. Again, students may disagree. Certainly, Casy’s philosophy gives the Joads a rationale for their suffering. Whether or not students agree with his beliefs, answers will cause thoughtful reflections.
4. Geographically, the Joads travel about 1,800 miles.

5. Tom hears rumors of disillusionment in chapter 10; the ragged man whose children starved meets them on his way back in chapter 16.

6. Casy and Tom get little out of their efforts for others—except death and the threat of death. Perhaps the term *superhuman* is arguable, but Tom remembers Casy, and his words in chapter 28 are powerful.
Steinbeck’s Use of Biblical Imagery

Directions: John Steinbeck drew the title for his novel from the song “Battle Hymn of the Republic” (“He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored”). Julia Ward Howe took the image from chapter 14 of the Book of Revelation. Use the following questions to consider the novel’s biblical allusions.

1. As Peter Lisca points out, the novel’s three sections (drought, journey, and California) correspond to the Israelites’ experiences in the Book of Exodus. In what ways is California not the promised land for the Joads?

2. Just as the novel’s title comes from the Bible, so does Rose of Sharon’s name. It comes from the Song of Solomon and is linked with love and plentiful nourishment. How is this connection evident in the novel?

3. When Uncle John puts Rose of Sharon's stillborn child in an old apple crate and floats it downstream, he says, “Go down and tell 'em.” These words remind us of a well-known spiritual and refer to a biblical leader. Who is the Israelite leader, and how is Steinbeck being ironic?

4. In the Bible, God gave the Israelites the commandments during their desert exodus. In the novel, the migrants develop new laws. What do the new laws require and condemn?

5. In chapter 20, Ma insists that the family will survive. Is there a correlation between her concept and the biblical people of God? Are the Joads “chosen people”?

6. One of Steinbeck’s major themes is humankind’s search for a promised land, a Garden of Eden. Why is it so significant that Tom comes upon a snake in the road (and kills it) just as the Joads first see California?

Mythic Journey Westward

Directions: Read the information, and answer the questions.

Hero myths are concerned with bigger-than-life persons who perform difficult deeds requiring superhuman courage. The episodes of the myth are important to the history of a nation or a race. The settings are vast. Myths sometimes include prophecies. Finally, the hero is sometimes granted immortality as a reward for fighting injustice.

If Tom Joad is the hero of John Steinbeck’s novel, he hardly seems godlike in chapter 1. By the end of the novel, he does achieve a mythical quality after Casy’s death.

1. Does Tom or Casy perform deeds of great valor?

2. List the great tribulations and obstacles that the Joads pass through in their journey.

3. Do Tom/Casy’s actions have importance for the people of this story or for generations yet unborn?

4. Does the setting of the novel cover a vast distance?

5. Are there prophecies of impending doom in the novel? Who brings them?

6. Do Tom and Casy unselfishly fight injustice? Are Tom and Casy transformed into almost superhuman characters by the novel’s end? Give evidence from the text.
Lesson 8
A Philosophical Adventure: Steinbeck’s Isms

Objectives

- To broaden understanding of the philosophy which lies at the heart of this novel
- To explore personal philosophies
- To develop critical thinking skills

Notes to the Teacher

While this lesson deals with abstractions, students should learn to read novels at many levels. The average reader looks for plot and characters when approaching a novel. The critical reader is enriched through comprehending various philosophical stances. Moving from who and what to why is the hallmark of a critical thinker.

The word Marxist for some students will immediately bring to mind communist; for others, the word will have no meaning. Early critics were more likely to categorize John Steinbeck and his novel as Marxist. Today’s critics almost unanimously read the novel as a plea not for revolution but for social justice through better wages and working conditions for the dispossessed.

Procedure

1. If students have studied nineteenth-century American literature, they may already be acquainted with some of the classic American philosophers discussed in this lesson. Review the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and Henry David Thoreau, for example.

2. Have students explore various philosophies and the values they endorse, such as altruism, honesty, and the pursuit of wealth.

3. Distribute Handout 20, and ask students to complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses

1. Transcendentalism relies on intuition and conscience; it is a form of idealism and reflects the attitudes of romanticism. In contrast, pragmatism is practical and always seeks whatever is most useful.
2. a. Casy saves Tom from prison and offers his life for better conditions for the workers.
   b. Tom avenges Casy’s death and chooses to follow in his footsteps, risking his life for others.
   c. Ma is a true nurturer, always looking out for her family and eventually for members of the human family.
   d. Rose of Sharon offers her breast to a dying stranger.
   e. The Wilsons offer their tent and blanket for a decent death and burial for Grampa.
   f. The Wainrights form a bond with the Joads through Agnes and Al’s relationship. They share what they have, helping Rose of Sharon in childbirth.

3. Tom is part of the oversoul, bound especially to those who are the least in the society. He is committed to seeking justice for the oppressed.

4. Students may already be familiar with the terms naturalism and realism, but a review will help even those who can identify the terms. You might give students an overview of the influence of Charles Darwin on British and American literature.

5. Distribute Handout 21. After you are sure that students understand the concept of naturalism, allow groups to complete the handout.

**Suggested Responses**

1. Examples of naturalism
   - natural disasters over which the Joads have little control (e.g., flood, drought)
   - the Joad family itself, which leads a natural life, especially the Grandparent Joads
   - Casy’s sermons on oneness with nature, holiness in life itself
   - emphasis of the natural over the supernatural
   - numerous correlations between animals and people

2. Choices and decisions
   - Casy’s decision to give himself up to save Tom from prison
   - Tom breaking parole to travel with family, choosing to take up Casy’s work after his death
   - The Wallaces of Weedpatch sharing their work with Tom
   - Mae giving candy below cost to father of hungry children
   - Rose of Sharon’s unselfishness at the novel’s end
6. Like the previous two handouts of this lesson, **Handout 22** needs some preparation time. Ask students what they already know about the Russian Revolution and the leftist movement in American labor during the Depression.

7. Distribute **Handout 22**, and read the information aloud. Students should be able to complete this as an out-of-class assignment. (Those who own possessions and will not share from their plenty with the have-nots of the world often blame revolutionary thinkers for uprisings and ultimate social chaos. Steinbeck advises the haves to look to themselves for the reasons for revolution. The poor, in their hunger and concern for their families, may become violent when all other means fail. The novel advocates the importance of caring for the well-being of other people.)
The Grapes of Wrath: An American Novel

Directions: Read the information, and answer the questions.

Great novels tell good stories and include memorable characters; they also convey philosophies of life. John Steinbeck's philosophy defies simple classification, but it reflects ideas from other American writers and thinkers such as Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Dewey, and William James. The novel The Grapes of Wrath reflects concepts of transcendentalism, including the oversoul, as well as Whitman's exuberant view of democracy. It also mirrors the pragmatism of Dewey and James.

1. Define transcendentalism and pragmatism.

2. The consequence of believing in an oversoul is living by the idea that people are bound one to another with spiritual ties. We become responsible for what happens to our neighbors and to society in general. Explain how this principle is exemplified in the actions of specific characters in the novel.
   a. Casy
   b. Tom
   c. Ma
   d. Rose of Sharon
   e. The Wilsons
   f. The Wainwrights

3. Review Tom’s words to Ma about his enduring presence (chapter 28). What philosophy does he manifest?
Naturalism? Maybe.

Directions: Read the information, and record specific ways the novel reflects and does not reflect the beliefs of naturalism.

John Steinbeck was a great lover and observer of the natural world. His close friendship with marine biologist Ed Ricketts and his themes of victimized lower classes led numerous critics to see Steinbeck as a literary naturalist, one who applied principles of scientific determinism to his fiction. In realism, authors portray everyday life as objectively as possible. Naturalism carries realism to an extreme.

The most important of American literary naturalists—Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Upton Sinclair, and Jack London—wrote stories that manifest Charles Darwin’s theory of survival of the fittest and bad luck; many of their characters commit suicide. While there are surely naturalistic features in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the characters of this novel are not mere fate-tossed animals who struggle toward survival of the fittest. The characters are often beset by circumstances over which they have little control, but there are moments when, unlike animals, the people make humane choices or decisions, when they overcome obstacles and go forward.

1. Looking back over the novel, list five things you remember which might justify the term *naturalistic* to describe the novel.

2. List five important choices or decisions that you can recall from the novel.
Marxism? No.

Directions: Read the information. Then review chapters 13, 14, and 15, and relate them to criticisms of *The Grapes of Wrath* as Marxist propaganda.

When *The Grapes of Wrath* was first published, critics rejected it for two major reasons: One group found the language offensive, and many libraries banned the book. A larger group, however, rejected the book on political grounds. John Steinbeck’s attack on the banks and landowners won him the label *communist*. The book was classified as propaganda, in the category of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. Judged a proletarian novel because it dealt with the laboring classes, the book was seen as Marxist by many readers.

Steinbeck, however, never saw communism as an answer to the Joads’ predicament. Rather, their only hope was a deep compassion for and a working together with one another. In chapter 14, for example, the narrator says, “The baby has a cold. Here, take this blanket. It’s wool. It was my mother’s blanket—take it for the baby.”
Lesson 9

People/Machines/Animals: Unifying Motifs in *The Grapes of Wrath*

**Objectives**

- To see how an author uses image patterns for unity, characterization, and explication of theme
- To see the novel as a unified whole

**Notes to the Teacher**

This lesson rewards the students’ efforts in recording animal and machine imagery. Even if they discovered only a fraction of the many possibilities, the students will have collectively found enough examples to answer the questions in this lesson. The skills developed will help them in reading novels for years to come.

**Procedure**

1. People use many animal analogies in everyday speech (e.g., quick as a rabbit, sly as a fox). Solicit other expressions that students can think of. Next, ask them to think of cars named after animals (e.g., Mustang, Ram, Beetle). Discuss why these names might have been chosen.

2. If students have completed the machine and animal imagery research, then have them use it to discuss the many references to machines and animals which they found in the novel. The Teacher Resource Page in Lesson 2 may be helpful.

3. Distribute *Handout 23*, and read the information with the class. Then have small groups answer the questions.

**Suggested Responses**

1. The people are reduced to animal level by the banks and owners; the people are close to nature, one with the land they farmed.

2. Pets include Tom’s turtle, the deserted cat in chapter 2, the dogs left behind, and the pet dog that is taken along and killed when run over by a passing car.

3. Some become wild; some are killed. The turtle begins a trek southwest.
4. Buzzards most often portend death. The rattlesnake is also a threat since it is poisonous.

5. The truck continues to break down or have problems; its condition is, at best, precarious. Eventually, it is completely stopped—as are the Joads.

6. John Steinbeck knew that life would be easier if farmers had access to tractors. The problem was that they had no money, had to sell what little machinery they had for food, and could not compete with farmers who did own machines.

7. Machines are good and should be shared.

8. Answers will vary. Your preliminary discussion may have touched upon this topic, but if not, students will have to reflect from their own experience to answer the question.
Putting the Pieces Together

**Directions:** Read the information, and answer the questions.

Animals and machines are important motifs in *The Grapes of Wrath* at both literal and symbolic levels. They unify the novel, help us to understand characters, and point out major themes in the work. Turtles, tractors, cats, and cars appear in the early chapters, but animal similes abound throughout the book. Muley is compared to a weasel, Al to a rooster. The roads to California are full of migrants who are described as insects.

John Steinbeck’s use of machine imagery is more complex. There are tractors and trucks; used car lots appear throughout the novel. Mechanization has driven out the team and wagon farmers of Oklahoma. In the novel, it is not machines that are evil, but the system that allows only the wealthy to own the tractors. When Steinbeck combines the machine and animal imagery, we get the monster image.

1. Why might Steinbeck have used so many references to animals in describing his characters?

2. Another way that Steinbeck uses animal imagery is through the inclusion of pets early in the story. How many pets (or animals destined to become pets) do you remember?

3. What happened to these animals?
4. Animals are sometimes used as omens in the story. What might the buzzard in chapter 16 signify? What is the significance of the rattlesnake that Tom kills as they prepare to enter California?

5. In what ways does the Joads’ truck reflect their sad situation?

6. Do you think Steinbeck is saying that America should have abandoned machines and technology to preserve the family-owned farms with a team of horses?

7. From all you have studied of these image patterns, what seems to be Steinbeck’s attitude toward the machine?

8. Is living in a technological world still problematic for us? Explain your answer.
Lesson 10
“The Education of the Heart”: A Way of Understanding the Novel as a Whole

Objectives
- To see the link between the novel’s beginning and its end
- To examine the values inherent in John Steinbeck’s novel
- To project the Joads’ future in light of what is known from the story

Notes to the Teacher
This final lesson is designed to pull together the entire unit by exploring a central motif in the novel: the Joads’ education of the heart. If students have been completing successive handouts in this unit, this lesson should provide a way of understanding the novel as a whole. In addition, the final handout—with its inherent question, “What next?”—allows students to discuss the future of the Joads and their neighbors in pre–World War II California, once again linking history with literature.

Procedure
1. Show students a few of the connecting links between the novel’s beginning and end. Read aloud the passages in chapters 1 and 29 that describe the women watching the men. Discuss the similarities; then contrast the Okies’ praying for an end to the drought (chapter 2) with the downpour and flood in chapters 29 and 30. Show that in both cases, nature is cruel to the migrants and that chapter 29 is a premonition of the bleakness of the last chapter.
2. Having discussed the grim reality facing the novel’s main characters, open discussion to Rose of Sharon’s action, and determine whether any students see in this symbolic offering a hope for humanity.
3. Distribute Handout 24, and use it for discussion.

Suggested Responses
1. Students usually report initial shock or surprise, followed by insight.
2. Numerous responses are relevant. Pa, for example, finally springs into action after the flood. Ruthie gives a flower to Winfield. Tom decides to take up Casy’s cause.
4. Distribute **Handout 25**, and have students discuss the future for the Joads. This handout provides an opportunity to emphasize the humane ending and to link the novel to actual historical events.

**Suggested Responses**

1. Steinbeck’s purpose was to have the readers see that even when the Joads had nothing, life and suffering taught them to share what little they had.

2. Answers will vary, but you may expect suggestions that some Joads will be dead, Tom will be in prison or killed, Al and Aggie will be married, and he will have a job in the garage, etc.

3. The war took some of the men in the draft. Aircraft plants employed men and women, creating a need for an employment of the destitute migrants. Most stayed in California, and the war, ironicaly, brought an end to their desperation.

4. Probably.
That Controversial Ending

**Directions:** Read the information, and answer the questions.

Nothing in *The Grapes of Wrath* so outraged its first readers as the scene in chapter 30 in which Rose of Sharon offers her breast to save the dying man from starvation. Even highly respected and influential critics saw the scene as offensive and crass. Readers even today often feel a kind of shock at the incident.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the ending is exactly right, that it reflects the maturation that Rose of Sharon has experienced through all of her hardships. So often in the early chapters she appears as a whining, selfish, immature girl. Her act at the novel’s end has nothing to do with sexuality. It involves giving what one has to save a life.

She is not the only one who changes in the course of the novel. By the end, the main characters have all undergone an education of the heart. The suffering has both changed and redeemed them.

1. Describe your response to the novel’s conclusion.

2. Can you identify events in the novel which help to change the hearts of the characters?
Chapter 31: The Future of the Joads

Directions: Read the information, and reflect on the Joads’ life after the conclusion of the novel.

Even if we believe that the characters experience a change of heart at the novel’s end, their future is still rather bleak. Casy is dead. Tom runs the same risk by taking up his cause. Al has stayed behind in the flooded boxcar with Aggie and the Wainrights—but they have no work or food. Ma and Pa Joad, Uncle John, Rose of Sharon, Ruthie, and Winfield take shelter in a barn, where they come across the dying man and his son. They have no food, no money, no car, no hope of immediate employment. The rains continue.

1. Why does John Steinbeck end the novel with Rose of Sharon’s feeding the dying man and not emphasize their plight?

2. If you had a crystal ball and could see into the future, what would your chapter 31 contain?

3. What did happen to the Joads (and their neighbors) in California after 1939?

4. Could Steinbeck have wanted his readers to be moved to write an alternative ending? If yes, what would it be?
A Word about the Film

Because the novel's film version is easily available for purchase or rental, teachers who opt to show it in class should be aware of some facts about the production. The picture lost out to *Rebecca* for the Best Picture Award of 1940, but John Ford and Jane Darwell won as best director and actress, respectively. For its time, the realism and political tenor of the film were revolutionary.

Viewed many decades later, however, the film seems more a period piece than the critical success of an earlier era. The black-and-white documentary quality remains. Some of the scenes linger in memory, especially the overloaded truck, the Oklahoma house demolishing, and the farewell of Ma and Tom. Censorship barred almost all of the objectionable language from the film, and the acting, in general, far surpassed much of what we see today.

The real problem with the film version is that at many levels it isn't the same story—or, rather, it's another version of the same story. The Wilsons, the Wainwrights, and the religious fanatics are conspicuously absent. There is no symbolic turtle; in fact, there are almost no animal references. Uncle John, Ruthie, and Winfield are so nondescript as characters that the story would not have lost anything by their not being a part of the film. Ma's passion to keep her family together (which does remain in the film) is seriously undercut when Noah simply vanishes from the picture—and not a soul even wonders where he is!

The episode at Weedpatch, displaced from the novel version, is part of the upbeat ending of the film. Tom does not hide in a cave. Ruthie does not tell anyone that her brother killed two men. In fact, Rose of Sharon is still looking forward to the birth of a new generation at the picture's end. The sun is shining, and Ma gives her speech of chapter 20 that the family will go on forever.

The film is an American movie classic. None of these comments are designed to discourage you from viewing it. It is just such a radical shift in emphasis, tone, story line, and characterization that no teacher should make the assumption that the film will help students to understand the novel better. The best classroom use of the film is probably to show it after the novel has been studied and have students write about it.
Essay Topics

Directions: Choose one of the following topics, and use it as the basis of a well-written and thoroughly developed essay.

1. Is John Steinbeck fair to the California owners? Does he present them all as heartless, cruel, and exploitative of the poor? Can you find any people in the novel who try to be kind to the migrants who arrive penniless in California?

2. How are the turtle (in the opening chapters) and the Joads alike? Is there significance in the turtle’s getting across the road against all odds and heading southwest, dropping seeds as it moves along?

3. Give examples of how Steinbeck presents religion in this novel. Does he condemn organized religion throughout the novel in favor of a sort of personal mysticism, or does he make a distinction between genuine religious expression and self-righteous, hypocritical religious people?

4. Why is it fitting that Grampa and Granma never make it to California?

5. In what ways does this novel transcend the critical issues of the thirties and the Depression and speak to us in our day? Are there issues that are the same for us? Explain.

6. Why do Casy and Tom get involved in the strikes and helping people they don’t even know? Wouldn’t it have been smarter to continue minding their own business and taking care of themselves and their family? Can you think of others today who take up causes from which they could just as easily have walked away?

7. One of Steinbeck’s major concerns in this novel is that America was undergoing great change during this period. Is America still undergoing great change, or have we reached a point where change is in much smaller things? Give examples to support either position.
Objective Test: *The Grapes of Wrath*

**Part A.**

**Directions:** Choose the best answers.

1. As the novel opens, the farmers are facing
   a. summer drought.
   b. a major flood.
   c. a series of tornadoes.
   d. swarms of locusts.

2. Tom Joad returns home from
   a. the army.
   b. college.
   c. his job in the city.
   d. prison.

3. The turtle in the first intercalary chapter
   a. is run over by a truck and killed.
   b. is struck by a truck but survives.
   c. is submerged in a pond.
   d. is kept as a pet by a small boy.

4. On his way home, Tom Joad comes across
   a. his grandfather.
   b. an old girlfriend.
   c. a bank robber.
   d. a former preacher.

5. The main reason for evicting sharecroppers seems to be
   a. the owners’ desire to work the land themselves.
   b. economic factors beyond everyone’s control.
   c. the essential cruelty of the landowners.
   d. government orders.

6. When Tom Joad gets home, who tells him where to look for his family?
   a. Muley Graves
   b. Jim Casy
   c. Grampa
   d. no one
7. When Tom reaches his old home, the land is planted with
   a. cotton.
   b. corn.
   c. tobacco.
   d. soybeans.

8. Uncle John’s personality changed because of
   a. his experiences in World War I.
   b. the death of his wife.
   c. his bout with cancer.
   d. an attack by a bear.

9. Rough handling at birth may have caused damage to
   a. Noah.
   b. Al.
   c. Tom.
   d. Ruthie.

10. Rose of Sharon was pretty wild until
    a. Ma explained what happens to wild girls.
    b. she got married.
    c. she became pregnant.
    d. the family started to travel west.

11. Who is Connie Rivers?
    a. a man Tom knew in prison
    b. Tom’s old girlfriend
    c. Ma’s niece
    d. Rose of Sharon’s husband

12. Most of the migrants from Oklahoma travelled
    a. Route 10.
    b. Route 422.
    c. Route 90.
    d. Route 66.
13. The dog that the Joads take with them
   a. is run over by a car.
   b. runs away.
   c. has puppies.
   d. makes it all the way to California.

14. After a while, the Joads start to travel with a family named
   b. Simmons.
   c. Wilson.
   d. Kelly.

15. Grandpa dies from
   a. a burst appendix.
   b. a stroke.
   c. a heart attack.
   d. unknown causes.

16. Mae is
   a. a waitress.
   b. Al’s girlfriend.
   c. a nurse.
   d. the name the Joads give to their truck.

17. Noah decides to stay
   a. at one of the camps for migrants.
   b. by railroad tracks.
   c. by a river.
   d. in a cave in the mountains.

18. People along the way refer to migrants as
   a. Okies.
   b. mushrats.
   c. hillbillies.
   d. foreigners.
19. What is a Hooverville?
   a. a beat-up old car
   b. a peach orchard
   c. a vacuum cleaner
   d. a migrant camp

20. The first thing the Joads look for in California is
   a. work to earn money.
   b. a house on which to make a down payment.
   c. a church in which to pray and thank God.
   d. a doctor for Rose of Sharon.

21. The Weedpatch camp is
   a. full of crime and corruption.
   b. located near job opportunities.
   c. a decent place to live.
   d. run by escapees from prison.

22. For a while, the Joads work at picking
   a. apples.
   b. corn.
   c. oranges.
   d. peaches.

23. For a while, the Joads live in
   a. the basement of a church.
   b. a gypsy caravan.
   c. a discarded railroad car.
   d. an old, abandoned mine.

24. Al decides to marry a girl named
   a. Missy.
   b. Aggie.
   c. Sally.
   d. Becky.
25. Who is killed by the police?
   a. Pa Joad
   b. Uncle John
   c. Tom Joad
   d. Jim Casy

26. Who encourages Rose of Sharon to nurse the starving man?
   a. his son
   b. Ma Joad
   c. Tom
   d. no one

27. The time setting is
   a. the 1890s.
   b. the 1920s.
   c. the 1930s.
   d. the 1950s.

28. From the beginning, it is clear that Tom Joad is
   a. timid.
   b. religious.
   c. tough.
   d. greedy.

29. Everywhere they go, the Joads
   a. are outcasts.
   b. make friends.
   c. commit small crimes.
   d. become more self-confident.

30. The novel supports
   a. capitalism as an economic system.
   b. the importance of religious commitment.
   c. the need for a unionized workforce.
   d. the viability of the American Dream.
Part B.

Directions: Respond to each of the following questions as completely as possible. Be sure to include supportive textual evidence.

1. Describe the relationship of the intercalary chapters to the rest of the book, and explain what they add to the novel as a whole.

2. Select a significant character in the novel that you find interesting, and describe his or her main characteristics, including ways he or she does or does not change because of the events that occur.
Answer Key

Part A.

1. a 11. d 21. c
2. d 12. d 22. d
3. b 13. a 23. c
4. d 14. c 24. b
5. b 15. b 25. d
6. a 16. a 26. b
7. a 17. c 27. c
8. b 18. a 28. c
9. a 19. d 29. b
10. c 20. a 30. c

Part B.

1. Answers can vary widely but should include the idea that the intercalary chapters make it clear that the book is about many people, not just about the Joad family. The main characters are not included in the intercalary chapters. Instead, they show what is happening in the outside world of diners, car salesmen, turtles, and landowners.

2. Answers can and probably should vary widely. Students often select Ma Joad, Tom Joad, Rose of Sharon, or Jim Casy, but it can also be interesting to focus on Al, Connie, Ruthie, or one of the other more minor characters.
Bibliography


The Grapes of Wrath

Entire Unit

RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

RL.11-12.5 Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

RL.11-12.6 Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

RL.11-12.7 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

Source
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