

The Grapes of Wrath

by John Steinbeck, 1939

WORK AND AUTHOR

The Grapes of Wrath:

1. Published in 1939.
2. An American epic.
3. Responsible for significant social reforms in labor conditions.

John Steinbeck:

1. Accused of being a communist.
2. Considered an agitator.
3. Criticized for his so-called untrue reports on the conditions of migrant workers.
4. Steinbeck grew up among the small farms of California's Salinas Valley.
5. He wrote about the migrant workers as a reporter and as a fiction writer.

THEME AND CONTENTS

1. The theme is one of survival and renewal, symbolized by the turtle.
2. This book is about confused, desperate people, crushed by poverty and exploitation, who struggle to redefine their futures.
3. It is a story of a handful of people among the thousands who migrated from Oklahoma and the Midwest during the Depression when a prolonged drought destroyed their farms and ruined them financially and morally.
4. It is the story of the army of migrants, and all the dispossessed people they represent, marching toward an inevitable demand for justice and restitution.

MAIN CHARACTERS

1. Tom Joad, the central character, a social outcast.
2. The Joads, traveling in one truck, include:
 - a) Pa, confused and bitter.
 - b) Ma, taking motherhood to a unique art form.
 - c) Grandpa.
 - d) Uncle John, ridden with grief and guilt.
 - e) Noah.
 - f) Rosasharn, a sister.
 - g) Al, the mechanic.
 - h) Ruthie, a 12-year-old going on 25.
 - i) Winfield.
3. Casy, the book's philosopher.

STORY

1. Tom Joad returns to Oklahoma after prison to find his family leaving for California.
2. With 250,000 people, they exodus over Highway 66 where Grandpa and Grandma die along the way. The rest finally make it to California.
3. There they end up in a shantytown; then a government camp; in orchards picking peaches; as "strike breakers," where Tom kills a man

who struck Jim Casy with an ax handle.

4. The family faces flood waters and other trials and stress.
5. The books ends on a depressing note with few of the Joad's problems resolved.

LASTING IMPACT

The book has undying human appeal because it addresses timeless issues such as:

1. The loss of human dignity.
2. The little man vs. the big company.
3. The human vs. the machine.
4. Nature vs. mechanization.
5. Ineffectuality of the individual vs. the strength of the group.
6. Humanism and love of mankind.

Steinbeck equates land with dignity and self-esteem, and he contrasts these with cities, machines, and greedy corporations.

He writes of the oneness of all down-trodden, poor people.