

# ***The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (Published by Penguin Books)**

Approved for use in Advanced Placement Communication Arts III and Communication Arts III

## **Summary**

As the Depression settled in economically around the United States, the Dust Bowl affected the farmers in the Midwest. *The Grapes of Wrath* is the story of one family whose farm is lost. They hear wonderful things about the opportunities in California and decide to travel west to begin a new life. After their long journey, they arrive to find that life is not much better in California. They refuse to give up and stay together as a family as they fight to survive against all odds.

## **Connection to the Curriculum**

This Pulitzer Prize winning novel centers on the very foundations of human survival and relationships within a family group and within society. Steinbeck's portrayal of this family's struggles allows the reader to interact with the themes of injustice, stewardship and responsibility, and the role of government. These lasting themes will stimulate critical thinking questions about the role of each student and how he/she is able to relate to the characters. The characters and their interactions with each other and society are an integral part of experiencing this novel. The Joads are not a watered-down version of characterization as is sometimes found in less complex novels. These strong characters remain uneducated and coarse throughout the novel, but through this crudity the reader is able to see the true changes that take place in the characters and their motivations. Although the Joad family is fictional, the historical backdrop is tied very closely to true historic events. The melding of the fictional characters and the trials they experience with the reality of history make this novel an excellent source of examining how culture influences an author's work.

## **Standards**

### **Course Objectives (Benchmarks)**

**Reading:** 1.2- The students read fluently. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

**Literature:** 2.1-The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text.

**Writing:** 3.1- The students use writing as a tool for learning throughout the curriculum.

**Research:** 4.1- The students use effective research practices.

### **Possible Skills Taught (Indicators):**

#### **Reading:**

1.2.1- The student adjusts reading rate to support comprehension when reading narrative texts.

1.4.10- The student generates and responds logically to literal, inferential, evaluative, and critical thinking questions before, during, and after reading the text.

1.4.14- The student explains and analyses cause-effect relationships in narrative texts.

1.4.17- The student analyzes and evaluates how an author's style and use of literary devices work together to achieve his or her purpose for writing text.

#### **Literature:**

2.1.1- The student identifies and describes different types of characters and analyzes their development.

2.1.2- The student analyzes the historical, social, and cultural contextual aspects of the setting and its influence on characters and events in the story.

2.1.3- The student analyzes and evaluates how the author uses various plot elements to advance the plot and make connections between events.

2.1.4- The student recognizes how an author's beliefs are reflected in his work.

#### **Writing:**

3.1.1- The student uses the writing process in various formats to demonstrate knowledge of content areas,

#### **Research:**

4.1.3- The student researches (the Depression) and verifies the accuracy, relevance, and completeness of (Steinbeck's) information.

**A Note on the Text:** (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.) *The tragedy of the Depression on the Joad family makes this a somber novel. Steinbeck uses a series of inter-chapters to express his opinions of the society at the time, implying regret that the government is unable to help the family more. Steinbeck honestly reveals both the family and society using real situations, including some mild profanity and violence. Steinbeck also employs vivid imagery including allusions to both history and the Bible.*

## **AP Connections**

Steinbeck's syntax, imagery, word choice, and theme development allow careful examination of highly complex language structures. This novel has been referenced on the AP exam in the past.

## **Additional Unit Design Connections**

Coming soon:

To be completed during future curriculum development activities