

The Grapes of Wrath Study Guide

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck

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Plot Summary

In Oklahoma, Tom Joad, imprisoned for killing a man in a brawl, is paroled and reunited with Jim Casy, a former preacher who has given up preaching and decided sin is just stuff that people do. Tom and Casy return to the Joad's farm and find the family preparing to leave for California. They have lost their farm, and there are flyers promising endless work in the paradisiacal California. They cling to California—or their dreams of it—as the only way to recover their lost lives. So, soon the entire Joad family—Grampa, Granma, Ma, Pa, the children Noah, Tom, Al, Rose of Sharon (who is pregnant), Ruthie, and Winfield, Rose of Sharon's husband Connie, Casy, and their dog—sets out on their journey for California in a rickety truck that Al and Tom struggle to keep running.

As they travel along Highway 66, they meet Ivy and Sairy Wilson, a couple heading to California, and they travel together for a while until near the border of California, when Sairy gets too sick to travel. During this last leg of the journey, Granma gets sick and soon dies. The closer they get to California, the more they hear rumors that the Promised Land is no paradise: they hear the migrants are suppressed and forced to work for barely enough money to feed themselves. Grandpa dies of an aneurism.

When they finally arrive, the worst of the rumors prove true. They stay in a Hooverville, a collection of homeless migrants who have set up a camp. Their experience is miserable. Work is scarce, though Tom is able to find a small job. The sheriffs of California abuse the migrants and stir up a fight in the Hooverville. Tom interferes and attacks a sheriff, but Casy turns himself in and tells them he started the fight. The Joads leave the camp, and later that night the deputies return and burn it to the ground. From there, they travel to the federal government's Weedpatch Camp where migrants are allowed to care for themselves and where they prohibit any deputies from entering. There the Joads have a nice place to live, hot water, and are provided food in return for work. Troublemakers try to stir up a fight at one of the camp's dances so the deputies can enter, but Tom learns of the plot and helps thwart it. In the end, though, a month goes by and they can find almost no work so they leave the comfort of the camp.

They find a job picking fruit, and outside of the farm, Tom once again meets Casy who was let out of jail. Casy is leading a strike against the farm owners' inhumane, low wages, and he convinces Tom it is only through uniting against the farm owners that the migrants will survive. While Tom is there, several deputies arrive and attack Casy, hoping to end the strike by killing him. Casy is killed, but Tom retaliates and kills one of the deputies, so he is forced to go into hiding. The family leaves that camp and finds another job picking cotton. They live in a boxcar near the farm. Ruthie, the young Joad daughter, gets into a fight with another girl at the camp and reveals her brother has killed two men and is now hiding. Ma, in fear for Tom's safety, insists he go away, and he tells her he is going to follow in Casy's footsteps and try to unite the migrant workers.

The cotton is soon picked, and there is little other work to be found. Then, when things seem as bad as they can get, there comes an endless rain and a terrible flood



destroying all of the few remaining crops. While the rain pours, Rose of Sharon goes into labor but delivers a stillborn baby. Sick and cold, the Joads abandon their flooded truck and take shelter in a barn. There they find a starving father and his son. The father had for days been giving all of his food to his son, and he is now too ill to keep any solid food down. The novel closes with Rose of Sharon sending everyone out of the barn and suckling the starving man.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Chapter 1. In the plains of Oklahoma, plows dig into the ground. The last rains come and do not heal the damaged soil. Then the wind comes and stirs up the dust, stirs it up into a storm, and drowns the crops in its suffocating clouds. The dust covers everything; men, women, and children hide in their houses, cover their faces with handkerchiefs to keep the dust from their mouths and eyes. The crops are ruined. Wives watch their men to see if they will break in the face of their ruined livelihood; they know they themselves can survive only if their men remain whole. The men crouch in the dust of the ruined land, and they try to think.

Chapter 2. In the midst of this desolate land is a truck stop, where a truck-driver chats with the waitress. Outside, a man named Tom Joad, dressed in brand new, clean clothes, sits on the running board of the truck and smokes, waiting for the truck-driver. The driver and waitress make small talk, but soon the driver leaves and Tom asks for a lift. The driver is reluctant but eventually lets Tom ride along. The driver tells Joad about the croppers being pushed off their land. The driver notices things about Joad: his new clothes, the way he carries himself; the driver suspects Tom has been in prison. Tom confesses: he has been in prison the last four years for murder. But soon, Tom comes to his stop and gets out of the truck; the driver rolls off into the distance.

Analysis

The novel opens with a picture of the desolate Oklahoma land during the grim days of the Dust Bowl era. The barrenness and sterility of the land is vividly painted. Chapter 1 never names characters, and it speaks of men and women collectively and anonymously. Every other chapter of the novel narrates in a similar fashion; the narrator often remains withdrawn from his subjects in the odd chapters. The struggle for life against overwhelming odds is a universal one, and so it speaks of the common, universal man and woman, unnamed and undescribed. The author uses vivid, almost poetic, descriptions in the opening chapter such as, "In the gray sky a red sun appeared, a dim red circle that gave a little light, like dusk; and as that day advanced, the dusk slipped back toward darkness, and the wind cried and whimpered over the fallen corn."

In Chapter 2, the universal struggle is exchanged for the individual, and the narrator introduces Tom Joad. Through the entire novel, the epic journey of this one man and his family symbolically stands for the plight of thousands of men and women during the Dust Bowl. Everything in the second chapter becomes smaller than the epic scope of Chapter 1 (this is another trend: the chapters about Tom Joad and his family are often foreshadowed by the preceding expository chapters). In Chapter 2, the language becomes simpler and more mundane. It is full of ordinary dialog between characters.



The dialog and description carefully portray Tom Joad and lay the foundation for a unique, well-developed character. Chapter 1's broad strokes of life during the Dust Bowl are brought to life by the small details of Chapter 2.

Vocabulary

gullies, emulsion, rootlets, dissipate, perplexity, hobnailed, bemused, listless, chambray, scrunch



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3. Along the barren highway, a land turtle slowly crawls along. A stem of wild oat catches around his leg and is carried with him. The turtle struggles over the edge of the highway and makes his way across. A sedan swerves to miss the turtle and nearly skids off the road. Then a truck barrels along and hits the turtle: the front wheel clips its shell and spins it off the highway. The turtle slowly pulls itself upright and crawls off the road. The stem of oat falls from the turtle, and three of the seeds are pushed into the ground.

Chapter 4. Tom Joad watches the truck disappear, removes his shoes, and then begins to walk down a dirt road. Tom sees the turtle crawling through the dust and captures it in his coat. In the shade of a willow tree, Joad meets Jim Casy, an ex-preacher who baptized Tom when he was a little boy. They share a bottle of whiskey, and Jim Casy explains when he would give revival meetings, everyone would be overcome by the Holy Spirit, but afterward he couldn't help taking a girl out into the field and having sex with her. Casy admits to feeling guilt over this for a long time because he saw himself as the shepherd of those girls' souls. Eventually, Casy says, he decided it wasn't a sin: "Maybe it's just the way folks is." He also came to realize, he says, maybe religion has it wrong; maybe the Holy Spirit is just all the men and women who love each other.

Jim Casy asks Joad why he has been away from home, and Joad confides he killed a man in a knife fight and was locked up in the McAlester prison. He was sentenced to seven years but got out on parole in four. Joad tells Casy about life in prison and confesses sometimes he thinks prison is easier than freedom: he had food and a bed, and he didn't have to decide things for himself.

Tom Joad gets ready to continue on to his family's home, and Jim Casy asks to go along with him. Tom lets him come, and they leave together. Tom tells how his father dragged their house to their property. They reminisce about Tom's father and soon come to Joads' home. As soon as Tom sees his house, he knows something is wrong. Nobody is there.

Analysis

In Chapter 3, the narrative switches again and focuses on a land turtle. As it struggles to cross the highway, the turtle symbolizes the struggle of life to persist, even in a land that is dying. When he makes it across and pushes the oat seed into the ground, it is clear that life goes on even though it struggles.

In Chapter 4, the narrator returns again to Tom Joad and introduces another main character, Jim Casy, the former preacher. Jim Casy's initials—J.C.—obviously connect to Jesus Christ, in whom Casy no longer believes. This connection becomes even more



obvious later on in the novel. In this chapter, Casy alters the Christian ideas of holiness and love by limiting them to the earthly relationships between men and women. God is cut out of the picture: "I got the call to lead the people," Jim Casy says, "an' no place to lead 'em." The earthly pleasures for which he left the pulpit lose their negative moral value for Jim Casy and become "just stuff people do."

This declaration comes right along with Joad's confession of the murder that put him in prison, and his statement that he would do the same thing again if he had the chance. While Jim Casy becomes the preacher of the novel's morality, Tom Joad lives it out and is self-confident enough to do so.

Vocabulary

fetlocks, hem, anlage, threshed, tiddly-wink, parapet, scrawny, mussed, abnormally, negation, irrigation, protruding, bolls, freshet



Chapters 5-6

Summary

Chapter 5. Men come on behalf of the land-owners to speak with the tenants who work the barren land. Some of the owner-men are kind, some are angry at what they had to do, some cold. They are part of something bigger, a machine that works without feeling. The land is poor and growing poorer; the soil blows away and the dust ruins crops. The tenants had to borrow money, and now the banks own the land; they care only for profit, and the tenants cannot gain any. The tenants ask for more time, but the owner-men say the banks cannot give it.

The owner-men tell the tenants they must leave. One man with a big tractor can replace many families, and it will save the banks money. The tenants have to leave. The land belongs to the banks now. The owners say the bank is a monster; it does not care about men. The owner-men say they should go to California: people say there is always work there.

A tractor comes crawling over the land. The driver does not care about the land any more than the banks; he simply drives the machine. He cuts into the land, and the tractor drops seeds in its wake.

Chapter 6. Tom Joad and Jim Casy find the Joad's old home abandoned, and determine everyone in the neighborhood has left. While Tom and Jim try to sort out what happened, a man approaches the house. It is a man named Muley Graves who stayed behind when his family left for California. He wanders about the abandoned houses and fields like "a ol' graveyard ghos", he says. Muley tells Tom the Joads went off to their Uncle John's house as they prepare to leave for California. Then Muley tells them how the bank's company men have been evicting all the tenants from the land: many of them have left for California where jobs are promised in abundance.

The three of them share a meal of snared rabbits, and Muley talks about how connected he is to the land: it is full of memories and blood from his father and brothers. While they chat, a landlord spots their campfire and comes to search for them. The three hide in the fields and escape. Soon, after the landlords leave, they wander off to a cave Tom dug as a child, and there they sleep.

Analysis

In Chapter 5, the narrator pulls away from the Joads and speaks of countless unnamed families. Again, the anonymity of the narration ties the lives of the Joads into an entire class of tenant farmers who have lost their land. There is a sharp contrast between the community of farmers and the collective of owners: through the novel, the farmers synergize and become more than individuals; here, the owners and bankers are reduced to sub-human status and are referred to as the Monster. In the passages like



Chapter 5, Steinbeck often leaves dialogue without quotations marks around it, while in the chapters narrating the Joads he includes them. The dialogue in these chapters also often lacks attribution to a certain character: Steinbeck does not always tell you who says what. This style sharply contrasts with the style in the chapters on the Joads, and it serves to blend all of the dialogue into itself and into the narration. Its effect is to break the artificial distinction between narrated action and dialogue that quotation marks create.

The narrator, in these early chapters, clearly sympathizes with the plight of the farmers and migrants who are being shoved off of their land. The novel remains unapologetic in this support throughout.

Vocabulary

tenant, cultivate, gulches, beseech, germinate, harrow, clod, phalli, gunny sack, truculent, peddler, gully, convulse



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Chapter 7. In a used car lot, the dealers plan how to swindle the hordes of departing people who are desperate for a vehicle. They know how badly migrants need vehicles so they sell vehicles with cracked batteries, torn tires, and engines full of sawdust for high prices. The farmers don't have any choice but to buy a car or they'll never get to California; the dealers gleefully rake in their money.

Chapter 8. Tom Joad and Jim Casy leave Muley and head towards Tom's Uncle John's farm. Tom tells Casy about his Uncle John, a widower who was never the same after his wife died. Tom finds his Pa in the bed of a truck and surprises him. They surprise his Ma, too, and they all celebrate Tom's return. Soon he is reunited with his Grampa and Granma and Tom's older brother, Noah—a quiet, introspective man.

They share breakfast, and Granma pesters Casy to say grace. He reluctantly does, but during his 'prayer' he ends up comparing his own wandering to Jesus', and then he says that real holiness is men working together to help one another. Tom's Pa tells him that the rest of the family (two sisters: Rose of Sharon and Ruthie; two brothers, Al and Winfield) are away in town. Rose of Sharon, whom they call Rosasharn, is married to a man named Connie and is pregnant. After breakfast, Al comes back to the house and greets Tom whom he reveres for killing a man and being his older brother.

Analysis

Many of the novel's characters are described in chapter 8. The characterization of the Joad family is almost as caricatures, sometimes grotesque. For example, Tom's Grampa is an ornery old man, uncouth and vulgar. Tom's Granma is excessively and comically pious, demanding prayers with obscene commands. The narrator does not much further develop the psychological dimensions of these characters. They almost remain stereotypes and so, in effect, show with one family an entire class of people on an exodus. The family is characterized enough to give them some depth, but each family member also captures a kind of person, rather than just one unique individual. Tom's brother Al, for example, is a stereotype of the typical teenager of the period: he cares first and foremost about women and cars; at the same time, his care for his family and the deference he shows to Tom gives him depth and prevents him from being trapped by the stereotype. This gives the novel much of its epic dimension, as the Joad family encapsulates an entire class of people journeying across the American West.

Vocabulary

lithely, obligation, compression, prospect, valve, streamline, insubstantial, nuisance, heifer, meerschaum, incredulous, animosity, divert, sheathing, cantankerous, vicious



Chapters 9-10

Summary

Chapter 9. The tenant farmers collect their belongings they can't use anymore and haul them to town where they sell everything for a fraction of its worth. They sell tools and horses; everything anyone will buy. Keepsakes and memories are left behind. And they are leaving the land, but they had become part of the land. They frantically burn the last of the things that won't fit into the truck, and they drive off through the dust.

Chapter 10. Tom Joad and his Ma discuss the handbills that tell of prosperity in California, and they admit to doubt about the truth for the first time. Grampa comes in and waxes eloquently about the grapes and oranges he'll pick when the family gets to California. Then, Jim Casy comes in and asks to join them; Ma says the men will discuss it that evening. A bit later, the rest of the family returns from town and all greet Tom excitedly.

Soon, they sit down for a family meeting. They decide to allow Casy to join them. They also decide to load up the truck during the night and leave at first light. Ma prepares meat while the others load the truck. When morning comes, Grampa refuses to leave, but the others slip cough medicine into his coffee and carry him onto the truck after he passes out. They all pile into the truck and depart.

Analysis

As the Joads come near to leaving, the first shadows of doubt creep into the narration about whether or not California will live up to its promises. When Ma burns up a box of letters and newspaper clippings, she is destroying her entire family's history. In Chapter 9, the nameless tenants wonder, "How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past?"

In Chapter 10, despite Casy's insistence he is not a preacher anymore, the family demands he shepherd them. Grampa says "[o]nce a fella's a preacher, he's always a preacher." Not only does Casy retain a vital part of his history, but even though he has renounced God and Jesus Christ, he goes on filling the role of a preacher with his new brand of holiness, a holiness that some of the Joads are desperate for.

Vocabulary

lucent, halter, hames, tugs, browband, gelding, forelock, plait, frantically, implement, pilgrimage, cornet, inveterate, brooder, voluptuous, provocatively, complacent



Chapters 11-12

Summary

Chapter 11. The land is empty. Only the tractors move, and as soon as they are turned off, they are dead. The man who drives the tractor does not know the land, and he does not love it. After the farmers are gone, their houses lay open and bare. The cats and mice move in; weeds spring up from the planks on the porches.

Chapter 12. All the migrants to California take Highway 66. People flee across it, terrified they will break down between the sparse towns. The drivers listen for any odd sounds in their engines, and worry. A driver needs a tire, and a gas station attendant tries to sell a damaged one. 250,000 trudge along the road. Abandoned cars line the shoulder. One family, though, waited on the roadside until someone offered to pull them, and they were pulled all the way to California.

Analysis

Both of these chapters are removed from the Joads and described in the removed, omniscient narrative voice as are many earlier chapters. The Joads depart for California in the previous chapter, and now the narrator emphasizes the emptiness of the land, and the disconnect between the land and the tractors that now cut into it. The wild animals do reclaim the houses though, as the bankers and owners cannot.

Then, in Chapter 12, the narration turns to the journey and foreshadows what the Joads will have to face. The bitter selfishness and greed that marks the exchange between the gas station attendant and the travelling farmer is significant in its representation of the dangerous individualism that absorbs men. It is the same divisiveness that Jim Casy so adamantly preaches against. This is what caused the miserable situation in the first place, the narrator insists. Even so, the chapter ends with at least a hint of hope. The last sentence says, "The people in flight from the terror behind—strange things happen to them, some bitterly cruel and some so beautiful that the faith is refired forever."

Vocabulary

corrugated, vacant, contempt, debris, plateau, caravan, tappets, gasket, rutted, nitrates, analysis, element



Chapters 13-14

Summary

Chapter 13. The Joads stop at a gas station. While they are there, their dog wanders onto the highway and is run over. Tom drives for a while, and when the evening comes they see another car pulled over along the road and stop near it. They meet Ivy and Sairy Wilson who have broken down. The Joads begin to make camp, and Grampa gets sick suddenly. He lies down in the Wilson's tent and soon dies of a stroke. The family decides they cannot afford to report his death, so they bury him there. Then, the Joads and the Wilsons decide to travel together: the Joads can fix their car and share the weight of the loads. After dinner, the family finally gets to sleep.

Chapter 14. The spirit of man is to work, to build something. The farmers began to move west, one by one. One family meets another along the way, and each "I" and "mine" merge into "we" and "ours". It grows. A half-million people are moving, and there is change coming: millions wait nervously.

Analysis

Chapter 13 is a chapter of death and union. As they begin their journey, the Joads lose their dog and then their Grampa. They are pictures of the old life abandoned: Casy says that Grampa was the land, and the land was him—it was not possible for him to leave. And yet, in the wake of the deaths, the Joads are united with the Wilson's family, and that meeting and joining are highlighted in Chapter 14 as the beginning of a grand change. The single family on the journey becomes a community, united in loss and purpose.

In Chapter 13, Rose of Sharon worries for her baby: she fears that the shock of her grandfather's death will harm it. Her concerns for the new life she carries mirror her mother's concerns for the new land to which they are travelling. Her mother tells her that a baby born of sorrow will be happy, but this assurance proves false for both her child and California.

Vocabulary

chattering, recognition, conscious, zenith, bewilderment, confidences, derricks, furrow, pauper, disintegrate, zygote, stimulus



Chapters 15-16

Summary

Chapter 15. In a diner along route 66, Mae serves guests and Al cooks the food. The rich folk come in, and they do nothing but complain. The truck drivers, though, if Mae treats them right, will always come back. One comes in, and Mae serves them coffee and pie. While the truckers eat, a family of poor farmers heading west pulls up to the gas pump and asks to buy a loaf of bread. Mae doesn't want to sell their sandwich bread, but Al convinces her to. The farmer's two sons stare in awe at a candy machine, and Mae sells them nickel candy for a penny. The truckers leave Mae a large tip and drive off.

Chapter 16. The Joads and the Wilsons cross the panhandle of Texas into New Mexico. Rose of Sharon and Ma discuss the new land, but Ma suddenly seems to realize it is all an illusion. The Wilson's car begins to rattle, and Al and Tom discover a rod needs to be replaced. Tom wants the others to go on ahead while he and Casy stay to fix the Wilson's car, but Ma refuses to go: she says the family unbroken is worth far more than any advantage gained by leaving. While Tom works on the car, Casy waxes about the hundreds of families heading west without any idea of what waits for them there.

Tom and Al take the car to a wrecking yard where they try to collect parts. The attendant is a one-eyed man who decides he wants to head west. They buy the part they need and then meet up with Casy. Tom replaces the damaged part, the car works, and catch up to the rest of the family. A man at the camp says he is coming back from California; he tells them the owners in California find starving migrants and pay them next to nothing when they are desperate for work.

Analysis

In contrast to the struggles depicted in the previous chapters, Chapter 15 exemplifies the unity the narrator hails in Chapter 14. The struggle to survive is punctuated by Mae's charity toward the migrating family. This fellow-feeling is paralleled in the next chapter by the woman's offer to give Tom beans. As the novel progresses, the necessity for men and women to support each other becomes more and more central.

The narrator in Chapter 16 once again emphasizes Rose of Sharon's total devotion to their unborn child. Every facet of her life currently revolves around care and concern for the child she carries. Yet while the Rose of Sharon focuses entirely on the future, Ma absolutely opposes the idea of splitting up the family even to save that future: for Ma, the family unbroken in the present is far more important than whatever might happen. She insists sticking together unbroken is far more valuable than earning a little more money by getting to California sooner.



In Chapter 16, Steinbeck reinforces the novel's connection to old epic by Tom's encounter with the one-eyed man, a reincarnation of the cyclops of Homer's and Virgil's classic epics. The cyclops is transformed from a Homeric cannibal to Steinbeck's pathetic, lonely man who cannot integrate with society because of his missing eye. The transformation is significant: Steinbeck emphasizes the equality of man and insists unity among men will heal man's wounds. A Homeric monster would disrupt this idea if it were naturally antagonistic to men.

Vocabulary

mica, quoit, accouterment, satirically, dungarees, tarpaulin, phonograph, sulphate, griddle, nuisance, lapel, turntable, insistent, humility, elaborate, shamble, angular, proprietor



Chapters 17-18

Summary

Chapter 17. The migrants all travel west. They camp, and one family joins another and another and another; soon, there are dozens of them, together. And they create a world with law and order. They respect one another and share each other's troubles. They talk of times gone and times to come. When day comes, they travel West again.

Chapter 18. The Joads cross through Arizona and over into California at the edge of the desert. They rest at the Colorado River. A father and son returning to the Panhandle warn them there is no land to have in California, jobs are not to be found. The Joads go on anyway. Noah, Tom's oldest brother, decides to stay along the river; he tells Tom their parents try to be kind to him, but cannot really care because he is odd. He wanders off while the family sleeps. A cop comes to their camp and threatens to run them off if they are there the next day; Californians don't want any "Okies", he says. They wait till the late afternoon to leave. The Wilsons have to stay behind: Mrs. Wilson is sick and won't make it across the desert. The Joads drive through the night. When the dawn comes, they see mountains and orchards sprawled across the landscape. Ma tells Tom that Granma died during the night. They drive on.

Analysis

These two chapters thematically mirror and contrast one another. Chapter 17 makes it clear the survival of the migrants is dependent on their ability to unify and support each other along the way; Chapter 18 dramatically twists this as the family begins to dissolve. Noah leaves, Granma dies, and they separate from the Wilsons. Their dreams of a paradise at the end of their journey begin to fade and the miserable reality of their plight begins to sink in. The tension created between these two chapters will continue through the second half of the novel.

In light of their suffering, Ma takes even more charge of the family and grows stronger. She lay next to her own mother's body all through the night so that the family would not have to stop. The strength and ability to lead the family she has shown throughout the novel becomes tangible and clear here as the family is tested. Pa proves himself too weak to keep the family together and moving, and he is too weak to hold onto his position as Ma slowly usurps it.

Vocabulary

scuttle, pioneer, ostracism, yearning, apprehended, listlessly, jowls, exhortation, hysteria, cindery, illuminate, flailing, cascade, heliograph



Chapters 19-20

Summary

Chapter 19. In California, the Americans came and took the land. They inhabited it and relished it. They built farms, more and bigger. But the farmers grew too much, and they grew separated from the land. They grew so large they hired others to work the land, and the small farms were absorbed into the larger. Then the migrants came, and the farm owners hate them because the migrants were strong. There are too many though, and they want the land that is not being used. If they could only feed their families, it would be enough. The migrants gather in Hooverilles, but the Californians don't want them. The owners of the land grow frightened because they know what 300,000 migrants can do if they join together. A child dies, and the family cannot pay to have him buried, but the other migrants give what they can to help one another.

Chapter 20. The Joads find a Hooverville camp near Bakersfield, and they set up there. A young man tells Tom everyone struggles to find work: hundreds want every job so the employers can pay as little as they want. If anyone opposes the meager wages, they are blacklisted and prevented from working at all. Connie and Rose of Sharon worry, and Connie begins to doubt he'll ever be able to earn money. Ma cooks up a stew for the family, and she is crowded by a handful of children all hoping for a bit. Tom and Al meet a man named Floyd Knowles who says there might be work up north. While they talk, a man comes to the camp and says he has work; when Floyd doubts his word, the man calls out a sheriff and tries to have Floyd arrested. The deputy sheriff draws his gun, but Tom trips him and Casy knocks him unconscious. Tom runs, knowing if he is caught after breaking parole he'll be sent back to Oklahoma. When more deputies arrive, Casy tells them that he started the fight himself, and he is arrested. Tom sneaks back into camp, but they are warned the deputy will be back during the night to burn the camp. Connie, Rose of Sharon's husband, deserts the Joads and his wife. They cannot wait or look for him, so they load up the truck and head south to find a rumored government camp.

Analysis

Chapter 19 continues the novel's series of historical and social criticisms. The narrator presents the history of California as a conflict between the rich landowners and the poor farmers parallels the plight of the migrant's in the novel's present. This chapter also acts as a prologue to the next chapter in which the Joads first enter the Hooverilles.

Chapter 19 portrays the Hooverilles in a historical tone, demonstrating the wide-spread nature of such camps, and the universal misery the migrants suffer; then, when Chapter 20 shows the Joads in such a plight, their suffering takes on significance for all the hundreds of thousands of migrants.



Chapter 20 is a critical turning point in the themes and actions of the novel. In it, many of the tensions come to a head. Ma must scrounge together a meal for her family, but her dedication to her own family is tested by the crowd of starving children who beg for food. Up to this point, Ma furiously tries to keep her family together and alive, and here this desire is held up against the needs of all the other poor who suffer just as they do. In the end, she does what little she can to help the children, but her primary responsibility remains to her family.

The same sort of tension is played out with Tom and Casy. Knowels rants about the unfair labor practices in California, and his words stir both Tom and Casy to act to unite the migrants, just as Ma tries to unite her family. After the fight with the deputy, Casy sacrifices himself for Tom, re-solidifying his role as a Christ-like-figure.

Rose of Sharon also reaches a breaking point in her tension between the idealized dreams of comfortable life and the reality of the poor migrants' plight. When Connie abandons her, she is forced to recognize (though it takes her a little while) that her idealized fancies will not be realized, and she must harden herself against the miserable situation. Through this, she begins to mature.

Vocabulary

sardonically, squatter, principal, serf, penitent, battery, dispossess, accumulation, nebulous, goad, thatch, rotgut, slovenly, burlap, belligerently, tawny, puttering



Chapters 21-22

Summary

Chapter 21. The migrants had not known the fury of industrialization. Then they are shoved onto the highways and they see the world changed. The men in California grow afraid, harden themselves, and prepare to defend their property from the "Okies". The companies see their chance: they force prices up and pay next to nothing for labor. Smaller farms break and are abandoned. They beat down the migrants, and the migrants begin to grow angry.

Chapter 22. The Joads drive to a fenced government camp that polices itself and does not allow any deputies in. They have hot water and a place to stay. A father and son at the camp invite Tom to go work with them digging a pipeline. There, their boss tells them the banks are forcing him to lower his wages to 25 cents an hour. He also warns Tom agitators intend to start a fight at the government camp so deputies can go in and arrest the migrants. In the camp, a committee of ladies is going to come and talk to Ma, so Ma cleans up the camp and forces everyone to wash up. The camp manager comes by and warmly welcomes the Joads. Then the committee of ladies comes and shows Ma around the camp. Pa, Uncle John, and Al drive around looking for work, but they cannot find any.

Analysis

Chapter 21 mirrors the historical commentary of Chapter 19, and it prepares for the Weedpatch government camp the Joads join in the next few chapters. The migrants begin to grow angry, and the government camp in Chapter 22 acts as a demonstration that the migrants and mankind in general can survive only if they join together and support one another. The anger that first begins to appear in this chapter will grow and deepen throughout the rest of the novel.

The Weedpatch camp disproves the claims the Okies are only filthy, stupid men. The camp is clean and well-kept; it is civilized in the midst of all the misery of the Hoovervilles. The camp the Joads enter in Chapter 22 reinforces some of Steinbeck's most important themes, especially the importance of union and brotherhood. The migrants in the camp show each other and the Joads a kindness and concern that heals many of the wounds caused by their disillusionment after arriving in California. That the migrants are able to support one another and act civilized belies the accusations of the Californians who base much of their harsh treatment on their belief that the "Okies" are somehow less than human.

Vocabulary

frawny, rachitic, postules, pellagra, blacklists, agrarian, prosperity, degenerate, windfall, ferment, ravenous, destitute, beckon, agitation, apprehensive, scandalous, sanitary



Chapters 23-24

Summary

Chapter 23. The migrants entertain themselves. They tell stories to one another of wars fought, of the wealthy. They do whatever it takes to distract them. They can get drunk. They play music: harmonicas, guitars, fiddles. When the music starts, the migrants dance and are merry. And they seek God: preachers hold revivals and baptise the migrants who will listen. They all struggle to get by.

Chapter 24. In the government camp, everyone prepares for the dance to be held that night. They know men are going to try to start a fight so the cops can call it a riot and enter the camp, and so the camp men prepare to stop them. The Joads get ready for the dance: Tom will help watch for troublemakers, Rose of Sharon only wants to sit on the sidelines, and Al goes to look for girls. Rose of Sharon fears men will make advances at her if she attends the dance, but Ma comforts her, and they go after all.

After the dance begins, three unknown men enter the camp and try to start a fight during a jig. The camp men grab them before trouble breaks out, and the deputy sheriffs cannot come into the camp. The camp men toss the three out of the camp, and the dance goes on without any trouble.

Analysis

Both of these chapters continue to reinforce the picture of the migrant community, a community that is strong because it is made of men and women who are determined to care for one another. Even in the face of starvation and opposition by antagonistic owners, the migrants live as human beings.

Chapter 24 shows this community more personally by focusing in on the lives of the Joads and the community dance held every weekend in the Weedpatch camp. The Joads are now able to concern themselves with society and worry about more than mere survival. Though a community dance seems anticlimactic after their struggle to arrive in California, the dance stands for the united community's ability to form a civilized entity.

Tom demonstrates an important shift in his character during this chapter. As the struggles of the migrants become more obvious to him, he begins to concern himself with his people and their future. When he learns (in Chapter 22) that agitators intend to stir up trouble, Tom works to unite the migrants to defend his community. He begins to concern himself with his people as a whole, and in doing so he begins to live out the morals Casy has preached from the beginning of the novel.

Vocabulary

sycamore, regiment, reformer, mellow, haycock, grovel, requisition, vagrancy, gingham, vacant, nonchalantly, recede



Chapters 25-26

Summary

Chapter 25. Spring comes to California. Scientists work to make the crops and fruits grow healthy and in great numbers. Fruit swells on their limbs and it is sweet. But the owners calculate, and the prices are low so they cannot pay men to pick their fruit and still make any profit on it. So they let the grapes and the peaches and prunes and plums fall to the ground and rot. The little farmers make no money and slip into debt; only the giant owners can survive. They destroy their crops to keep up the price. The starving migrants gather to collect the rotting fruit, but the owners cannot allow that so they pour kerosene over the fruit. The migrants go hungry, and a great anger begins to ripen.

Chapter 26. A month has passed, and the Joads have not found any work. Ma insists they leave the camp to find work, and the others are forced to give in to her. The Joads bid their friends in the camp farewell and prepare to leave. Al has to fix a flat tire on their truck, and while he works on it a man greets them and tells them that there are peaches to be picked on the Hooper ranch to the north. They make it up to the ranch later that day, and at the entrance of the ranch they see a blockade of deputy sheriffs and a crowd of picketers. The family immediately gets to work. At the end of the day, they have earned only a dollar, but it is enough to buy themselves a meal. Tom sneaks into the picketers' camp and finds Jim Casy in charge of the group which had gone on strike after their wages were dropped to 2 ½ cents.

Casy has come to believe it is need that makes men bad, and the ranch owners keep people needy by making them work for almost nothing. Casy says if their strike is broken up, the ranchers will drop the Joads' pay to 2 ½ cents too. As they talk, two men come into their camp with picks and one bludgeons Casy's head with the pick handle. Tom grabs the pick and kills the man before his face is struck and his nose broken. Tom sneaks back into his family's camp and sleeps the night. In the morning, Tom tells them what happened: he wants to leave to keep them out of trouble. His Ma insists that he stay, and the whole family decides to leave the ranch. They find a job as cotton pickers. Tom hides along a creek near their camp, and Ma puts food in a culvert for him.

Analysis

Chapter 25 uses highly poetic and biblical language to depict evocatively the wastefulness of the large farm owners. This chapter dramatically shifts from the relative peace of the previous few chapters and, by doing so, foreshadows the further sufferings in the following chapters. This chapter is also the narrator's most poignant portrayal of the migrant workers' wrath in the face of a corrupt economic system symbolized by the decaying crops. He describes the migrants' anger in the terms of crops, and it is from this that the novel derives its title.



In Chapter 26, that wrath is exemplified by Casy's murder and Tom's vengeance on his killer. It is made explicit the conflict between migrants and farm owners is one of life and death. Tom proves he is strong enough to fight in the battle. By immediately following the narrator's discussion of the "grapes of wrath", it is clear when Tom kills Casy's murderer, his action symbolically exemplifies the ripened wrath of an entire people. Casy's status as a Christ-figure lends symbolic weight to his death, and it also acts as a catalyst to force Tom into greater actions on behalf of the migrant people.

In this chapter, the reader also sees the final solidification of Ma's leadership over her family. At the beginning of the chapter, it is she who insists the family must leave the comfort of the Weedpatch camp. Though Pa tries to protest it is his job to make decisions for the family, Ma proves the stronger: she is able to lead where Pa proves himself weak.

Vocabulary

putrescence, denunciation, pall, spindly, quarantine, fertile, grafting, tannic acid, putrefying, bevel, solemn, coupés, hooligan, docile, hankering, twittering, thresh



Chapters 27-28

Summary

Chapter 27. Signs asking for cotton pickers are everywhere. The owners sell bags for a dollar, but most workers never work enough to pay for their own bag. Too many need work, and there isn't enough for one man to earn much. The owners rig the scales to cheat the workers, and the workers fill their bags with stones. The cotton will disappear quickly.

Chapter 28. At the cotton picking camp, the Joads stay in a boxcar that they share with another family, the Wainwrights. They are earning a little money, and Ma treats Ruthie and Winfield to Cracker Jack. Another kid in the camp tries to take Ruthie's Cracker Jack, and Ruthie threatens to sic Tom on her, and Ruthie tells Tom is in hiding because he killed a man. Ma gets scared and goes out along the creek to Tom and tells him he ought to leave. Tom tells his Ma he has been thinking about some of Casy's ideas, that everyone's soul is just a little piece of one great big soul. Tom decides he will go and try to unite the migrants against the owners as Casy did.

As Ma goes back to camp, a man tells her of some cotton picking work a bit north. The Joads decide they will take the work. The Wainwrights come to Ma and Pa Joad and tell them they've been worried because Al and their daughter have been wandering off every night, and they fear their daughter, Aggie, is going to get pregnant. Later, Al tells them that he and Aggie are going to get married. The families celebrate.

The next day, the Joads and Wainwrights drive up north to the job, but there are so many workers that the cotton is picked by noon, and they earn little money. Rose of Sharon goes along and comes down with a chill. They return to the camp crestfallen, and they huddle around a fire as it begins to rain.

Analysis

The expository narration in Chapter 27 is a dramatic shift from that of Chapter 25. The narrator changes from poetic, biblical language to the earthy, simple language of the migrant workers picking a field of cotton. This chapter is one of the best in the novel at economically capturing a glimpse of everyday life for the workers.

In Chapter 28, Tom is forced to leave his family, but this gives him the opportunity to completely devote himself to the cause of the migrants. Under the weight of oppression, Casy's message sinks deeply into Tom, and he takes up the work Casy started. His departure hints at hope for the migrants, but it is also a wound on the Joad family as Tom was vital in supporting them. By the end of the chapter, they struggle to survive as the rain begins to fall.



Vocabulary

inquisitive, snick, cultivated, occupant, aristocrats, brooding, stout, hurtle, grubby, cynical, effluvium, thicket, patina, eddy, lusterless



Chapters 29-30

Summary

Chapter 29. Rain comes to California, and it rains for days. The lakes and rivers rise and spill over into the fields. The highways are flooded. The migrants huddle in their camps and wait while their cars are ruined by the flood. Sickness soon follows. The migrants turn to stealing; the townspeople become afraid. The crops are ruined and there will be no more work. The women watch their men again, watch to see if they will break. But the men's fear and despair turns to anger, and the women know they will remain whole as long as they can be angry.

Chapter 30. The rain pours on. Rose of Sharon, sick and weak, goes into labor. The Joads are unable to leave their flooding camp, so Pa gathers some other men and builds an embankment to stem the rising water. The men work through the night, but a tree is broken loose by the floodwaters and crashes into their bank, and the water pours through into the camp. It floods their truck and ruins the motor. Mrs. Wainwright tells Pa Joad Rose of Sharon's baby was stillborn. Pa has Uncle John take the baby to bury it; instead, he wanders away and places a crate holding the baby in the stream, and it is carried away.

Pa uses the last of the family's money to buy a meal, and they all eat huddled together on a platform above the water in their boxcar. The rain slows, and Ma forces the family to leave their boxcar and find higher ground. They wander down the highway and, just as it begins to rain again, they find an abandoned barn that they enter. In the corner are a boy and his father who is dying of starvation. The man had given all their food to his son and was too sick to keep solid food down. Ma and Rose of Sharon share a look, and then Ma makes everyone else leave the barn. Rose of Sharon then sits next to the starving man and bares her breast. He feebly tries to protest but soon gives in and is suckled by the girl. As he feeds, she smiles mysteriously.

Analysis

The concluding chapters of this novel come swiftly and leave a profound impression. With these chapters come a flood of biblical proportions that ruins any hope of further work for the migrants. At the same time, both of these chapters end with a note of hope. In Chapter 29, Steinbeck uses the idea of rain as a healer and source of life: the chapter ends with fresh, green leaves peeping through the soil.

In Chapter 30, the negative aspects of the flood are mirrored by Rose of Sharon's stillborn child. As the flood comes, the men of the camp struggle in vain to slow the rising waters, but the flood is too great for them. But, counter to this, the novel's close also gives hope in Uncle John's sending off of the dead baby, and in Rose of Sharon's suckling of the starving man. Steinbeck borrows the image of the baby sent downstream



in a basket from the biblical narrative of Moses who rescues his people from slavery. Uncle John sends the baby's corpse down the waters, telling the baby to spread word of the migrants' suffering by its death. The very final picture of the novel is also a hopeful one: after her child's death and while she faces starvation, Rose of Sharon is able to completely break from her self-absorbed attitude earlier in the Joads' journey and feed the starving father in the most intimate manner possible.

Vocabulary

crag, freshets, churning, engulf, sodden, cringe, relentless, precinct, perspiration, paring, range, utensils, levee, interlace, frenzy, intermittent, squalls, billow, cultivator, scraggly



Characters

Tom Joad

Tom is the principle protagonist of the novel, and he lives out its message. Early on in the work, he is firstly concerned with being with his family, and he refuses to focus on the future. As the novel progresses, Tom begins to be concerned with the sufferings of the migrants, and, spurred on by Casy, he looks forward to a future where his people no longer suffer. Tom absorbs the message Casy preaches, and his character is strong enough to act it out. He is angry when it is right, and he is calm when it is necessary. Where lesser men would hesitate, Tom acts to defend his people. When he is forced to leave his family, he explicitly decides to follow Casy's message and unite the migrant workers against the oppressive owners in California.

Jim Casy

Jim Casy is a former preacher who joins Tom and the Joad family early on in the novel. He has given up preaching Christianity, but he can't help but continue to try to help people through his words. As the novel progresses, Casy becomes the voice of union for the migrants. He lets himself be arrested for Tom, and then leads a strike in protest of the low wages. His words and actions embody the most important message of the novel, that men only have strength when they are united.

His morality is distinct from the old Christian one he used to espouse. Casy struggled with lust for a long time while a priest, and then came to believe that it was not sin: sin, he decided, was just stuff people did. His message rejects the transcendent and the absolutely moral for an earthy message of brotherhood and community.

Al Joad

Al is a stereotypical teenage boy. He could never manage the leading roles Tom and Ma take up because he only sustains an interest in cars and girls. At the beginning of the novel, his interests seem trite and unimportant, but as the novel progresses, Al's love and skill with cars becomes pivotal to the family's survival. In Chapter 28, his infatuation with girls transforms into what appears to be an adult pursuit of commitment as Al decides to marry Aggie Wainwright. At the opening of the novel, Al worships his big brother Tom and places him on a pedestal. Throughout the novel, he comes to know Tom as just another man and his hero-worship fades to a normal respect.

Rose of Sharon

Rose of Sharon, often called Roseasharn, is the teenaged wife of Connie. As the novel progresses, she develops from a petulant, high-spirited girl into a woman of seriousness



and maturity who is able to push passed her grief and care for a starving man. Her pregnancy, and her dreams of her child's future, are one of the most important symbols of the new life the Joads and the Migrants hope to find in California. Giving birth to a stillborn child marks the lowest valley of the family's suffering.

Ma Joad

Ma is the strong-willed, stubborn matriarch of the Joad family. Early on in the novel, as the family starts on their journey, Ma begins to take charge of the family and usurp her husband's traditional role. When Pa and all others hesitate to act, Ma is willing to do what needs to be done so her family will survive. She repeatedly insists the family stay together in the face of all their suffering and all the death they experience. Ma exemplifies an ideal of determination in the face of misery and loss. She quietly lies next to her own mother's corpse while the family crosses the desert because she knows that they must keep going no matter what. This quiet determination allows her to hold the family together even when there seems to be no hope.

Pa Joad

Pa is a kind, strong man who, in the early chapters of the novel, leads his family wisely and cautiously. He takes charge as the family plans their trip to California, but when trouble arises, his ability to lead falters. As troubles come, and as he proves unable to find work in California, he succumbs to despair and confusion. Though he repeatedly displays attempts to protect and care for his family, his efforts eventually fail and nearly break Pa. Near the end of the novel, while Rose of Sharon is giving birth, Pa works tirelessly to build up an embankment to stop the floodwaters; in the end, though, things outside his control destroy it and leave him shattered. In Chapters 1 and 29, the narrator tells how the men watch their women to see if they will break: in Pa's case, that break comes, and it is up to Ma to lead the family.



Objects/Places

The Bank

The banks that own much of the land evict many of the farmers who are then forced to migrate. The banks become an entity outside of man's control and they are referred to collectively as the Monster.

The Truck

Early on, Al buys and fixes an old jalopy for the family. They carry all of their belongings and their entire family across the country to California in this overloaded truck.

Hooverilles

Hooverilles are camps for the homeless migrant workers. The Joads stay in these camps several times. They are filthy, squalid places. Deputies repeatedly burn down Hooverilles, supposedly in response to "red" (socialist) agitators.

California

California seems to be a Promised Land full of work and beautiful country. The reality is much harsher, and the Joads struggle to survive when they finally arrive.

The Weedpatch Camp

The Weedpatch Camp is a government camp in which the migrants are free to take care of themselves. The Joads stay here for a while, and it is a bastion of community in the face of all the inhumane treatment by the land owners.

Route 66

The thousands of migrants (including the Joads) follow highway 66 across the Southwestern United States on their journey to California.

Apple Box

After Rose of Sharon delivers a stillborn baby, they place it in an apple box. Uncle John takes it and sends it floating across the flooding stream as a messenger of the migrants' suffering.



Tractors

Tractors represent the modern industrialism that replaces many of the older farmers. They are lifeless and cold things, removed from the land and unable to care for it.

Floodwaters

At the close of the novel, a massive flood destroys the remaining crops in California. It leaves thousands of migrants without work. It also brings a renewing spring after it recedes.

Box of Letters

As the Joads prepare to leave their home and land, Ma burns a box of letters and cards she has collected over the years. They are all memorabilia of the family's past, and by burning it Ma is symbolically cutting herself off from their history.

The Boxcar

Toward the end of the novel, the Joads stay in a boxcar outside of a cotton farm where they work. They share the boxcar with the Wainwrights. It is here that Rose of Sharon gives birth to her stillborn child.



Themes

The Dangers of Industrialization

Throughout the novel, the plight of the migrant farmers is repeatedly tied to the rise of industrialization, especially in the form of tractors. As the farmers are forced off of their land, they are regularly replaced by tractors driven by men who do not know the land and do not know how to care for the crops. The narrator never directly condemns industrialization as the primary cause, instead it is viewed as a divide between man, the earth, and other men. As tractors replace farmers, the old farmers lose their connection with the work of their hands, and they lose connection with their fellow farmers.

Later on in California, the chapters of authorial intrusion repeatedly blame the absorption of smaller farms into gigantic farms, tilled by machines and run by men who never touch their land. The separation between man and his land that is caused by industrialization is closely connected to the separation between man and his fellow man that results in such much inhumanity through the novel.

The Healing Powers of Family and Community

The narrator makes it clear over and over again the greatest hope the migrants have is in uniting with one another. Ma Joad desperately struggles to keep her family together, and it is only through their bond to one another that the Joads are able to survive in the miserable situation they find in California. Jim Casy repeatedly preaches much the same but on a grander scale: he insists mankind's common humanity must unite us. In the government camp, when families join into a community and are left free to care for themselves, the migrants prosper and live in peace. Even though they still struggle to find work, they are bolstered and healed by the civilized compassion they can show one another in the camp. The narrator also makes it clear union is the natural form for men—especially suffering men. When the Joads meet the Wilsons, they are quickly bound together by Granpa's death; and in the related historical chapter, the narrator describes dozens of families joining together and becoming one.

Wrath

The title of the novel is drawn from one of the many chapters that tell of the migrants growing and fermenting anger against their oppressors. Tom Joad, the novel's main protagonist, is over and over again overcome with wrath in the face of injustice: when he faces the unjust treatment of the migrants at the hands of the deputies, he struggles to restrain himself from violence. When Casy is killed, Tom does not restrain himself, and his wrath results in the death of one of the deputies. Though it is often checked by prudence (many times by Ma), the Tom's anger at the migrants' oppression is portrayed with dignity by the narrator and recognized as just. In the second to last chapter, wives

watch their husbands to see if they will break under their suffering, but the narrator tells us "the break would never come as long as fear could turn to wrath".

The word "wrath" is usually used in connection to God and a righteous indignation towards sins or wrongs. Steinbeck's regular use of biblical language connects with this idea of wrath, and casts the migrants' anger into an almost noble light, lending it righteousness and justness.



Style

Point of View

The *Grapes of Wrath* alternates between a limited third person narrator that follows the Joad family, and an omniscient, impersonal third person narrator. The odd chapters are usually historical narrative, and the style is consistently impersonal and removed. The even chapters follow the Joads, and the narrator is subsequently more personal and limited.

The more removed narration allows for an epic, sweeping narration of hundreds of thousands of migrants. It also has room for more authorial intrusion, and Steinbeck uses these chapters to provide historical analysis in connection to the migrants' plight and the industrialized West. The narrator is obviously sympathetic to the plight of the workers and repeats the idea they must stand united to survive.

Though it is still omniscient, the more personal narration of the even chapters that follow the Joads avoids such authorial intrusion, and instead allows the story and the characters to exemplify the same themes on their own.

Setting

The setting of the novel changes drastically as the novel progresses. It begins in Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl years of the late 1930's, and the first half of the novel then follows the Joads across the Midwest and West into California. Most of the latter half of the book is set in Hoovervilles and the Weedpatch government camp in central California. As the setting changes from barren, overworked fields in Oklahoma to luscious orchards in California, the plight of the Joads goes the opposite way. The Promised Land in California is cut off to them by the greedy farm owners who repress the farmers.

The narrower setting of the latter half of the novel is the various camps in which the Joads stay. The government camp acts as a bastion of hope amidst the miserable situations of most migrants in California, but when the setting changes to the Hoovervilles and the work camps, it evokes the misery of the farmers' situation.

Steinbeck is writing about his contemporary period, and his use of the Dust Bowl as a vital plot device reflects the themes and problems he was trying to draw attention to.

Language and Meaning

Steinbeck's language is simple and earthy. In some of the expository chapters that punctuate the Joads' narrative, he draws on a great deal of poetic and biblical language to convey the importance of the events he portrays. In the even chapters that narrate



the Joad family, the language becomes more mundane and simple, drawn from the normal language of the period. The dialog in the novel reflects the manners of speech during the later thirties, especially among the farmers of the Midwest.

The use of poetic and biblical language in the expository chapters is vital to the atmosphere of the novel, and works well to reinforce several of Steinbeck's key ideas. The language lends weight and seriousness to the dramatic, universal stories he tells, and it elevates the plight of the suffering migrants.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty chapters. The chapters alternate from historical narration and analysis (usually the odd chapters) to a narrower narration that follows the Joad family. The chapters vary greatly in length: those that describe broad historical events related to the migrants are usually only a few pages long; those chapters narrating the Joads range from fifteen to thirty pages long.

The *Grapes of Wrath* has one primary plot and a few connected sub-plots. The primary plot follows the Joad family after they lose their farm in Oklahoma as they travel to California where they try to find work and make a life for themselves. The expository chapters paint the same story for all the hundreds of thousands of migrants, and many events are paralleled between the narrative and expository chapters. Some of the sub-plots include Casy's—and later Tom's—attempt to unite the migrants, and Rose of Sharon's pregnancy. The ending of the novel is left open, and the plots themselves are not entirely resolved. We never know how successful Tom is in uniting workers, nor do we know if the Joads ever make enough money to support their family.



Quotes

There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say. (Chapter 4)

Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus? Maybe,' I figgered, 'maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holyy Sperit—the human sperit—the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of. (Chapter 4)

There is a warmth of life in the barn, and the heat and smell of life. But when the motor of a tractor stops, it is as dead as the ore it came from. The heat goes out of it like the living heat that leaves a corpse. Then the corrugated iron doors are closed and the tractor man drives home to town, perhaps twenty miles away, and he need not come back for weeks or months, for the tractor is dead. And this is easy and efficient. So easy that the wonder goes out of work, so efficient that the wonder goes out of land and the working of it, and with the wonder the deep understanding and the relation.

The causes lie deep and simply—the causes are a hunger in a stomach, multiplied a million times; a hunger in a single soul, hunger for joy and some security, multiplied a million times; muscles and mind aching to grow, to work, to create, multiplied a million times. The last clear definite function of man—muscles aching to work, minds aching to create beyond the single need—this is man. (Chapter 14)

We're Joads. We don't look up to nobody. Grampa's grampa, he fit in the Revolution. We was farm people till the debt. And then—them people. They done somepin to us. Ever' time they come seemed like they was a-whippin' me—all of us. An' in Needles, that police. He done somepin to me, made me feel mean. Made me feel ashamed. An' now I ain't ashamed. These folks is our folks—is our folks. An' that manager, he come an' set an' drank coffee, an' he says, 'Mrs. Joad' this, an' 'Mrs. Joad' that—an' 'How you getting' on, Mrs. Joad?'" She stopped and sighed. "Why, I feel like people again. (Chapter 22)

The people come with nets to fish for potatoes in the river, and the guards hold them back; they come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges, but the kerosene is sprayed. And they stand still and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the screaming pigs being killed in a ditch and covered with quicklime, watch the mountains of oranges slop down to a putrefying ooze; and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage. (Chapter 25)

Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry n' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why,



I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes. (Chapter 28)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Who is Tom Joad? Why was he away from his family before the open of the novel? What has happened while he was gone? Whom does he kill? Why? What goal does he begin to pursue? Why does he decide to try to unite the workers, and who led him to that? Why is this important to the themes of the novel?

Topic 2

Discuss Rose of Sharon's growth through the novel. What is her character like at the beginning? What role does her pregnancy play? What effect does Connie's departure have on her? What is her character like at the end of the novel? What is the mysterious look she gives while suckling the starving man? Why is it significant?

Topic 3

Who leads the Joad family? How does the tension between Ma and Pa affect the family? Why does Ma become so hard and stubborn? Why can Pa do nothing about it? What drives Ma to take control? What sort of difficulties does she face as she tries to protect her family?

Topic 4

Who is Jim Casy? Why did he give up being a pastor? Did he truly stop preaching? How does he see sin? How does he see mankind? What message does he teach throughout the novel? What is the significance of his sacrifice to protect Tom? What is the significance of his death?

Topic 5

How many deaths and losses does the family suffer? Which is the most traumatizing? Why does Noah leave? Why does Connie leave? Why does Casy say that Grampa could never leave Oklahoma? What is the significance of the Joads' dog dying?

Topic 6

How do the characters view California early in the novel? What makes them think that their ideas might not be reality? Why do owners distribute handbills about the work



there? Do the Joads' idealized dreams of California make the miserable reality harder to bear?

Topic 7

Discuss the expository chapters in which the narrator describes the historical situation surrounding the events in the novel. Is the narrator too heavy-handed in his descriptions of conflict between migrants and wealthy land owners? Do the narrator's calls for the migrants to unite come across too much like preaching for an effective novel?