

Honors English 3 Summer Reading

Your summer assignment is to read *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck and complete the work described below. On the first day of school, you will turn in parts I, II, and III. Your work should be entirely original. Plagiarism will not be tolerated.

Within the first two weeks of school, you will take a test on the novel and write an essay. The dates for these assignments will depend on your teacher, so be ready on the first day.

As you read the novel, you are encouraged to annotate and/or keep a notebook. This is not required, but it is a helpful way to process the reading and organize your ideas, which could help you succeed on the assessments upon return to school. Your notes will not be collected or graded. The rest of this document gives you suggestions on how to focus as you read the novel and what notes might be helpful. These ideas are from

The NEA Big Read has helpful homework and discussion ideas which are included below, so feel free to attempt these in preparation for the test. You might even start a book club with your peers and use these questions as a way to compare your insights. (Again, not required, just encouraged.)

Chapters 1–5: Think about how the Oklahoma landscape shapes the lives of the people who live in it.

Chapters 6–9: Who is telling the story, and what is the value of having alternating voices in the narration? Steinbeck’s narration alternates between the specific story of the Joad family and the larger story of all the Dust Bowl migrants. He accomplishes the latter through inter-chapters that he called “generals.” Why would Steinbeck do this? Is the alternation consistent, or are there deviations? How does his focus on the migrants (for example, in Chapter 9) contribute to the point of view of the book?

Chapters 10–13: Trace the motivations and development of the main characters. Is the family itself a character in the novel? Keep track of each character’s way of talking. What particularities do you notice in the phrases, word choices, and education of these characters?

Who is the antagonist? Is it the men who drive the tractors? Is it the bank officials who own the land? Or is the antagonist not a person at all, but the “monster” hounding the farmers from Oklahoma all the way to California? Are the protagonist and the antagonist in this novel in a fair fight? Can the Joads win, or are the odds stacked against them?

Chapters 14–17: Find examples in the text where Steinbeck helps you see the landscape in a new way by comparing it to something else. For instance, find moments where inanimate objects are compared to animate ones.

Chapters 18–19: What does California represent to the Joads. Which textual evidence conveys their view of the state?

Chapters 20–21: How have major characters changed? How has death affected other members of the Joad family? Does any character fail to evolve? If so, why? Are the Joads responsible for what happens to them?

Chapters 22–24: Think about how Steinbeck has organized the events that make up the plot, and whether the story so far points to a likely resolution. What have the two most important turning points been so far in the novel?

What could become of the Joad family if they stay in the government camp? Are they likelier to be doomed or saved?

Chapters 25–26: Will the novel end on a tragic or comic note? Can you predict any particular tragedy or triumph for a main character?

Additional NEA Discussion Questions:

- Steinbeck writes in Chapter 3 about nothing more than a turtle crossing a highway—a turtle that later reappears in the novel. Why does Steinbeck devote such an elaborate account to such a mundane event? What does the turtle represent, or foreshadow?
- Steinbeck says of the age of commercial farming, “Men ate what they had not raised, had no connection with the bread. The land bore under iron, and under iron gradually died” (Chapter 5). Imagine the land as a character in *The Grapes of Wrath*. What does it look like? What is its past? How does it change during the novel? Is it still alive by the end?
- Tom Joad learns how to write in prison. But “ever’ time Pa seen writin’,” he tells Muley, “somebody took somepin away from ’im” (Chapter 6). What role does writing and education play in Steinbeck’s novel? Is it ever used on behalf of the Joads? How is it used against them? What would the Joads have thought of *The Grapes of Wrath*?
- The Joads and their fellow travelers are forced to buy and sell everything within reach: cars, plows, a loaf of bread, a cup of water, a place to camp. As Steinbeck writes, “Merchandising was a secret to them” (Chapter 10). What does Steinbeck say about the world of business? Do the Joads ever come out on the better side of a bargain? Is there any such thing as a fair deal in the novel?
- At the end of Chapter 20, Ma tells Tom, “We’re the people—we go on.... A different time’s comin’.” Is Ma right? For the migrant workers of America, did a different time ever come? Is the Joad experience still a part of the American landscape? How can we tell?
- Violence, either real or threatened, is a part of everyday life for the Joads. Are they violent among themselves? Is their violence premeditated? Does it achieve its goal? Find examples of where their violence is justified or unjustified.

Assignment Parts I, II, and III (To Be Turned In On The First Day Of School):

I. Before reading:

Answer the questions after listening to the Big Read audio guide found online:

<http://www.neabigread.org/books/grapesofwrath/media/>

How does the novel capture important historic events?

How did the novel make an impact on history?

What are your first impressions/expectations before you start reading?

II. Read and annotate the three handouts from NEA Big Read (“The Dust Bowl,” “The WPA,” and “Migrant Farm Workers”)

III. *The Grapes of Wrath* was an instant bestseller in 1939 and was almost immediately adapted as a major motion picture, released in 1940. Some great American novels have been attempted by Hollywood multiple times; however, there has never been a re-make of *The Grapes of Wrath*. This classic film starring Henry Fonda is 77-years-old, and we think this American tale is ready for a reboot.

1. Choose three major characters from the novel.
2. For each one, decide which living actor/actress should play this part in a new version of the movie. (You might find imdb.com helpful for looking up names of performers by searching movies or shows in which they’ve appeared.)
3. For each one, write a paragraph identifying your choice and explaining what characterizations in the book led you to visualize this performer.

If you have any questions/concerns, please contact Amy Ramos (aramos@pasco.k12.fl.us).