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 represents 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).

The Dust Bowl

The Dust Bowl catastrophe began with a plow and a dream. The escalating price of wheat during World War I encouraged the cultivation of large areas of the Great Plains previously used only for grazing. Through the 1920s, farmers confident in the bounty of the American heartland plowed under an area of 100 million acres, including parts of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico.

Farmers plowed the marginal land and reaped good harvests for years. But when cattle and sheep were returned to the land in the late 1920s, they overgrazed soil that had already been loosened by cultivation. The native grasses that retained water were plowed under or eaten and rubbed away by livestock. A serious mistake in land management, the planting and overgrazing of the Plains needed only a small push to become a full-fledged disaster.

That push came in 1931 when the rains stopped. Within three years, the central Plains region became a vast desert. High winds blew loose Plains soil as far as the East Coast, darkening closer cities under "black blizzards." On a dry, windy day the sun could hardly be seen, and the dirt collected in drifts. In 1935 the area was dubbed a "dust bowl" by the Associated Press, a grim name that never went away. It became the worst drought in American history.

By mid-decade, the federal government was working to restore the land. Through progressive practices like contour plowing, crop rotation, shelter belts, and strip plowing, agriculturalists strengthened the Great Plains against human abuse and unfriendly weather. By the early 1940s, the area was already recovering.

The legacy of the Dust Bowl was harsh. About a quarter of the area's population, perhaps as many as two million people, left the land. Some 200,000 ended up in California, where they accepted the ill-paid stoop labor of migrant workers. It was the most concentrated migration in United States history. When Woody Guthrie sang, "I'm a-goin' where them dust storms never blow, blow, blow, / An' I ain't a-gonna be treated this way" ("Blowin Down This Road"), he sang for a heartland population that had become refugees in their own country.

During the Dust Bowl years, what early explorers had dubbed the Great American Desert—the North American interior—lived up to its name. The Dust Bowl was not simply the result of prolonged drought but the consequence of humans and nature unwittingly working in concert toward a disastrous end.

The WPA

The Work Projects Administration (WPA), originally called the Works Progress Administration, was the largest government agency established to fight unemployment during the Great Depression. From its inception in 1935 as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, the agency was responsible for refurbishing America's road infrastructure, erecting buildings and bridges, improving airports, developing the arts, and giving millions of its employees an honest wage and a job in the broken American economy.

By 1935, America had some twenty million people on government relief. The WPA paid heads of families on relief for a thirty-hour work week. The agency employed both blue- and white-collar workers, who did everything from building zoos and writing books to laying sewers, landscaping parks, and paving airport runways.

The WPA is well remembered for its contribution to American arts and letters. One program was the Federal Writers' Project, an ambitious venture that produced, among other things, a series of comprehensive state and regional guidebooks. The American Guide Series offered cultural essays, automobile tours, historical reflections, photographs, and more. The Writers' Project also produced extensive folklore research, including interviews with many former slaves recorded in the Slave Narrative Collection.

The WPA's reach in the arts extended far beyond the written word. Through the Federal Art Project (FAP), unemployed American artists were hired to decorate and create murals for public buildings such as schools, libraries, and post offices. They created some 200,000 works of art during the FAP's tenure. Among the artists who worked for the WPA were Thomas Hart Benton, Ben Shahn, Willem de Kooning, and Jacob Lawrence.

WPA photographers also captured the visual saga of America in the Great Depression. They depicted urban and rural life of the 1930s and extensively documented programs including the Federal Theatre Project, another artistic arm of the WPA. Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans took the best-known photos of the Depression, those showing poverty in rural America, under the direction of the Farm Security Administration, a sister relief agency created under the New Deal.

The WPA employed over eight million people during its existence, including writers Saul Bellow, John Cheever, Studs Terkel, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston. By the time the agency disbanded in 1943, it had bequeathed a legacy, both economic and artistic, that would benefit generations of Americans with its documentary precision, its enormous scale, and its human touch.

Migrant Farm Workers

Land in America is plentiful, but not always cheap. Those who cannot afford to buy it often work it for a wage. Tenant farmers cultivate a plot of land and pay a portion of the harvest to the owner, as do the Joads before the beginning of *The Grapes of Wrath*. But migrant farmers and laborers occupy a rung further down the ladder, traveling seasonally and getting paid by the bushel to do painful and dehumanizing "stoop labor."

Since subsistence farming began to wane during the late nineteenth century, cheap migrant labor in America has been in constant demand. The people taking migrant jobs have belonged to many different groups: whites like the Joads, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos. The Depression-era photographs of Dorothea Lange, Horace Bristol, Walker Evans, and others made the grim faces of migrant farmers a permanent part of the collective American memory.

During the Depression, American citizens desperate for work did most of the migrant labor. Due to the labor shortage caused by World War II, however, the Bracero Program brought five million Mexican agricultural workers to the United States, beginning in 1942. The program ended two decades later, when a rash of accusations and lawsuits charging human rights abuses were filed against the American and Mexican governments.

In the 1960s, the United Farm Workers brought to light the conditions of migrant laborers. Led by Arizona-born César Chávez, the union organized protests, marches, and boycotts to educate the American public about who was picking their produce and the conditions in which they lived. In the 1970s, an estimated seventeen million Americans participated in a successful boycott of nonunion grapes.

In more recent years, right-to-work legislation and a surplus of labor have prevented most migrant farmers from unionizing. Though estimates vary, it is safe to say that more than two million migrant farm workers labor in America's fields—most of them Spanish-speaking and at least 100,000 of them children. About a third of the total are U.S. citizens who live a hand-to-mouth existence. Their average education stops at the sixth grade, their lifespan ranks substantially below the American norm, and the majority of them have incomes well below the poverty line.

Many farm workers today labor under conditions familiar to the writers and photographers who chronicled their precursors during the Depression. Migrant farmers remain a large yet nearly invisible presence in the American mosaic.