

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Grapes of Wrath

by John Steinbeck

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Chapter 1

1. The author describes the cumulative effects of the drought on the land and especially the corn crop – all made worse by a prolonged windy spell that's temporarily let up. "The people, lying in their beds, heard the wind stop. They lay quietly and listened deep into the stillness." This merciless, extreme weather sets the menacing tone of the story. Has threatening weather or another adverse event ever frightened you? Write a short poem describing your feelings and what caused them.

2. "After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew they were safe and that there was no break....The women knew it was all right, and the watching children knew it was all right. Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole." Is there anyone in your life who gives you a strong sense of security? If so, write a letter to that person explain how you feel about the role he or she plays in your life.

Chapter 2

3. A truck driver picks up Tom Joad and correctly suspects that his hitchhiking passenger is a released convict. “That big old nose of yours been stickin’ out eight miles ahead of your face. You had that big nose goin’ over me like a sheep in a vegetable patch.” Have you had the experience of someone trying to ferret information out of you that you’d prefer to keep to yourself. Describe the incident and how you felt about it in a paragraph or two.
4. Do you know anyone who’s ever been in jail? How do you think it might feel to be a former convict? How might others – family, friends, and casual acquaintances – react to you? Write a paragraph or two about your thoughts.

Chapter 3

5. In his description of the turtle’s struggle to cross the highway, the author makes the creature seem almost human. List some other instances in literature of such animal personification and tell why they did or didn’t appeal to you.

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Chapter 4

6. The Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung put forth the theory of a “collective unconscious.” When the preacher Casy tells Tom, “ ‘Maybe all men got one big soul ever’body’s a part of.’ Now I sat there thinkin’ it, an’ all of a sudden – I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it.” Do a little research on Jung’s hypothesis in the library or on the Internet and write a brief essay about your opinion on the beliefs expressed by Jung and those in Casy’s speech.

7. Tom Joad received a seven-year sentence for manslaughter in self-defense. Do you think his sentence was justified? Write a letter to the editor of the newspaper where you’ve read a story about the trial and the sentence. Tell him or her why you agree or disagree with the sentence Tom was given. Include whether you think he deserved parole after serving only four years of his sentence.

Chapter 5

8. “The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It’s the monster. Men made it, but they can’t control it.” Sometimes the institutions people create can also destroy them. Charitable institutions can sometimes be heartless; institutions of learning can also stifle creativity. Do you know of any such institution firsthand? If so, write an E-mail to a friend describing the institution and how you have experienced its destructive forces, as well as how you think it might be changed for the better. If not, write an E-mail explaining your feelings about banks in general.

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Chapter 6

9. Tom returns to find his family home abandoned. Have you ever undergone a sudden loss that left you disoriented? In a letter to a friend, describe the experience and how it made you feel.
10. Muley describes his wanderings over his and his neighbor's properties, recalling the significant events that occurred there. He tells Tom and Casy, "Place where folks live is them folks." Almost everyone has a place that is special that feels like a part of home or safety or security. Write a paragraph or two describing your special place and why it is important.
11. Tom tells Casy and Muley about a fellow prisoner who was secretary to the warden and read all the time. He talked with the man about prisons and his attempt to make sense of his experience there. "An' he says it don't do no good to read books. Says he's read ever'thing about prisons now, an' in the old times; an' he says she makes less sense to him now than she did before he starts readin'. He says it's a thing that started way to hell an' gone back, an' nobody got sense enough to change her." Do some research about current movements for prison reform and write an op-ed column for your local newspaper, describing the changes that you think ought to be made in today's prison system. Explain why reading can bring real value to your life, despite what the prisoner says.

Chapter 7

12. The used car dealer tells a prospect, "Now look here, mister, I ain't got all day. I'm a business man but I ain't out to stick nobody" – but his actions reveal the truth behind his words. Since ancient Rome, a business motto has been, "Let the buyer beware." Do you think it's fair or ethical for a business to take advantage of customers? Do you think it's proper for government to take a role in the regulation of businesses to protect consumers? Pretend you are a customer at this used car lot. Write a letter to your state representative describing how the Joads were treated and what should be done about unscrupulous salespeople.