

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Pearl

by John Steinbeck

Copyright © 1985 by Prestwick House Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938. 1-800-932-4593.
www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her
personal use. This material, in whole or part, may not be copied for resale. Revised July, 2011.

ISBN 978-1-60389-894-2

Item No. 201101

The Pearl

Notes

In the short preface to this novel, John Steinbeck wrote: “If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it.” In effect, he hinted that there is a symbolic, as well as literal level of meaning in this story and that the symbolic level of meaning might be seen differently by each reader. Therefore, the student should realize that more exists in *The Pearl* than the plot and should not read the story simply to discover what happens. *The Pearl* should be read to reach a level of understanding beyond the surface facts; otherwise, much meaning is lost.

While the action in *The Pearl* is easy to follow, there is one historical point to keep in mind when reading this novel. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish landed in Mexico and proceeded to subjugate and enslave the native peoples who inhabited the area. Today, while their descendants are no longer enslaved, the Indians are still considered an under class; the descendants of the Spanish settlers are seen as the richer, more powerful, professional ruling class. In the story, you will note that the doctor, the priest, and the pearl buyers are all of Spanish descent.

In some instances, Kino and his family practice the Catholic religion brought by the Spanish, while at the same time, holding on to their old beliefs of pagan gods. Because of the beliefs, race, and poverty of the Indians, the Spanish consider them inferior.

Steinbeck refers to the native inhabitants as “Indians.” This unit maintains his original language.

Note: All references come from The Penguin Book edition of *The Pearl*, Copyright 1945, renewed 1973.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to

1. answer objective questions on the literal meaning of this story.
2. define the terms “allegory” and “symbolism,” and state a meaning for the story. In so doing, the student will identify who or what the following characters symbolize:
 - Kino
 - Juana
 - Coyotito
 - the doctor
 - the priest
 - the trackers
3. write separate essays tracing the development of the following motifs in the novel:
 - the struggle for survival
 - racial, class, and social prejudices
 - free will vs. determinism
 - man’s existence as part of the entire spectrum of existence
 - appearance vs. reality
4. recognize multiple levels of meaning in *The Pearl* and be able to find similarities between them.
5. identify and explain at least three of the animal metaphors used in the novel.
6. define and locate examples of the following literary terms in the text:
 - allegory
 - imagery
 - juxtaposition
 - literal meaning
 - metaphor
 - motif
 - parable
 - paradox
 - personification
 - protagonist
 - simile
 - symbol
 - theme

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In an allegory, the characters act as a symbol for something else, and a lesson is revealed in the action of the plot. With that in mind, state what lesson is to be learned through what the different characters symbolize and how the action of the plot supports your answer.
2. A common theme in literature is that appearance is not the same as the reality. Consider the pearl in light of what it appears to be and what it really is. Discuss how your understanding of either the pearl or of another object in the novel changes by the end of the story.
3. By referring to incidents in the story, prove or disprove the following: A major theme in this story is that being a part of a larger whole (family, civilization, clique, etc.) brings safety, security, and happiness; when one turns his or her back on the whole, however, unhappiness is the result.
4. In two paragraphs, show that both of the following are also themes in this story; cite incidents from the story and/or comments to prove the point in each of your paragraphs:
 - A. In life, both animals and mankind must struggle to exist.
 - B. Man is not free; fate is determined by forces beyond anyone's control.
5. Examine how the following statement is true for this story: A simple life close to nature brings more happiness than a wealthy life in a civilization that is removed from nature.
6. Consider who the representatives of established authority are, and point out how they act together to keep the Indians oppressed. Why is it important to Kino that Coyotito receives an education?
7. What function does the Preface serve? Infer why Steinbeck felt it was necessary to include a preface to this story?
8. List three possible things that the pearl might symbolize.
9. List three possible lessons that this allegory might be teaching.
10. Steinbeck uses a number of animal metaphors in the novel to make points about society or the human condition. Identify five of these, and indicate the point made in each metaphor.

The Pearl

Chapter 1

VOCABULARY

avarice – greed

bougainvillea – a tropical woody vine with purple or red flowers

covey – a small group of birds

feinted – tricked

indigene – native

pulque – a drink made from a plant

scorpion – an insect with a poisonous sting

suppliant – one who begs or prays for help

1. What is a parable; why do you suppose Steinbeck calls our attention to this word in his preface?

2. What do the names of the characters suggest about where this story takes place?

3. Who appears to be the protagonist in this story?

4. Who would you guess the antagonists will be? How can you tell?

Chapter 3

VOCABULARY

almsgiver – one who gives to the poor
benediction – a blessing; good wishes
consecrated – made holy
cozened – tricked, deceived
disparagement – to degrade
distillate – a pure state; what remains
lucent – light, clear

1. In the opening, to what is the town compared? Why do you suppose the author makes this comparison?

2. In what sense does Kino become “every man’s enemy”?

3. How does Steinbeck compare the news of the pearl to the poisonous sting of the scorpion?

4. What literary term does Steinbeck employ to emphasize what the townspeople’s desire for the pearl was like?

Chapter 5

1. What does Juana try to do with the pearl? Why? What does Kino do in response to Juana?

2. What happens on the beach?

3. After finding the pearl on the sand, Juana has a second opportunity to throw away the pearl. Why does Juana not get rid of it this time?

4. Why will it not matter that Kino has killed the man in self-defense?
