

Focus **ON READING**

The Pearl

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This is a sample not intended for classroom use.



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Introduction/Classroom Management

WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

Focus on Reading is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

USING *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference page for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

Vocabulary Words to Know lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

Things to Know identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

Questions to Think About helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Focus on Reading is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary** and **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** and **Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

Deepen Your Understanding is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

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Focus on the Book

Synopsis

Kino and Juana are indigenous people living on the outskirts of La Paz, Mexico, with their infant son, Coyotito. When Coyotito is stung by a scorpion, there seems to be no hope for medical treatment, until Kino finds a magnificent pearl with which to pay the doctor. As Kino dreams of rising out of poverty, the people around him dream of stealing the valuable pearl for themselves. In the course of trying to make their family's life better, Kino and Juana learn about the evils of wealth and the things that are most important in life. The bad fortune that comes of their good fortune forces them to reconsider their own attitudes.

A condemnation of the way people treat their fellows, this book tells of searing tragedies. A whole culture is devalued and suppressed, families and communities break apart, and a child dies. The blame does not fall on just one person or group or class, but on all. Although the story is about one family's experience, such tragedies must have been—and still may be—common occurrences for those who are not part of a dominant culture.

About the Author

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, in 1902. He attended Stanford University, but he never obtained his degree. Instead, he supported himself by doing manual labor, and he wrote in his spare time. Often he used experiences with the people around him—and the people themselves—in his novels. Because of his closeness to his subjects, he was able to make his characters genuine and true, with the qualities of real people.

Mr. Steinbeck wrote many novels, including the well-known *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*, both of which depict migrant workers. Mr. Steinbeck chose to portray the Mexican lower class in *The Pearl*, basing his story loosely on a parable in which a merchant trades all his possessions for a pearl that symbolizes heaven.

Poverty is a common theme in Mr. Steinbeck's novels, and his works have been studied as explanations of human behavior and community. Mr. Steinbeck won a Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath*. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. He died in 1968.

Historical Background

The Pearl takes place in Mexico at a time when many Mexicans lived in poverty. With Columbus's "discovery" of the New World, many native people were forced into slavery and many more died from European diseases. Spain called what is now Mexico "New Spain," forcing the indigenous people into harsh labor as miners, pearl divers, and farmers. The king of Spain used the money from the pearls the native workers found to furnish his palace and support his government.

Even though Spain eventually released natives from slavery, the local people still made up the lowest social class. A Native American was regarded as lower on the social scale than any European—whether that European was educated, a beggar, or even a convict. Although no longer called slaves, Native Americans were not allowed much more freedom than they had been as slaves. Kino's family is a depiction of a typical Native American family at this time, that because of race, were forced to live in poverty.

Before the arrival of Europeans, the Native Americans flourished. Many people farmed; they were more technologically advanced than many Europeans (some tribes had plumbing systems and running water within their villages); their religious beliefs supported them, and they maintained an ecological balance with the world around them.

The arrival of the Europeans, however, changed this way of life. Many people saw Mexico as a place for second chances and new beginnings. Many convicted criminals were sent there, and people who were considered lower class in their own countries came to Mexico to rise above their class. In the search for a better life, Europeans pushed the natives to the outskirts of the villages and towns.

Some European Christians saw the colonization of Mexico as an opportunity to convert Native Americans to Christianity. Most Native Americans accepted Christian traditions but blended the beliefs with their own. Although they believed in practicing the sacraments in the church, the financial offerings required by corrupt clergy prevented them from practicing as the Christians taught. Thus, as they adopted the teachings of the church, they continued to practice their native religions.

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Focus Your Knowledge

In the period during which the Mexicans began to fight for independence, Spain released many of its native slaves. Although technically free, the natives did not have a way to improve their social status. Many people continued the occupations they had been forced into by the Spanish.

- Look at a current map of Mexico and the United States. Look for the towns of La Paz and Nayarit. What do you know about life in Mexico today? What is the relationship between the United States and Mexico?
- What do you know about pearl diving? Have you seen any magazine articles or television documentaries featuring this job? Do you think it is an easy job? What kind of people are pearl divers?
- Think about what you know about Native American beliefs. Now think about what you know about Christian beliefs. How are these belief systems different? How might people living with both religions try to blend them? How do you think it would affect their lives?
- Imagine that you are a person native to a particular country. Now imagine that another country conquers your country and imposes a new set of rules. The new rulers tell you what profession you can have and what religion you must follow. They also suggest that they are superior to your people, even though they really do not know anything about your culture. How do you think you would feel? How do you think your parents would feel about raising a family under these conditions?

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Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

covey—a group, especially of birds
fainted—bluffed; made a fake attack
plaintively—sadly; sorrowfully
steely—very hard; cold
strenuous—difficult; intense
avarice—greed

alms—something (food or money) given freely to the poor
indigent—needy; poor
subsequent—following; coming after; next
suppliant—humble

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

A **hanging box** is a type of cradle that is hung above the ground. Because it does not touch the ground, it keeps some creatures and insects from disturbing the baby.

A **shawl** is a type of large scarf. It can be used as a coat, a blanket, a scarf, or a wrap to protect one's face. A rich woman would have many shawls, but a poor woman often only had one to serve all purposes.

A **scorpion** is a poisonous arachnid (it is a creature related to the spider) that attacks prey by stabbing and stinging with its tail. Scorpion stings can be deadly if not treated properly.

Game chickens are roosters raised to fight each other. When two roosters are together, they are normally inclined to fight, and some people would train their roosters to fight. Rooster fights—and gambling on them—was a popular form of entertainment at one time. It is now illegal in the United States.

Pulque is a fermented, milklike Mexican drink made from the juice of certain plants.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. How is music important in Kino's life?
2. Why don't the people expect the doctor to come to Coyotito?
3. Why do so many people go to the doctor's house with Kino?
4. In what ways is the doctor's servant similar to Kino? In what ways is he different? Why are the two different?
5. What does the doctor think of his life and the people around him? Why does he think this way?

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Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. "Outside the brush house in the tuna clump, a **covey** of little birds chattered and flurried with their wings."

covey: _____

2. "Near the brush fence two roosters bowed and **fainted** at each other with squared wings and neck feathers ruffed out."

fainted: _____

3. "In his mind a new song had come, the Song of Evil, the music of the enemy, of any foe of the family, a savage, secret, dangerous melody, and underneath, the Song of the Family cried **plaintively**."

plaintively: _____

4. "And Kino saw her determination and the music of the family sounded in his head with a **steely** tone."

steely: _____

5. "They made a quick soft-footed **procession** into the center of the town, . . . Apolonia, her big stomach jiggling with the **strenuous** pace, then all the neighbors with the children trotting on the flanks."

strenuous: _____

6. "They knew his ignorance, his cruelty, his **avarice**, his appetites, his sins. They knew . . . the little brown pennies he gave sparingly for **alms**."

avarice: _____

7. ". . . they followed the procession, . . . to see what the fat lazy doctor would do about an **indigent** baby with a scorpion bite."

indigent: _____

8. "The doctor had once for a short time been a part of the great world and his whole **subsequent** life was memory and longing for France."

subsequent: _____

9. ". . . the neighbors departed so that the public shaming of Kino would not be in their eyes. . . . Slowly he put his **suppliant** hat on his head."

suppliant: _____

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Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. What is the first thing Kino looks at when he wakes?
 - a. Juana
 - b. the door
 - c. the hanging box
2. Where does Kino live?
 - a. in the village center
 - b. in Mexico City
 - c. in a brush house
3. What does Juana fix for breakfast?
 - a. cookies
 - b. corncakes
 - c. fish
4. When does Kino first hear the Song of Evil?
 - a. when he sees the scorpion
 - b. when he goes to the doctor
 - c. when the neighbors come
5. Where does Kino see the scorpion?
 - a. in Coyotito's hanging box
 - b. on the ground near Coyotito
 - c. on the rope of Coyotito's hanging box
6. Who is Juan Tomás?
 - a. Kino's brother
 - b. the town doctor
 - c. a neighbor
7. What does Juana do that surprises Kino?
 - a. She asks Kino to call the doctor.
 - b. She tries to suck the poison out of the sting.
 - c. She uses magic to discourage the scorpion.
8. Who do Kino and Juana see in front of the church on their way to the doctor's house?
 - a. the priest
 - b. the beggars
 - c. the children
9. What reason does the doctor give the servant for not treating Coyotito?
 - a. The bill will never be paid.
 - b. The sting is not serious.
 - c. The doctor is too busy.
10. What reason does the servant give Kino for the doctor's refusal to treat Coyotito?
 - a. The bill will never be paid.
 - b. The sting is not serious.

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c. The doctor is out.

I. CHAPTER 1

DURING READING

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. What does Kino still do that all his people once did?
2. What are some of the things that make the Song of the Family?
3. What is the Song of Evil?
4. What does Kino think is impressive about Juana?
5. Why do the beggars follow Kino to the doctor's house?
6. What does the doctor think about Kino?
7. How does Kino feel about the doctor?
8. How would you describe the doctor?
9. What does the doctor wish for?

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10. Based on his description and attitude, for what reason does the doctor refuse to help Coyotito?

I. CHAPTER 1

AFTER READING

Deepen Your Understanding

A *parable* is a short, simple story that uses symbols to teach people how to live. Reread the introductory paragraphs that appear just before the first page of the story.

Given the nature of parables as explained in those paragraphs, and from clues you have read in the first chapter, predict how the story of the pearl will be a parable. What issues might be tackled? What kind of life lessons might be shown? How do you think people will be characterized? Explain your ideas and give examples to support them.

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