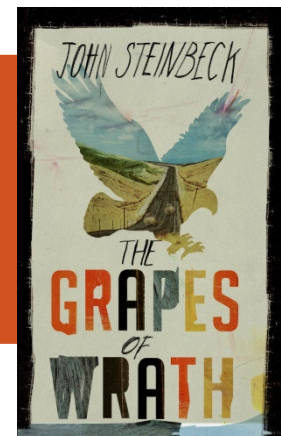




# The Grapes of Wrath

John Steinbeck



## Author Background

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, USA in 1902. After high school he entered Stanford University majoring in English, then in 1925, moved to New York City to pursue a career in writing. He was unsuccessful and returned, disappointed, to California the following year. Though his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, was published in 1929, it attracted little literary attention. Two subsequent novels, *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To A God Unknown*, met the same fate.

After moving to the Monterey Peninsula in 1930, Steinbeck made his home in Pacific Grove. Here, Steinbeck found material he would later use for two more works, *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*. With *Tortilla Flat* (1935), Steinbeck's career took a decidedly positive turn, receiving the California Commonwealth Club's Gold Medal. In 1937, *Of Mice and Men* was published. Two years later, the novel was produced on Broadway and made into a movie. In 1940, Steinbeck won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *The Grapes of Wrath*, bringing to public attention the plight of dispossessed farmers.

During the war years, Steinbeck served as a war correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*.

Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. He married three times and had two sons. He died in December 1968 in New York City. His ashes are interred in the Garden of Memories cemetery in Salinas, the valley he had written about with such passion.

## Book Summary

Tom Joad, newly released from prison after serving a sentence for manslaughter, makes his way home, and along the way is joined by Jim Casy, a former preacher. Tom learns that his family has been evicted from the farm and has moved in with Uncle John. When the two men reach Uncle John's home, they find the family, preparing to drive to California.

The Joads' and Casy head out along Route 66, joining an exodus of poor tenant farmers heading west. They encounter many obstacles on the journey, as well as warnings that the jobs they expect in California are illusory. Upon arrival in California, they find that their trials are far from over.

Steinbeck masterfully depicted the struggle to retain dignity and to preserve the family in the face of disaster, adversity, and vast, impersonal commercial influences. He based his epic on his visits to the migrant camps and tent cities of the workers, seeing firsthand the horrible living conditions of migrant families.

When Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, he plainly stated his purpose in writing the novel: "I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this (the Depression and the plight of the worker)."

## Discussion Questions

- ❖ Are we meant to conclude that Tom's killing of the deputy is justified?
- ❖ What makes Casy believe that "maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of"?
- ❖ Why does Steinbeck devote a chapter to the land turtle's progress on the highway?
- ❖ Why does Pa yield his traditional position in the family to Ma?
- ❖ What does Ma mean when she says, "Bearin' an' dyin' is two pieces of the same thing"?
- ❖ As Tom leaves the family, he says, "I'll be ever'where—wherever you look". In what sense does he mean "everywhere"?
- ❖ Why does Steinbeck interrupt the Joads' narrative with short chapters of commentary and description?
- ❖ Why does Rose of Sharon smile as she feeds the starving man with milk intended for her baby?
- ❖ What does Steinbeck mean when he writes, "In the souls of the people *The Grapes of Wrath* are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage"?
- ❖ Why do different characters insist at different points in the book, "A fella got to eat"?
- ❖ Why does the book start with drought and end with floods?
- ❖ Is the family intact at the end of the novel?
- ❖ Does nature function as a force for either good or evil in this book?

## References

- ❖ LitLovers: Grapes of Wrath (Steinbeck) - <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/399-grapes-of-wrath-steinbeck>
- ❖ LitCharts: The Grapes of Wrath - <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-grapes-of-wrath/summary>