

Approved for use in all levels of English III

Summary of the Work:

As the great depression strangles the U.S. economically, the Midwestern United States is hit with years of drought, later referred to as The Dust Bowl. This novel is a historical fiction about a family's flight from Oklahoma to California to begin a new life after the dust and the banks force them from their farm. The plot follows the Joad family through heartache, death, extreme poverty and prejudice. They refuse to give up and stay together as a family to survive against all odds. The main theme of the book is "the journey from I to we." The novel instills an appreciation of our common humanity, and demonstrates the need to work together to achieve a common goal.

Steinbeck's novel is a fictionalized compilation of actual people and events he encountered while traveling across the U.S. with the "Oakies" as a journalist in 1939.

Rationale:

This classic novel is a perfect fit for the integrated study of American Literature and American History in the junior year. It is not only an accurate account of human drama during the dust bowl, but the novel also teaches many important values still viable for young people today. These values include: the need for compassion and justice for the oppressed; the importance of avoiding stereotypes and labels; the need to share what we have with others; the importance of commitment to our beliefs; a respect for our religious heritage and that of others; the realization that change is part of the human condition; the importance of caring about the earth and our environment; and an understanding of the role of technology in society.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

- Wilson's Fiction 01/01/96

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- Pulitzer Prize, 1940
- Outstanding books for the College Bound
- Random House 100 Best Books of the 20th Century
- Modern Library 100 Best Novels

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 680
- Readability Level: 7.8

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee: Used in Helena Schools since 1960's; reviewed for use at CHS 1992

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

This is a somber novel because of the deplorable conditions endured by the Joad family during their migration to California. Steinbeck uses a series of intercalary chapters to express his opinions of society at the time. He is critical of law enforcement, and the government's inadequate attempts to ease the plight of the dispossessed. The book contains some mild profanity within the context of the Oakies' vernacular speech. There is also some violence and, of course, the controversial ending involving a young girl's courageous self-sacrifice to save the life of a dying stranger. In this scene and many others, Steinbeck's vivid description arouses sympathy for the plight of the emigrants, employing both symbolic and overt allusions to the Bible.

Connection to the Curriculum:

This novel is an excellent vehicle to integrate the study of American history and literature. Its themes are varied and timeless, its symbolism rich. Steinbeck's syntax, imagery, and word choice, lend themselves to complex linguistic analysis. The in-depth characterization and unusual structure offer students insight to the writer's craft. The novel lends itself to meaningful and analytical student essays.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)