

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

HARD TIMES: JOHN STEINBECK, AMERICAN LITERATURE, AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

I. CRITICAL READING 15%

- A. PURPOSE AND MAIN IDEA
- B. STRUCTURE
- C. RESTATEMENT OF INFORMATION
- D. GENRES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS
- E. LANGUAGE AND TONE
- F. GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX
- G. VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT
- H. DICTION

II. THE NOVEL: *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*, JOHN STEINBECK (1902-68) 60%

- A. STEINBECK'S BIOGRAPHY: A LIFE IN WRITING
 - 1. Early Life and Education
 - a. Only son of John and Olive Hamilton Steinbeck; born on February 27, 1902
 - b. Childhood in Salinas Valley and on maternal grandparents' ranch
 - c. His mother certified as a teacher at 17 and a major influence on shaping his early education and reading
 - d. Attends Salinas High School (1915-19)
 - e. Attends Stanford University intermittently for a period of six years but never finishes the degree (1919-25)
 - 2. Work Experience
 - a. When not attending classes at Stanford, he worked as a farm laborer, ranch hand, store clerk, and factory worker (1919-25)
 - b. Travels by freighter to New York, works as construction laborer on the building of Madison Square Garden and briefly as a journalist for the New York American (1925)

- c. *Lives in Lake Tahoe working as a caretaker for an estate; has the time and solitude to write (1926–28)*
 - d. *Publishes his first novel Cup of Gold, and from this point forward he supports himself by writing (1929)*
3. Early Publication: *Cup of Gold: A Life of Sir Henry Morgan, Buccaneer, with Occasional Reference to History (1929)*
- a. *Heavily influenced by the Grail quest and Malory's Morte d'Arthur*
 - b. *Fictionalized biography of Henry Morgan, a 17th-century English pirate*
 - c. *Also influenced by Rafael Sabatini's Captain Blood and James Stephens' Crock of Gold (1912)*
4. First Marriage, Family Life, and Friendship
- a. *Marries Carol Henning on January 14, 1930*
 - b. *Meets marine biologist Edward Ricketts in 1930; Ricketts becomes a lifelong friend and heavily influences the development of Steinbeck's own personal philosophy*
5. Life and Writing in the 1930s: Political Activism, Disintegrating Personal Life, and the Pressure of Writing the Masterpiece
- a. *The Pastures of Heaven (1932), a collection of relatively unrelated short narratives with the thematic unity of a novel*
 - b. *To a God Unknown (1933), an attempt to combine fiction and philosophy*
 - c. *His mother dies following a stroke (1934)*
 - d. *Tortilla Flat (1935), the funny yet satiric tale of working-class paisanos' quest for a better life*
 - I. INFLUENCE OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGENDS
 - II. CHARACTERS A RACIALLY MIXED GROUP LIVING IN A SHANTYTOWN AREA NEAR MONTEREY
 - III. COMIC OVERTONES BLENDED WITH TRAGEDY
 - IV. THE NOVEL WAS AN INSTANT SENSATION, STEINBECK'S FIRST COMMERCIAL SUCCESS
 - V. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PROLETARIAN NOVELS
 - e. *Steinbeck's father dies (1935)*
 - f. *In Dubious Battle (1936), a grimly realistic story of a farm workers' strike*
 - g. *In Depth: Of Mice and Men (1937), the story of two itinerant ranch hands that serves as a parable for human responsibility*
 - I. TITLE TAKEN FROM ROBERT BURNS'S "TO A MOUSE"
 - II. CONCEIVED AS A PLAY IN NOVELLA FORM
 - III. CHARACTERS ARE MARGINALIZED CALIFORNIA RANCH HANDS AND "BINDLESTIFFS" OR HOBOES, ONE OF WHOM, LENNIE SMALL, IS MENTALLY DISABLED
 - IV. AN ATMOSPHERE OF FOREBODING AND FORESHADOWING ESTABLISHED AT THE BEGINNING
 - V. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE QUEST THEME

- h. *Their Blood is Strong (1938)*, Steinbeck's articles on the Dust Bowl refugees commissioned by the San Francisco News in 1936 and originally entitled "The Harvest Gypsies," collected and published by the Simon J. Lubin Society
 - i. *The Long Valley (1938)*, Steinbeck's collection of short stories, includes the widely anthologized "The Chrysanthemums" and the four stories which comprise *The Red Pony*, a collection of stories about the coming of age of Jody Tiflin, a very popular collection especially with juvenile readers
 - j. *His marriage to Carol volatile; meets Gwyndolyn Conger (1939)*
 - k. *Film Premiere: Of Mice and Men (1939)*, director, Lewis Milestone; screenplay, Eugene Solow
 - l. *The Grapes of Wrath (1939)*, widely considered Steinbeck's masterpiece, the culmination of his writing and thought during the decade of the 30s, wins both the National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize (1940)
6. Life and Writing in the War Years, the 1940s: Literary Success, Scientific Expeditions, Work in Film, and Remarriage
- a. *Film Premiere: The Grapes of Wrath (1940)*, director, John Ford; screenplay, Nunnally Johnson
 - b. *In May 1940, Steinbeck travels to Mexico to work on the film The Forgotten Village and in June travels to Washington and meets with President Roosevelt to discuss Nazi propaganda in Mexico*
 - c. *Sea of Cortez (1941)*, Steinbeck's collaboration with Ed Ricketts, the result of their marine expedition in March and April 1940, to narrate the life of the people and marine life in the fragile Gulf of California habitat
 - d. *In February 1941, Carol leaves for an extended trip to Hawaii, Steinbeck lives with Gwyn*
 - e. *The Forgotten Village (1941)*, director, Herbert Kline; screenplay, John Steinbeck
 - f. *Carol files for divorce (1941)*
 - g. *Film version of Tortilla Flat (1942)*, director, Victor Fleming; screenplay, Lee Mahlin and Benjamin Glazer
 - h. *The Moon is Down (1942)*, Steinbeck's contribution to the war effort, a story of the invasion and occupation of a small Scandinavian town by the army of a totalitarian state
 - i. *Bombs Away (1942)*, Steinbeck writes on the quality of the air force at the suggestion of General Henry Arnold; a nonfiction account of a bomber team
 - j. *Lifeboat (1944)*, director, Alfred Hitchcock; screenplay, Jo Swerling; original manuscript (1943), John Steinbeck.
 - k. *Film version of The Moon is Down (1943)*, director, Irving Pichel; screenplay, Nunnally Johnson
 - l. *Marries Gwyn in New Orleans on March 29, 1943*
 - m. *Meets Ernest Hemingway in New York, spring, 1943*
 - n. *First son Thom born August 2, 1944*

- o. *Cannery Row* (1945), Steinbeck's novel about the need to experience the "hot taste of life," set in Monterey's waterfront, includes a fictionalized portrait of Ed Ricketts in the character of Doc
 - p. Second son John IV born June 12, 1946
 - q. *The Wayward Bus* (1947), an allegory of modern life centering on a group of characters traveling on a bus from one California town to another; an accident forces them to reexamine themselves and their relationships to each other
 - r. *In Depth: The Pearl* (1947), a lyrical fable which Steinbeck considered a parable about the destruction wrought by the drive for wealth and power; shows the tragedy that a magnificent pearl can bring to the life of a simple Indian
 - I. SHORT NOVEL WRITTEN AS A PARABLE
 - II. RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN IN CUERNAVACA, MEXICO
 - III. CHARACTERS ARE MEXICANS IN A POOR FISHING COMMUNITY
 - IV. BIBLICAL THEME OF SACRIFICE
 - V. FILM VERSION: *THE PEARL* (1947), DIRECTOR, EMILIO FERNANDEZ; SCREENPLAY, JOHN STEINBECK, EMILIO FERNANDEZ, AND JACK WAGNER
 - s. *A Russian Journal* (1947), a volume of essays accompanied by the photographs of Robert Capa based on Steinbeck's lengthy visit to the Soviet Union, July–September 1947
 - t. *Gwyn files for divorce* (1948)
 - u. Ricketts killed in an automobile accident in May 1948, shortly before another collaborative project with Steinbeck was to begin, a joint marine expedition to Vancouver Island
 - v. Meets Elaine Scott, wife of actor Zachary Scott (1949)
 - w. Film version of *The Red Pony* (1949), director, Lewis Milestone; screenplay, John Steinbeck
7. Life and Writing in the 1950s: Third Marriage, Continuing Activism, and Work in Film
- a. The play *Burning Bright* opens in New York to heavy criticism
 - b. Marries Elaine on December 28, 1950; she maintains the right home environment to support his writing
 - c. *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951), the separate publication of the "log" or journal portion of *Sea of Cortez*
 - d. *In Depth: Viva Zapata!*: (screenplay by Steinbeck, directed by Elia Kazan (1952), one of the most successful movies of 1952; incorporates Steinbeck's powerful portrait of the complex character of Emiliano Zapata and serves as a warning against the abuse of power
 - I. RESEARCHED IN CUERNAVACA AT THE SAME TIME STEINBECK WAS WRITING *THE PEARL*
 - II. BASED ON EDGCUMB PINCHON'S *ZAPATA, THE UNCONQUERABLE*
 - III. THE THEME OF THE ABUSE OF POWER

- e. *In Depth: East of Eden (1952)*, Steinbeck's longest and most ambitious work, conceived as the narrative of his family, borrows heavily from the Biblical story of Cain and Abel
 - I. WORKING TITLE WAS SALINAS VALLEY
 - II. BEGAN RESEARCH FOR THE NOVEL IN 1948 IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE DEVASTATING LOSS OF ED RICKETTS AND HIS BITTER DIVORCE FROM SECOND WIFE GWYNDOLYN
 - III. STEINBECK ACTS AS NARRATOR
 - IV. THE FICTIONAL TRASKS ARE BASED ON THE HISTORICAL HAMILTONS, STEINBECK'S MATERNAL FAMILY
 - V. STEINBECK'S FICTIONAL EMBODIMENT OF THE HEBREW CONCEPT OF *TIMSHEL*
 - VI. PRIMARY THEME OF THE ETERNAL STRUGGLE OF GOOD AND EVIL
 - VII. FILM VERSION (DIRECTOR ELIA KAZAN, SCREENPLAY PAUL OSBORN) APPEARS IN 1955 STARRING JAMES DEAN, WHO WAS POSTHUMOUSLY NOMINATED FOR BEST ACTOR
 - f. *Sweet Thursday (1954)*, a sequel to *Cannery Row* and Steinbeck's last attempt to fictionalize Ed Ricketts
 - g. Meets William Faulkner in New York
 - h. *Pipe Dream*, the musical comedy version of *Sweet Thursday* opens in New York
 - i. *The Short Reign of Pippin IV (1957)*, a light tale about an astronomer drafted to rule the French
 - j. *Once There Was a War (1958)*, the collection of Steinbeck's 1943 dispatches written when he was a war correspondent for the Tribune
 - k. Steinbeck decides to temporarily set aside his project rendering Malory's *Morte d'Arthur in modern English (1958)*, but returns to his research for the project in 1959
 - l. Steinbeck suffers a stroke in December 1959
8. Life and Writing in the 1960s: A Philosophical Perspective on American Life and the Nobel Prize for Literature
- a. *The Winter of Our Discontent (1961)*, Steinbeck's last novel, set in a fictional eastern community intended to represent a modern wasteland, a study of America as a moral vacuum
 - b. *Travels with Charley (1962)*, Steinbeck's most important volume of travel literature, the record of his 1960 journey across America with his French poodle Charley
 - c. Steinbeck suffers a heart attack in Italy, November 1961
 - d. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1962)
 - e. Steinbeck is selected to receive the Medal of Freedom from President John F. Kennedy; he receives the medal in September 1964, after Kennedy's assassination
 - f. Steinbeck's friend and editor dies (1964), and his sister Mary dies (1965)

- g. Steinbeck and Malory scholar Eugene Vinaver find a Malory manuscript to which little attention had been paid (1965); the incomplete manuscript that resulted from Steinbeck's research would be posthumously published as *King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1976)
 - h. President Lyndon Johnson becomes Steinbeck's personal friend and appoints Steinbeck to the Council for the National Endowment for the Arts
 - i. *America and Americans* (1966), nine essays that accompany a selection of photographs meant to capture a cross-section of American life
 - j. Steinbeck and Elaine in Vietnam from November 1966 through January 1967, covering the war as correspondents for *Newsday*
 - k. Steinbeck suffers a stroke and then an episode of heart failure
9. Death on December 20, 1968; burial in Salinas, California

B. THE GRAPES OF WRATH IN DEPTH

1. Historical Context of the Novel

- a. *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*
- b. *The Depression comes to California*
- c. *High unemployment*
- d. *Migration of Dust Bowl farmers*
- e. *Involvement of the Communist Party*
- f. *Strikes and unionizing the farm workers*
- g. *Documentary Evidence of the Depression in California*
 - I. "DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE STRIKE OF THE COTTON PICKERS IN CALIFORNIA IN 1933," KERR AND TAYLOR
 - II. THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF DOROTHEA LANGE (1932–39)
 - III. *THE PLOW THAT BROKE THE PLAINS* (1936), PARE LORENTZ
 - IV. "THE HARVEST GYPSIES" (1936), JOHN STEINBECK, 7 ARTICLES IN THE *SAN FRANCISCO NEWS* WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOROTHEA LANGE REPRINTED AS *THE HARVEST GYPSIES: ON THE ROAD TO THE GRAPES OF WRATH*
 - V. *THEIR BLOOD IS STRONG* (1938), JOHN STEINBECK, REPRINT OF "THE HARVEST GYPSIES" WITH ADDITIONAL ESSAY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOROTHEA LANGE
 - VI. HORACE BRISTOL'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF CALIFORNIA MIGRANT WORKERS TAKEN WHILE TRAVELING TO LABOR CAMPS WITH STEINBECK PUBLISHED IN *LIFE*, 1939; BRISTOL LATER RE-TITLES THE SERIES *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*
 - VII. *FACTORIES IN THE FIELD: THE STORY OF MIGRATORY FARM LABOR IN CALIFORNIA* (1939), CAREY MCWILLIAMS
 - VIII. *AN AMERICAN EXODUS* (1939), PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOROTHEA LANGE, TEXT BY PAUL TAYLOR
 - IX. *VIOLATIONS OF FREE SPEECH AND RIGHTS OF LABOR* (1940–42), THE REPORT OF THE LA FOLLETTE COMMISSION

2. Literary History and the Novel

- a. *Steinbeck's place in high modernism*
- b. *Steinbeck and his contemporaries*

- c. *Steinbeck and naturalism*
 - d. *Steinbeck and the proletarian novel*
3. Form and Structure of the Novel
- a. *Plot and summary of events: three main sections aligned to geographical location*
 - b. *Structure: alternating chapters*
 - I. NARRATION OF THE PLOT: FROM THE MICROCOSM
 - II. INTERCHAPTERS: TO THE MACROCOSM
 - c. *Plotting migration: time, motion, and geography*
4. Characters
- a. *Jim Casy, an ex-preacher who travels with the Joads and later leads a labor strike, he serves as the sacrificial victim and Christ figure in the narrative*
 - b. *Will Feeley, an Oklahoma sharecropper who drives the tractor that destroys the Joads' land and house*
 - c. *Muley Graves, an Oklahoma sharecropper who refuses to leave the land, hiding from the tractors during the day and hunting at night; he is the "ghost" of defiance to the landowners' oppression*
 - d. *Al Joad, the youngest Joad brother who matures under his older brother Tom's tutelage*
 - e. *Grampa Joad, a feisty patriarch who is the first victim of the journey west; Grampa dies of a stroke on the first night away from his land*
 - f. *Granma Joad, as cantankerous as Grampa, Granma Joad only survives his death by a few days, dying shortly after the family crosses into California*
 - g. *Ma Joad, the true family matriarch, the "citadel" of the family, Ma understands the necessity of family unity as well as the need for unity of the community for the greater good*
 - h. *Noah Joad, the oldest Joad son who probably sustained congenital brain damage, he chooses a hermit's path at the Colorado River and leaves the family*
 - i. *Pa Joad, the head of the family who slowly gives in to the helplessness of the family situation, yielding his authority to Ma*
 - j. *Ruthie Joad, the youngest Joad daughter, age twelve*
 - k. *Tom Joad, the novel's protagonist, recently paroled after serving time for killing a man who had attacked him, Tom bears witness to the suffering he experiences on the road westward and chooses to fight against injustice*
 - l. *Uncle John Joad, Pa's brother who blames himself for the death of his wife and for his family's troubles*
 - m. *Winfield Joad, the youngest Joad son, age ten*
 - n. *Floyd Knowles, a young migrant worker who shares his experiences with the Joads at a migrant camp*

- o. *Jim Rawley, a labor camp manager, based on the real-life Weedpatch camp manager, Tom Collins*
 - p. *Connie Rivers, husband of Rose of Sharon who ultimately abandons her and disappears*
 - q. *Rose of Sharon, the oldest Joad daughter, married to Connie Rivers and pregnant with her first child who, through losing both her child and her husband, matures into a "Madonna" figure at the end of the novel*
 - r. *The Wainright Family, the family that shares a boxcar with the Joads at the cotton camp*
 - s. *The Wilsons, Ivy and Sairy, are the first couple the Joads encounter on their journey; they become united as the Joads reach out from immediate family to the larger community, and they travel westward together*
5. Setting
- a. *The Great Plains Dust Bowl*
 - b. *The Road: Route 66*
 - c. *California as the Garden of Eden*
 - d. *"Hooverville" camps, Bakersfield, the San Joaquin Valley, and California farming in the Depression era*
 - e. *The Weedpatch Camp*
 - f. *The rains come: flooding in the Central Valley*
6. Style
- a. *Counterpointing styles in chapters and interchapters*
 - b. *Variation of narrative styles in the interchapters*
 - c. *Use and management of "Okie" dialect in the chapters*
7. Literary and Narrative Techniques
- a. *Narrative Point of View*
 - b. *Literary and Historical Allusion*
 - I. THE TITLE
 - II. BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS
 - III. ECHOES OF MILTON AND BLAKE
 - IV. TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN EMERSON AND WHITMAN
 - V. REAL PEOPLE: WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST, PRETTY BOY FLOYD, BING CROSBY
 - c. *Metaphor and figurative language*
 - d. *Symbolism: the waste land yields to the Garden of Eden with the snake at its heart*
8. Themes
- a. *The quest for home*
 - b. *Endurance, injustice, and the righteousness of wrath*

- c. *People in harmony with the land in contrast to modernization*
- d. *Humanity as a community—the “Oversoul”*
- 9. Contemporary Reception and Reviews of *The Grapes of Wrath*
 - a. *Popularity of the novel*
 - b. *Contemporary reviews, both positive and negative*
- 10. Novel into Film: The Adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940, film directed by John Ford, screenplay by Nunnally Johnson)
- 11. Conclusion: The Place of the Novel in the Narratives of the Great Depression

III. SHORTER SELECTIONS 25%

- A. CONNECTIONS TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND STEINBECK’S *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*
- B. STUDS TERKEL, SELECTION FROM *HARD TIMES: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION*, E.Y. “YIP” HARBURG AND CÉSAR CHÁVEZ
 - 1. Terkel’s Interest in the Great Depression
 - 2. Background of the Interviews
 - 3. Form of the Oral History
 - 4. Harburg’s Story and Song
 - 5. Chávez’s Memoir of the Mexican-American Farm Worker Experience
- C. MERIDEL LE SUEUR, “WOMEN ON THE BREADLINES”
 - 1. Le Sueur, a Woman Writing in the 1930s
 - 2. Background of the Essay
 - 3. Critique and Form
- D. ZORA NEALE HURSTON, “THE GILDED SIX-BITS”
 - 1. Hurston: African-American, Female, and Writing for the Federal Writers Project in the 1930s
 - 2. Background for the Work
 - 3. African-American Narrative and Dialect
 - 4. Hurston’s Critique of Materialism
- E. WILLIAM FAULKNER, “BARN BURNING”
 - 1. Faulkner’s Depiction of Evolving Class Structures in the 1930s
 - 2. Background of the Story and Its Relationship to the Depression
 - 3. Narrative Viewpoint
 - 4. Narrative Techniques
- F. CARL SANDBURG, EXCERPT FROM *THE PEOPLE, YES*
 - 1. Sandburg and Politics in the 1930s

2. Politics and the Poem

3. Verse Form

4. Metrics

5. Theme

G. LANGSTON HUGHES, "LET AMERICA BE AMERICA AGAIN"

1. Hughes, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Great Depression

2. Hughes's Poetry and Political Activism

3. Verse Form and Structure

4. Metrics

5. Theme