

American  
Masterpiece

# The Grapes of Wrath

John Steinbeck



John Steinbeck  
1902–1968



FLORIDA

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD  
Literary Analysis  
Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.10 Select a  
variety of age and ability appropriate  
fiction materials. ...

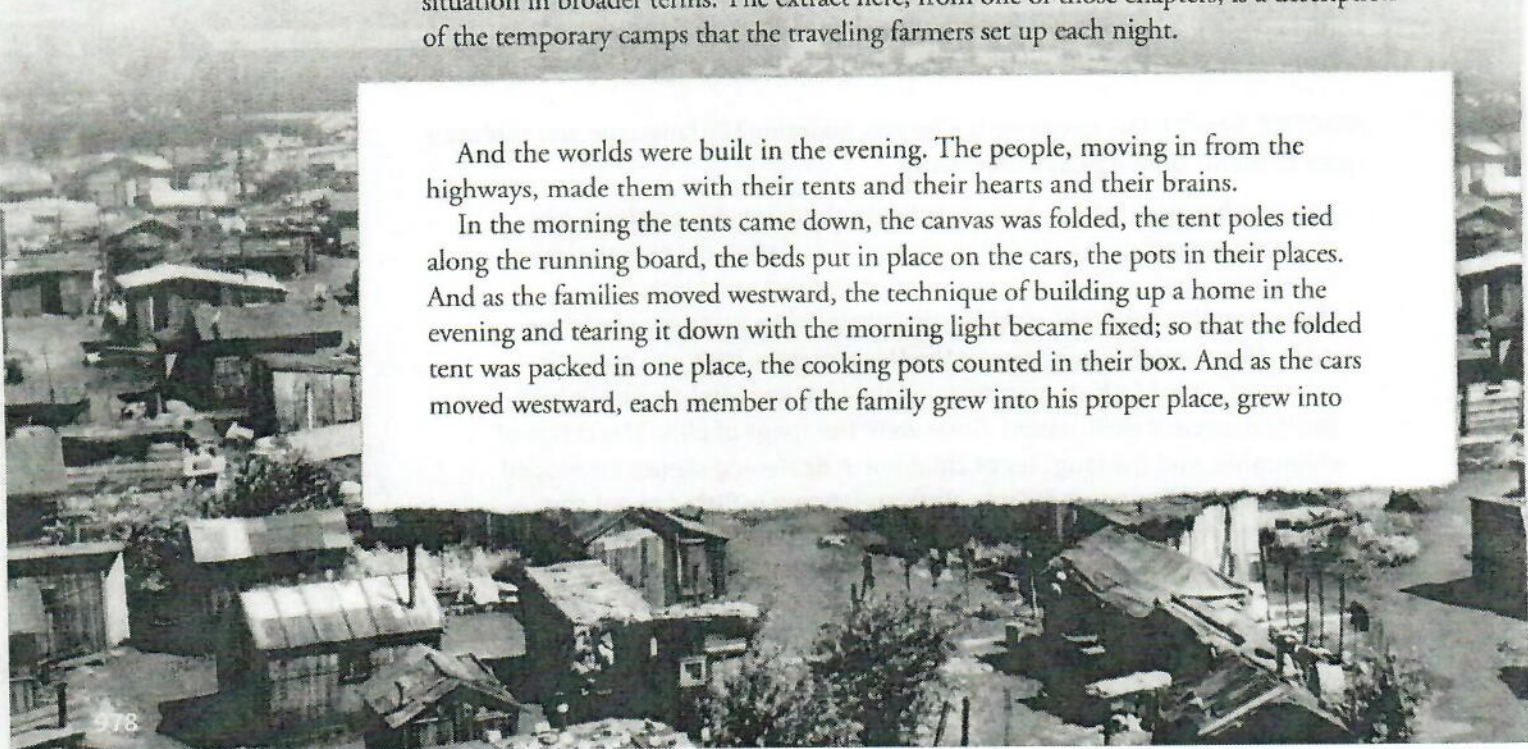
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** John Steinbeck firmly followed the principle “Write about what you know.” Much of his fiction is set in California’s Salinas Valley, where he grew up, and other areas of California where he spent time. Often it deals with the problems of working men and women, which he knew first-hand from the string of odd jobs he held as a young man—fruit picker, ranch hand, and apprentice painter, to name just a few. Steinbeck published his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, just a few months before the stock market crash ushered in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

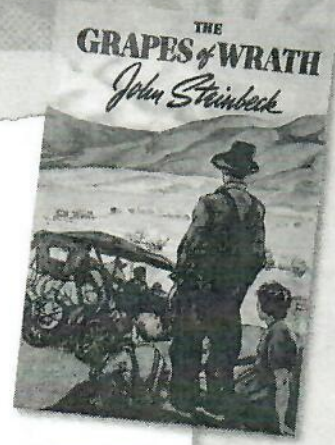
Many of his later works focus on the effects those hard times had on average Americans. Among those hit worst were farm families who left the drought-ravaged Dust Bowl for California, only to be packed into shantytowns and paid a pittance as farm laborers. In 1936, Steinbeck traveled from Oklahoma to California with a group of these migrants to report on their plight for the *San Francisco News*; it was this experience that inspired his greatest novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

**ABOUT THE NOVEL** The blockbuster novel of 1939, *The Grapes of Wrath* tells the story of the Joads, a family of Oklahoma migrant farmers, or “Okies,” who leave their small farm in an old jalopy to make the long journey to California in search of work. Ma Joad holds the family together as they face untold hardships and disappointments. Despite their difficulties, the family never gives up their basic humanity and spirit of endurance. Interspersed between the chapters of their story are poetic chapters describing the situation in broader terms. The extract here, from one of those chapters, is a description of the temporary camps that the traveling farmers set up each night.

And the worlds were built in the evening. The people, moving in from the highways, made them with their tents and their hearts and their brains.

In the morning the tents came down, the canvas was folded, the tent poles tied along the running board, the beds put in place on the cars, the pots in their places. And as the families moved westward, the technique of building up a home in the evening and tearing it down with the morning light became fixed; so that the folded tent was packed in one place, the cooking pots counted in their box. And as the cars moved westward, each member of the family grew into his proper place, grew into





his duties; so that each member, old and young, had his place in the car;  
10 so that in the weary, hot evenings, when the cars pulled into the camping  
places, each member had his duty and went to it without instruction:  
children to gather wood, to carry water; men to pitch the tents and  
bring down the beds; women to cook the supper and to watch while the  
family fed. And this was done without command. The families, which  
had been units of which the boundaries were a house at night, a farm by  
day, changed their boundaries. In the long hot light, they were silent in the cars moving  
slowly westward; but at night they integrated with any group they found.

Thus they changed their social life—changed as in the whole universe only man  
can change. They were not farm men any more, but migrant men. And the thought,  
20 the planning, the long staring silence that had gone out to the fields, went now to the  
roads, to the distance, to the West. That man whose mind had been bound with acres  
lived with narrow concrete miles. And his thought and his worry were not any more  
with rainfall, with wind and dust, with the thrust of the crops. Eyes watched the tires,  
ears listened to the clattering motors, and minds struggled with oil, with gasoline,  
with the thinning rubber between air and road. Then a broken gear was tragedy.  
Then water in the evening was the yearning, and food over the fire. Then health to go  
on was the need and strength to go on, and spirit to go on. The wills thrust westward  
ahead of them, and fears that had once apprehended drought or flood now lingered  
with anything that might stop the westward crawling.

30 The camps became fixed—each a short day's journey from the last.

And on the road the panic overcame some of the families, so that they drove night  
and day, stopped to sleep in the cars, and drove on to the West, flying from the road,  
flying from movement. And these lusted so greatly to be settled that they set their  
faces into the West and drove toward it, forcing the clashing engines over the roads.

But most of the families changed and grew quickly into the new life. And when  
the sun went down—

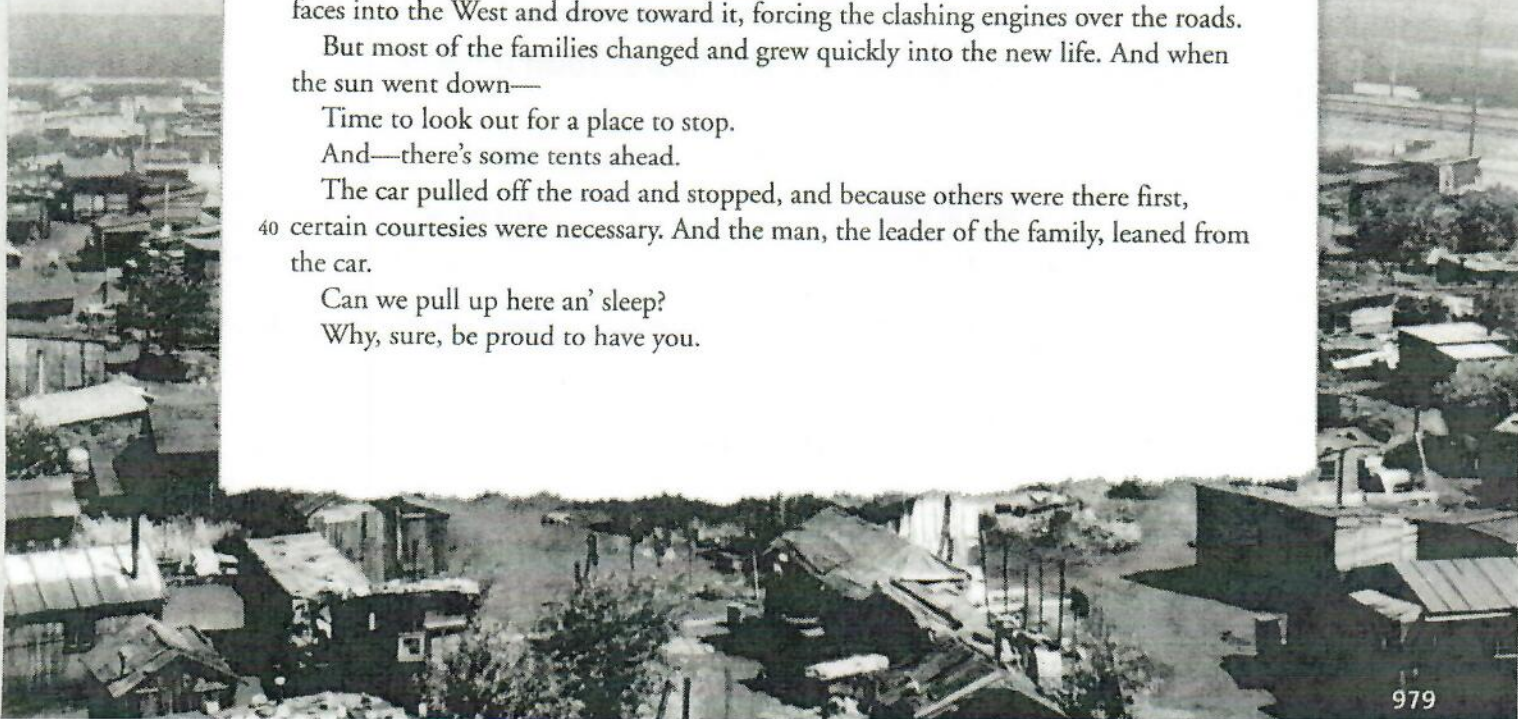
Time to look out for a place to stop.

And—there's some tents ahead.

The car pulled off the road and stopped, and because others were there first,  
40 certain courtesies were necessary. And the man, the leader of the family, leaned from  
the car.

Can we pull up here an' sleep?

Why, sure, be proud to have you.



# Photo Essay: The Grapes of Wrath



Use with *The Grapes of Wrath*, page 978.

Before John Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*, he traveled through California's migrant labor camps with *Life* magazine photographer Horace Bristol. The following pictures were taken by Bristol at that time. The captions are Steinbeck's and the accompanying essay appeared along with the photos and captions. As you view "the worlds [that] were built in the evening" and the people who built and inhabited them, bear in mind that you will later be asked to decide which is more compelling, the photo essay or the excerpt from the novel.

## Skill Focus: Analyze Photographs

The photographs on these next few pages can be analyzed and appreciated both as fine art and as a cultural record of how Depression-era migrant workers lived. Asking yourself the following questions as you view each photograph can help you do this:

- What shape or space is emphasized in the **composition**? What is the **focal point**, or spot that draws your attention? What else catches your eye?
- From what **vantage point**, or distance and position, did Bristol take the photograph? What impact does this have on your view of the subject?
- What **techniques** did Bristol use and why? For example, what sort of lighting did he choose, and what effect does it have?
- What is the **mood** created by the image?
- What information do you gather from the image and its **caption**?

For each image, note your observations on a chart like the one begun here.

Photograph #1: Ma Joad?	
Focal Point of Composition	Woman's face; I also notice her hands
Vantage Point and Its Impact	Next to woman at eye level; it makes me feel like I'm having a conversation with her, establishes a feeling of equality and intimacy
Techniques and Their Effects	Sunlight with shadow reveals wrinkles and dirt.
Mood	
Information from Image & Caption	



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### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS Literary Analysis & Information and Media Literacy

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.1** Analyze and evaluate information from text features (e.g., transitional devices, table of contents, glossary, index, bold or italicized text, headings, charts and graphs, illustrations, subheadings).

**Benchmark LA.1112.6.1.1** Explain how text features (e.g., charts, maps, diagrams, sub-headings, captions, illustrations, graphs) aid the reader's understanding.



"I always kept 'em together and kept 'em fed. I planned for 'em. I can buy this house for ten dollars. I'll have a garden along there. Ducks can swim in the irrigation ditch. I got to get ten dollars."

## The GRAPES of WRATH

Photographs by HORACE BRISTOL  
Captions by JOHN STEINBECK

### A ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS

What is emphasized in the photograph's **composition**? What does the **focal point** tell you about the woman? Explain.

In 1934, when the rest of the U.S. began to rise out of Depression, dust began to blow in Oklahoma and Montana, Arkansas and the Dakotas. Thousands of bewildered farmers and farm hands lost their holdings or their jobs and began to drift West. By the time the dust stopped blowing, the banks and the land companies found that mechanized farming over huge areas could make the land pay when individual farmers could not. The drift Westward continued and grew. Lured by assurances of green land and good money, the farmers sold their old tools and older houses, their livestock and furniture for anything they would bring. They used the money to buy shaky old cars, sawing off the bodies to  
10 make sedans into flimsy trucks. Along Route 66, through the Texas Panhandle, New Mexico and Arizona, they squeaked and rattled by tens of thousands, a bedraggled leaderless horde, camping beside the creeks and prairie villages, headed for California as a promised land.

**B ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS**

Study the photograph and reread the caption. How does the text affect the impact of the photograph? Explain.

"Lettuce crate fell on my head. They give me fourteen dollars compensation. I'm the lucky one. I'm gonna die pretty soon now. I wish he didn't feel so bad about it."



**C ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS**

What is the focal point of this photograph? What mood is established? Explain.



"It's the kids. . . . A man can get hungry and it ain't so bad. A man gets sick when the kids are hungry."

In California the migrants found no promised land. Instead, they found that thousands of their own kind had already glutted the market for cheap itinerant labor. Furthermore, scrabbling about the State to look for work, fighting each other for jobs, they learned that California hated them because they were hungry and desperate. Because most of them came from Oklahoma, they were scornfully called "Okies," harried along between scarce jobs. Migrants are still in California, squatting in hideous poverty and squalor on the thin margins of the world's richest land. Of the one-third of a nation which is ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished these are the bitterest dregs.

The problem of the Okies, though grim, is not insoluble. Some hope of a solution is suggested by the fact that an American writer can not only write about the Okies but that the result can be hailed by U.S. critics as the book of the decade. In *The Grapes of Wrath* (The Viking Press, \$2.75), John Steinbeck (*Of Mice and Men*) presents the Okies in all their stink and misery, their courage and confusion. His 600-page novel, which may become a 20th Century *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is now a nationwide best-seller. Last week, Producer Darryl Zanuck paid \$75,000 for the right to make it into a movie.

"We just got in. Gonna work in the peas. Got a han'bill that says they's good wages pickin' peas."



**D ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS**  
What details of Depression-era migrant worker life are recorded



**E ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS**

Reread the caption. What information do you get about the company from this caption? Based on this information, what can you infer about the company?

“The company lets us live in ‘em when we’re pickin’ cotton. When we ain’t workin’, we pay rent. Water’s comin’ up in ‘em now.” **E**



"We got to have a house when the rains come . . . jus' so's it's got a roof and a floor. Just to keep the little fellas off'n the groun'."

The pictures on [these pages] are not simply types which resemble those described in *The Grapes of Wrath*. They are the people of whom Author Steinbeck wrote. Before starting his book, he lived in California's migratory labor camps. LIFE Photographer Horace Bristol accompanied him. The woman on [page 981] might well be Ma Joad, Author Steinbeck's heroine. The man with the double-edged ax [page 986] is a counterpart of his hero, Tom Joad. Captions for their pictures and all others on these pages were written by Steinbeck. Some are excerpts from his book. Others were written especially for LIFE's photographs.

**F ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS**

How would you contrast the mood of the photographs on pages 984 and 985?

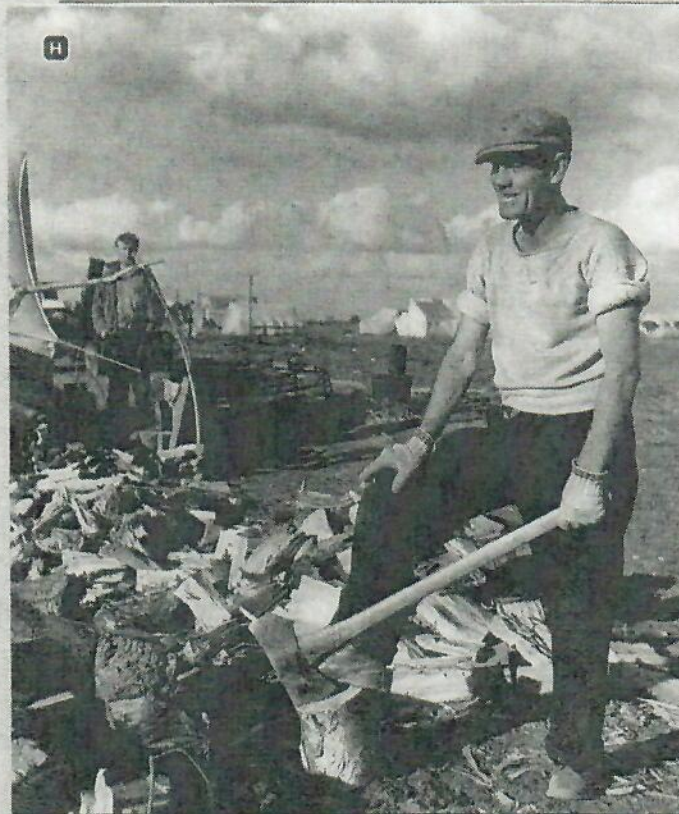
**G ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS**

What do the shadows in this photograph serve to emphasize? Explain.



**H ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS**

Horace Bristol could have **cropped**, or cut, the background figure out of this image without losing any part of the man and ax in the foreground. Reread the caption. What is the impact of having the second man in the background?



“The whole thing’s nuts. There’s work to do and people to do it, but them two can’t get together. There’s food to eat and people to eat it, and them two can’t get together neither.”

“She’s awful pretty. An’ she been to high school. She could help a man with figuring and stuff like that.”

**I ANALYZE PHOTOGRAPHS**

From this last photograph and caption, what might you gather about people’s attitudes toward their circumstances? How might the photographer’s **vantage point** be said to contribute to this idea?



## Comprehension

1. **Recall** In the late 1930s, what combination of events and promises prompted many farmers in the plains states to travel westward?
2. **Recall** Who wrote the captions for the photographs in this photo essay? Are they fiction, nonfiction, or a mixture of both?
3. **Summarize** What typically happened to the Midwestern farmers who migrated to California? How were they regarded by Californians?

## Critical Analysis

4. **Analyze Tone** How would you describe the attitude of the speaker in the caption for the image on page 984? How does the information conveyed by the photograph and caption on page 985 help you understand this attitude?
5. **Analyze Photographs** Based on this photo essay, what have you gathered about the living conditions and attitudes of Depression-era migrant workers?
6. **Evaluate** Reread lines 23–30 of the essay text. Do you agree or disagree with the writer's assertion? Explain.

## Read for Information: Compare and Evaluate

### WRITING PROMPT

Reflect on the excerpt you read from *The Grapes of Wrath* and on the photo essay you just studied. In your opinion, which paints a more powerful portrait of the migrant farm workers? Why?

The following steps will help you answer the prompt:

1. Review the selections and decide based on your first reaction, which piece you find more powerful.
2. Now go back and analyze each piece, taking notes on the following elements:
  - the amount of information provided
  - the kinds of details and information conveyed
  - the ideas or themes emphasized
  - the author's perspective and the photographer's vantage point
  - the literary elements and the artistic techniques
  - the mood and thoughts evoked
3. Review your analysis. As you look at the relative strengths of each piece, do you still have the same opinion about which is more compelling? Why or why not?
4. Now state your opinion about which selection is more compelling, and give the reasons for your opinion, comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each piece.



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