

Example of dialogue about the grapes of wrath essay

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AA: It is really difficult to imagine what the Joad family went through in our own time. We really don't have anything happening in the twenty-first century that mirrors what they went through.

SA: What do you mean? There are people who are homeless and unemployed today. There are also people who get their homes foreclosed by the bank when they can't pay their loans and they end up having to move out and often have nowhere to go.

AA: You're right, but there are so many more social structures in place to help people than there were back then. If you lose a job, you can apply for unemployment relief. If you don't have anywhere to live, you can go to a homeless shelter and then move into transitional housing as you start to get back on your feet. Back then, they didn't have anywhere to go at all.

FA: So why did they go to California then?

SA: They thought they would find work out there. Remember those ads that popped up in the movie? The fruit growers in California knew that there were a ton of people in Oklahoma and the rest of the Dust Bowl area who were looking for a place to live and a job - any job. So they advertised for a lot more positions than they actually had. They figured that there would be so many workers that they wouldn't have to pay much at all in the way of wages, because people would be glad just to have a job.

FA: What's amazing to me is how the family held together in the face of all of that adversity. I mean you have people dying on them while they're traveling across the country - and not gently like that guy in Little Miss Sunshine. They are literally traveling on hidebound tires moving across the country with everything they have with them. I'm sure that's not what Pa Joad had in

mind when he bought the farm in the first place.

AA: It's pretty clear that Ma is the glue that holds the family together, as long as she can. What events like the Dust Bowl show us is that the connecting forces that hold humanity together don't necessarily work when a major disaster takes place. When it became clear that the Dust Bowl was going to turn into an economic disaster zone, the rest of the country really didn't do anything to help. The dominant structure was the family, and the Joads just had each other to depend on.

SA: Do you think that the things that Tom did helped or hurt his family structure?

FA: At the end, it's pretty clear that the Joads had nothing. They had their love for one another, but that wasn't going to feed them. They finish in an abandoned barn, with Rose of Sharon nursing a homeless man who is about to starve to death. She lost her own baby, and it wasn't clear that the Joads would be surviving much longer at all, even with their strong support for each other. If it hadn't been for people like Tom who were willing to risk everything in order to agitate for change, then things might not have gotten better. The government might never have done anything to take care of the poor.

AA: So you're saying that the government basically put together the New Deal to maintain order? That seems kind of cynical.

FA: In a situation like this, where the family unit is destroyed by economic events, social order is threatened. All those hobos traveling in boxcars across the country? All those Okies heading into California looking for picking jobs? All those people shoehorned into those dormitories with their families,

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paying ridiculous prices for groceries at the company store? That was a powder keg waiting to happen. That's why the U. S. government opened relief camps in California, so that the state wouldn't turn into chaos. It was the nice thing to do, but it was also necessary to preserve order.

SA: In other times, when families were hit hard by economic adversity, they could turn to friends in their churches or communities. In this situation, though, entire communities were wiped out because they all depended on income from farming to survive. While the Joads stay strong and stay together, they simply can't deal with what has happened to them. Perhaps the saddest part of the story comes at the end, when it isn't clear that they're going to live even a matter of a few more weeks.

AA: It's similar in a way to Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle*. You have people living at the mercy of economic forces much larger than them, and they simply can't fight back. In modern times, I wonder how similar things would have gotten after the collapse of 2008 and 2009 if you didn't have homeless shelters and unemployment in place. I just wonder.