

# Grapes of wrath synopsys essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The film *The Grapes of Wrath* is about a family from Oklahoma trying to escape the Dust Bowl, which dried up the land, caused the lack of jobs, and made them to move to California in hopes of finding better jobs. The story begins with Tom Joad the main character, who had been just released from jail. He then reunites with his family so that they can move to California for work. As they reach California, they park at a camp for people searching for migrant work. The Joad family had heard that there was plenty of work, however when they get to the camp, the camp ground is full of other starving, jobless workers waiting for a chance to work. Not only was there no work, the camps were constantly controlled by police, there was no running water, and the homes that they were living in comprised of mainly shacks. After getting into trouble at the camp site, Tom and his family leave and search for another migrant work camp.

Soon after, they arrive at yet another work camp called the Keene Ranch. After working at the ranch, Tom realizes that they could not afford the high food prices with the wages that they have been getting, and they consider moving. As Tom continues working, he discovers that there are a group of migrant strikers who were most likely the reason why there are so many jobs available for Tom and his male family members. As time goes by, Tom again gets into trouble and the family then has to search for yet another migrant camp.

They stumble upon another camp, the Wheat Patch, which is run by the U. S department of Agriculture. This camp is different. There are no police allowed in the camp ground without a warrant. They provide clean running water, and you basically are provided housing and you work off the rent

through working on the farms. Even though this camp ground is much better than the others, Tom is not satisfied. Because of his previous experiences of the other camps and what he had gone through, he decides to leave his family and begin his mission for social reform. As the story ends, and as he leaves, he says that he wants to help people in need, wherever he goes, and try to improve society for the future. As a result the family leaves and they go their separate ways. The story ends with Tom's mother saying that they just have to move on, and survive without Tom.

There are a couple of themes that was emphasized throughout the movie. For example, there was the belief that California was the "promise land" and that there were enough jobs and plentiful farms for everyone. When they were crossing the borders to get into California, the Joad family was surprised to see border control keeping many people from going into California.

In reality, there were only a few openings for jobs. Because of the strikes that occurred during the 1930s, it opened a small amount of jobs that were widely advertised. When they arrived, California was overcrowded with people and there were not enough jobs for everyone. Many people were disappointed by the lack of jobs when they came to California. Even when they were able to settle in work camps, and found jobs, the jobs that they had were not guaranteed. They literally had to migrate from camp to camp.

Another theme in the movie was to live the "American Dream." Many Oakies believed in the "American Dream" in that they would be able to find work that would not only provide for themselves, but also be able to earn enough

money to live a good life. However, when they got there, they were sadly mistaken. Work was scarce, and the conditions in the camp were barely livable and people there were far from friendly. Many people barely earned enough to support themselves let alone their family. If that wasn't enough, some camps even cut wages in half. Being Migrant workers during the 1930s was tough and many people were not able to survive. Only through time when World War II approached, was when more jobs opened up did things start to become better.

#### Historical Context:

The movie *The Grapes of Wrath* was based on the Dust Bowl experience that brought migrant workers in California. "After World War I, a recession led to a drop in the market price of farm crops and caused Great Plains farmers to increase their productivity through mechanization and the cultivation of more land. This increase in farming activity required an increase of spending and caused many farmers to become financially overextended." (Fanslow, 1) When the stock market crashed, in 1929, it made things worse. "Many independent farmers lost their land when banks came to collect their notes, while tenant farmers were turned out when economic pressure was brought to bear on large landholders." (Fanslow, 1). This caused a 30 percent unemployment rate.

With the increase of farming came the loss of rich soil and the ability to retain moisture. As a result there was a seven year drought that started in 1931, followed by dust storms that came to be known as the "Dust Bowl". In

addition to the drought, the Great Depression sent thousands of farmers and their families to find work in California.

Many people chose California because of “ the state’s mild climate allowed for a long growing seasons and a delivery of crops with staggered planting and harvesting cycles.” (Fanslow, 1) For people who worked as farmers their whole lives, this seemed like an wonderful place to work in. What also brought people to California were the many fliers that were sent out saying that there was plenty of work in California. Most of the people who moved form the Great Plains were “ Okies” or people from Oklahoma. “

Approximately 20 percent were from Oklahoma.” (Fanslow, 2) Other states that came were from Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. When these groups got there, they were immensely disappointed because California was not what they expected. However, when they arrived, many of the jobs were taken, and a lot of the working conditions were unbearable. Many people had no jobs and as a result starved to death. Also there was only temporary work available; people had to move from camp to camp looking for the next prosperous field of land to farm in. They basically had to move where the work was.

Even though there was work available, and the crops were plentiful, California still dealt with The Great Depression like everyone else. During the Great Depression, events such as the Downward Spiral of Spending, Black Tuesday, and the Crisis of Confidence, caused much of the harsh conditions of many Californians. Californians could not afford to support themselves, let alone bring in everyone else from other states for work. The new groups of people who migrated into California made things even worse.

Employment rates became higher in California than any other state. Many families fought other minorities as well for jobs. There was even border control to restrict the amount of people going into California for work. Even when whole families were able to find work it wasn't even enough to support themselves. Many of the living conditions made working in the camps unbearable. The homes made to house the migrant workers and their families were basically just shacks. Most of the homes had no running water, it was very dirty, and police patrolled the camps on a daily basis, to make sure that no one caused trouble, and that no workers left without permission.

During their free time, migrant workers even had time to "engage in recreational activities." (Fanslow. 3) They had activities such as singing and making music that took place in their homes and in the public. In addition to songs, people also housed dances. As time went by, there was no longer a need for migrant farmers. Migrant working came to an end as World War II came along and many farmers went from working on farms to enlisting in the war. As the war moved on it gave more people stable jobs and "improved the state of the economy." (Fanslow, 3) The ones who did not enlist "took advantage of the job opportunities that had become available in the West Coast shipyards and defense plants." (Fanslow, 3)

Conclusions:

The Grapes of Wrath was a good choice for this assignment because I already had an idea of what the movie was about from previous history classes, and I had also read the book before. After seeing the movie, I thought that it was rather accurate. This movie is a great way of showing

people how the “ Dust Bowl” affected the nation, because it showed the process by which the migrant workers had to go through to work in California. It also showed what they had to go through to continue working in the farms. There were many details within the movie that was true to California history. For example, they showed the rough environments that many families lived in, the kind of food that they ate, and roughly how much food costs. The movie even captured many of the important facts, including the farmer’s strikes, the music and dances in the camps, and how the wages of the migrant farmers fluctuated.

There were many limitations when it came to the movie itself. The movie did not mention the many other ethnic groups that that migrated to California. Many Mexicans for example, tried to migrate into the work camps were poorly mistreated. Mexicans and Mexican Americans were paid even less than Americans. “ As the Great Depression took toll on the California’s economy during the 1930s, however, Mexicans and Mexican Americans become targets for discrimination and removal.”(Anonymous) Many whites claimed that Mexican immigrants were taking all of the jobs that belonged to them. “ At the same time that the wages were dropping due to the new white refugee labor, established Mexican and Mexican American farm workers had become a threat by banding together, often with other non-whites, and organizing strikes to protest lowered wages and the worsening living conditions.”(Anonymous) This worsened the conditions in the work camps, and caused the government to send Mexican immigrants back to Mexico.

The movie also points out that such themes such as the “ American Dream” and “ the promise land” that the Joad family most desperately searched for was broken by the harsh reality of the migrant work camps. The Joad family came to California only to find that there was no work for them. The movie helped show the reality of what California was like in the 1930s.

Overall the movie was fairly accurate, and even though the film only showed view points from the White Americans, it was still a good example of how hard it was to get into California, and how difficult it was to work and survive when the Joad family had finally arrived.

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