

# John Steinbeck's message

Literature, American Literature



John Steinbeck's Message In The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck emphasizes Ma Joad. Steinbeck uses Ma Joad to express his views on how people can reach the American Dream. In the book, Steinbeck does not express that individuals can achieve the American Dream. He expresses his idea that the people should unite and continue to strive for the American Dream even through the worst of times. Through Ma Joad, he emphasizes that the poor and lower class should unite and continue to push for their American Dream and that this will create a better country and future. In The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck uses Ma Joad to show that people should continue to strive for the American Dream through perseverance and unity. John Steinbeck expresses the importance of unity through Ma Joad. Ma Joad is the character that holds the Joad family together and often states her opinion that " it ain't good for folks to break up" (Steinbeck 165). Ma will not accept any ideas of breaking the family apart. When the Joad family discusses splitting up, Ma Joad " stepped to the touring car and reached in on the floor of the backseat. She brought out a jack handle and balanced it in her hand easily" (168). Ma threatens Pa with the jack handle and tells him: " I ain't a-goin; jus' the minute you take sleep in your eyes, I'll slap ya with a stick of stove wood" (169). John Steinbeck uses this scene to symbolize the lower class stepping up and making a stand. Before this scene, Ma Joad does not have as much power as the men, but she steps up and takes control. Steinbeck also uses Ma to show that everyone should unite and act like one family. Ma never turns down a person in need. She helps Jim Casy who wants to get to California: " I never heerd tell of no Joads or no Hazletts, neither, ever refusin' food an' shelter or a lift on the road to anybody that asked"

(102). She helps starving children: “ ‘I can't send 'em away,' she said. ‘I don't know what to do. Take your plates an' go inside. I'll let 'em have what's left’ ” (257). She even helps reassure a dying man that his child will be safe: “ ‘Sure,' Ma said. ‘You jus' be easy. He'll be awright’ ” (454). John Steinbeck wants people as a whole to act like Ma and help each other. When Ma says “ Each'll help each, an' we'll all git to California, ” this is a symbol for a larger cause besides the Joads and the Wilsons making it to California (148). This symbolizes that everyone should help everyone get to California, or in other words, to reach their American Dream. Perseverance is another attribute that Steinbeck shows through Ma Joad. Ma Joad uses perseverance throughout the entire book. She keeps the family moving. Steinbeck uses her to symbolize how everyone should continue to strive and persevere. When the Joads are in one place too long, Ma says: “ I ain't a settin' here no longer” (351) or “ We got to git outa here” (448). John Steinbeck uses Ma to emphasize on another point involving perseverance. Even after a problem or obstacle, people should keep going. Ma takes charge immediately after facing a problem, such as when Tom kills the policeman who murders Jim Casy: “ For a moment Ma stared into his eyes. ‘ Pa,' she said. ‘ Break up some boxes. We got to get breakfast.' You got to go to work” (390). She does not let this problem delay the family. Another key point of perseverance that Steinbeck uses Ma Joad to express is that the people must continue to strive and persevere, not for their own sake alone, but for the future's. Some people may die, and some may be starving and sick, but people will continue on and create a better future. Ma states: “ Ever'thing we do-seems to me is aimed right at goin' on. Seems that way to me. Even gettin' hungry-even

bein' sick, some die, but the rest is tougher (423). Ma knows that the sacrifices her and her family make will help the people as a whole and the future. At the end of the book, Rose of Sharon agrees to breastfeed a dying man, and this satisfies Ma. She smiles and says: " I knowed you would, I knowed! " (454). She knows then that Rose of Sharon finally understands that everyone must help everyone in order for people as a whole to succeed, even if this means giving the only thing you have left to someone else. This scene shows that people will learn from other people such as Ma Joad, and the people as a whole will persevere. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck uses Ma Joad to symbolize that people must unite and persevere in order to work toward the American Dream. During the Great Depression, corporate farmers and the rich made it hard for the poor farmers and migrants to continue to strive for the American Dream. The same problems are still occurring today. The rich societies maintain power and control and dominate the lower class. If people today would take after the example that Ma Joad sets, they could potentially create a better future. In order for the lower class to succeed, they must unite and continue striving for a future that may someday become an American Dream. Works Cited John Steinbeck. *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Penguin Group, 1939. Print