

Theme analysis: the grapes of wrath essay

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



The Grapes of Wrath is a perfect example of a political novel that narrates the experience of the Joad family after being evicted from their farm in Oklahoma and their discouraging journey to California.

In the first few chapters, the author gives the reader an opportunity to participate in the story of the Joads by exploring their experience in their traditional life and their new found life, but in the last sixteen chapters; the author takes a broader look at the experience of displaced migrants in America as a whole. As a result, the novel portrays the issue of land ownership in California and America at large, the conflicts between the Haves and the Have-nots, people's reactions to injustices, and the strength of a woman (Steinbeck ix).

It also delves into the impact of the Great Depression and the nature of parity and fairness in a larger context regarding America. Thus, this essay presents an in-depth analysis of The Grapes of Wrath, which reveals that the novel develops upon a wide range of themes including hope, class conflict, fanaticism, and commitment as described in the preceding discussions.

The theme of hope develops through the character of Ma Joad who struggles to keep her family together despite that the Joads have encountered many deaths, hardships, and deprivations. In fact, at the end of the narrative, the author describes the family as barely surviving (Steinbeck 455).

Conversely, the Joads display an optimistic mood because as the family expands, the family members get to recognize the need to identify with the group, and thus, they begin to realize the importance of group consciousness. Hope is also derived from the family's long and challenging

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journey, whose experience enlightens some family members such as Ma Joad, Pa Joad, Tom, Jim Casy, John, and Rose of Sharon.

Actually, the family members are optimistic that the end of their long journey will come after realizing the American dream (Steinbeck 65). As a result, the desire to have a good life coupled with other motives encourages some family members to fight harder as opposed to those who are unable to see the end result of the journey including Al, Connie, and Noah.

Moreover, the family is determined to experience a different way of life, which gives them a broader perspective of the world compared to their traditional life. In the end, it is obvious that the family has succeeded in terms of understanding and exploring life-time experiences in the face of different challenges.

Another major theme in *The Grapes of Wrath* entails class conflict. A conflict exists between the poor migrants, native Californians, and the powerful business people (Steinbeck 23). This conflict presents a clear picture of the characteristics of economic injustices in America during that time.

From a social perspective, the novel describes the economic disasters that arise after the migrants are forced to forgo their agricultural activities not only because of the natural disasters, but also because of the establishment of larger farms by the landowners, business people, and the banks.

Actually, at the beginning, the author notes that the land owners and banks evicted the tenants from the farms thereby making them to move to California in large numbers (Steinbeck 13). Thus, it is apparent that the

business people and landowners are insecure in some way because they understand that the presence of migrants in their farms is a threat to their business and financial establishments.

Here, the migrants symbolize increased government interference, labor unions activism, and increased taxes on privately held property. This form of class conflict is the cause of the violence observed between the two groups and even the torching of government camps by state residents in California who are of the idea that the presence of migrants in their land is a threat to their financial interests (Steinbeck 305).

Moreover, class conflict can also occur when hardships, materialistic interests, and problems within the family are personalized. For instance, within the Joad family, Rose of Sharon is obsessed with her pregnancy and the future dreams instead of helping in the journey while her husband, Connie is still angry that they left Oklahoma, and thus he prefers to disappear rather than help in the family hardships (Steinbeck 45).

Fanaticism is also a major theme developed in *The Grapes of Wrath*. From both the religious and the social perspectives, it is obvious that fanaticism should be condemned because it is a trick used by a certain class of people to deny life, happiness, and advance economic deprivation in the society.

For instance, the former preacher, Jim Casy tells Tom that religion denies different aspects of life such as sexuality. Furthermore, in the camp, a fanatic religious woman claims that dancing is sinful, and thus, poor people should not dance but instead they should wail and moan because they are

sinner (Steinbeck 55). On the other hand, religious fanatics claim that religion allows for economic classes within the society including the poor class.

Additionally, the experience of the Joads and their American counterparts shows that social fanaticism and prejudice causes fear and lack of faith among the migrants. As a result, this phenomenon led to instances of violence between the migrants and the native Californians, homelessness, starvation, and malnutrition among other shameful events. Therefore, it is certain that fanaticism, be it religious or social, is not a good thing after all.

Lastly, the novel develops on the theme of commitment in an extensive manner. Here, we note that the members of the Joad family were committed to certain goals and values, which kept them going and finally led to their success.

For instance, Tom and Jim Casy were committed to making Christ-like sacrifices for the rest of the family. As a result, Jim decided to surrender to the authorities to replace Tom and Floyd in order to show his commitment to loving all. Additionally, Jim becomes a labor activist and he dies while fighting for the rights of laborers.

Conversely, despite that at the beginning of the Journey, Tom does not want to identify with the group, his experience and friendship with Jim makes him to realize the need to fight for social justice and the significance of group consciousness within the family and in the society (Steinbeck 445).

Therefore, commitment is a virtue that should be emulated by each member of the society if at all collective tasks and goals are to be accomplished.

Steinbeck, John. *The grapes of wrath*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002. Print.