

# Contrasting the movie and novel form of the grapes of wrath

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



John Steinbeck wrote the *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939 to rouse its readers against those who were responsible for keeping the American people in poverty. *The Grapes of Wrath* tells the story of the Joad family, migrant farmers from Oklahoma traveling to California in search of an illusion of prosperity. The novel's strong stance stirred up much controversy, as it was often called Communist propaganda, and banned from schools due to its vulgar language. However, Steinbeck's novel is considered to be his greatest work. It won the Pulitzer Prize, and later became an Academy Award winning movie in 1940. The novel and the movie are both considered to be wonderful masterpieces, epitomizing the art of filmmaking and novel-writing. Although both the novel and movie form of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* are considered to be American classics, the novel provides a deeper understanding of the story's time and meaning. Absent from the film, the novel's interchapters provide a greater understanding of the time in which *The Grapes of Wrath* takes place. First, in the movie it is unclear why the Joads are forced to abandon their farm. It is described very briefly by Muley Graves, leaving the audience in a state of confusion. However, in the novel, Chapter 5 explains exactly why the farmers are forced to leave. In this interchapter, Steinbeck uses a dialogue between a farmer and a representative from a bank; the farmer is forced to leave because the bank, or the "Monster" as Steinbeck says, needs to make a profit, and if the farmer cannot produce any goods to pay off debts, then the bank forecloses the land. This happened to many farmers in the 1930's due to a drought, demonstrating how the novel gives a better understanding of the time. Second, in the movie, the Joads travel down Route 66 to California. The

movie does not discuss in depth the vast significance of this route. On the other hand, Chapter 12 of the novel describes how Route 66 is a river of immigrants. This interchapter explains how the thousands traveling Route 66 are refugees from the troubles in the East, giving a better description of the time period. Finally, the movie never describes in depth the economic situation of California during the 1930's. In the movie, the story ends leaving the viewer with the image of California as a land of prosperity. However, the novel attacks the economic situation of California with rage in Chapter 25. In this interchapter, Steinbeck describes how a surplus can make prices so low that the farmers have no income, or how the supply of farm goods can be so scarce that the goods are priced too high to sale. This situation plagues California, and farmers are thrown in poverty. This chapter shows how California is not a safe haven for farmers, but a harsh, devouring environment. The interchapters in the novel form of *Grapes of Wrath* describe in detail the time period of the storyline, while the movie leaves the spectators unaware of the actual situation of the migrant farmers in the 1930's. In the novel form of *Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck uses different literary elements, which are not present in the movie, to provide a deeper meaning of the story. One major element in the novel that is absent in the movie is Steinbeck's use of color and imagery. In the novel, Steinbeck paints a beautiful picture of the landscape in *Grapes of Wrath*. "The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hare crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country...the sun was as red as ripe new blood." On the other hand, color is absent in the movie. The film is black and white, completely eliminating the factor of the

beautiful setting in the story. The next element Steinbeck uses in the novel is symbolism. Steinbeck fills the novel with incredible symbolism, from Tom crushing the grasshopper, to our determined turtle, and also when Uncle John sends the dead baby down the river. These symbols give a deeper meaning to the novel. Tom crushing the grasshopper symbolizes the banks crushing the farms with the bulldozers; the turtle symbolizes the Joad family, constantly struggling to reach California and never giving up; Uncle John sending the dead baby down the river symbolizes Moses being sent down the river as an infant. All these symbols enrich and empower the novel's meaning. However, symbolism is virtually absent from the film. This lack of symbolism takes away from the depth and strength of the novel. The literary elements used by Steinbeck in the novel makes the story richer and more vivid than the dull, vapid film. The novel form of *Grapes of Wrath* provides a more sensational experience than the movie. The novel gives the reader a complete feeling of the time period. It describes in every detail the situation of the Joads, as well as other farming families forced to be refugees from their homeland. On the contrary, the film leaves the reader questioning as to what exactly is happening in America in the 1930's. The novel enthralls the reader with its beautiful descriptions of the setting, and its deep symbolism. On the other hand, the film is barren, dry of symbolism and color. The movie is focused solely on the plot, depriving the audience of Steinbeck's unbelievable writing skills. Despite the fact that both the movie and novel form of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* are viewed as American classics, the movie is almost insufferable when compared to the wonderful masterpiece in the novel form of *Grapes of Wrath*.