

The grapes of wrath: chapters 8, 16, 30

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Tom and Casy make their way to Uncle John's and meet Tom's family. They encounter Pa, Ma, Grampa, Granma, Noah, and Al. At breakfast, Pa tells Tom that his two younger siblings Ruthie and Winfield, his other sister Rose of Sharon, and Connie, Rose of Sharon's husband, are in town with Uncle John.

“ But when they're all working together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang—that's right, that's holy” (Steinbeck 84-85). Casy states this quote as the grace before breakfast. Casy explains that when people work together, it's the right thing, or in his words, “ holy.” This quote develops one of the few themes seen throughout the novel, that the power of family and working together. Chapter eight is the first chapter where the Joad family is together, with some exceptions such as Uncle John, Rose of Sharon, etc. So the quote falls in the idea of the chapter, family. The whole family plans to travel together to California and work as a family.

Ma Joad: “ Tommy, don't you go fightin' ' em alone. They'll hunt you down like a coyote” (Steinbeck 79). In this quote, she makes sure that no person goes alone and her care for her family shows in this chapter. She worries about Tom when she sees him and worries that he may have gotten hurt. The word “ alone” is the opposite of her character and her purpose in the novel. Throughout the novel, Ma Joad is determined about keeping her family together in their journey to California. Even through hard circumstances, such as Granma's death, she makes sure that her family is strong enough to push through.

Rose of Sharon's pregnancy is a striking symbol in chapter eight. Even though it is not very explained thoroughly in the chapter or physically shown, it is mentioned by Pa Joad at breakfast. Her pregnancy symbolises a new beginning, as in a new start for the Joad family. The family will leave behind their old ways in their farm and start a new life in California.

On their third day of traveling with the Wilsons, the Wilsons' car breaks down. Tom and Al go into town to find parts to repair the car and talks to the attendant. At the camp, a man tells Pa that there's no work in California and this worries Pa.

““ We don't want you to go ' way from us,' she said. ' It ain't good for folks to break up'” (Steinbeck 173). When Rose of Sharon announces that she and Connie plans to go to town and leave the family, Ma Joad worries about the idea of splitting the family and is reluctant. She determines to keep her family together under all circumstances. This is her role in this novel and her role is emphasized numerous times in the novel.

The highway to California is a symbol not only in chapter sixteen, but throughout the novel. It symbolizes home and also danger. In the journey to California, the highway becomes the home to the dozen of families looking to travel west. But the highway can also be a symbol of danger. In the journey, the Joads face many dangers. The highway is a constant place of roadkill, such as the rabbit, and in chapter 16, the Wilsons' car breaks down on the road. So the highway to California can symbolize both home, a positive connotation, and danger, a negative connotation.

In chapter 30, there are two symbols that are present. First is the symbolism of the flood. The flood symbolizes the great number of people that are “flooding” to California in order to find work. The substantial number of people moving to California for work is shown throughout the novel, especially in the camps. This vast amount of workers and those looking for work allowed the employers to lower wages in order to pay less. The landowners have a process where the workers are treated poorly and do not earn enough to live. Those who looked for work are moved around camps, such as Hooverville, where the conditions are unclean and inhumane. All of these actions advanced the theme of inhumanity, people taking advantage of those who are less privileged than they are.

The second symbol that is present is Rose of Sharon’s delivery of a stillborn baby. When Uncle John is tasked to bury the baby, he instead puts the box and guides it gently down the stream. This action advances the theme of hope. Rose of Sharon’s baby being carried down the stream symbolizes when Moses was carried down gently as a baby in the Nile River in the Book of Exodus in the Bible. This symbolism puts forward that the Joad family will be freed from their difficulties, just as Moses freed the Hebrews in Egypt from their difficulties.

After Rose of Sharon’s delivery of a stillborn baby, instead of losing hope, the family perseveres through and moves forward along their journey. This action shows a sliver of hope. The family moving forward advances the theme of hope and perseverance.