

An engaging novel
has provoking ideas



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An engaging novel has provoking ideas 'The Pearl' is a novella written by American author John Steinbeck in 1947. It is the story of a Mexican pearl diver, Kino, and explores man's nature as well as greed and evil. In the story, Kino, a poor fisherman, lives in a small town called La Paz with his wife Juana, and his baby son Coyotito. The interaction between characters and setting is explored thoroughly by John Steinbeck in his book 'The Pearl'. Multiple themes are included and can be seen through a wide range of diverse linguistic techniques. This novella is very interesting and deep and contains a lot of emotional writing. The story goes like this; one morning Coyotito is stung by a scorpion and Kino must find a way to pay the town doctor to treat him. Soon Kino discovers a massive pearl which he is prepared to sell to pay the doctor but he is attacked several times and is cheated by the doctor and the pearl buyers. He is forced to flee to the capital after killing a man, but trackers followed who eventually traded their own lives for Coyotito's. He returns with Juana back to La Paz with a dead Coyotito, rifle and the Pearl. He realises all the harm the pearl has done and throws it back into the sea. This novel offers readers thoughtful provoking ideas of people as well as objects which can bring many evils. Characters in this book are not what you would expect in such a short book like this. The ideas introduced are expressed very simply, but is very true to what was happening to when this book was written, where racism and discrimination was very high among social groups. The most provoking idea is the pearl. The pearl changes throughout this book, just like Kino. After Kino opened up the oyster, the pearl is described: At the start of the novel, Steinbeck wrote a very meaningful sentence; "If his story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it." In these lines,

Steinbeck does not set up opposites such as good versus evil, or black versus white. Steinbeck even inverts the major symbol of the pearl. A pearl usually signifies purity and innocence, qualities which a man loses and tries to find. In this novel, Kino possesses innocence and purity at the beginning of the novel, and these simple, beautiful qualities starts diminishing after he finds the pearl. By changing the symbolism, Steinbeck enforces the parable aspect of his story; we examine what happens to a man when he acquires something as valuable as the Pearl of the World but, after doing so, lost his human dignity in the process. The pearl is a very complex symbol which made Kino vulnerable to attacks on his life, but it also makes him stubborn and determined to protect what is his. If Kino's life is a parable, then it is a parable for many people's own lives: nothing in life is black or white, innocent or evil; everything is a shade of grey in between, and often does not show its true side at first. In the pearls true nature; He looked into his pearl to find his vision. " When we sell it at last, I will have a rifle," he said, and he looked into the shining surface for his rifle, but he saw only a huddled dark body on the ground with shining blood dripping from its throat. And he said quickly: " We will be married in a great church." And in the pearl he saw Juana with her beaten face crawling home through the night. " Our son must learn to read," he said frantically. And there in the pearl Coyotito's face, thick and feverish from the medicine. The pearl sent him chaotic visions that haunted him. Steinbeck uses dramatic irony here, giving Kino the opposite of what he wanted to see. He uses this effectively to show how the readers that pearl is a malignant object. Kino, just like his people, still does not realise the evil of the pearl due to his stubbornness Another key theme of the novel was that wealth brought evil. It changes people, often for the worse. In “ The

Pearl', many people have been corrupted by money, such as Kino, the Doctor and the Priest. Kino starts wanting unrealistic things from other cultures that he did not even need, such as a marriage and a rifle. He and Juana were already spiritually bonded and did not need it to be started by a 'priest'. The following quote shows the changes in people when they hear about wealth. 'It came to the priest walking in his garden, and it put a thoughtful look in his eyes and a memory of certain repairs necessary to the church. He wondered what the pearl would be worth. And he wondered whether he had baptized Kino's baby, or married him for that matter. The news came to the shopkeepers, and they looked at men's clothes that had not sold so well.' Steinbeck uses repetition of the words 'The news came'. This creates a new atmosphere every time, showing exactly what the characters think when they hear the news. It also adds a sense of rhythm to the news washing over the town. Everyone in the whole town wanted a Kino's wealth and this attracted many evils to him. People either tried to cheat him out of his money or attack him to steal the pearl. Kino tried so hard holding onto the pearl and at the same time everything else he owned, but this turned out impossible. He brutally hit Juana, killed 4 men, had his boat and house burnt down, and it was not until Coyotito died that he had realised his wrong. And finally, another theme is the songs that Kino hears in his head. This theme was developed very well, because the songs were a motif. This theme was repeated throughout the book developing it into a major theme. These songs warn, comfort and encourages him at different times. There is very little dialogue in the book, and song is what is used to express Kino's feelings. 'The Song of the Family came now from behind Kino. And the rhythm of the family song was the grinding stone where Juana worked the

corn for the morning cakes.’ Not only did the songs come from Kino’s feelings, but Kino’s surroundings. Many sounds can stir up a song in Kino’s head and change his emotions. Throughout the novel, whenever Kino has a particularly powerful feeling or instinct, he hears a song in his head that corresponds to that feeling. The songs show us readers what Kino was thinking about or feeling right now, because the only other way his emotions were expressed was through action. When he is happy with his family in Chapter 1, for instance, he hears the Song of the Family, which created a warm and loving environment within the book and within Kino. When he senses malice or dishonesty, he hears the Song of Evil. These songs point to the oral nature of Kino’s cultural tradition. The ancient, familiar songs, presumably handed down from generation to generation, occupy such a central place in how Kino’s people perceive themselves that the songs actually give form to their inner feelings. The songs are basically Kino’s judgment, what he makes decisions from. In conclusion, an engaging novel such as ‘The Pearl’ does have thought provoking ideas. Key themes set out perfectly such as the Songs and the Pearl creates thought in many people. The most key theme in the book, the Pearl, makes the most readers think, about the people in this world. No one is completely evil or good, everyone is somewhere in between, it just depends which side you are leaning towards. Another theme that will make readers stop and think is The Songs that Kino hears. Readers wonder about Kino’s traditions and how it has been passed down. How they are so primitive in their ways of thinking, that they are unable to create new songs. Also, how keen their senses are, and how it works together with the songs. It often makes readers think that Kino is indeed an animal. And finally, the theme; Wealth brings Evil. Money is very

important in this world; no one can survive without it. Money is a tool that everyone uses, but also causes the downfall of many. Many people are greedy and are only motivated by money, and just want more. Readers will definitely think about why they are working their job, why are they exhausting their body? Is it to live the perfect dream and be the richest person on Earth? Or is it simply to survive?