

A dollar cannot buy a
smile: riches vs.
happiness in 'the
pearl'



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What is greed? Should family be sacrificed in return of money? Does greed ruin a person? These are all questions that are answered in the book, *The Pearl*, by John Steinbeck. In *The Pearl*, a simple man named Kino, and his wife Juana, risk their lives to protect a pearl which they believe can ultimately cure their sick son. While some may say that money can buy happiness, John Steinbeck's narrative suggests that money cannot buy happiness because money can destroy a family and money makes people a target for evil.

After Kino obtains the pearl, Steinbeck shows that money can destroy a family. Kino wakes up in the middle of the night after hearing Juana leave their house, planning to throw the pearl in the ocean. Kino reacts swiftly to protect his wealth because he believes it will bring him happiness: " He struck her in the face with his clenched fist and she fell among the boulders, and he kicked her in the side." (Steinbeck 76). The pearl caused Kino to physically abuse Juana. This does the opposite of making the couple happy. Towards the end of the book, Kino begins to realize the effects of having the pearl. He is looking at the pearl when he realizes the trouble that it has caused him: " And in the surface of the pearl he saw Coyotito lying in the little cave with his head shot way." (Steinbeck 117). The purpose of having the pearl was to use it to save Coyotito. In the end it killed him.

Kino's family was destroyed because of the pearl. The second point that Steinbeck demonstrated in his book was that money makes people a target for evil. Kino was attacked multiple times by greedy people attempting to steal the pearl. One person was so jealous of his newfound wealth that he burned down his house, along with all of his belongings: " A tall edifice of fire
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lighted the pathway. Kino broke into a run; it was his brush house, he knew.” (Steinbeck 81). Kino lost everything. Kino’s house getting burned down represents that greed can destroy all of a person’s possessions. Additionally, someone attacked Kino in his sleep: “ Greedy fingers went through his clothes, frantic fingers searched him, and the pearl, knocked from his hand, lay winking behind a little stone in the pathway.” (Steinbeck 77). The pearl has brought more evil to Kino and his family than fortune. Kino was put in danger several times due to the pearl, which also caused Kino to lose everything.

While some may believe that money can improve one’s rank in society, Steinbeck clearly demonstrates that Kino and Juana are happy with their lives and do not desire much more. Juana describes how she feels about the pearl by saying, “ Kino, the pearl is evil. Let us destroy it before it destroys us.” (Steinbeck 73). Juana thinks they do not need the pearl to be happy, that they already have everything they need. They live a simple life, but they enjoy it: “ On her hard bare feet she went to the hanging box where Coyotito slept, and she leaned over and said a little reassuring word.” (Steinbeck 2). Although Kino and Juana have little, they have their son, which means everything to them. Kino and Juana do not care about their rank in society as long as they are happy.

In the end of the book, Kino and Juana threw the pearl back into the water, where it came from. This represents that Kino and Juana ended up where they started. The pearl brought them so much trouble that they had get rid of it. This also shows that money does not necessarily mean happiness.

Steinbeck demonstrates this by explaining throughout his book that money destroys family relationships and that money attracts evil.