

The pearl essay



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?? Pearlescent Deception?? That which emanates beauty may sometimes bring about unintended consequences. This concept is tastefully illustrated in John Steinbeck??™s *The Pearl*, a novel in which an impoverished pearl diver, Kino, happens upon a magnificent pearl in the midst of a crisis within his family; his newborn child has been bitten by a scorpion and requires medical attention which Kino could not have previously afforded.

This pearl is predicted to bring great wealth to Kino??™s family and to provide his young son, Coyotito, with an education; therefore, liberating him from the cruel vice of poverty. Upon finding the pearl, there is a dramatic change in the behavior of those surrounding Kino. Suddenly, the doctor decides it is appropriate to address the medical needs of Kino??™s son wherein previously Kino had been denied service altogether due to his social class. Furthermore, Kino is later confronted by assailants in the dark of night, attempting to steal the pearl from him and although he manages to retain the pearl, Kino??™s wife, Juana, begins to worry about the security of her family and of the dangers that have arisen from the pearl??™s discovery. When Kino tries to sell the pearl to a local buyer, he feels as though he has been cheated and he initially decides to hold onto his newfound capital. Many of the people in Kino??™s village criticize him for not selling the pearl when it was still possible; however, Kino is persistent and still believes that the pearl will bring his family great prosperity.

Despite his family-oriented motivation, Kino is driven to extreme measures when his hut is destroyed and he is forced to kill a man who attempts to steal his pearl. Now a murderer and fugitive, Kino must seek escape with his family in the mountains, where he is being tracked by armed bounty hunters.

Kino attempts to deal with his pursuers but in the midst of his ambush they become aware of his plan and firing ensues. When his son is found dead, a victim of the crossfire, Kino returns to his village and thrusts the pearl, now devoid of value, back into the sea. Kino's final realization of the pearl's true corruption is the most important revelation in the story. In Steinbeck's novel, this pearl symbolizes the corrupting power of greed, which relentlessly destroys everything worthwhile in Kino's life, a man simply trying to help his own family. The author uses this irony to bring about tragedy and hope in the story. When he finds the pearl, Kino is enamored by its beauty and by the hope it brings.

In Kino's eyes "It was the greatest pearl in the world" (Steinbeck 19). The pearl is portrayed as "perfect" and it brings about "the secret melody" beautiful, rich, and triumphant (Steinbeck 19). In Paul Geffen's "Themes, Motifs and Symbols in The Pearl" it is said that "Kino's desire to gain wealth perverts the pearl's natural beauty" (1). Kino is portrayed as a strong male leader in his family, but also as a nurturing father to his son. His "desire to gain wealth" is simply his well-intentioned response to the circumstances his family faces. The pearl arrives as an answer to these intentions, however, as hopes of a brighter reality come to Kino so do the greater ambitions of wealth and power. In his quest to capitalize on his treasure Kino "transforms from a happy contented father to a savage criminal" (1).

Kino's ethical boundaries are shattered as he seeks desperate measures of protecting the pearl from the corruption around him and he even strikes his own wife, Juana, an act previously unthinkable to him, when she herself

becomes aware of the pearl's corruption and then tries to get rid of its evils in the sea. At this point the pearl has destroyed the sanctity in Kino's household and all of his actions are dictated by the desperate urge to sell the pearl quickly and to live free of his previous worries. As the pearl elicits more and more greed on Kino's part (3) his simple lifestyle becomes influenced by the outside world's destructive influence (3) and even his once close friends begin to alienate him and leave him to destroy himself (2). As we see Kino's own wife and brother, Juan Tomas, suspect that Kino is wrong for not selling the pearl earlier, Juana tries several times to discard the pearl because she believes it to be the source of her family's troubles even though she, too, care deeply for the wellbeing of her newborn, Coyotito.

This shows the pearl as being a symbol of greed and destruction rather than purity and prosperity.