

# The grapes of wrath by john steinbeck essay

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



The Grapes of Wrath is a novel by John Steinbeck that was published in 1939 and awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. This book was initially withdrawn from the libraries of New York, Kansas City, and Buffalo because of its detailed description of a hard life. It was also banned in Ireland in 1953 and the Canadian city of Morris in 1982.

However, The Grapes of Wrath is now part of many US school and college curricula. Furthermore, it “ created a national sensation for its depiction of the devastating effects of the Great Depression” (1, p. 1). This essay considers the plot, main characters and several crucial issues addressed in the novel, such as family, workers’ lives, and other social problems.

The story takes place during the Great Depression and begins with the moment when the protagonist, Tom Joad, returns home from prison. He was convicted of accidental murder and was released early for good behavior (2). Returning to his homeland, Tom does not know that strange events are happening on the farm. Now, the owners of the land banish farmers from these sites. They decide to use mechanical devices instead of manual labour as it is much cheaper for them than to support the whole family.

When Tom comes home, he sees that the house is empty and there is no one there. Neighbors said his family was packing up at Uncle John. Relatives meet the man happily, and soon they go to California to find work. On the highway, Tom and his family join other people moving West and make friends with the Wilsons.

However, when former farmers approach California, they meet many refugees who run from these places. It appears that all the information

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spread through leaflets is propaganda and a hoax. People work virtually for free, and there is a high unemployment rate because of refugees.

Nevertheless, despite the rumors, the Joad family continues on their way.

Finally, they decide to stop by the river for a rest, because the road continued through the hot desert. Noah, one of Tom's brothers, separates from the family and continues to look for work on his own. The rest of the family is forced to go on, as the police suddenly begin to chase them.

Crossing the desert, the family loses their grandmother, and they have to spend all their money on her funeral in California.

Finally, Tom and his family are offered to earn some money by collecting fruit. While walking around the neighborhood in the evening, Tom meets the Reverend Casy, who tells him about how he got out of prison. He explains to the protagonist that everyone here is being cheated, and that is why the workers go on strike.

However, refugees, who arrived to earn money, prevent them from defending their rights. Casy is also tempting to start to agitate migrants, but Tom knows that hungry people will not agree to it. After the conversation, the preacher is killed at night, and Tom is beaten, but he manages to murder the attacker. The police start looking for him, and, therefore, the Joad family has to drive away.

Soon they stop at a place where the cotton harvest brings them considerable profits. However, his younger sister plays with another child and blurts that her brother is forced to hide because of the murder. Tom understands that it

is dangerous for him to stay there, and the work is over. The family has to go to another area, where Tom's sister Rose gives birth to a dead baby. After that, they find an abandoned barn and meet a boy. He persuades them to help his father who is dying of hunger, and Rose helps him.

In the beginning, the protagonist of the novel has his philosophy, which represents the principle *carpe diem*. However, when Tom meets the Reverend Casy, he realizes that he needs a longer-term view of his actions. As the family travels West, Tom learns more and more, and Casy teaches him that the only way to be powerful in this world is to join other people and struggle together for a better life. The murder of the Reverend turns Tom into a firm advocate of social justice.

Jim Casy is also one of the main characters of *The Grapes of Wrath*. He supports the idea of sacrifice and stands against injustice by organizing laborers to fight the terrible conditions they faced in California. At the end of the story, Casy decides that he wants to devote himself to improving the workers' lives in California. In addition, the Reverend's death helps change at least one person, Tom Joad, who becomes an activist.

These two characters represent complete opposites, as Tom's mother becomes the center of strength during their trip, while his father weakens. When Pa loses his confidence, Ma tries to hold the family together and takes essential decisions on her own. More than that, this character depicts the theme of sacrifice, like the Reverend Casy. While Pa tries to serve his family as the provider, he isolates more from the rest as finding work is a hard time

for him. Eventually, readers may notice that Pa becomes another one of Ma's children.

One of the central themes of *The Grapes of Wrath* is familial and community support during hard times. John Steinbeck uses the Joad family as an example of mutual assistance and empathy.

Besides, other migrant laborers face hardships and share their sufferings, which allows them to build a strong community. Another critical issue risen in the novel is social injustice (3). Workers are exploited on the plantations, forced to work hard, while they are paid very little money, and the protagonists try to fight this inequality in different ways.

Observing the settlers, I notice how the author expresses his sympathy with the fate of people who cannot defend their dignity and human rights. I believe that *The Grapes of Wrath* is a thought-provoking novel as it makes people reconsider their values and principles.

Furthermore, the book teaches to treat each other with respect and kindness, especially in challenging situations. The author explains that "only through solidarity groups of ordinary people can hope to change and transform the system itself" (4, p. 50). Therefore, happiness can be found only when all people strive for it together.

The novel *The Grapes of Wrath* is one of John Steinbeck's most famous works. The author managed to describe vividly the hardships and problems that working people had to face. It plunges into the era of the Great Depression, which refers to the 30s of the 20th century, and shows the

atmosphere of that time in a very detailed way. That is why this book remains popular with readers all over the world in the 21st century.

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