

Allegory in "the pearl" by john steinbeck essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The Pearl , written by John Steinbeck, has caught the eyes of many literary critics. The Pearl is a novel about a young man named Kino whose son is bitten by a scorpion. When the son is taken to the doctor , the physician refuses to treat him because the family has no money. In desperation Kino and his wife Juana pray for a miracle. One day Kino, a pearl diver , discovers a lustrous pearl that would hopefully pay for his son's recovery. In the mean time the young son Coyotito recovers on his own; therefore, Kino begins to marvel at all the wonderful things the pearl could bring. In the end, the pearl brings nothing but frustration and loss. Kino and Juana contentedly fling the pearl back into the ocean, only to return to the simple life once more. Steinbeck's brilliant novel accurately depicts allegory to implement the book's purpose. There are five significant interpretations of allegory presented by The Pearl , all sufficiently justified.

John Ernst Steinbeck was born on February 27, 1902, in Salinas , California. (Magill 2519). Steinbeck's first short novel, The Pearl , is based on a local legend he heard in Baja , California (Day 106). Some people, however, feel that Steinbeck wrote the novel based on his personal convictions (Anderson 1). John Steinbeck's methods have always been close to an allegorical one. Even his earliest works, such as The Grapes of Wrath, show evidence of allegory (Davis 149).

In his remarks Steinbeck lets us know that The Pearl is not totally realistic, " I tried to write it as a folklore , to give it that set-aside, raised-up feeling that all folk stories have," so one could expect some form of allegory (Steinbeck 3). Some see The Pearl as a strong allegorical message about human greed.

Kino becomes the symbol of the poor but happy man who is destroyed when he begins to want the things of the material world (Barron 1). It is not so much that Kino is an impoverished Mexican fisherman (although he is): more importantly, he represents an everyday man faced with the temptation of wealth beyond his wildest imagination (Stillmen 2). The pearl that was supposed to bring happiness and fulfillment brings only destruction (Barron 1). As Steinbeck puts it, "humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more," (Bloom 28).

Several critics see *The Pearl* as an allegory of social oppression. In this view, Juan Thomas is a symbol of the ancient Indian wisdom, Kino is a symbol of the Indian's desire for freedom, and the doctor, priest, and pearl buyers are symbols of the oppressive Spanish culture. The pearl represents Kino's means of escaping oppression, but the powerful forces of the social system are too strong for even the pearl to overcome. When Kino throws the great treasure back into the sea, the message seems to be that the poor Indian does not have a chance (Barron 1).

The Pearl can also be interpreted as an allegory of the soul (Lisca 134). Kino says that the pearl has become his soul. This closely echoes the Gospel according to Matthew in the New Testament, in which the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a "pearl of great price". If the pearl is seen as a symbol of salvation two meanings can be formed about the meanings of its loss at the end: Kino is lucky to return to a simple state of human happiness and poverty or he is denied a soul as punishment for his reliance on material things (Barron 1).

A somewhat more familiar interpretation of the allegory of the soul is the story of Adam and Eve. After eating from the forbidden tree (" Yes, God punished Kino because he rebelled against the way things are"), following being expelled from the garden (Kino's words , " We must go away"), subsequent to going to the land that lies " east of Eden" (the area Kino and Juana fled to), Kino and Juana return to Eden and put the apple back on the tree as it were. This is all suggested in the structure of *The Pearl* (Lisca 137).

Steinbeck's reading led him much further than just the Bible. There is also the allegory of the medieval poem, " Pearl" , in which the poet tells the story of the personal grief of a loving father who has lost his daughter (a child dead before she had lived). The father drops a " pearl of great price" while suffering his loss. A maiden appears to him wearing a pearl covered garment. She is identified with the lost pearl and also parallels with his deceased daughter. The maiden lectures him about the ways to salvation. In *The Pearl* Coyotito can be identified with Kino's " pearl of great value" (Lisca 134).

One can establish relatively effortlessly a basis to infer allegory in Steinbeck's novel *The Pearl*. There is substantial data accessible from many literary resources to maintain the ideas of allegory in a number of areas such as , human greed, social oppression, the religious aspect, and in reference to medieval poetry. It is evident Steinbeck's sole intent was for *The Pearl* to be interpreted as an allegory , one where each reader developed his or her own true meaning .