

The grapes of wrath- symbolism essay

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Symbolism Symbols are often used to represent bigger ideas and concepts in a novel. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, there are many symbols to represent the lives of not only the Joad family but the migrants as a whole. Steinbeck uses the symbols of the dust and the turtle to show the struggles of the migrants and how they overcame all odds, revealing the only hope the migrants had to survive the harsh trek cross country was perseverance. The dust is the first significant symbol Steinbeck uses to represent the migrants and their struggles.

As the dust filled the air in Oklahoma, families watched their lives settle to nothing along with the dust, “The men were silent and they did not move often. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men- to feel whether this time the men would break” (3). The dust is symbolic of the migrant’s lives eroding to nothing. It represents not only mother nature’s roll in the horrible tragedy of the crumbling families, but also represents the banks and large plantations that took over the small and venerable families and farms just like the dust engulfed their homes.

Though the migrants went through so much with losing their farms, homes, and lives, they still stood strong and found a way to keep moving forward, “After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant” (3). The migrant families overcame their struggles with the dust over taking their homes along with all of the other struggles they faced, and they moved west for a new life. On their journey west, the migrants faced many challenging obstacles that they had to persevere through.

Steinbeck uses the symbolism of the turtle to represent the stubborn migrants fighting their way west, “ And over the grass at the roadside a land turtle crawled, turning aside for nothing, dragging his high-domed shell over the grass” (14). The turtle was set back by both nature and man on his journey across the road, just like the migrants were on their long trek westward. The turtle faced a red ant, barely escaped death by a car twice, and had to struggle with rough terrain along with flipping himself upright after being flipped over by the front wheel of a ruck. Like the migrants overcoming sickness, death, car problems, moneyshortage, unfair merchants, and lack of work, the turtle also overcame all of his challenges and setbacks and continued to persevere on his path, “ Its front foot caught a piece of quartz and little by little the shell pulled over and flopped upright... The turtle entered a dust road and jerked itself along, drawing a wavy shallow trench in the dust with its shell.

The old humorous eyes looked ahead...” (15). Even though the turtle had several setbacks, he still held his head high and looked forward down the path he was traveling, never forgetting where he was going just like the migrants. The dust and the turtle symbolize the journey of the migrants starting from the moment they were kicked out of their homes.

The turtle is a better representation of how hard the migrants fought to reach their final destination, just to find they had to fight to live one day at a time. The dust is the best symbol Steinbeck uses to represent the bigger farms and natures roll in the future of the migrants. However both symbols represent the bigger picture, the perseverance the migrants had to use to

survive each day on their journey, and each hour once they reached their overpopulated destination of California.