

Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12

The Grapes of Wrath

John Steinbeck



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Discussion Questions, Vocabulary, Writing Assignments and Activities

Chapters 1 and 2

Level I

1. When was the last rain? (*early May*)
2. Describe what happened to the corn. (*It faded and dried up.*)
3. What began to settle on everything? (*dust*)
4. Find the paragraph describing Tom Joad. Make a list of words that describe him. (*p. 9*)
5. What did the sign on the truck say? (*"No Riders"*)
6. Where has Tom been? (*McAlester Prison*) For how long? (*4 years*) Why? (*for homicide*)
7. What did the driver indirectly warn Tom about? (*the farmers being forced off their land*)

Level II

1. What would happen if the men "broke"? How would their faces have looked?
2. To what can you compare the dust storms?
3. The men didn't have much to do. Did they enjoy just sitting around?
4. Why did the driver give Tom a ride even though it was against company rules? Would you have done it? Do you think the driver regretted his decision?
5. What does "The driver's eyes slipped over Joad's face to memorize it" mean?
6. What do you think Tom will find at his father's farm?

Vocabulary

rivulet (3)
protruded (9)
judiciously (12)
homicide (18)

listless (8)
insinuation (12)
bemused (6)

cowl (10)
emulsion (5)
hobnailed (9)

dissipated (3)
chambray (9)
subtle (12)

Writing Assignment

Write a paragraph describing how the area around your home changes because of weather. How does it look after a big snowstorm? How does it look after several days of rain? How does it look after not raining for a month?

Chapters 3 and 4

Level I

1. Who is the "character" in this chapter? (*a land turtle*)
2. What does the 40-year-old woman driver do? (*swerves to miss the turtle*)
3. What does the pickup driver do? (*swerves to hit the turtle*)
4. What does Tom pick up to bring to the kids? (*the turtle*)
5. Who does Tom see under the tree? (*Casy, the former preacher*)
6. List words describing Casy's appearance. (*pp. 24-25*)
7. What did Casy do while he was preaching that bothered him? (*had sexual relations with girls he had just "saved"*)
8. How did Tom kill a man? (*The man knifed him at a dance; Tom hit him with a shovel.*)
9. What was good about prison? (*clean clothes, regular meals*) What was bad? (*no women*)
10. How did Pa Joad "steal" their house? (*When the family living in it moved, Pa and Tom's brother, Noah, cut it in half and dragged one half to their farm.*)

Level II

1. What do you think the turtle stands for?
2. What does the woman driver stand for?
3. What does the pickup driver stand for?
4. Why is it important that the turtle "planted" some seeds accidentally?
5. In what ways is the turtle admirable?
6. Discuss what Casy meant by "Got a lot of sinful idears but they seem kinda sensible."
7. Casy says words are just words; none of them are bad. Write a paragraph explaining why you do or do not agree.
8. Find out what Emerson's idea of the "oversoul" was and how Casy's ideas are similar (p. 31).

Name _____

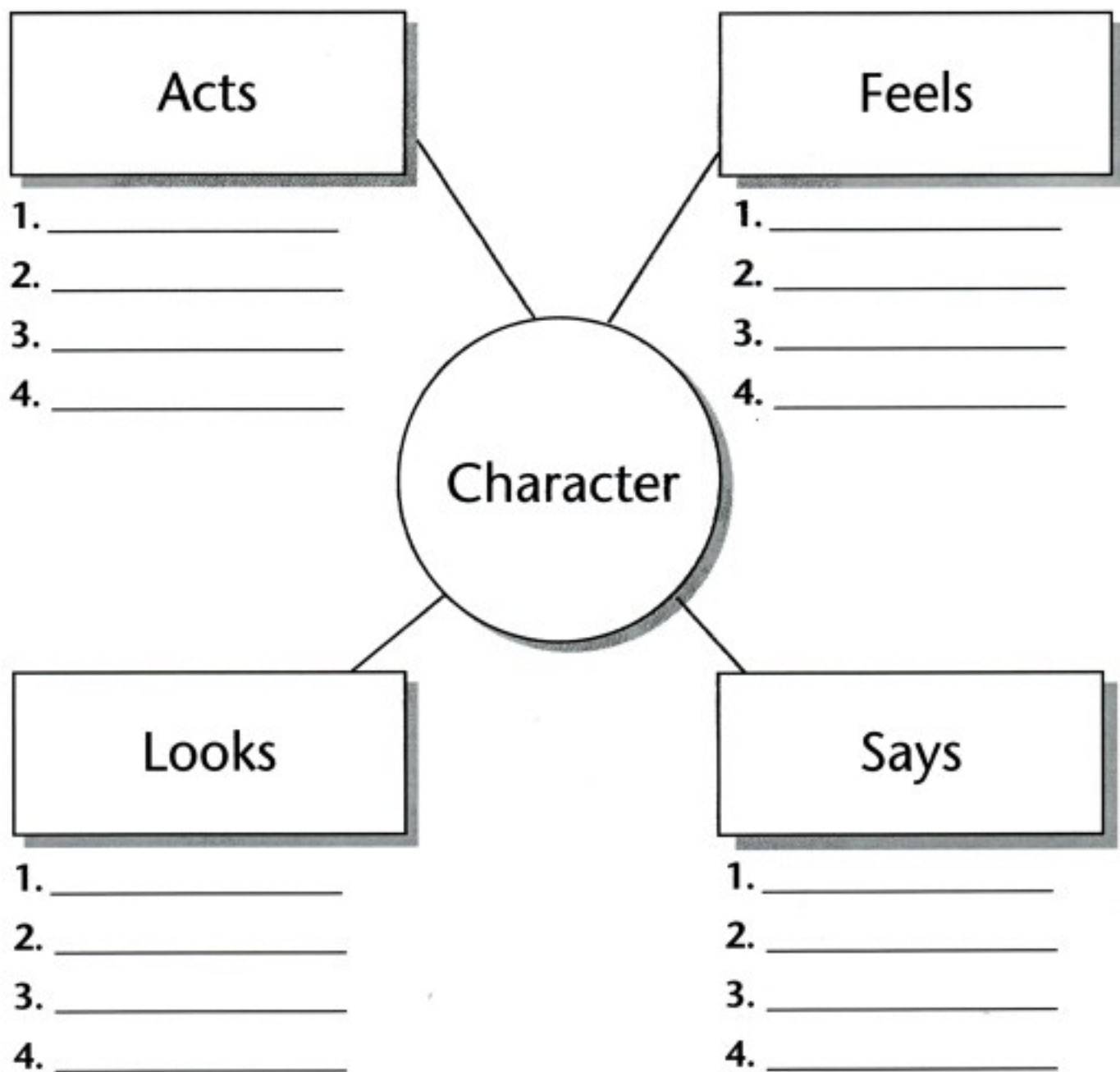
The Grapes of Wrath
Chapters 13-18

When the migrant families were still on their farms, they had certain needs and fears. When they were on the road, their needs and fears changed. Complete the chart below for each situation.

On the Farm	On The Road
Needs:	Needs:
Fears:	Fears:

Attribute Web

The attribute web below is designed to help you gather clues the author provides about what a character is like. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and what others say about him or her.



Level II

1. What made cotton picking good work?
2. The Joads are "aristocrats" in the boxcar camp. Where do the aristocrats in your community live?
3. Why didn't Ma get angry at Ruthie for telling the other children about Tom?
4. Reread page 537. What are Tom's dreams now? What is Ma's hope for Tom?
5. How does Ma explain her ability to cope with change better than Pa does? (pp. 541-542)
6. Why did Rose of Sharon crawl into the bushes after hearing Al's news?

Vocabulary

placards (520)	inquisitive (521)	aristocrats (525)
cynically (531)	majestically (531)	effluvium (532)
patina (539)		

Writing Assignment

Al and Aggie are 16. Does this seem "grown up" to you as it does to their parents? Do you think 16 is old enough to get married?

Chapters 29 and 30

Level I

1. What is the "greatest terror" of all? (*no work for three months*)
2. What came with the rain, cold, and lack of work? (*disease, starvation, death*)
3. What happened where a number of men gathered together? (*Fear changed to anger.*)
4. Why did the Joads have to stay at the boxcar camp even though the water in the creek was rising? (*Rose of Sharon went into labor.*)
5. What happened to the truck? (*It got too wet and the motor wouldn't start.*)
6. What happened to the embankment the men built? (*It collapsed.*)
7. What happened to Rose of Sharon's baby? (*It was born dead.*)
8. How are the events in questions 5, 6, and 7 above symbolic of what is happening in society as a whole at this time? (*machinery is the enemy; hopes and dreams collapse; children are dying*)

Project Ideas

1. Skim the pages of *The Grapes of Wrath* to make a list of things the Joads bought and how much they paid for them. Then consult a newspaper and find today's prices for similar items. Make an illustrated poster showing the price comparisons.
2. Analyze the nutritional value of the Joads' daily diet by listing a typical day's menu (when they had money for food) and finding the grams of protein, carbohydrates, and fat for each food. Also categorize each food by group: fruit, vegetable, grain, meat, dairy. What is wrong with the Joads' diet? Which food groups are missing or poorly represented? What is the fat content?
3. Read a biography of Cesar Chavez, the founder of the National Farm Workers' Association. Draw parallels between Chavez' family and the Joads. Write a summary of your conclusions.
4. Rose of Sharon received no prenatal care. Find out what she should have done if the family could have afforded it, and why prenatal care is so important. Make a poster showing what expectant mothers should and should not do.
5. The illustration on the front cover of the novel is by William Low. Use charcoal, watercolors, or pastels to design your own cover illustration for *The Grapes of Wrath*.
6. With a partner or group, choose an important scene from *The Grapes of Wrath* and write a script for dramatization. Present the skit to your class. Include an explanation of why you think the scene is important to the novel.
7. Listen to the lyrics of some songs from the '30s, or consult songbooks in your library to read the lyrics. Find several songs that reflect how people felt about economic conditions. Play the songs for your classmates, or read the words aloud.
8. Find pictures of 1930s cars like the ones the migrant people drove to California. Learn how these old cars worked differently than the ones we have today. Give an oral report on your findings.
9. Find out how modern farming techniques prevent dust storms, crop flooding, and soil exhaustion. Look for information on crop rotation and terracing. Write a report on your findings.