

Grapes of Wrathⁱ

By JD Hysong



Examining an author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. Biographical criticism is the practice of analyzing a literary work through the lens of an author's experience. In this lesson, explore the author's life to understand the novel more fully.

John Steinbeck reported on the Depression-era migrant workers of his native California for various newspapers and journals. A chronicler of the poor and dispossessed, he was a frequent visitor to migrant encampments, an experience that compelled him to write *The Grapes of Wrath*—the novel for which he won the 1940 Pulitzer Prize and is best remembered today.

Discussion Activities

Listen to The Big Read Audio Guide. Students should take notes as they listen.

Ask them to present the three most important points they learned from the Audio Guide. To go more in depth, you might focus on the reflections of one particular commentator. How does the commentator's background shape his or her reading of the novel?

Have students read the following essays from the Readers Guide: "Introduction to the Novel" (pp. 3–4), "John Steinbeck, 1902–1968" (pp. 6–7), and "Steinbeck

Writing Exercise

and His Other Works” (pp. 10–11). Divide the class into groups and assign each group one of the essays. Each group will present a summary of the points in its assigned essay. Ask students to add a creative twist to make their presentations memorable.

Students will be divided into groups of six. They will then collaboratively write a six page paper, using Live Documents. Each student will write one page each. This project is to be completed outside the class. The paper subject is to focus around the in class discussions on how Steinbecks’ background affects his writing.

Homework

Read Chapters 1–5 (pp. 1–39). Ask students to think about how the Oklahoma landscape shapes the lives of the people who live in it. How does their own landscape shape the students’ lives? When did their parents move here, and why?

Standards

- 11.2
- Students read and understand grade-level-appropriate material. The selections in the www.doe.in.gov/standards/readinglist.html illustrate the quality and complexity of the materials to be read by students. At Grade 11, in addition to regular classroom reading, students read a wide variety of nonfiction, such as biographies, autobiographies, books in many different subject areas, essays, speeches, magazines, newspapers, reference materials, technical documents, and online information.

Time

One week

ⁱ <http://www.neabigread.org/books/grapesofwrath/teachersguide02.php>