

Reading Project: Year 5

In our reading project we are going to discuss some of the most famous novels of English and American literature. All the novels in this project require careful reading beyond the plot level. For a full understanding you will have to read between the lines and find the symbolism and allusions of the texts. In order to see these hidden beauties always read with a pencil in your hand and mark any interesting or odd passages in the margin. Discuss your selections in your readers' conferences.

Step 1: Choosing a novel

Visit Amazon.com in the internet and find the five books in our project. Read the brief plot summaries and some readers' comments, then choose the novel that interests you most. You need not order them at Amazon. All of the books are available in Graz.

The Books:

John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*

J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

Step 2: Getting Started: (Reading Diary)

Read the first chapter of your novel and write a 10-minute entry in your reading diary. Please take your reading diary very seriously. Go beyond the plot level and write about all your thoughts, associations, questions...(Check your handout "What is a reading diary?" for further instructions.) Write a second entry into your reading diary after you have read the first half of your novel, and a third one after finishing.

Your reading diary and your marginal notes in the book will be used as a basis for discussion in your readers' conferences. These notes will also help you remember your reflections later (for Matura preparation for example).

Step 3: Readers' Conferences and Workshop tasks

1. Work in your group and share your reflections and questions. Read each other's diaries and try to answer each other's questions. Ask your teacher for help in case of disagreements or open problems.
2. In each readers' conference choose 10 vocab. items that you would like to remember and write them into your vocab book.
3. Do the workshop tasks carefully and collect all the tasks in a folder.

Step 4: Preparing the Presentation

Choose one or two of the presentation tasks (see separate handout). Distribute the work load evenly among the group members and design an interesting, well-rounded group presentation.

Copy your contribution for all the group members + one for your teacher.

Step 5: Presentations

Groups present their novels.

Peer-evaluation and feedback of the presentations + Assessment and feedback from teacher

Step 6: Project Folder

Organize your project folder and hand it in for final assessment. Hand in your reading diary.

Book Presentation

For our final presentations of the reading project choose one of the following tasks. Each student in your group must do a different task. Discuss which of the tasks are most meaningful in connection with your novel. Choose tasks that complement each other so that the class gets a full picture of the main themes, symbolism, background and style of your novel.

- Short biography of the author
- Present an alternative book cover and blurb (and print out all the covers and blurbs available at Amazon.com). Discuss the symbolism of these covers.
- Character portraits of the main characters. (You might want to use the *character profiles* handout. Adding a picture will make your portraits even more realistic.)
- Present the historical and cultural background of your novel. (Use visual aids)
- Write a newspaper article reporting an important incident in your novel.
- Write a poem or song-lyrics that might be used in a film or radio-play of your book.
- Act out a scene of your choice.
- Prepare a "bubble sheet" (A3 poster) where you collect important quotes from your book.
- Identity bags: Bring a bag full of objects that are somehow important to the main character of your book. Show them and explain their relevance.
- Design a board game or quiz to be played in class.
- Choose your favorite scene and imagine how it would be shown in a film. Draw a film storyboard.
- Find a painting or other work of art that deals with one of the main themes in your book. (Choose a painting that reflects the symbolic and metaphorical level of your book, rather than a painting that shows the setting of your story.)
- Road signs: Identify a few symbolic items in your book and draw them like "road signs". Consider the shapes and colors of road signs and make use of their symbolism. Explain the meaning of the symbol on the back of your sign (50 – 100 words).
- Alternative idea: If you have an idea of your own contact your teacher about it.

Additional ideas for the readers of *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World*

- Present the basic principles of propaganda and advertising (use visual aids)
- Give a propaganda speech about any topic of your choice. Then explain the methods you have used.
- Present to pros and cons of genetic engineering (use visual aids)

Pearls and People

When you think of pearls, what are the first things that come to your mind? Write your associations in the box.

What does the pearl signify for Kino and his family at the end of chapter II?

Character portraits: Collect notes about the main characters. What are their character traits? How do they behave?

Kino

Juana

Coyotito

The doctor

Exploring the Symbolism in *The Pearl*

1. **The Pearl:** The pearl takes on different appearances throughout the story. Collect all the descriptions that Kino and Juana give of the pearl. Copy the quotes on a worksheet and don't forget to note page numbers. How do these descriptions of the pearl match Kino's and Juana's situation in the story? Summarize your findings. (100 –200 words)
2. **Music:** Steinbeck makes it clear that music is an important part of the people of the village. Kino, who grew up with this music, has his own songs in his head. His songs provide him comfort and give him warning. As you go along collect Kino's songs. Note page numbers and themes of the songs. In what way do they reflect Kino's situation in the story? Summarize your findings in about 100-200 words.

The Pearl: a Parable

Parable, name given originally by Greek rhetoricians to a literary illustration. In the New Testament it signifies a short, fictitious narrative, designed to illuminate a spiritual truth; it has been used similarly by later writers to convey a moral point.

In the introduction to *The Pearl* Steinbeck writes "If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it."

What meaning do you take from *The Pearl*? What do you consider to be the moral of the story? Does it have any relevance for our life today?

Write a short essay of about 200 words.

Looking at some details:

1. How did you think *The Pearl* was going to end? Were you surprised about the ending? How do you feel about it?
2. In chapter VI Kino's flight with his family is described in great detail. The atmosphere, sights, sounds and smells of the desert and mountains are portrayed vividly. There are also constant references to animal life.

3. Find a few passages where Kino and Juana are compared to wild animals. Mark them in your book and write down the page numbers for further reference.

4. How are the trackers portrayed? Find a few telling passages.

5. Comment on the passage where the trackers hear Coyotito crying (chapter VI, about four pages from the end, last direct speech.)

6. Read chapter I, §8 and Chapter VI, §7. In chapter I Kino watches the ants “with the detachment of God.” How does he treat the ants in chapter VI? Can you explain this?

7. Reread chapter III, § 9 – 15 and chapters VI, §10 and compare Kino’s thoughts. What has happened to his vision?

8. Compare chapter III, second last paragraph and chapter VI, fourth last paragraph. Describe the changes of the pearl as Juana and Kino perceive it.

9. One of Kino's dreams is fulfilled at the end of the story. However, he has to pay a much higher price than the pearl. What does Kino gain and what does he lose?

10. What is Juana and Kino's original reason for hoping to find the perfect pearl in chapter II?

What is their ultimate reason for getting rid of the perfect pearl at the end of chapter VI?

Who is the only character in the story who has no direct, personal interest in the pearl?

11. Imagine *The Pearl* as a movie. If you had to choose a freeze frame from the book to use as a poster advertising the film, which one would you choose and why?

John Steinbeck's Life and Work

John Steinbeck is one of the most widely read American writers. He spent much of his life writing about the common folk of the world. He wrote about everyday men and women with common struggles.

What in Steinbeck's life would prompt him to tell the world about farmers, laborers, strikers and fishermen?

Read the timeline of events in Steinbeck's life and find out what might have influenced him to depict such characters. Then summarize your findings in a coherent text. Write about 150 words.



The Martha Heasley Cox
Center for Steinbeck Studies

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN JOHN STEINBECK'S LIFE

(by Robert B. Harmon)

27 February **1902**, Steinbeck born in Salinas, California, the third of four children and the only son of John Ernst II and Olive Hamilton Steinbeck. He spent his childhood and adolescence in the Salinas Valley, later called the "Salad Bowl of the Nation."

1915-19 Attended Salinas High School (Original building no longer in existence.)

1919-25 Attended classes at Stanford University, leaving without taking a degree. During these years, Steinbeck dropped out for several months and was employed intermittently as a sales clerk, farm laborer, ranch hand, bench chemist and factory worker.

November **1925**, traveled by freighter from Los Angeles to New York City; worked as a construction laborer and, briefly, for the *New York American*

1926-28, lived in Lake Tahoe, California and worked as a caretaker for a summer home.

August **1929**, publication of first novel, *Cup of Gold*, by McBride (New York).

14 January **1930**, marries Carol Henning. October, meets Edward F. Ricketts, marine biologist, philosopher, longtime friend.

October **1932**, novel, *The Pastures of Heaven*, published by Brewer, Warren, and Putnam (New York).

September **1933** September, novel, *To A God Unknown* published by Ballou (New York).

1934 Gathers information on farm labor unions. Interviews labor organizer in Seaside.

28 May **1935**, first popular success, novel *Tortilla Flat* about Monterey's paisanos. Published by Covici-Friede (New York); beginning of lifelong friendship with editor Pascal Covici.

October **1936**, novel, *In Dubious Battle*, about striking workers. Published by Covici-Friede.

06 February **1937**, play-novelette, *Of Mice and Men* published by Covici-Friede; Summer, first trip to Europe and Russia; September, *The Red Pony*, three connected stories, published by Covici-Friede; November 23, New York opening of the play *Of Mice and Men* (207 performances).

April **1938**, *Their Blood Is Strong*, a nonfiction account of the migrant labor problem in California, published by the Simon J. Lubin Society (San Francisco); May, receives the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the play *Of Mice and Men*; September, short story collection, *The Long Valley*, incorporating *The Red Pony* (1937), published by Viking (New York), where Pascal Covici became an editor after the bankruptcy of his own firm.

April **1939**, *The Grapes of Wrath*, his greatest critical success, published by Viking, provoking both great popular acclaim and violent political condemnation for its depiction of Oklahoma migrants and California growers, as well as for its alleged "vulgar" language and socialist bias. December, film of *Of Mice and Men* released.

January **1940**, film of *The Grapes of Wrath* released; March 11 - April 20, marine expedition in the Gulf of California with Ricketts; Spring, receives the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath*; Summer, documentary film about living conditions in rural Mexico, *The Forgotten Village*.

Spring **1941**, separated from Carol; Fall, moves to New York City with singer Gwyndolyn Conger; 05 December, *Sea of Cortez*, written with Edward Ricketts, published by Viking.

March **1942**, sued for divorce by Carol; 06 March, novel, *The Moon Is Down* published by Viking; 08 April, New York opening of the play *The Moon Is Down*; May, film of *Tortilla Flat* released; 27 November, *Bombs Away* published by Viking.

March **1943**, film of *The Moon Is Down* released; 29 March, marries Gwyn Conger in New Orleans; June-October, in Europe and North Africa as war correspondent for *New York Herald Tribune*. Divorce from Carol final.
02 August **1944**, birth of first son, Thom.

02 January **1945**, publication of novel *Cannery Row*, by Viking.

12 June **1946**, birth of second son, John IV.

February **1947**, novel, *The Wayward Bus*, published by Viking; August-September, tour of Russia with photographer Robert Capa, for the *New York Herald Tribune*; November, novella *The Pearl* published by Viking.

April **1948**, *A Russian Journal*, an account of his 1947 tour of Russia, published by Viking; May, Ed Ricketts killed in automobile accident; August, divorced by Gwyn; December, elected to American Academy of Arts and Letters.

October **1950**, novella, *Burning Bright*, published by Viking; 18 October, New York City opening of the play *Burning Bright*; 28 December, marries third wife, Elaine Anderson Scott.

September **1951**, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, the narrative part of the *Sea of Cortez* (1941) including an original essay "About Ed Ricketts," published by Viking.

March **1952**, film, *Viva Zapata!* released (screenplay published in Rome by Edizioni Filmcritica in 1953; first published in America, edited by Robert Morsberger, by Viking in 1975); September, novel *East of Eden* published by Viking.

June **1954**, novel, *Sweet Thursday*, published by Viking (a sequel to *Cannery Row*).

March **1955**, purchases a summer home in Sag Harbor, Long Island, New York; 03 November, New York City opening of *Pipe Dream*, a Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein III musical based on *Sweet Thursday*.

April **1957**, novel, *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, published by Viking; film of *The Wayward Bus* released.

September **1958**, *Once There Was a War*, a collection of his 1943 wartime dispatches, published by Viking.

February - October **1959**, travels in England and Wales, researching background for a modern English version of Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1485).

September - November **1960**, tours United States with poodle, Charley.

April **1961**, twelfth novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, published by Viking.

July **1962**, *Travels with Charley*, the journal of his 1960 tour, published by Viking; 25 October, Steinbeck is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

October - December **1963**, travels to Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union on United States Information Agency cultural tour with dramatist Edward Albee.

12 October **1966**, *America and Americans*, reflections on contemporary America, published by Viking.

December **1966** - January **1967**, extensive visit to South Vietnam for fact-finding and to visit John IV.

20 December **1968**, dies of arteriosclerosis in New York City.