

THEATRE  
RESOURCE GUIDE

# The Grapes of Wrath

adapted by Frank Galati  
*from the novel by John Steinbeck*

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## Using this theatre resource guide

This theatre resource guide for *The Grapes of Wrath* is designed to be used with students before and after attending the Festival Theatre production. The guide includes information and activities that will increase student understanding of this and other theatrical performances. You may reproduce any and all of the following pages to distribute to students or parents.

### **The Authors and Story History**

**Page 3**

This page familiarizes students with the authors and history of the story.

### **Story Themes**

**Page 4**

This page familiarizes students with the story themes of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

### **Character List**

**Page 5**

This page provides an overview of the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

### **Lines of Dialogue**

**Page 6**

This activity page provides dialogue from the script and involves students in experimenting with different ways to speak or “deliver” character’s lines.

### **The Part YOU Play**

**Page 7**

This page reminds students of their role as audience members, stressing the importance of listening carefully and responding appropriately. Post-performance discussion questions are also included.

### **References:**

SparkNotes Editors. “SparkNote on The Grapes of Wrath.” SparkNotes.com. SparkNotes LLC. 2007. Web. 24 Mar. 2016.  
Barbara Shoup, Executive Director of the Indiana Writers Center. “Throughout His Life, John Steinbeck was a Champion of the Downtrodden and Repressed.” Storytellingarts.org/2016/03/1451/ Web. 24 Mar. 2016.

# THE AUTHOR AND STORY HISTORY

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US novelist John Steinbeck (1902 – 1968). (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902. He was a solitary individual who preferred to spend time exploring the outdoors and sporadically attended Stanford University until leaving to pursue his writing career. Steinbeck began writing novels in 1929, but he achieved little commercial or critical success until the publication of *Tortilla Flat* in 1935.

Steinbeck frequently used his fiction to delve into the lives of society's most downtrodden citizens. A trio of novels in the late 1930s focused on the lives of migrant workers in California: *In Dubious Battle*, published in 1936, was followed by *Of Mice and Men* in 1937, and, in 1939, Steinbeck's masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

In the years following the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck wrote seven more novels and two novellas. He also produced eleven works of nonfiction.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1962, for his "realistic and imaginative writing, combining as it does sympathetic humor and keen social perception." In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

## History of the Story

The young Steinbeck had spent summers working with migrant workers on sugar beet farms, where he observed the harshness of their lives as well as the strong sense of community that enabled the migrants to survive. His deep, personal knowledge of this material, his sympathy and respect for the migrant families, and his growing anger about the indifference of the industrialists in their abuse of the land and willful destruction of people's lives inspired *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Published in 1939, *The Grapes of Wrath* was an instant bestseller. In 1940, the novel was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the National Book Award. The book was quickly made into a famed 1940 Hollywood movie of the same name and was adapted for the stage by Frank Galati in 1988. Through the years, the story has inspired numerous popular songs including Woody Guthrie's two-part song—"Tom Joad - Parts 1 & 2"—from the album *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940).

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# STORY THEMES

## 1) Man's Inhumanity to Man

Steinbeck consistently points to the fact that the migrants' great suffering is caused not by bad weather or mere misfortune but by their fellow human beings. Historical, social, and economic circumstances separate people into rich and poor, landowner and tenant, and the people in the dominant roles struggle to preserve their positions. The story draws a simple line through the population—one that divides the privileged from the poor—and identifies that division as the primary source of evil and suffering in the world.

*How is the division between the privileged landowners and poor migrant workers perpetuated in the story?*



*Migrants during the Great Depression.*

## 2) The Power of Family & Fellowship

The Grapes of Wrath chronicles the story of two “families”: the Joads and the collective body of migrant workers. Although the Joads are joined by blood, it is not their genetics but their loyalty and commitment to one another that establishes their true kinship. In the migrant lifestyle portrayed in the play, the biological family unit quickly becomes a thing of the past, as life on the road demands that new connections and new kinships be formed.

*How do the characters join together to face adversity?*



*An abandoned farm north of Dalhart, Texas, 1938. Credit: Dorothea Lange, The Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division.*

## 3) Effects of Selfishness & Altruism

According to Steinbeck, many of the evils that plague the Joad family and the migrants stem from selfishness. Simple self-interest motivates the landowners and businessmen to sustain a system that sinks thousands of families into poverty. In contrast to and in conflict with this policy of selfishness stands the migrants' behavior toward one another. Aware that their livelihood and survival depend upon their devotion to the collective good, the migrants unite—sharing their dreams as well as their burdens—in order to survive.

*What are some examples of self-perpetuating cycles of greed and generosity in this play?*

# CHARACTER LIST

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**Tom Joad** - The play's protagonist, and Ma and Pa Joad's favorite son. Tom is good-natured and thoughtful and makes do with what life hands him. He lives fully for the present moment, which enables him to be a great source of vitality for the Joad family.

**Ma Joad** - The mother of the Joad family. Ma is introduced as a woman who knowingly and gladly fulfills her role as "the citadel of the family." She is the healer of the family's ills and the arbiter of its arguments.

**Pa Joad** - Ma Joad's husband and Tom's father. Pa Joad is an Oklahoma tenant farmer who has been evicted from his farm. A plainspoken, good-hearted man, Pa directs the effort to take the family to California.

**Jim Casy** - A former preacher who gave up his ministry out of a belief that all human experience is holy. Often the moral voice of the novel, Casy articulates many of its most important themes, among them the sanctity of the people and the essential unity of all mankind.

**Rose of Sharon** - The oldest of Ma and Pa Joad's daughters, and Connie's wife. An impractical, petulant, and romantic young woman, Rose of Sharon begins the journey to California pregnant with her first child.

**Grampa Joad** - Tom Joad's grandfather. The founder of the Joad farm, Grampa is now old and infirm. Once possessed of a cruel and violent temper, Grampa's wickedness is now limited almost exclusively to his tongue.

**Granma Joad** - Granma is a pious Christian, who loves casting hellfire and damnation in her husband's direction.

**Al Joad** - Tom's younger brother, a sixteen-year-old boy obsessed with cars and girls. Al is vain and cocky but an extremely competent mechanic, and his expertise proves vital in bringing the Joads to California.

**Connie** - Rose of Sharon's husband

**Noah Joad** - Tom's older brother. Noah has been slightly deformed since his birth: Pa Joad had to perform the delivery and, panicking, tried to pull him out forcibly.

**Uncle John** - Tom's uncle, who, years ago, refused to fetch a doctor for his pregnant wife when she complained of stomach pains. He has never forgiven himself for her death, and he often dwells heavily on the negligence he considers a sin.

**Ruthie Joad** - The second and younger Joad daughter. Ruthie has a fiery relationship to her brother Winfield: the two are intensely dependent upon one another and fiercely competitive.

**Winfield Joad** - Winfield is the youngest of the Joad children.

**Floyd Knowles** - The migrant worker who first inspires Tom and Casy to work for labor organization.

**Muley Graves** - One of the Joads' Oklahoma neighbors.

**Agnes Wainwright** - The daughter of the couple who shares the Joads' boxcar toward the end of the story. Agnes becomes engaged to Al, who leaves his family in order to stay with her.

# 6

# LINES OF DIALOGUE

*The playwright writes lines of dialogue for the actors to speak. The dialogue gives information about the story and the characters.*

Read these lines of dialogue from *The Grapes of Wrath* as prepared for stage by Frank Galati. What messages do you think the character in the play is trying to convey with these words?

Actors experiment with different ways to say or “deliver” lines. Work with a partner. Try delivering these lines in different ways to most effectively send the message you think should be conveyed. (Boldly, fearfully, sadly, proudly, etc) When you attend *The Grapes Of Wrath*, listen for these lines and for how the actor delivers them.

## Group One:

# 1

*Narrator*

“Men stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn, dying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust. And the women came out of the houses to stand by their men- to feel whether this time they would break. The women studied the men’s faces secretly. For the corn could go, as long as something else remained.”

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## Group Two:

# 2

*Casy to Joad family at Uncle John’s farm.*

“I got thinkin’ how we was holy when we was one thing, an’ mankin’ was holy when it was one thing. An’ it on’y got unholy when one mis’able little fella got the bit in his teeth an’ run off his own way, kickin’ an’ draggin’ an’ fightin’. Fella like that bust the holi-ness. But when they’re all workin’ together- kind of harnessed to the whole shebang—that’s right, that’s holy.”

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## Group Three:

# 3

*Ma to Tom after they are forced to leave Hooverville*

“Easy. You got to have patience. Why, Tom- us people will go on livin’ when all them people is gone. Why, Tom, we’re the people that live. They ain’t gonna wipe us out. Why, we’re the people- we go on....We keep a-comin’. Don you fret none, Tom. A different time’s a comin’.”

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## Group Four:

# 4

*Ma to Rose of Sharon before Granma passes*

“They’s a time of change, an’ when that comes, dyin’ is a piece of all dyin’, and bearin’ is a piece of all bearin’, an’ bearin’ an’ dyin’ is two pieces of the same thing. An’ then things ain’t lonely any more. An’ then a hurt don’t hurt so bad, ‘cause it ain’t a lonely hurt no more, Rosasharn.”

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## Theatre Etiquette

To prepare for presenting *The Grapes of Wrath*, actors memorized their lines and practiced their movements. They worked with director who helped them move about the stage and play their parts well. The costume and set were also planned with the director and created a look that was historically correct. The stage manager is ready to make sure everyone on stage and backstage is safe and does the right things at the right time. All Festival Theatre needs now is YOU!

YOU have a part to play in *The Grapes of Wrath*. You are the audience. Your part requires you to listen carefully and watch closely.

It's okay to laugh or applaud if you enjoy a play, but remember that you and the actors are in the same room. Talking or whispering to friends during the performance will distract actors. Help them play their parts well by playing YOUR part well.

## Reacting to the Performance

After the performance, share your experience of *The Grapes of Wrath* with your class, family and friends:

- Who was the most memorable character and why?
- What did you learn about life in the Great Depression? In what ways was this time different than now? How was it the same?
- What were the lessons and themes of the play?
- How did the Joad family handle their hardships?
- What was your favorite part of the play and why?

## Get Involved

For information about Arts Education opportunities at Festival Theatre, visit [www.festivaltheatre.org](http://www.festivaltheatre.org) or call 715.483.3387.