Grapes of Wrath

Chapter 1
1. What tragedy is foreshadowed by the suggestion that “the leaves of the young corn became less stiff and erect; they bent in a curve at first, and then, as the central ribs of strength grew weak, each left tilted downward”?

2. Why does the sky darken?

3. What does Steinbeck suggest about the power of wrath when he writes that as long as the men were “hard and angry and resistant,… no misfortune was too great to bear”?

4. Why does Steinbeck not introduce any of his major characters in this chapter?

Chapter 2
1. To what extent does the description of Tom Joad’s new clothes serve as a narrative clue about his past?

2. What is significant about the way Tom convinces the driver to violate his “No Riders” policy?

3. Why was Tom incarcerated for four years?

Chapter 3
1. What human characteristics does the turtle exemplify?

2. To what extent does the turtle’s encounter with the car and the truck parallel the fate of the Joad family as they are driven off their land?

Chapter 4
1. Why does Jim Casy profess he cannot preach any more?

2. What might Steinbeck be suggesting by making the preacher’s name Jim Casy?

3. What does Casy’s attitude toward sin contribute to the unfolding theme of the novel?

4. How does Tom’s being a paroled convict fit into this theme?

5. Why does Casy not profess to love Jesus?

6. According to Casy, what is the Holy Spirit?
Chapter 5
1. How sincere is Steinbeck in calling the banks monsters? How do you know?

2. Why do most landowners send spokesmen or representatives to talk to the tenant farmers?

3. What is the significance of the goggles worn by the tractor drivers?

4. Why would it be pointless for the farmers to shoot the tractor drivers in order to avoid eviction?

Chapter 6
1. What do we learn about the Joad farm when we read that “the cotton grew in the dooryard and up against the house”?

2. What does the turtle’s continued journey in a southwestern direction foreshadow?

3. What is the significance of the dry well on the Joad farm?

4. What effect does Steinbeck’s use of colloquialism and regional dialect?

5. To what extent is Muley Graves’ name indicative of the consequences he will face if he stays in Oklahoma?

6. What is the significant about this simile: “The gray cat sneaked away toward the open barn shed and passed inside like a shadow”?

7. What is significant about Tom’s prediction that Pa Joad will be critical of the writing skills he acquired in jail?

Chapter 7
1. How do the pace and tone change in this chapter? How does Steinbeck achieve this new pace and tone?

2. Why does Steinbeck use the shift in tone and pace?

3. What aspects of the Dust Bowl crisis does Steinbeck suggest in this chapter?
Chapter 8
1. Although Uncle John drinks and has licentious tendencies, the reader still has sympathy, if not admiration, for this character. How does Steinbeck accomplish this?

2. How does Steinbeck use light and darkness to suggest character and developing relationships?

3. Why is the Joad family at first apprehensive when they see Tom is not in jail anymore?

4. What does the following description reveal about Ma's character and her standing in the Joad family: “And since Tom and the children could not know hurt or fear unless she acknowledged hurt and fear, she had practiced denying them in herself”?

5. What is the "strange, silent house" in which Noah lives?

6. Why does Pa feel ashamed that Noah is such an "awkward" child?

7. To what extent does Casy's failure to say "Amen" at the end of his prayer illustrate the difference between his religious convictions and the religious convictions held by families like the Joads?

8. To what extent does Casy's failure to say "Amen" at the end of his prayer foreshadow the need for the Joad family to adjust or abandon their adherence to rules and artificially imposed doctrines as they embark on their journey west?

Chapter 9
1. How do the descriptions of people sorting out their belongings prior to leaving for California affect the reader?

2. What does the line, "But I warn you, you're buying what will plow your own children under," indicate about the relationship between the people leaving Oklahoma and the people staying behind?

Chapter 10
1. How does Ma's vision of California resemble the biblical Eden and the Promised Land? What promises are conveyed by means of the biblical imagery?

2. What did Tom learn in prison that he is able to convey to Ma when she enquires about the length of the journey ahead of them?

3. How does Ma respond to Tom's fear that there are too many people looking for work in California?
4. How has pregnancy affected Rose of Sharon?

5. How can we evaluate Uncle John’s attitude toward women—and toward Rose of Sharon in particular—when we learn that he “would have liked Rose of Sharon to sit in the honor seat. This was impossible, because she was young and a woman.”?

6. Before the Joads leave for California, “The family met next to the most important place, near the truck.” What made the truck so central to the Joad family?

7. What new role emerges for Al?

8. Who makes the final decision about taking along Casy, and what does this decision reveal about the power hierarchy in the Joad family?

9. Why does Ma decide to burn the personal belongings she is unable to take to California?

10. What mood is created in the last paragraph of this chapter, and what word choices and images does Steinbeck employ in order to establish the mood?

Chapter 11
1. What idea does Steinbeck convey with the simile, “The heat goes out of it like the living heat that leaves a corpse”?

2. What does Steinbeck suggest when he claims that “the land is so much more than its analysis”?

3. How does Steinbeck emphasize the desolation left behind after the migration of the tenants?

Chapter 12
1. What road is the main route for migrants traveling west?

2. What is the purpose of listing all of the towns passed by the migrants on the way to California?

3. What do the specific car problems mentioned in this short chapter refer to?
4. What do the travelers learn about the California border patrol, and to what extent does this warning foreshadow events that will occur later in the novel?

5. Why does Steinbeck end the chapter with the anecdote about the stranded family and the sedan?

Chapter 13

1. What does Steinbeck suggest when he writes that Al “had become the soul of the car”?

2. In what way are the yellow gas stations that are putting the fat man out of business reminiscent of the tractors that destroy the farmhouses in Oklahoma?

3. What is the significance of the death of the Joads’ dog at this early stage in the family’s travels?

4. Why does Oklahoma City embarrass Ruthie and Winfield “with its bigness and its strangeness”?

5. How does Tom appease Ma’s fears that he will be arrested for violating the terms of his parole?

6. How does Grampa’s death affect the relationship between the Joads and the Wilsons?

7. Why is the Joad family at first apprehensive about burying Grampa without informing the authorities?

8. What is significant about the Joads’ decision to bury Grampa without informing the proper authorities even though they are apprehensive at first?

9. How are the Joads beginning to act more like members of a larger community than they did at the beginning of their journey to California?

10. What makes Sairy Wilson a heroic character even though she is physically weak?

11. What does Casy imply when he says that “Grampa didn’ die tonight. He died the minute you took ‘im off the place”?

Chapter 14

1. What does Steinbeck mean by “Manself”?

2. What, then, is the significance of the paragraph that ends, “fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept”?
3. Why is the change, as Steinbeck puts it, “from ‘I’ to ‘we,’” such a momentous development for the disenfranchised migrant families?

4. What is the social significance of this change? When does Steinbeck make it most clear?

5. What does Steinbeck achieve by shifting to the second person at the end of the chapter?

6. Why are the Western States “nervous”?

Chapter 15
1. What was Steinbeck’s purpose for including the license plates and car types of the vehicles driving west on Highway 66?

2. What attitude toward the migrant farmers is exemplified by Mae and Al at the hamburger stand?

3. Explain the ambiguity of truck drivers’ response to Mae’s kindness.

4. What is the significance of Al’s taking the nickels from the cash register to win the jackpot in the slot machine?

5. Why does Steinbeck have this incident occur to an anonymous family and not the Joads?

Chapter 16
1. What is the “new technique of living” the families are settling into? What does it suggest about the way life on the road changes the migrant families?

2. How does Steinbeck demonstrate Rose of Sharon’s naiveté and immaturity in this chapter?

3. What course of action does Tom suggest when the Wilson’s touring car breaks down?

4. What is significant about Ma’s refusal to comply with Tom’s proposal?

5. How does Tom and Al’s exchange with the one-eyed man support Steinbeck’s Socialist theme?

6. What do the Joads learn about the handbills when they talk to the raged man at the campsite?

Chapter 17
1. Why is it easy for the families in the camps to form communities?
2. To what extent does the community that forms in the camps on the road resemble traditional, non-transient society?

3. In these communities, it is a “right” of hungry people to be fed. To what extent does this right differentiate the roadside communities from the world existing outside of these communities and illustrate Steinbeck’s Socialist ideals?

4. Explain the threat to the migrant farmers that is foreshadowed by the simile in the following line: “But along the highway the cars of the migrant people crawled out like bugs, and the narrow concrete miles stretched ahead.”

Chapter 18

1. Some adjectives used to describe the landscape seen by the Joads when they are crossing over from Arizona into California are “jagged,” “pale,” “broken,” and “terrible.” What impact do descriptions like these have on the tone of the chapter?

2. Why does the man bathing in the river insist that the people in California are “scairt”?

3. How did the word “Okie” devolve into a derogatory term?

4. Why does Steinbeck include the story of the journalist with the million acres?

5. Why does the bathing man regret telling the others about the hardships in California?

6. What does Ma mean when she tells Rose of Sharon, “bearin’ and dyin’ is two pieces of the same the thing”?

7. Why is Ma afraid that the policeman will talk to Tom?

8. How does Steinbeck foreshadow the unraveling of the Joad’s California dream?

9. What does Steinbeck suggest about the nature of prejudice in the following lines uttered by the young boy working at the service station: “Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain’t human. A human being wouldn’t live like they do.”?

10. When the Joads stop at the inspection station, Ma’s face is “swollen and her eyes [are] hard.” What does this description suggest about Ma?
11. What biblical allusion is embedded in the passage that describes the Joads traveling across the desert before they reach a land filled with orchards and rich, fertile soil?

Chapter 19

1. Why does Steinbeck begin the chapter with the fact that California once belonged to the Mexicans who were pushed off it by Americans hungry for land?

2. Why does Steinbeck compare the farming industry in California to the Roman Empire?

3. What are the three “facts” that forebode an ominous future for the landowners?

4. Why do the landowners hate the Okies?

5. Why is Steinbeck devoting so much of this chapter to discussion of land ownership, squatting, and how one comes to “own” land?

6. What does the following mean: “For every manload to lift, five pairs of arms extended to lift it; for every stomachful of food available, five mouths to open”?

7. On what kind of note does this chapter end?

Chapter 20

1. How does the concept of survival by community effort begin to evolve in this chapter? What inspires this idea for Tom?

2. Why, according to Knowles, have the landowners over-advertised for labor?

3. What happens to workers who try to organize a labor union?

4. How do law enforcement officials deal with disorderly, demanding, or inquisitive migrant workers?

5. Which statements by Connie foreshadow his later disappearance?

6. What does Connie’s consideration to “study tractors” reveal about his loyalty to the Joad family and to other farmers in Oklahoma?
7. To what extent does Ma's decision to share dinner with the hungry children at the camp reflect the moral dilemma faced by the poor and disenfranchised with regard to their responsibilities toward their own families and toward the larger migrant community?

8. Why does Floyd share his knowledge of work in the North with the Joads, but not with other families, and to what extent does his decision reflect challenges faced by the migrant communities?

9. Why does Jim Casy accept the blame for Tom when he attacks the police officer?

10. Why do the Joads plan to move to the government camp?

Chapter 21
1. How does the simile in the closing paragraph of this chapter underline the correlation between hunger and anger?

Chapter 22
1. How does the description of the white buildings in the Weedpatch camp affect the tone of this chapter?

2. What aspects of the Weedpatch camp are reminiscent of a Socialist system?

3. How does Timothy Wallace's failure to introduce himself by name illustrate the theme of moving from concern for the individual to concern for the community?

4. What differentiates Mr. Thomas from many of the other landowners and employers?

5. What does Thomas mean when he says that the Bank of the West has "paper on everything it don't own"?

6. What is ironic about the existence of a "Farmers' Association"?

7. Why is the Farmer's Association not able to enter the camp unless there is a riot?

8. How does Steinbeck create comic relief in this chapter?

9. What is the issue of "reds" and "red agitators"?
10. What does Ma’s reaction to hearing that the Ladies’ Committee will be coming to her tent reveal about her sense of personal pride?

11. Why is Ma reassured when the camp manager accepts a cup of coffee at her tent?

12. Why does Ma suddenly begin to reminisce about the sad times when she finally reaches a place where she can relax and be happy?

13. Why is Rose of Sharon frightened of the religious woman?

Chapter 23
1. What activities provide entertainment for the migrant families?

2. What is ironic about the “religious life” of the commune?

Chapter 24
1. How does the discovery and expulsion of the would-be agitators illustrate the power of community?

2. How does Pa’s discussion with the man in the black hat exemplify the growing labor problem?

Chapter 25
1. How does Steinbeck create a change of tone and mood between the beginning of the chapter and the end? Why does Steinbeck employ this change in tone and mood?

2. Why do the landowners destroy the food even though thousands of people are starving to death?

3. What significance does this chapter have for the title of the novel?

Chapter 26
1. What is significant about the fact that it is Ma who decides when the family should move on?

2. How does this shift in power exemplify Steinbeck’s Socialist theme?

3. What reason does Ma give Tom for making Pa angry? How does this support Steinbeck’s theme of wrath?
4. How do the men’s recognition of the benefits and strengths of the Weedpatch camp help establish the theme of Socialism?

5. How is Steinbeck able to convey the idea that-despite all the hardships they have already endured-the Joad family is clinging to a sense of hope to keep them going forward as they leave the Weedpatch camp to move a new farm in search of work and lodging?

6. Jim Casy tells Tom that he believes the men he met in jail “was nice fellas” and that it was “need makes all the trouble.” What has Casy realized?

7. How has Casy’s experience in prison enabled him to realize the necessity to build a Socialist society?

8. Why do the policemen murder Casy?

9. How does Casy’s death establish him as a Christ figure?

Chapter 27
1. How is the cotton industry corrupt on the part of the landowners as well as the pickers? What is ironic about this corruption?

2. How does this chapter emphasize the theme of human endurance?

Chapter 28
1. What does the fact that the Joads buy new clothes for themselves reveal about their financial situation?

2. How does Tom’s new philosophy/theology- which he learned from Casy- reflect Steinbeck’s Socialist views?

3. In this chapter, Uncle John says that he “don’t need no safety razor, neither. Stuff settin’ out there, you jus’ feel like buyin’ it whther you need it or not.” How does his statement function as a criticism of the nature of capitalism?

4. How does Tom’s conversation with Ma establish him as a disciple of the Christ-like figure, Casy? How does Tom adopt Casy’s religious convictions?

5. What is significant about Al and Aggie’s announcement?

Chapter 29
1. What is ironic about the fact that the torrential rains and floods they bring cause so much sickness and death among the migrants in this chapter?
2. How does this chapter correlate the rainfalls with the theme of wrath?

Chapter 30
1. How do the sense of community and cooperation between the migrant workers in the cotton camp disintegrate in this closing chapter?

2. What is the significance of the fate of Rose of Sharon’s baby for the cycle of life theme?

3. How does Steinbeck use religious imagery connected with the burial of Rose of Sharon’s dead baby in order to further the novel’s political agenda?

4. How does the final scene of this novel, which is both poignant and controversial, illustrate Casy’s notion of the human soul?

5. How does the final scene draw a correlation between the theme of the cycle of life and the theme of change?