

English 1 Honors
Summer Reading Guide
***The Pearl* - John Steinbeck**

Background

The Pearl was written by Nobel Prize winning author John Steinbeck in 1947. A native of California, Steinbeck spent a number of years in his adult life studying the marine life along the shores of the Gulf of the California Baja (the setting of *The Pearl*). It was here that Steinbeck met the Indian people on whom he based his characters in *The Pearl*. It was also where he heard an old story about “the pearl of the world,” which was about a large pearl that was eventually tossed back into the sea from where it was taken.

The Pearl opens with a statement that the tale to be told is a parable. A parable is a story that gives a moral or lesson. Many examples of parables can be found in the Bible. As you read the novel, try to decide what lesson Steinbeck is teaching through his story of the pearl.

Symbolism

The Pearl is heavily allegorical. An allegory is a story in which people, things, and happenings have hidden or symbolic meaning. Allegories, like parables, are used for teaching or explaining ideas or moral principles. The pearl itself is used in many pieces of literature as a symbol of purity, goodness, and perfection. As you read, think about how Steinbeck is using the pearl as a symbol.

Guiding Questions

After finishing *The Pearl*, you should be able to discuss/answer the following:

1. Describe the following main characters: Kino, Juana, Coyotito. What does each represent?
2. What emotions and values are symbolized by Kino’s song of the family? How does the song of evil threaten those values?
3. What does Kino think that the giant pearl will do for him? How does the pearl actually affect his life? How are each of his dreams corrupted or fulfilled in an ironic way by the final chapter of the novel?
4. How do the townspeople react to the news of Kino’s pearl? What generalizations can you draw from their reaction? Do you believe this generalization is true in real life?
5. How and why does Juana look at the pearl differently than Kino?
6. When and why does Kino first realize his old life is gone?
7. How do Kino’s and Juana’s personalities balance each other?
8. Is *The Pearl* a tragic story of loss or one of triumph? Explain your position by analyzing the central conflict throughout the course of the novel.
9. How do the following types of conflict as relate to the novel:
 - character vs. nature – a character faces a problem with some force of nature (a storm, cold, etc.)
 - character vs. character – a character faces a problem with another character(s)
 - character vs. self – a character faces a physical or emotional problem or struggle
 - character vs. society – a character faces a problem with part of society (government, law, tradition, etc.)
 - character vs. fate – a character faces a problem with a force such as fate, God, or luck