

The Grapes of Wrath

Warm-ups/Close Readings

Identify and explain all language/literary devices working within the passage to create meaning. Explain the author's purpose, and the significance of the passage to the work as a whole.

1. (Ch. 3)

The concrete highway was edged with a mat of tangled, broken, dry grass, and the grass heads were heavy with oat beards to catch on a dog's coat, and foxtails to tangle in a horse's fetlocks, and clover burrs to fasten in sheep's wool; sleeping life waiting to be spread and dispersed, every seed armed with an appliance of dispersal, twisting darts and parachutes for the wind, little spears and balls of tiny thorns, and all waiting for animals and for the wind, for a man's trouser cuff or the hem of a woman's skirt, all passive but armed with appliances of activity, still, but each possessed of the anlage of movement.

2. (Ch. 9)

But watch it, mister. There's a premium goes with this pile of junk and the bay horses--so beautiful--a packet of bitterness to grow in your house and to flower, some day. We could have saved you, but you cut us down, and soon you will, be cut down and there'll be none of us to save you.

3. (Ch. 9)

To California or any place--everyone a drum major leading a parade of hurts, marching with our bitterness. And some day--the armies of bitterness will all be going the same way. And they'll all walk together, and there'll be a dead terror from it.

4. (Ch. 10)

The ancient Hudson, with bent and scarred radiator screen, with grease in dusty globules at the worn edge of every moving part, with hub caps gone and caps of red dust in their places--this was the new hearth, the living center of the family; half passenger car and half truck, high-sided and clumsy.

5. (Ch. 14)

Here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart; make them hate, fear, suspect each other. Here is the anlage of the thing you fear. This is the zygote. For here "I lost my land". is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate-- "We lost our land."

6. (Ch. 15)

Lines of weariness around the eyes, lines of discontent down from the mouth, breasts lying heavily in little hammocks, stomach and thighs straining against cases of rubber. And the mouths panting, the eyes sullen, disliking sun and wind and earth, resenting food and weariness, hating time that rarely makes them beautiful and always makes them old.

7. (Ch. 16)

In the grassy lot the wrecks lay, cars with twisted, stove-in noses, wounded cars lying on their sides with the wheels gone. Engines rusting on the ground and against the shed. A great pile of junk; fenders and truck sides, wheels and axles; over the whole Iota spirit of decay, of mold and rust; twisted iron, half-gutted engines, a mass of derelicts.

8. (Ch. 17)

The cars of the migrant people crawled out of the side roads onto the great cross-country highway, and they took the migrant way to the West. In the daylight they scuttled like bugs to the westward; and as the dark caught them, they clustered like bugs near to shelter and to water.

9. (Ch. 25)

There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificate--died of malnutrition--because the food must rot, must be forced to rot.

10. (Ch. 29)

Over the high coast mountains and over the valleys the gray clouds marched in from the ocean. The wind blew fiercely and silently, high in the air, and it swished in the brush, and it roared in the forests.

Teacher's Notes to *Grapes of Wrath* Warm-ups

1. Syntax/parallel structure creates a rhythm suggesting movement.

Descriptive details are organized around the movement of seed from grass to moving animals, wind, people.

Connotative language--tangled, broken, dry--creates a subtle atmosphere of death/decay; however, the paradox life in death is first suggested in term "sleeping life" which is "waiting to be spread and dispersed." Language describing movement of seed suggests power: "every seed *armed* with an *appliance* of dispersal, twisting *darts* and *parachutes* for the wind, little *spears* and balls of tiny thorns." Passage concludes with paradox of seed which is carried, and therefore passive, but possesses the "anlage of movement."

Note scientific term "anlage" suggesting embryo. Passage symbolically relates to theme of revolution.

2. Steinbeck's use of the colloquial provides immediacy. Ominous tone established by direct warning of first sentence and is reinforced by the repetition of "you" throughout the passage.

That the bay horses are "so beautiful" adds a sense of poignancy to the speaker's loss.

Metaphoric language--packet, grow, flower--becomes ironic as the product is bitterness.

Idea of growth echoed in the repetition of "cut down" which metaphorically describes the Oakies' treatment by the salesmen. This passage connects to development of grapes of wrath motif.

3. Syntax/rhythm of passage abrupt--suggesting marching? Passage begins with the singular "everyone" but ends with the plural "they." "Drum major" and "parade" suggest pride except that the parade is a parade of "hurts" ; the people are marching with bitterness.

An ominous, threatening tone is established by the image "armies of bitterness" and "dead terror."

4. Details are selected to suggest the passage of time: the ancient Hudson, bent, scarred, worn, hub taps gone, caps of red dust, perhaps indicative of the old life. However, these images contrast with the second half of sentence in which old car becomes transformed into "new hearth," the living center of the family."

Connotative power of hearth evokes a strong sense of renewal.

5. Steinbeck's use of second person creates a powerful accusatory tone.

The image of the two squatting men suggests vulnerability; however, the product of their treatment--hate, fear, suspicion--grows into something very powerful.

Steinbeck again establishes the metaphor of the growth of hatred, this time with scientific language--anlage, zygote, cell. By relating the growth of hatred to the splitting of cells, Steinbeck suggests the inevitability of reaction or effect.

6. Parallel structure unifies the series of images.

Note negative verbs: straining, panting, disliking, resenting, hating. Strong sense of dissolution created by images: lines of weariness, of discontent, bodies unnaturally confined by "little hammocks" and "cases of rubber." Details point to the cause of discontent as separation from nature and the natural: eyes dislike sun, resent food, hate time. Rhythm of final sentence echoes the passing of time which is the enemy of these people, a time which "rarely makes them beautiful and always makes them old."

7. Inverted sentence order emphasizes "the wrecks lay"--cumulative sentences layer series of noun phrases, images suggesting the piles of junked cars.

Details suggest the passage of time: wheels gone, engines rusting, parts of cars piled, mold, rust, twisted iron.

Connotative language creates human element, the "twisted, stove-in noses," "wounded cars," the "spirit of decay," the "halfguttled engines," the "mass of derelicts." Connotative language adds symbolic tone to passage, perhaps comparing junked cars to junked lives. . .

8. Loose sentence structure contributes to the sense of movement established through details of cars on the highway.

The connotative language--verbs crawled, scuttled, clustered--likens the migrant people to a colony of bugs, an analogy which suggests their vulnerability, their lack of power. Yet the buglike movements also suggest the inevitability of their progress.

9. Balanced structure of first three sentences creates a fervent, solemn tone whose intensity builds through repetition.

Simple syntax--there is a crime here, there is a sorrow here, there is a failure here--heightens the sense of the enormity of wrongs.

Only images make up the sentence following--these images of life which can rectify the great wrongs. Modifiers "fertile," "straight," "sturdy" and "ripe" emphasize the life-giving properties of these elements denied the starving children. Steinbeck's image of children dying for profit is a scathing indictment of the economic system. The image of the coroner filling in a death certificate with "died of malnutrition" juxtaposed with the image of rotting food fittingly ends this passage, a powerful political statement.

10. Repetitive syntax--two introductory prepositional phrases--creates sense of the movement of the storm, which continues through parallel structure of second sentence.

Connotative language--marched, fiercely, swished, roared--create a stormy mood; personification of wind contributes to this atmosphere.

Suggestions for Writing about Language

1. **Begin with a statement which focuses on the meaning of passage:**

In this passage, Steinbeck's diction and syntax portray discontented, wealthy women who are out of touch with nature.

2. **Don't "lump" examples of connotative language and over-generalize their meaning:**

Words such as "old," "sullen," "panting," "resent," "dislike," "straining" all give a negative impression.

3. **Instead, blend examples of the connotative language into your sentences which explain their context and then comment on their meaning:**

The women's faces are "sullen"; they are bored and unhappy with the monotony of their lives. Their bodies strain against the unnatural confines of undergarments. . . .

4. **Connect mention of syntax to meaning:**

This paragraph starts out with parallel construction: There is a crime, there is a sorrow, there is a failure. The three nouns have powerful connotations suggesting injustice and mistreatment.

Note subtleties of meaning:

The word "coroners" is in the plural, subtly showing that the number of children dying is too much for one coroner.

ARCHETYPAL PASSAGES IN *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*

Directions: For 5 of the following passages, provide an interpretation of how the passage reflects a certain archetype we have studied. Be sure not only to identify the archetype but also to interpret how this archetype applies to this passage.

1. "The cars of the migrant people crawled out of the side roads onto the great cross-country highway, and they took the migrant way to the West. In the daylight they scuttled like bugs to the westward; and as the dark caught them, they clustered like bugs near to shelter and to the water. And because they were lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. Thus it might be that one family camped near a spring, and another camped for the spring and for company, and a third because two families had pioneered the place and found it good. And when the sun went down, perhaps twenty families and twenty cars were there." -chapter 17

2. "Her full face was not soft; it was controlled, kindly. Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and a superhuman understanding. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken. . . .And from her great and humble position in the family she had taken dignity and a clean calm beauty. From her position as healer, her hands had grown sure and cool and quiet; from her position as arbiter she had become as remote and faultless in judgment as a goddess."

3. "'Then I'll be aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where---wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an' - I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build-why, I'll be there."

4. "A jackrabbit got caught in the lights and he bounced along ahead, cruising easily, his great ears flopping with every jump. Now and then he tried to break off the road, but the wall of darkness thrust him back. Far ahead bright headlights appeared and bore down on them. The rabbit hesitated, faltered, then turned and bolted toward the lesser lights of the Dodge. There was a small soft jolt as he went under the wheels. The oncoming car swished by."

5. "The banks were machines and masters all at the same time." "It's the monster. The bank isn't like a man. . . . [the tractor driver is] a part of the monster, a robot in the seat..."

6. "So easy [is the tractor's work] that the wonder goes out of the work, so efficient that the wonder goes out of land and the working of it, and with the wonder the deep understanding and the relation."

7. "Casy turned to Tom. 'Funny how you fellas can fix a car. Jus' light right in an' fix her. I couldn't fix no car, not even now when I seen you do it' 'Got to grow into her when you're a little kid,' Tom said. 'It ain't jus' knowin.' It's more'n that. Kids now can tear down a car 'thout even thinkin' about it.' "