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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Pearl

by John Steinbeck

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to

1. answer objective questions on the literal meaning of this story.
2. define the terms “allegory” and “symbolism,” and state a meaning for the story. In so doing, the student will identify who or what the following characters symbolize:
 - Kino
 - Juana
 - Coyotito
 - the doctor
 - the priest
 - the trackers
3. write separate essays tracing the development of the following motifs in the novel:
 - the struggle for survival
 - racial, class, and social prejudices
 - free will vs. determinism
 - man’s existence as part of the entire spectrum of existence
 - appearance vs. reality
4. recognize multiple levels of meaning in *The Pearl* and be able to find similarities between them.
5. identify and explain at least three of the animal metaphors used in the novel.
6. define and locate examples of the following literary terms in the text:
 - allegory
 - imagery
 - juxtaposition
 - literal meaning
 - metaphor
 - motif
 - parable
 - paradox
 - personification
 - protagonist
 - simile
 - symbol
 - theme

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In an allegory, the characters act as a symbol for something else, and a lesson is revealed in the action of the plot. With that in mind, state what lesson is to be learned through what the different characters symbolize and how the action of the plot supports your answer.
2. A common theme in literature is that appearance is not the same as the reality. Consider the pearl in light of what it appears to be and what it really is. Discuss how your understanding of either the pearl or of another object in the novel changes by the end of the story.
3. By referring to incidents in the story, prove or disprove the following: A major theme in this story is that being a part of a larger whole (family, civilization, clique, etc.) brings safety, security, and happiness; when one turns his or her back on the whole, however, unhappiness is the result.
4. In two paragraphs, show that both of the following are also themes in this story; cite incidents from the story and/or comments to prove the point in each of your paragraphs:
 - A. In life, both animals and mankind must struggle to exist.
 - B. Man is not free; fate is determined by forces beyond anyone's control.
5. Examine how the following statement is true for this story: A simple life close to nature brings more happiness than a wealthy life in a civilization that is removed from nature.
6. Consider who the representatives of established authority are, and point out how they act together to keep the Indians oppressed. Why is it important to Kino that Coyotito receives an education?
7. What function does the Preface serve? Infer why Steinbeck felt it was necessary to include a preface to this story?
8. List three possible things that the pearl might symbolize.
9. List three possible lessons that this allegory might be teaching.
10. Steinbeck uses a number of animal metaphors in the novel to make points about society or the human condition. Identify five of these, and indicate the point made in each metaphor.

The Pearl

Chapter 1

VOCABULARY

avarice – greed
bougainvillea – a tropical woody vine with purple or red flowers
covey – a small group of birds
fainted – tricked
indigene – native
pulque – a drink made from a plant
scorpion – an insect with a poisonous sting
suppliant – one who begs or prays for help

1. What is a parable; why do you suppose Steinbeck calls our attention to this word in his preface?

2. What do the names of the characters suggest about where this story takes place?

3. Who appears to be the protagonist in this story?

4. Who would you guess the antagonists will be? How can you tell?

Chapter 2

VOCABULARY

algae – seaweed

bulwark– a wall built for defense

estuary – the wide mouth of a river where it empties into the sea

incandescence – brightness given off by a hot object

mangrove – a tropical tree

poultice – herbal medicines applied to a wound or sore

undulating – waving, swinging

1. How is a canoe a “bulwark against starvation”?

2. Contrast Kino’s actions in the previous chapter over his frustration with the doctors to Juana’s reaction. What can you infer from this? What does Juana’s reaction suggest about women in Kino’s culture?

3. For what does Juana pray, and why does she pray for it? Why is it odd?

14. Why does it take a great deal of courage for Kino to make the decision to go to the city?

15. Why is Kino's brother afraid for him?

16. Kino's brother, Juan Thomas, is older and seemingly wiser. What insightful comment does the brother make about their friends? What can you infer from the advice?

17. What does Kino say this second time in response to Juana's bid to get rid of the pearl, which she deems evil? What is implied in his answer?

18. At this point, do you think Kino is right, or is he just being stupid and stubborn?

19. What plan do they make for the next day?

20. What opinions do you have of Juana and Kino's marriage at this point?
