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The Pearl
John Steinbeck



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ISBN 978-1-60389-621-4

Item No. 201718

Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Chapter 1

1. As Kino awakens, he becomes aware of his home, his wife, and his child. He thinks of this home feeling as the “Song of the Family.” Write a brief description of how you feel when you greet your family at the beginning of the day.
2. Kino and his family are descendants of the ancient Indians who inhabited Mexico before the rich Spaniards took over the country. Their family life includes songs and customs passed down to them from their ancient ancestors. “Juana sang softly an ancient song that had only three notes and yet endless variety of interval. And this was part of the family song too. It was all part. Sometimes it rose to an aching chord that caught the throat, saying this is safety, this is warmth, this is the *Whole*.”

When Juana sings her song, it is referred to as the “Whole,” meaning that it comes from the Indians’ ancient roots. Many families in America have roots which tie them to other cultures. The customs and beliefs of these other cultures are often part of modern family life. Can you think of any family traditions your family enjoys, which are rooted in another culture? If so, describe the tradition and how you feel about it.

3. Critics believe that the animals in this story support the theme that living creatures must struggle for survival. Review the descriptions of the roosters, the ants, and the dog. Consider the ways each of these animals tries to survive in the world. What non-human creatures are part of your daily life? If it is true that all creatures must struggle to survive, relate the ways these animals fight to survive.

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7. Kino, his wife, and his neighbors all go to see the doctor. In the following passage, Kino is about to knock on the doctor's gate.

“Kino hesitated a moment. This doctor was not of his people. This doctor was of a race, which for nearly four hundred years had beaten and starved and robbed and despised Kino's race, and frightened it too, so that the indigene came humbly to the door. And as always when he came near to one of this race, Kino felt weak and afraid and angry at the same time. Rage and terror went together. He could kill the doctor more easily than he could talk to him...”

If you can understand how Kino feels about the doctor, write a letter to a classmate who does not get it.

8. Some critics believe that one of the themes in this story is that a simple life, close to nature, is happier than a life lived in civilization. Write a letter from the doctor's servant to Kino helping Kino to understand that the doctor is not a happy man despite his wealth and position.
9. When the doctor refuses to treat Coyotito, his (Kino's) neighbors feel Kino's shame. “They melted away. The beggars went back to the church steps, the stragglers moved off, and the neighbors departed so that the public shaming of Kino would not be in their eyes.”

If this scene were to happen today, what do you think the spectators might do?

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In your experience, do you agree with Juan when he says Kino can only count on friends if they are not faced with danger? Write a letter to Kino either supporting or refuting Juan's statement.

33. Juana wants Kino to destroy the pearl because it is evil. She is afraid for Kino's safety. Kino insists that he must fight for his son's chance to receive an education. He says, "I am a man." Earlier in the story the doctor treats Kino and all of the Indians as if they are no better than animals. What is implied by Kino's statement that he is a man?

Chapter 5

34. In the following passage Steinbeck discusses why Juana stays by Kino's side even after he beats her:
- "It [I am a man] meant that he was half insane and half god. It meant that Kino would drive his strength against a mountain and plunge his strength against the sea. Juana, in her woman's soul, knew that the mountain would stand while the man broke himself; that the sea would surge while the man drowned in it. And yet it was this thing that made him a man, half insane and half god, and Juana had need of a man; she could not live without a man."

Complete the following dialogue between two students discussing this passage:

First Student: Juana is a fool to go back to Kino. I would never stay with a man who beats me.

Second Student: On the surface, I agree with you, but I think this passage is dealing more with the theme of the struggle for survival than it is with wife beating.

You: I understand what you are both saying. If you look at the images in the passage, they seem to be suggesting that...

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44. Kino and Juana's relationship is very interesting. After she refuses to let Kino sacrifice himself, Kino takes strength from her. "He looked then for weakness in her face, for fear or irresolution, and there was none. Her eyes were very bright. He shrugged his shoulders helplessly then, but he had taken strength from her. When they moved on it was no longer panic flight."

Kino is stronger because he is not alone. How do you feel about tackling a difficult problem alone? What kind of support do you receive from those around you? Have you ever felt emotional strength from someone you thought was weak?

45. The pools by the lake are described as "places of life because of the water, and places of killing because of the water, too." If you can understand the meaning of this passage write a letter explaining it to a classmate who does not get it.
46. In this chapter, Kino kills the trackers. Do you think he was motivated to do this because of his lust for wealth or because of his desire to protect his family? Write a letter from Kino to his brother Juan telling him why he killed the men.
47. Kino and Juana's return to the town is an important event. Write a newspaper article of this event for the local paper. Be sure to include the normal who, when, what, where, why, and how, which are in most newspaper stories. Also include how the townspeople felt when they saw Kino and Juana again.