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The Good Earth
Pearl S. Buck



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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 the novel opens, Wang Lung's sense of gender roles is clear as he prepares for the arrival of his bride. Make a list of household duties that you feel are female responsibilities and those that you consider male responsibilities. Why do you think certain roles are gender-specific?
2. As Wang Lung walks to the House of Hwang, he purchases special foods and visits a barber. He also worries about the appearance of his bride. Imagine you are going to be married. What special preparations and/or purchases would you need to make your wedding day special?
3. O-lan stands submissively as the Ancient Mistress relieves her of her duties and describes her as "a good slave, although somewhat slow and stupid," as well as commenting on her lack of beauty. Imagine you are O-lan. Write a diary entry revealing how you feel about how the Ancient Mistress has described you.
4. Wang Lung's first days with O-lan are characterized by a mixture of pride and awkward silence. Contrast the marriages in the novel with those of today. Which method do you think is more likely to bring happiness? Why?
5. Throughout Chapter One, Wang Lung shows great respect and admiration for his father even though they do not always agree. Describe a conflict you have had with an adult in which you failed to show respect. Do you think a more respectful attitude would have helped in resolving the conflict? Why or why not?

CHAPTERS 4-6

10. With a strong wife, a healthy son, and a good crop, Wang Lung worries that his life is too fortunate and says, “The air and the earth were filled with malignant spirits who could not endure the happiness of mortals, especially of such as are poor.” To ward off possible bad luck, Wang Lung burns incense in the little family temple. What are some common superstitions today? What do people do to keep misfortune from coming their way?
11. Wang Lung does not become friendly with his neighbors because he fears they will begin borrowing things from him. Does your family have good relations with your neighbors? Why or why not?
12. As the new year approaches, Wang Lung decorates the house with red paper as a symbol of prosperity and good luck. Write a paragraph about how you feel the perfect New Year should be celebrated.
13. When Wang Lung and O-lan take the baby to meet the Ancient Mistress, it is extremely important to them that they appear prosperous. In other words, “they dress to impress.” Are people judged by the way they dress? Why do you think some clothing styles are more popular than others?
14. Write a letter to your school newspaper explaining your thoughts on the emphasis teenagers place on fashion.
15. Wang Lung states that “Land is one’s flesh and blood.” Clearly, he considers land to be his most prized possession. What is your most prized possession? What would you be willing to sacrifice in order to keep it?

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24. It is implied that Wang Lung's uncle and his wife resort to cannibalism to keep from starving to death during the famine. Write a letter to the editor of the China Times explaining your opinion on the necessity of staying alive by any means or on the horrible idea of eating a human being.
25. Despite starvation, Wang Lung and O-lan refuse to sell their land. Imagine you are faced with the same situation. Would you sell your land for food? Why or why not?

CHAPTERS 15-16

36. Ching weeps when Wang Lung gives him seeds to start replanting, and a lifelong friendship is sealed. Construct a list explaining what qualities make a longstanding friendship.
37. Do you have a friend now that you can visualize being your friend twenty years from now? What experiences do you predict you will share with this friend?
38. With their newfound wealth, Wang Lung and O-lan make several small home improvements. Imagine you are given \$500 to make improvements in your room. What items would you buy? Make a collage from catalog clippings of the items you would like and be sure not to spend more money than your budget allows.
39. After Wang Lung discovers O-lan's jewels, he demands all of her treasure except two pearls. He then buys three hundred acres of prime farmland from the House of Hwang, ensuring a secure future for the family. In today's society, what items make a person feel secure? Why?