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Teaching Unit™

Sample



The Good Earth

by Pearl S. Buck

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



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The Good Earth

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:

1. point out and discuss the realistic and naturalistic elements found in *The Good Earth*.
2. discuss the extent to which this novel is deterministic. Consider the degree of individual initiative and possible free will for characters.
3. point out and discuss the Chinese customs and history presented in the novel.
4. point out incidents and comments that demonstrate Buck's realistic portrayal of both the comic and tragic aspects of life.
5. respond to experiences, characters, and events in the novel.
6. identify examples of characterization, figurative language, imagery, point of view, foreshadowing, contrast. Point out how these features further develop meaning in the novel.
7. define the term *objectivity* and point out how the term relates to this novel.
8. discuss the universality of the human struggle presented in this novel.
9. point out and discuss the significance of the novel's title and its relationship to the major themes.
10. to cite specific incidents and/or comments in the novel to support the following themes found in the novel:
 - Both physical and emotional sustenance exists in having ones own land.
 - There are natural cycles of life evident in birth and death, growth and decay, etc.
 - There is a constant struggle between the wealthy and the poor in society.
 - Humans struggle to survive in the midst of harsh environments.
 - There is a value to hard work that goes beyond the immediate rewards.
 - Wealth and pride may corrupt one's values.
 - In Chinese society prior to the revolution, the position of a woman was one of subservience.
 - There are obligations that exist in relationships between family and community members.

The Good Earth

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Compare and contrast the Chinese customs that are present in the novel to American customs. Some topics include: obligations to family, the position of women, foot binding, wedding and burial ceremonies, child rearing, and marriage.
2. Discuss the relationship of Wang Lung and O-lan. Compare and contrast the relationship he has with his wife to the relationships he has with Lotus and Pear Blossom.
3. Tell the story of one day in Wang Lung's life. Consider what he does first, where he goes and what the place looks like, and how he deals with people.
4. Why can Wang Lung not take part in the city life? Compare and contrast the ways of city life to Wang Lung's.
5. How does Wang Lung feel about his life? How do these opinions change throughout the story? Discuss the relationships he has with his wife and family members, farming conditions, and his financial situation.
6. Make a list of at least four reasons for the fall of the House of Hwang.
7. What universal experiences do the characters in the novel go through? How can you relate to their experiences and circumstances?
8. Describe the personality traits, attitudes, and values of two characters.
9. In what ways does Wang Lung demonstrate his pride?

The Good Earth

Chapters 1 – 2

Vocabulary

articulate – to express with words
cauldron – vessel used for boiling water
contrived – obviously planned
demurring – voicing objection
fruition – accomplishment; bearing fruit
gruel – thin, watery porridge
guffaw – burst of laughter
impudence – offensive, bold behavior
obeisances – body movements or gestures
stolid – impassive
thatched – roofing made of plant material
volubly – fluently
zenith – summit; upper region in the sky

1. What is the setting for the novel? Describe the images you have of Wang Lung's farm, his house, the city, and the House of Hwang.

2. What is the point of view in the novel? What effect does knowing these thoughts have on the reader?

3. Characterize Wang Lung by his personality traits, his attitude and his values. How do you feel about Wang Lung?

4. Read again the section that tells of the birth, death, and burial of the fourth child. The focus of the narration is Wang Lung's thoughts and feelings about what is happening. What effect does this focus have on you?

5. What details indicate that O-lan killed the fourth child? What details indicate that the uncle has eaten his own children? Do you find these actions to be realistic?

6. What image do you have of the fire wagon?

Chapters 19 – 20

Vocabulary

comfit – a sugar-coated pastry
imploringly – urgently begging
indolent – lazy
loafers – people who are habitually idle
prodigally – extravagantly wasteful
repine – to be discontented; to complain
slavishly – having the characteristics of a slave
superintended – supervised

1. What, in your opinion, determines Wang Lung's decision to have an affair with Lotus?

2. The reader describes Wang Lung's love affair with Lotus as a sickness. "It was though a man, dying of thirst, drank the salt water of the sea which, though it is water, yet dries his blood into thirst and yet greater thirst so that in the end he dies, maddened by his very drinking. He went in to her and he had his will of her again and again and he came away unsatisfied." How does Wang Lung's love affair with Lotus contrast to his relationship with O-lan? Explain Wang Lung's misery. What resolves this sickness? What is your opinion of the resolution?

3. What does the incident with the pearls suggest to you?
