# *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck

## Synopsis

Tom Joad, newly released from prison, makes his way home, and along the way he is joined by Jim Casy, a former preacher. Tom learns that his family has been evicted from the farm and has moved in with Uncle John. When the two men reach Uncle [John’s home](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Home), they find the family, [enticed](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/enticed) by handbills advertising farm-labour jobs, preparing to drive to [California](https://www.britannica.com/place/California-state). The Joads and Casy head out along [Route 66](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Route-66), joining an exodus of poor tenant farmers heading west.

Upon arrival in California, they stop in a migrant encampment, where they speak with a man named Floyd Knowles, who informs them that jobs are scarce and families are literally starving to death in the makeshift migrant camps. When a man arrives seeking workers to pick fruit, Floyd asks for the proposed [wages](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/wages) in writing. A policeman accuses him of [communism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism) and tries to arrest him. A fight breaks out, and, when the policeman shoots at the fleeing Floyd, Casy knocks him out. Casy is arrested, and the [Joad family](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Joad-family) heads to another town, where they are met by a hostile crowd gathered to keep “Okies”—migrants from [Oklahoma](https://www.britannica.com/place/Oklahoma-state) —away. However, they later find the government-run camp Weedpatch, which is kept clean and organized by committees of residents, and Tom finds work.

They soon are offered jobs picking peaches, but the pay is so low that they cannot afford an adequate dinner. Tom finds Casy, who is now organizing striking peach pickers—the Joad family was hired to be strikebreakers. A group of men approach the meeting under cover of darkness, and one of them strikes Casy with a pick handle, killing him. An enraged Tom kills that man before returning to his family. Fearful that Tom will be arrested, the Joads leave the peach farm. They subsequently find work picking cotton, as well as a home in a boxcar that they share with another family. When the season for cotton ends, the Joads again struggle to find work. Endless rains cause flooding, and [Rose of Sharon’s](https://www.britannica.com/plant/rose-of-Sharon) baby is stillborn. When the rising waters begin to fill the boxcar, the Joad family leaves. They soon reach a barn, in which they find a small boy and a starving man. The book ends with Rose of Sharon feeding the man her breast milk.

## Discussion questions

1. Are we meant to conclude that Tom's killing of the deputy is justified?
2. What makes Casy believe that "maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of" (p. 24)?
3. Why does Pa yield his traditional position in the family to Ma?
4. What does Ma mean when she says, "Bearin' an' dyin' is two pieces of the same thing" (p. 210)?
5. As Tom leaves the family, he says, "I'll be ever'where—wherever you look" (p. 419). In what sense does he mean "everywhere"?
6. Why does Rose of Sharon smile as she feeds the starving man with milk intended for her baby?
7. What does Steinbeck mean when he writes, "In the souls of the people The Grapes of Wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage" (p. 349)?

*Synopsis from https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Grapes-of-Wrath  
Discussion questions from https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-reading-guides/fiction/399-grapes-of-wrath-steinbeck?showall=1*