



THE DUST BOWL

## Comparing Media to Text

You will now read an excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath*. Complete the first-read and close-read activities. Then, compare the depiction of historical events in the video with that in the novel excerpt.



from THE GRAPES OF WRATH

### About the Author



Few writers portray more vividly than **John Steinbeck** (1902–1968) what it was like to live through the Great Depression of the 1930s. His stories and novels capture the poverty, desperation, and social injustice experienced by many working-class Americans during this bleak period. While many of his characters suffer tragic fates, they almost always exhibit bravery and dignity in their struggles.

### Tool Kit

First-Read Guide and Model Annotation

### STANDARDS

#### Reading Literature

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

## from The Grapes of Wrath

### Concept Vocabulary

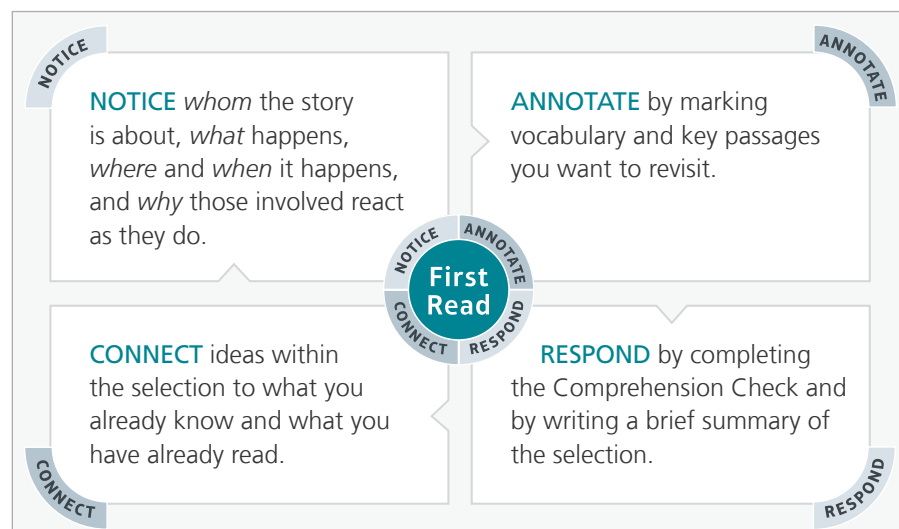
You will encounter the following words as you read an excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath*. Before reading, note how familiar you are with each word. Then, rank the words in order from most familiar (1) to least familiar (6).

WORD	YOUR RANKING
ruthless	
bitterness	
toil	
sorrow	
doomed	
frantically	

After completing your first read, come back to the concept vocabulary and review your rankings. Mark any changes to your original rankings.

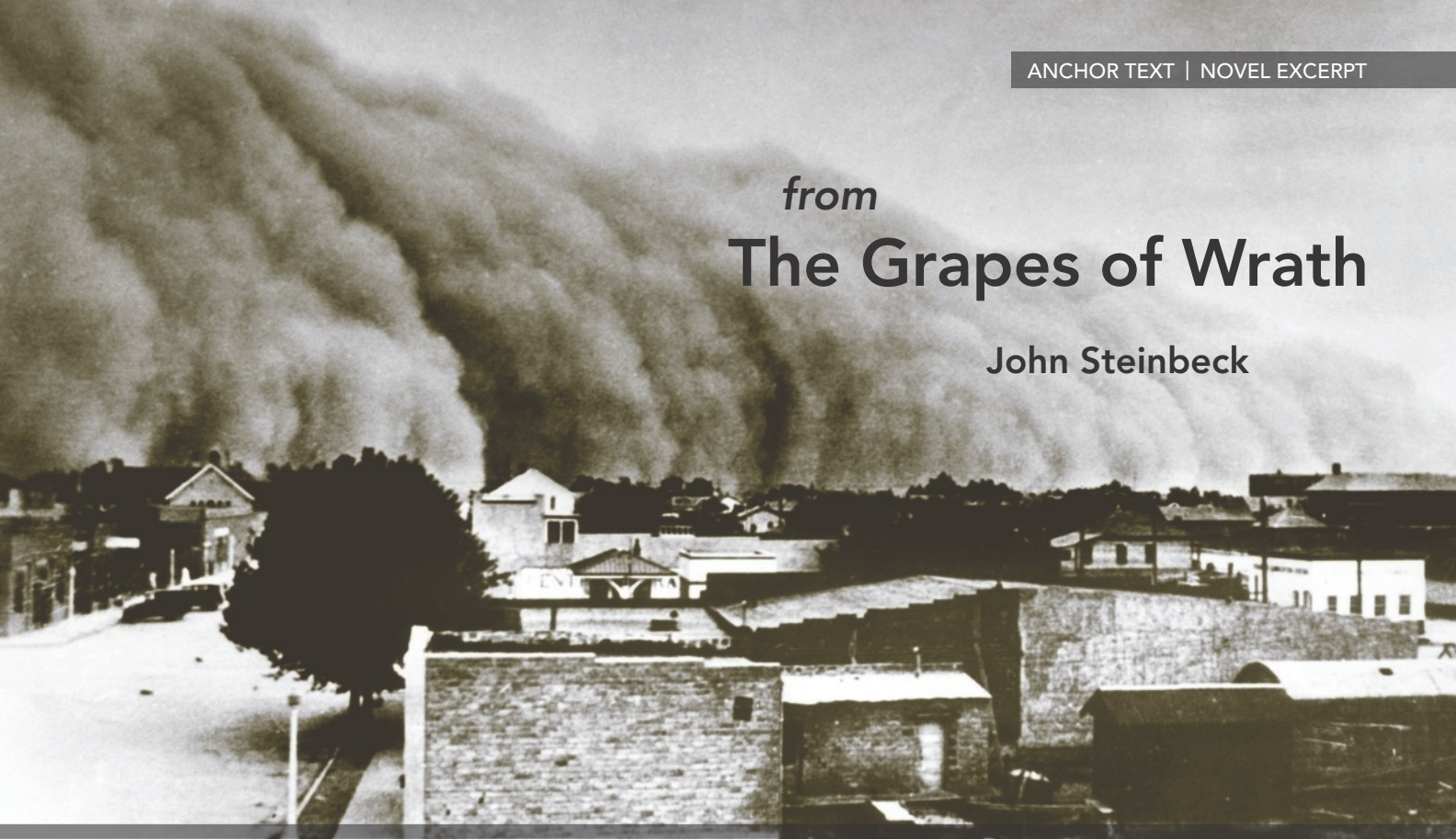
### First Read FICTION

Apply these strategies as you conduct your first read. You will have an opportunity to complete the close-read notes after your first read.



from  
**The Grapes of Wrath**

John Steinbeck



### BACKGROUND

During the Great Depression, a severe drought in Oklahoma caused massive dust storms that blew away topsoil and destroyed farmland. Devastated farming families had no choice but to sell all their belongings and leave. This is the situation faced by the Joad family in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. In this excerpt, the narrator describes the aftermath of the devastating drought.

SCAN FOR  
MULTIMEDIA



- 1 **I**n the little houses the tenant people sifted their belongings and the belongings of their fathers and of their grandfathers. Picked over their possessions for the journey to the west. The men were **ruthless** because the past had been spoiled, but the women knew how the past would cry to them in the coming days. The men went into the barns and the sheds.
- 2 That plow, that harrow, remember in the war we planted mustard? Remember a fella wanted us to put in that rubber bush they call guayule?<sup>1</sup> Get rich, he said. Bring out those tools—get a few dollars for them. Eighteen dollars for that plow, plus freight—Sears Roebuck.<sup>2</sup>

### NOTES

**ruthless** (ROOTH lih) *adj.*  
 having no compassion  
 or pity

1. **guayule** (gwy YOO lee) a desert shrub containing rubber, native to Mexico and Texas. During the Great Depression, it was thought that guayule could be profitably processed for rubber.
2. **Sears Roebuck** company that sold clothes, farm equipment, and other goods by mail order, which supplied much of rural America.

## NOTES

**bitterness** (BIHT uhr nihs) *n.*  
quality of having a sharp,  
unpleasant taste; condition  
causing pain or sorrow

**toil** (TOYL) *v.* work hard and  
with difficulty

**sorrow** (SOR oh) *n.* great  
sadness; suffering

- 3 Harness, carts, seeders, little bundles of hoes. Bring ‘em out. Pile ‘em up. Load ‘em in the wagon. Take ‘em to town. Sell ‘em for what you can get. Sell the team and the wagon, too. No more use for anything.
- 4 Fifty cents isn’t enough to get for a good plow. That seeder cost thirty-eight dollars. Two dollars isn’t enough. Can’t haul it all back—Well, take it, and a **bitterness** with it. Take the well pump and the harness. Take halters, collars, hames, and tugs.<sup>3</sup> Take the little glass brow-band jewels, roses red under glass. Got those for the bay gelding.<sup>4</sup> ‘Member how he lifted his feet when he trotted?
- 5 Junk piled up in a yard.
- 6 Can’t sell a hand plow any more. Fifty cents for the weight of the metal. Disks and tractors, that’s the stuff now.
- 7 Well, take it—all junk—and give me five dollars. You’re not buying only junk, you’re buying junked lives. And more—you’ll see—you’re buying bitterness. Buying a plow to plow your own children under, buying the arms and spirits that might have saved you. Five dollars, not four. I can’t haul ‘em back—Well, take ‘em for four. But I warn you, you’re buying what will plow your own children under. And you won’t see. You can’t see. Take ‘em for four. Now, what’ll you give for the team and wagon? Those fine bays, matched they are, matched in color, matched the way they walk, stride to stride. In the stiff pull-straining hams<sup>5</sup> and buttocks, split-second timed together. And in the morning, the light on them, bay light. They look over the fence sniffing for us, and the stiff ears swivel to hear us, and the black forelocks! I’ve got a girl. She likes to braid the manes and forelocks, puts little red bows on them. Likes to do it. Not any more. I could tell you a funny story about that girl and that off bay. Would make you laugh. Off horse is eight, near is ten, but might of been twin colts the way they work together. See? The teeth. Sound all over. Deep lungs. Feet fair and clean. How much? Ten dollars? For both? And the wagon—I’d shoot ‘em for dog feed first. Oh, take ‘em! Take ‘em quick, mister. You’re buying a little girl plaiting the forelocks, taking off her hair ribbon to make bows, standing back, head cocked, rubbing the soft noses with her cheek. You’re buying years of work, **toil** in the sun; you’re buying a **sorrow** that can’t talk. But watch it, mister. There’s a premium goes with this pile of junk and the bay horses—so beautiful—a packet of bitterness to grow in your house and to flower, some day. We could have saved you, but you cut us down, and soon you will be cut down and there’ll be none of us to save you.

3. **halters, collars, hames, and tugs** parts of the harnesses used to attach horses to horse-drawn plows.

4. **bay gelding** reddish-brown male horse.

5. **hams** back of a horse’s knee.

8 And the tenant men came walking back, hands in their pockets, hats pulled down. Some bought a pint and drank it fast to make the impact hard and stunning. But they didn't laugh and they didn't dance. They didn't sing or pick the guitars. They walked back to the farms, hands in pockets and heads down, shoes kicking the red dust up.

9 Maybe we can start again, in the new rich land—in California, where the fruit grows. We'll start over.

10 But you can't start. Only a baby can start. You and me—why, we're all that's been. The anger of a moment, the thousand pictures, that's us. This land, this red land, is us; and the flood years and the dust years and the drought years are us. We can't start again. The bitterness we sold to the junk man—he got it all right, but we have it still. And when the owner men told us to go, that's us; and when the tractor hit the house, that's us until we're dead. To California or any place—every one a drum major leading a parade of hurts, marching with our bitterness. And some day—the armies of bitterness will all be going the same way. And they'll all walk together, and there'll be a dead terror from it.

11 The tenant men scuffed home to the farms through the red dust.

12 When everything that could be sold was sold, stoves and bedsteads, chairs and tables, little corner cupboards, tubs and tanks, still there were piles of possessions; and the women sat among them, turning them over and looking off beyond and back, pictures, square glasses, and here's a vase.

13 Now you know well what we can take and what we can't take. We'll be camping out—a few pots to cook and wash in, and mattresses and comforts, lantern and buckets, and a piece of canvas. Use that for a tent. This kerosene can. Know what that is? That's the stove. And clothes—take all the clothes. And—the rifle? Wouldn't go out naked of a rifle. When shoes and clothes and food, when even hope is gone, we'll have the rifle. When grampa came—did I tell you?—he had pepper and salt and a rifle. Nothing else. That goes. And a bottle for water. That just about fills us. Right up the sides of the trailer, and the kids can set in the trailer, and granma on a mattress. Tools, a shovel and saw and wrench and pliers. An ax, too. We had that ax forty years. Look how she's wore down. And ropes, of course. The rest? Leave it—or burn it up.

14 And the children came.

15 If Mary takes that doll, that dirty rag doll, I got to take my Indian bow. I got to. An' this roun' stick—big as me. I might need this stick. I had this stick so long—a month, or maybe a year. I got to take it. And what's it like in California?

16 The women sat among the **doomed** things, turning them over and looking past them and back. This book. My father had it. He

## NOTES

### CLOSE READ

**ANNOTATE:** Mark examples of repetition of words and phrases in paragraph 10.

**QUESTION:** What ideas are being emphasized through repetition? Why does the narrator keep using the pronouns “us” and “we”?

**CONCLUDE:** What can you conclude about the narrator by the words he uses and ideas he conveys?

**doomed** (doomd) *adj.*  
destined to a bad outcome



## NOTES

### CLOSE READ

**ANNOTATE:** Mark the punctuation in paragraphs 17 and 18.

**QUESTION:** What patterns are created by the questions and statements? What do the dashes indicate?

**CONCLUDE:** What effect do the patterns and use of dashes create? How do they bring to life this unnamed narrator?

**frantically** (FRAN tuh klee)  
adv. acting wildly with anger, worry, or pain

liked a book. *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>6</sup> Used to read it. Got his name in it. And his pipe—still smells rank. And this picture—an angel. I looked at that before the fust three come—didn't seem to do much good. Think we could get this china dog in? Aunt Sadie brought it from the St. Louis Fair.<sup>7</sup> See? Wrote right on it. No, I guess not. Here's a letter my brother wrote the day before he died. Here's an old-time hat. These feathers—never got to use them. No, there isn't room.

- 17 How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past? No. Leave it. Burn it.
- 18 They sat and looked at it and burned it into their memories. How'll it be not to know what land's outside the door? How if you wake up in the night and know—and *know* the willow tree's not there? Can you live without the willow tree? Well, no, you can't. The willow tree is you. The pain on that mattress there—that dreadful pain—that's you.
- 19 And the children—if Sam takes his Indian bow an' his long roun' stick, I get to take two things. I choose the fluffy pilla. That's mine.
- 20 Suddenly they were nervous. Got to get out quick now. Can't wait. We can't wait. And they piled up the goods in the yards and set fire to them. They stood and watched them burning, and then **frantically** they loaded up the cars and drove away, drove in the dust. The dust hung in the air for a long time after the loaded cars had passed. 🐼

6. ***Pilgrim's Progress*** Christian story by John Bunyan about living virtuously.

7. **St. Louis Fair:** The World's Fair of 1904, celebrating a hundred years of American ownership of lands west of the Mississippi River.

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## Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read.

1. What big change is taking place in the lives of these characters?

2. What are the men doing in paragraph 7?

3. What happens after the people burn their belongings?

4.  **Notebook** Write a brief summary of this excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath*.

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### RESEARCH

**Research to Clarify** Choose at least one unfamiliar detail from the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an aspect of the story?