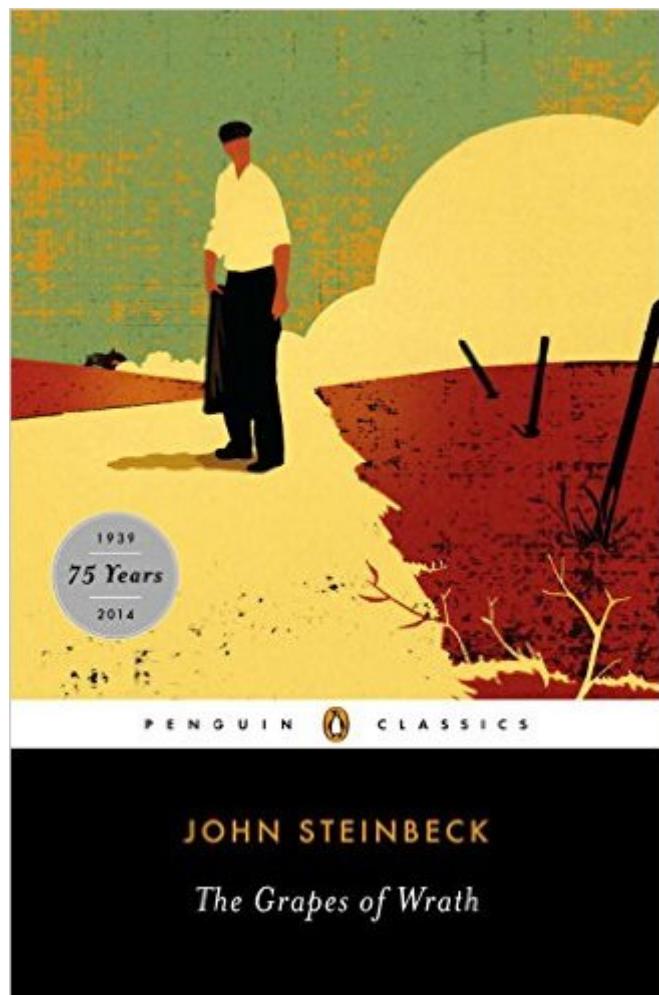


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The Grapes Of Wrath



Synopsis

The Pulitzer Prize-winning epic of the Great Depression, a book that galvanized "and sometimes outraged" millions of readers. First published in 1939, Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning epic of the Great Depression chronicles the Dust Bowl migration of the 1930s and tells the story of one Oklahoma farm family, the Joads "driven from their homestead and forced to travel west to the promised land of California. Out of their trials and their repeated collisions against the hard realities of an America divided into Haves and Have-Nots evolves a drama that is intensely human yet majestic in its scale and moral vision, elemental yet plainspoken, tragic but ultimately stirring in its human dignity. A portrait of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, of one man's fierce reaction to injustice, and of one woman's stoical strength, the novel captures the horrors of the Great Depression and probes into the very nature of equality and justice in America. At once a naturalistic epic, captivity narrative, road novel, and transcendental gospel, Steinbeck's powerful landmark novel is perhaps the most American of American Classics. This Penguin Classic edition contains an introduction and notes by Steinbeck scholar Robert Demott. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

I don't know how anyone could read this book and not give it a five star rating. The true test for me of a "great book" is one that stays with me -- one I can't stop thinking about long after I've finished. I read this book for the second time in my life a month ago (first time was in high school many years ago), and I'm still haunted by the suffering endured by the Joad family. The interesting thing is that Steinbeck wrote this book in 1939 at the height of the injustices being fraught upon the migrant workers in California. I'm sure it wasn't popular then as it brought to the forefront the corruption of some powerful people in America. It also spoke to the conscience of every American which eventually led to political reform in California. After reading this book, I did some research into Steinbeck's motivation and learned that he was haunted by the plight of California's migrant workers to the point of obsession. To fuel his anger, he would visit the migrant camps each day full of their dirt, disease and hungry people and then return home to write about those people responsible for these conditions -- people he considered to be murderers. Steinbeck concentrated on the circumstances of one family, The Joads, tenant farmers in Oklahoma until they were forced out by the larger companies who wanted their land back. With dreams of luscious grapes and peaches in abundance waiting to be picked, they loaded up their belongings and began their journey on Route 66 headed for Bakersfield, California. They began their trip with a bevy of colorful characters led by Ma and Pa Joad. It's amazing how much power Steinbeck gave to Ma Joad -- years before women had any right to a voice. Unfortunately, just as the Joads were heading out, so were thousands upon thousands of other families. This would ultimately lead to supply and demand. There would be too many workers for the few jobs available and, consequently, people would be agreeing to work for peanuts just to be able to feed their families. Steinbeck's writing is astounding as the unrest of the migrants builds to a crescendo and just as the dust has risen in Oklahoma, so will the voices of the poor migrant workers. Steinbeck says, "In the eyes of the hungry, there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people, the grapes of wrath are growing heavy." It is just a matter of time before their wrath is unleashed and you can feel it in every page you turn. He says that, "Our people are good people; our people are kind people. Pray God some day kind people won't all be poor. Pray God someday a kid can eat." I don't know how you can read some of his words and not get teary eyed. But sixty years have passed since the writing of this book and there are still migrant stories to be told and kids who have no food to eat yet sadly the world continues despite its injustices. I won't kid you into believing that this is an easy book to read. The first 150 pages are so slow going that I almost had to put it down. But I kept on going just as the Joad's kept on going and I'm certainly glad I did. We could all take a lesson from their quest for survival and their quest just to be able to eat the next day. Their determination, in light of all the obstacles they had to face, is truly a lesson to be

learned. You feel a sense of accomplishment after reading a book like this -- I know I did.

I can't remember the last time I was moved so profoundly by a work of fiction. I finished the book two weeks ago and have not been able to stop talking or thinking about it. Read this book. It will truly change the way you view the world. The book is beautifully written. Steinbeck's style flows so smoothly and is so accessible. The book follows the Joad family for about nine months as they are driven from the place they've called home for generations and travel to California, only to find out that it is not the land of opportunity they expected. Steinbeck's formula here is to intersperse the lengthy chapters chronicling the Joads' journey with short chapters that encapsulate some nuance about the period or the people, giving you a picture of the greater struggle taking place, of which the Joads are just a small part. It creates a very powerful effect. This migration west involved hundreds of thousands of individuals. You see in a few pages the big picture, then you are pulled back into the intimacies of the Joads' lives and the tragedy is made very personal. In one especially startling example, Steinbeck puts these words into the mouth of a character after selling a nameless migrant and his family some gas for their car, "Well, you and me got sense. Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain't a hell of a lot better than gorillas." In the next chapter, the Joads make camp along a stream and Ma is so happy for the clean water and the chance to stay put for a day so that she can take a bath and wash the family's clothes. The Joads are good, honest, decent people looking for the means to earn an honest wage and thereby feed their family. The thought of charity repels them. At one point Pa talks about the prospect of picking cotton and is so excited about the fact that it's good, hard work, worthy of the wage he'll earn. How soft and incredibly privileged it makes us all seem. "They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless - restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do - to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut - anything, any burden to bear, for food." I live in a citrus community in Florida, which is populated by a large number of migrant workers. It never occurred to me to wonder how they felt about their lives. I never thought to wonder if they had dreams of someday owning their own home and staying put for a while. I've read criticism that "The Grapes of Wrath" is a communist manifesto. It may have socialist leanings, but how long can individuals or a society overlook the less fortunate without feeling some shame? Read this book. It should be mandatory, but would be wasted on most teenagers (or maybe I just think it might have been wasted on me). Pick it up as an adult, as I did, and read it. You'll never again look at others or yourself in the same way.

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