

The Grapes of Wrath

“The Harvest Gypsies”

- Seven newspaper articles on migrant workers Steinbeck observed in 1936.
- An eyewitness account of the horrendous Dust Bowl migration, a major event in California and U.S. history.
- Steinbeck toured the squatters' camps and “Hoovervilles” of California
- Found once strong, independent farmers so reduced in dignity, beaten in spirit, sick, sullen, and defeated that they had been “cast down to a kind of sub-humanity.”
- From 1935-1938, between 300,000 and 500,000 “Okies” (migrant farmers from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri arrived in California).
- This provided the factual foundation for The Grapes of Wrath.
- Traces the story of the fictional Joad family: typical farming family forced off their land by drought and foreclosure during the Great Depression
- It is a drama that is “intensely human, yet majestic”

Pre-Reading

- There are 16 “inter-chapters” in the novel (generally, the odd-numbered chapters, but not always).
- They help create a total picture by establishing the entire social conditions of which these characters are a part.
- It would have been impossible to have the characters carry this entire load. These characters must be real, credible, and believable.
- So these inter-chapters fill in the larger picture to give some historical perspective about the conditions that all of these migrants faces, not just the Joads.