### Using Intercalary Chapters as Moral Tales:

### Power vs. Powerlessness in *The Grapes of Wrath* Chapter Sixteen

William Martino, NEH Institute Scholar 2013

Xavier High School, New York, NY

**Rationale**: Some teachers might consider teaching *The Grapes of Wrath* in its entirety a bit daunting. Providing students with selections from the text, namely intercalary chapters, is one way for educators under time constraints to expose students to *Grapes.* With specific focus on chapter sixteen as a short story, this lesson aims to compare and contrast cultural values/experiences of the Great Depression, to provide insight into migrant work camps, and to discuss relationships between migrant workers and non-migrant workers during the Depression. Certainly, this lesson can be taught as part of a larger unit on *Grapes of Wrath* or Depression Era literature.

**Goals:**

* To demonstrate understanding of various cultural references contained in chapter sixteen
* To analyze Steinbeck’s purpose for including such references
* To describe conditions in migrant work camps
* To discuss relationships between migrant workers and non-migrants (power vs. powerlessness)
* To examine the role of social conscience

**Time:** 3-4 days depending on class schedule (**2 days max for block scheduling**).

**Level:** Grades 9-12

**Materials:** Copies of *Grapes of Wrath* chapter sixteen, two PowerPoint presentations (see attached), links to videos (see below).

**Prior Knowledge:** Students should be able to exhibit general knowledge of the Great Depression and migrant worker camps. Students should also be able to engage in discussions regarding character motives and social consciousness.

A great resource is Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History: <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/great-depression-and-world-war-ii-1929-1945> **NOTE: You must create an account to log on to GL Primary Sources page. It only takes a second. Use this link to create your account:** [**https://www.gilderlehrman.org/community/user/register**](https://www.gilderlehrman.org/community/user/register)**.**

Another excellent resource is from The Library of Congress “American Memory: Voices from the Dust Bowl” <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afctshtml/>

**Day One**: The Migrant Worker

Begin class by playing Mary Sullivan’s “Sunny California” <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/songs/california.html>

See attachment for lyrics.

Engage in classroom discussion regarding the emotions Sullivan exhibits in her song. Ask students to explain some of the hardships she endures in the migrant camp. Students may want to choose a specific passage from the song and discuss why it resonates with them. Further, they may want to discuss current songs that tackle the same issues.

If time allows, teachers can also play “Government Camp Song.” This one tends to elicit more emotion from students because this is sung by children. Lyrics might be difficult to understand but the chronicling of each “unit” in the camp is pretty interesting.

<http://hearingvoices.com/news/webworks/dust-bowl/> (This website provides myriad camp songs that teachers can use in tandem with PowerPoint on migrant workers).

The images I chose, mostly from Lange’s collection, provide insight into the migrant experience. Ask students to pay attention to various details in the photos (e.g. facial expressions, clothes, vehicles, parental relationships, etc.) You may also want to engage in a discussion on themes presented in the photos (loneliness, despair, work). For tomorrow, ask students to find another photo chronicling migrant workers and write a one paragraph reflection/analysis of their photo for tomorrow.

**Day Two:** The Other End of the Spectrum

Begin class by asking students to share their reflections and photos. Explain to students that we will move beyond the migrant worker and take a different look at the Depression.

Begin by mentioning that Steinbeck references various types of music in chapter sixteen. Here are a few options for beginning this transition (all mentioned in chapter sixteen). I like Goodman best because the students recognize this tune. If time allots, use all clips for this lesson.

* Benny Goodman’s 1935 “Sing, Sing, Sing” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2S1I_ien6A>
* Bob Hope, 1938 “Thanks for the Memory” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44Owr4iBctU>
* Maria Grever’s “Tipi Tipi Tin”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHwySih989o>

While listening to music, ask students to compose a list of words/phrases that best describes the mood of each piece. How do these word/phrases compare or contrast with the emotions elicited by the migrant worker songs from the previous day? See “hearing voices” link above for more music from the camps. Explain that chapter sixteen moves beyond the migrant worker and looks at other travelers on Route 66. Use PowerPoint to set the scene for the story (see attached). “Sing, Sing, Sing” also works well as background music for the PowerPoint.

After the slideshow, ask students to compare the cars that “whizzed viciously by on 66” to those used by the migrant workers. What types of people might own such cars? Why would such luxurious cars be traveling west on 66? Are they traveling for the same reasons the migrants are traveling?

For homework, have students compose a creative, one-page narrative whereby they discuss how they might feel if they were a migrant worker traveling alongside a 1938 Cadillac (or vice versa).

**Day Three:** Tackling the Text and Making Connections

Begin class by having students share their narratives from the previous night. Explain that they will read chapter sixteen aloud in class today. Remind students to read with a pen and underline any key passages that they feel are essential to the story.

If reading the chapters takes the entire period, remind students to review the chapter for homework. If there is time, ask students to share what key phrases/passages they chose from the chapter and explain their reasoning behind their choices.

**Day Four:** Reflection

Open the floor for discussion on chapter 16. Points for discussion might include, but are not limited to:

* Mae’s transformation: What sparks the change in Mae’s behavior? Is there an epiphany present? Ignorance?
* Internal conflicts vs. external conflicts
* Big Bill’s conversion / motives: Why “go to hell” followed by a slamming door? How are students to interpret that?
* Al’s insistence on helping the migrant worker
* Steinbeck’s description of women as “languid, heat-raddled ladies, small nucleuses about whom revolve a thousand accoutrements.”
* Steinbeck’s description of men as “clean, pink men with puzzled worried eyes, with restless eyes.” **How do these descriptions compare to Steinbeck’s descriptions of the migrant workers**?
* Steinbeck’s attitude toward those who drive out west looking for a vacation.
* Importance of place: Why a diner? Diner as microcosm of the world? Aren’t there Maes, and Als, and Bills throughout?
* Role of industry, commodities, food, even candy.
* Presence of rational discourse
* Cultural references…why does Steinbeck go to such lengths to describe so many seemingly unnecessary “things”?

**Assessment**: Personal response essay. Ask students to reflect, in their own words, what Steinbeck is “getting at” in chapter sixteen. In other words, *what’s the point*? What is he saying about the need for social consciousness? What statement does this chapter make about the relationship between power and powerlessness?