



OwlTeacher
Teaching with Movies & Literature

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Good for the following school subjects:

- ✓ American History
- ✓ The Great Depression

Directed by John Ford
1940; NR; Classics; Drama; 129 minutes; Black & White;
Available from www.OwlTeacher.com bookstore

Synopsis: This film is based on the critically acclaimed by the same name and written by John Steinbeck. The book was published in 1939, at a time when the Great Depression was still going and people could relate to the events and characters. The film is tightly based on the novel. It is about an Oklahoma family suffering the effects of the Great Depression and who decide to migrate to California for better opportunities and a fresh start. Historian Alan Brinkley has stated, "To modern readers and film viewers, *The Grapes of Wrath* has become an unusually vivid historical document: a portrait of a portion of American society in the Great Depression and of a political sensibility that continues to resonate..." Both the novel and the film are an excellent supplement to a unit on the Great Depression. The social themes outlined for class discussion include migration, despair, poverty, individualism; conflict, community, and solidarity just to name a few.

Educational Benefits of this movie: This film gives students a deep understanding of what individuals and families felt and suffered during the Great Depression. Since the novel and the film were both produced during the Great Depression, they are primary sources and divulge many facts and details about the time period that inspired the story.

Study Questions:

1. How does the movie, *The Grapes of Wrath*, convey the values of family and community? Be specific.
2. In the midst of desolation there is hope. In what ways does the film exhibit this statement?
3. America has struggled throughout history to settle two distinctly different ideals: rugged individualism vs. collective strength. How do you see these ideals being resolved in the movie?
4. What techniques does Ma Joad use to make sure her family does not fall apart?



5. List examples from the film in which you see the following elements:
- ✓ The relationship between women and men at this time
 - ✓ The status and quandary of law enforcement
 - ✓ The struggle between labor unions and business owners
 - ✓ How children and teenagers were affected by the Great Depression
 - ✓ Why Americans felt that California offered more opportunities and a better life.
6. Based on class discussions and studying this unit, list examples and describe ways in which the film is a true historical record of the Great Depression.

Project:

Research different government New Deal programs to help Americans survive the Depression. You may choose to research programs mentioned in the film like Resettlement Administration (RA) which provided migrant camps such as Wheatpatch or you may choose other programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) which created conservation jobs and hope for young men from all over the United States. Create a large poster advertising this New Deal program, listing its benefits, details, and how people can join or sign up. Include images to catch audience attention. Be creative! These posters will be displayed throughout the classroom.