

Name _____

Date _____

John Steinbeck - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. The Dust Bowl was a period in the 1930s when droughts ravaged the south-central United States. It was named for the intense dust storms that resulted from long periods without rain. Soil erosion from farming created the conditions in which huge dust storms—some as tall as a mile, and as wide as several *hundred* miles—to form. This led to a drastic decrease in crop output, greatly reducing farmers’ profits and quality of life. At the same time, the Great Depression upended the American economy, further worsening conditions in the region. Steinbeck’s **The Grapes of Wrath** explores this setting, evoking the desolation and suffering of the Joad family as they flee Oklahoma for California.

What was one consequence of the Dust Bowl?

A. Increased crop output



B.

Desperate working conditions for farmers

According to the text, droughts and “intense dust storms” led to “a drastic decrease in crop output, greatly reducing farmers’ profits and quality of life.”

C. The Great Depression

D. Steady profits for urban businessmen

2. The term “naturalism” describes a literary and artistic movement that held a strong belief in the influence of nature on human behavior. It began in France in the late 19th century, popularized in an essay by Émile Zola. A second wave, American Naturalism, began in the early 20th century. In naturalist literature, characters behave in accordance with what the authors viewed as natural impulses, often coming into conflict with the order of human society. For example, a pampered house dog transforms into a wild beast in Jack London’s **The Call of the Wild.** Scholars do not always agree about whether John Steinbeck belonged fully to literary naturalism, but **The Grapes of Wrath** does contain elements of naturalism. In the novel, powerful naturalistic forces, such as the Dust Bowl and mighty floods, influence the conflict and characterization.

Why is **The Grapes of Wrath** considered to contain elements of naturalism?

- A. The novel’s characters are all farm animals. B. It depicts a class struggle between workers and their bosses.
- C. The book criticizes capitalism and the human cost of the Great Depression.



D.

The Dust Bowl and floods are major parts of the story.

*According to the passage, *The Grapes of Wrath* includes “powerful naturalistic forces” that “influence the conflict and characterization.”*

3. In writing **The Grapes of Wrath**, Steinbeck blamed corporate greed for the harsh conditions farmers faced in the Dust Bowl and in their migration to find other work. He celebrated the way workers banded together in spite of their mistreatment. Through the hardships they experience, the Joads find their way by trusting one another and their fellow workers, presenting the importance of community and collective action as a major theme. They have frequent clashes with police and other members of authority, who embody the corporate rule that Steinbeck criticizes. These authorities persecute the novel’s characters for organizing strikes and asking for guaranteed wages, representing how corporate greed undermines workers’ rights.

Which theme in **The Grapes of Wrath** best relates to Tom Joad striking with his fellow workers?

- A. The economic turmoil of average Americans during the Great Depression
- B. The harsh changes to the environment caused by giant dust storms
- C. The importance of collective action in securing workers’ rights
- D. The generosity of authority figures who care for their subordinates



C.

The importance of collective action in securing workers’ rights

The passage states that Steinbeck “celebrated the way workers banded together” and “the importance of community and collective action as a major theme.”