

## WHS Book Rationale

**Title:** The Grapes of Wrath

**Author:** John Steinbeck

- **Intended Audience**

English 11 Honors

- **Brief summary and educational significance**

Steinbeck won the Pulitzer Prize for this novel about the Oklahoma migration in the 1930s. This book follows the specific experience of the Joad family as they must face the loss of their land, joblessness, and the prejudice of Californians to the migrants. This narrative is interspersed with poetic interchapters that explore the larger issues of migrant laborers during the Dustbowl and Depression. This text provides connections to American history also taught to 11<sup>th</sup> grade students.

- **Purpose of teaching the work and how it will be used**

- This book has both straightforward and stylistically complex writing. Though the narrative itself is direct, the interchapters are poetic and provide examples of imagery, symbolism, dialogue, and thematic connections.
- Steinbeck uses techniques such as documentary style to influence his audience to support migrant policies: connections to documentary film and photography (Dorothea Lange)
- Connections to Transcendentalism and other American literary periods to understand influence on Steinbeck's style.
- Changes and growth in characters (Tom Joad, Jim Casey, Rose of Sharon, and Ma Joad) all illustrate the dramatic effects of poverty, loss and the migrant situation.

- **Potential problems**

- Depictions of religious characters
- Political and social perspective of the author
- Controversial final scene

- **Addressing potential problems**

- The novel's historical context helps students understand the political and social significance of the text.
- Use of supplemental texts (an essay countering Steinbeck's claims, alternate endings to the novel) all help students realize choices writers must make in their work, as well as the difficulties in analyzing literature.
- Teaching the conflict: Steinbeck refused to change the final scene—is this a strength or a weakness of the novel? The discussion itself helps students understand the importance of a writer's choices and the significance of an important literary symbol.