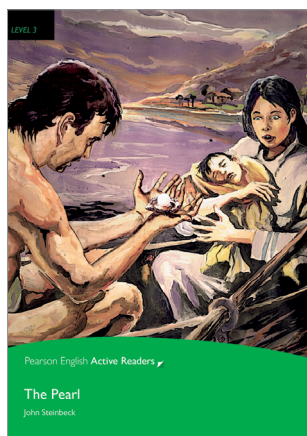


The Pearl

John Steinbeck



Summary

A Mexican Indian pearl diver called Kino finds a very valuable pearl that can change his life and his family's life for good. As soon as the priest, the doctor, and the pearl buyers hear of Kino's extraordinary find, they try to trick him into giving them the pearl. After a series of disasters, Kino throws the pearl back into the sea.

Chapter 1: Kino, Juana and their baby son, Coyotito, live in a wooden house by the sea in peace and contentment. One morning, a scorpion stings Coyotito on the shoulder and the wealthy town doctor to whom they take the child refuses to help him because they are poor.

Chapters 2–3: Later that same morning, Kino and Juana take their canoe to the oyster bed in the hope of finding a good pearl to pay the doctor's fees. To their great surprise, they come across a very big pearl, the Pearl of the World, which will allow Kino's dreams to come true. He wants to marry Juana in the church, send Coyotito to school, buy clothes for the family and a gun for himself. News travels quickly and soon the townsfolk start devising ways in which to get money out of Kino.

The priest is the first to come and visit them to remind Kino of his duty to the church.

Chapters 4–5: The doctor soon comes to treat Coyotito and, although the child is much better, he persuades the couple that the child is very ill in order to "cure" him with his own medicine. When still in Kino's house, the doctor tricks Kino into unwittingly revealing where he has hidden the pearl. That same night a thief tries to rob Kino of his pearl, but fails.

The following day, Kino tries to sell the pearl in his town but the pearl dealers have already agreed to tell Kino that the pearl is valueless because it is too big. Aware of the trick, Kino decides to sell the pearl in another town.

Chapter 6: Both Juan Tomás, Kino's brother, and Juana try to convince Kino that it is dangerous to defy the white townsfolk, but Kino is adamant: he will go to the capital and find an honest buyer. That night, another thief tries to get hold of the pearl but also fails.

Chapters 7–8: That same night, Juana tries to throw the pearl back into the sea, aware of the fact that its possession will end up destroying her family. Kino follows her, stops her and hits her. On his way back to their house, he is attacked a third time and kills the man in self-defense. When getting ready to flee the town, Kino finds that his canoe has been broken and that his house is on fire. In despair, the family hides in Kino's brother's house before leaving the town. After a day's walk Kino realizes they are being followed by three trackers. To escape, the family heads toward the mountains and hides in a small cave close to a stream.

Chapter 9: That evening, the trackers, in search of water, camp on the same site, unaware that the family is so close. Kino gets ready to attack them but before he can do so, Coyotito cries out and one of the trackers shoots at what he thinks is an animal and kills the child. Kino leaps on the trackers and kills the three of them. Heartbroken, the couple returns to their town and Kino throws the pearl back into the sea.

About the author

John Steinbeck (1902–68) is one of the best known and most acclaimed American writers of the twentieth century. A believer that man is conditioned by his social environment, his major theme is the predicament of the downtrodden, as can be seen in *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *The Pearl* (1947).

In 1962 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature "for his keen social perception." The award and the many movie versions of his novels have increased his popularity even further.

The original text

The Pearl is derived from a well known folk tale in Lower California of an Indian boy who finds a pearl of great size which, rather than solving his economic problems for good, brings such unhappiness to its unfortunate owner that he ends up throwing it back into the sea. In Steinbeck's version, the finder of the pearl is a married man and the tragedy involves his child, Coyotito.

Told in a simple style which is reminiscent of folk tales, the novel relies on striking visual imagery which gives readers the impression they are watching a movie. Moreover,

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the constant reference to the songs Kino's people sing, apart from embellishing the novel, are a reminder of the oral nature of the Indians' culture.

Background and themes

Mexico was a country inhabited by more than 700 Indian tribes who spoke almost 100 different languages when the Spanish conquered it in 1521. After that, the national language was Spanish and the Indian population declined owing to disease, poverty, wars and revolution. As time went by, very few Indians were able to climb the social ladder. When *The Pearl* was written in 1947, Indian Mexicans like Kino and his family were still poorer than the Spanish Mexicans. However, *The Pearl* is not solely a criticism of the social system in Mexico; it applies to any unjust system in whichever country.

Free will versus social conditioning: Does Kino shape his destiny or is he a victim of social forces he cannot control?

Colonial arrogance versus native submissiveness: If Kino had been white and had had access to an education, would he have been treated the way he was?

Avarice versus generosity: Is Kino the victim of his own greed or of that of others?

Discussion activities

Chapter 1

Before reading

- Discuss:** Have students discuss what they know about pearls.
What's a pearl? How is a pearl formed? Do you or your family have any pearls? What colour are they?
Using encyclopedias or the Internet, have students look up information about natural and cultured pearls and which seas natural pearls are found in.

While reading

- Discuss:** Have students discuss which insects are the most dangerous in the area in which they live.
- Guess:** Ask students to write down Juana or Kino's thoughts after the scorpion bites Coyotito (page 6).
- Discuss:** Have students discuss the doctor's behavior.
 - We all work to earn money. Is the doctor right or wrong in refusing to see Coyotito because his parents don't have any money?*
 - How could Kino pay the doctor?*
- Role play:** Have students dramatize the dialogues between a) Kino and the doctor's servant and b) the doctor and his servant on pages 6–7.

After reading

- Discuss:** Have students discuss how they would film the scene of the scorpion bite.

Chapters 2–3

Before reading

- Guess:** Have students read the title of Chapter 2 and the phrase in italics beneath the title on page 10.
Is this an ordinary pearl? How big are ordinary pearls? What will Kino do with such a big pearl? Will he visit the doctor again? Will he sell it?

While reading

- Discuss:** Have students discuss opening the big oyster.
Why doesn't Kino open the big oyster first? If you were Kino what would you do?
- Discuss:** Have students talk about becoming rich all of a sudden.
When Kino finds the great pearl he starts dreaming of a better future for his family. What would you do if you suddenly had a lot of money?

After reading

- Write:** Have students make a list of all the things that Kino wants to do and buy when he sells the great pearl. Ask their opinion about each of Kino's plans.
- Write:** Have students write an article for a local newspaper using one of these headlines: "Poor Fisherman Finds Beautiful Pearl" or "Priest Visits Lucky Fisherman."
- Guess:** Ask students to imagine the lyrics of Kino's Song of Evil when the priest came to visit him.

Chapters 4–5

Before reading

- Guess:** Have students read the title of Chapter 4 and the phrase in italics beneath the title on page 22.
Who will be the first thief? And the second? Whose house are Kino and the doctor in? Why does the doctor want to see Kino now?

While reading

- Discuss:** In pairs, have students discuss the dishonest doctor.
What does the doctor give Coyotito "to attack the poison"?
- Discuss:** Have students discuss the first thief.
Who's the first thief? How does he know where Kino has hidden the pearl? Who has sent him? Does Kino hurt him with his knife?

After reading

- Discuss:** Have students consider what to do with the pearl. Get them to discuss the following (page 30).
What does Juana want to do with the pearl after a thief tries to steal it? Does Kino agree? Why/ why not? Which of the two do you think is right?
- Role play:** Have students imagine and dramatize the conversation among the three pearl buyers after hearing that Kino wouldn't sell them the pearl.

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Chapter 6

Before reading

- 18 Guess:** Have students read the title and the lines in italics beneath the title on page 40.
Who will be the second thief? Will he be able to steal Kino's pearl? Who says these words? Why does this person say that the pearl is evil?

After reading

- 19 Write:** Have students write down the lyrics of Juana's Song of the Family, which she sang to keep evil out (page 43).
- 20 Role play:** Have students imagine a talk among a group of Kino's neighbors after the second thief tried to steal the great pearl. Then get them to dramatize the dialogue.

Chapters 7–8

While reading

- 21 Discuss:** Have students consider the issue of domestic violence. Have students discuss whether Kino was right or wrong in hitting Juana.
- 22 Guess:** Ask students to imagine why Juana gives back the pearl to Kino after the attack on pages 50–51.
Why doesn't Juana throw the pearl into the sea when she finds it in the path? Why does she give it back to Kino?
- 23 Discuss:** Talk about Kino's canoe. Have students discuss the importance of canoes for Kino and his people.

After reading

- 24 Write:** In pairs get the students to write down the conversation between Apolonia and Juana in which Juana speaks about the terrible events of the evening (pages 50–52).
- 25 Discuss:** Have the students discuss the following.
- *Kino thinks it's better for him to give himself to the trackers but Juana doesn't. Who do you agree with?*
 - *Kino wants Juana to carry on walking alone while the trackers follow him but again she doesn't want to.*
 - Which of the two is right?

- 26 Guess:** Have students predict what will happen next.
At the end of Chapter 8 Kino asks Juana to keep the baby quiet because the trackers are very near. Will the baby cry or not? If it does, what will happen to the family?

Chapter 9

Before reading

- 27 Guess:** Have the students read the title of the chapter and the sentence in italics beneath the title on page 66.
- *What kind of music will come from the pearl now that Kino and Juana are being followed?*
 - *Whose is the cry of death? What has happened?*

While reading

After reading

- 28 Discuss:** Have students discuss Kino's attack on the trackers.
Do you think Kino's plan is good? Why (not)? Can you think of a better plan?
- 29 Guess:** Have students predict Kino's future.
Kino has killed the three trackers. Isn't it dangerous for him and Juana to return to their town? Why do they do so?
- 30 Write:** Get students to imagine what will happen to Kino now that he has returned to his town.
- *Kino has killed three men. Will he be sent to prison?*
 - *What will happen to Juana? Where will she live now that their house has been burnt down?*
- 31 Write:** Have students write a new ending to the story. The ending of *The Pearl* is very sad. At what point in Chapter 9 can the story be made different? In class or as homework, ask students to write a happier ending to the story and share it with the rest of the class.