

"...I'll be all around' in the dark. I'll be ever'where—wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why, I'll be there. See?"

*The Grapes of Wrath*  
Chapter 27

**Teaching *The Grapes of Wrath***



## I. CONTEXT, historical

### DECADE OF ANXIETY

Artists attempted to capture “the people’s” experience:

Documentary  
photography:  
Dorothea Lange,  
Walker Evans

Film: Pare Lorentz  
“Plow that Broke the  
Plains”

Painting: murals

Theater: The SF Theater  
Union and *Of Mice  
and Men*



## **II. Context, biographical**

### **The Road to *Grapes*: Becoming a Partisan Writer**

- *In Dubious Battle*, 1936
- *Of Mice and Men*, 1937
- “Dubious Battle in California,” 1936
- “The Harvest Gypsies,” October 1936
- “Starvation Under the Orange Trees,” 1938
- “L’Affaire Lettuceburg,” unpublished ms, 1938
- *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1939

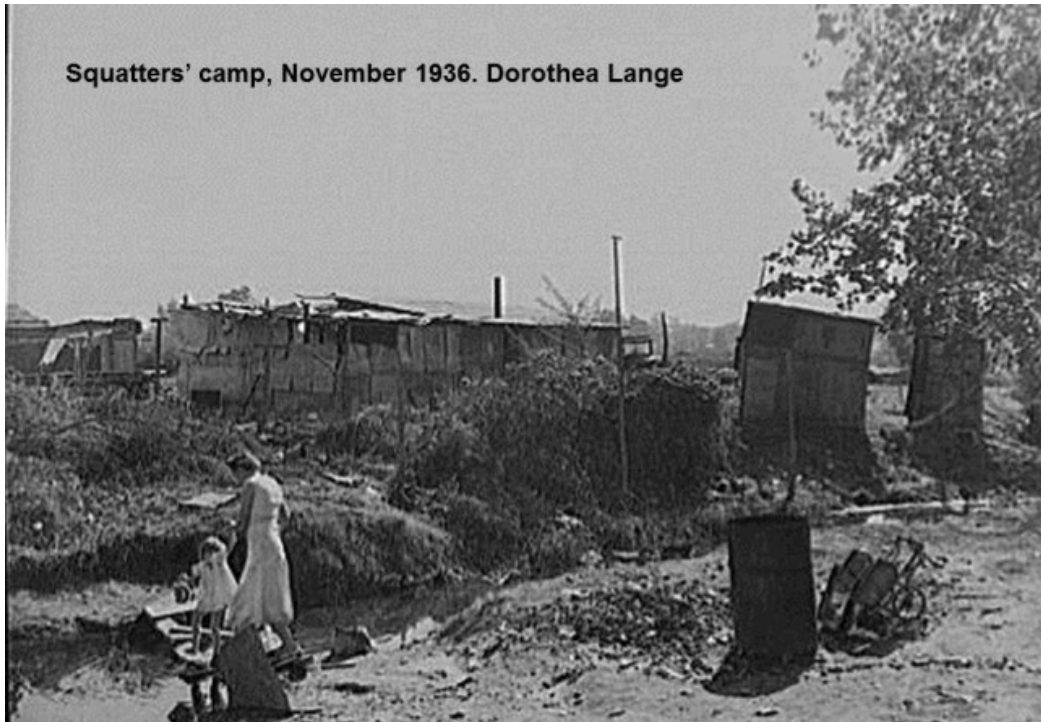
## **BECOMING A JOURNALIST, FALL, 1936:**

**“Dubious Battle in California”**

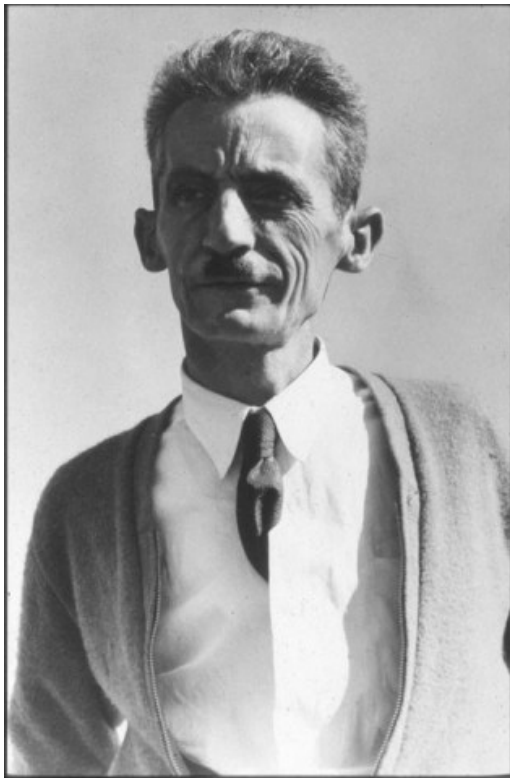
**“The Harvest Gypsies”**

**“I’ve seen such terrific things in the squatters’ camps that I can’t think out of them right now. There’s Civil War making right under my nose. I’ve got to see it and feel it. I have a lot now... I start on another play tomorrow and I think it will be a good one. It is to be laid in a squatter camp in Kern County. Instead of stage direction I’ll furnish photographs. This thing is happening now and it’s incredibly rich dramatically.”**  
**Steinbeck to Elizabeth Otis, 1936**

Squatters' camp, November 1936. Dorothea Lange



“The Harvest Gypsies,” John Steinbeck, 1936



## **Tom Collins, manager of the Arvin Migrant camp**

**Arvin Migratory Labor Camp  
Reports: July 11-18, 1936**

**--"Groups at Camp": 54-74**

**--"Individuals": 279-364**

**--"Number cases illnesses":**

**"Tonsillitis, Mumps, Boils,  
Diphtheria, Pneumonia,  
Pregnancy"**

**--"Treated at camp first aid  
station": 56**

**--"Destitute persons----none"**

**--"Referred to other agencies----as  
above"**

**--"Group heads unemployed---  
none"**

**...**

**--"Children at camp":--154**



“The Harvest Gypsies” articles published by the Simon Lubin Society, 1938. Funds used for relief of farm workers.



**III. Context: The idea of “participation” and Springsteen’s “The Ghost of Tom Joad”**  
“Participation” was a favorite word of both Edward Ricketts and John Steinbeck—meaning, for both, full engagement of the mind and senses.

**“The songs of the working people have always been their sharpest statement and the one statement which cannot be destroyed. You can burn books, buy newspapers, you can guard against handbills and pamphlets, but you cannot prevent singing.”**

**“Songs are the statements of a people. You can learn more about people by listening to their songs than in any other way, for into the songs go all the hopes and hurts, the angers, ears, the wants and aspirations.” JS, “Woody Guthrie”**







Drawings by Thomas Hart Benton



## **PARTICIPATION:**

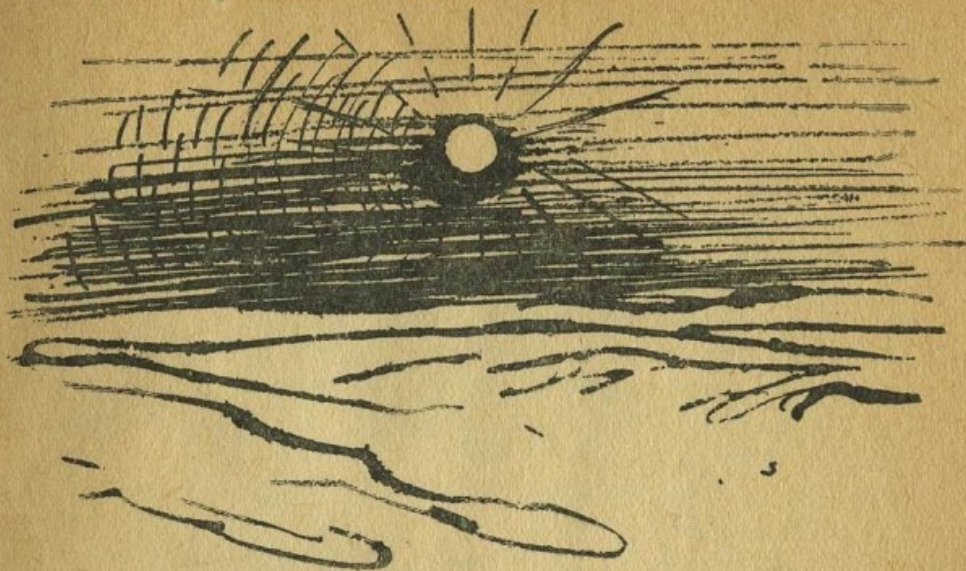
**“Throughout I’ve tried to make the reader participate in the actuality, what he takes from it will be scaled entirely on his own depth or hollowness. There are 5 layers in this book; a reader will find as many as he can and he won’t find more than he has in himself.”**

**“You say the inner chapters were counterpoint and so they were—that they were pace changers and they were that too but the basic purpose was to hit the reader below the belt. With the rhythms and symbols of poetry one can get into a reader—open him up and while he is open introduce—things on an intellectual level which he would not or could not receive unless he were opened up.  
(JS to Herbert Sturtz, 1953)**



ГЛАВА ПЯТАЯ

Important themes: LAND and LAND USE



ГЛАВА ПЕРВАЯ

1940, The Grapes of Wrath, U



**“She’s a nice country. But she was stole a long time ago. You git acrost the desert an’ come into the country aroun’ Bakersfield. An’ you never seen such purty country—” (Ch. 18)**

**Important themes: The meaning of home**





**Thomas Hart Benton: The Joads leaving home**



Thomas Hart Benton illustrations for 1940 *Graphic Arts*

**Important themes: Workers on the land:** Filipino lettuce pickers, Salinas Valley, 1935. Dorothea Lange







**Short handled hoe, Lara Soto adobe, August 2005, Photo by Nancy Burnett**

**Salinas Valley: Today the long handled hoe**



## **Important themes: Power/powerless**

**“The thing that arouses me to fury more than anything else is the imposition of force by a stronger on a weaker for reasons of self interest or greed. That arouses me to a fury. It’s the one unforgivable thing I can think of.”**

**Casy:** “I got to thinkin’ how we was holy when we was one thing, an’ mankin’ was holy when it was one thing. An’ it on’y got unholy when one mis’able little fella got the bit in his teeth an’ run off his own way, kickin’ an’ draggin’ an’ fightin’. Fella like that bus the holiness. But when they’re all workin’ together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang—that’s right, that’s holy.”

**Important themes: Group man**



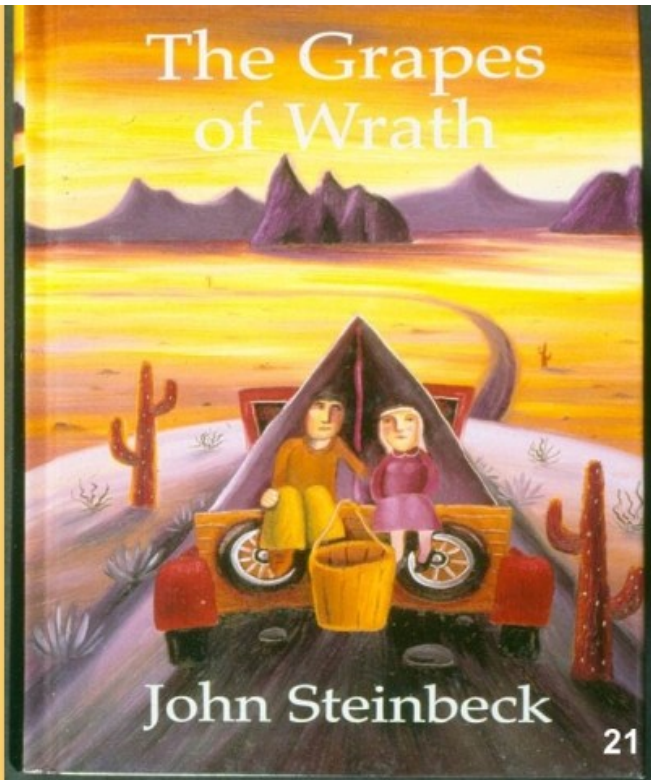
Drawing by Thomas Hart Benton 20

**Important Themes: Migration**

**“The people in flight...” Chapter 12.**

**Road book.**

**Migration.**



## WHY ENDURE?

“Steinbeck’s fervor...the holding power of a documentary film.” Jim Houston

“For me the language of the book is central and the spectacle secondary.” Frank Gallati, wrote script for *Grapes*

Individualism of 1920s—and of America—challenged by Steinbeck’s faith in “the simple decency of common men and women.” *NY Times*

“One of the most compelling examinations of dispossession ever written.” London *Sunday Times*

“This novel pits Oklahoma entropy against Western fecundity, as migrants journey from ‘a place of sadness and worry and defeat’ to California, ‘a new mysterious place.’”  
SS