
The Influence Of The Grapes Of Wrath

John E. Steinbeck Jr, was an American novelist and highly regarded member of the writing community, with works including as the “Grapes of Wrath” and the “Mice of Men”, winning him the Nobel Prize for Literature and also, the Pulitzer Prize. Steinbeck’s books although written up to 90 years ago, are still important and relevant in today’s society. As they provide insight into humanity and tackle issues that were affecting people decades ago, that are still relevant today.

One of Steinbeck’s most acclaimed and renowned texts is the “Grapes of Wrath”. This text captured issues of America’s depression era. Such as the significant poverty that people were living in, along Route 66, after the tragedy that was the Oklahoma Dust Bowl. The text also raises issues surrounding discrimination of the “Okies” by members of the public, law enforcement and employers, in California. Steinbeck also shows the effect of poor treatment on families and communities of desperate parents and starving children. The way in which thousands of families were forced off of the land their own grandfathers had pioneered, was also greatly illustrated by Steinbeck. Steinbeck depicts the heartlessness and selfishness shown by the ‘monster’, that is the bank. But ultimately, Steinbeck was raising the issue of injustice and inequality, which he was seeing firsthand whilst writing this novel.

Although, an essay could be written about the notorious John Steinbeck and his text the “Grapes of Wrath”. The topic of this essay is concerning the influence that the “Grapes of Wrath” had and continues to have on its readers and how Steinbeck was and still is able to make the audience take particular views, through his text and writing techniques used, 81 years ago.

Paragraph One (First issue in text):

Steinbeck raises the issue of homelessness countless throughout the novel. Considering the grapes of wrath is a book about the journey of a ‘homeless’ family.

An excerpt from the book that could make the reader take a certain view or opinion on homelessness as an issue of this time period is:

“Muley continued: ‘Well, sir, it’s a funny thing. Somepin went an’ happened to me when they tol’ me I had to get off the place. Fust I was gonna go in an’ kill a whole flock a people. Then all my folks all went away out west. An’ I got wanderin’ aroun’. Jus’ walkin’ aroun’. Never went far. Slep’ where I was. I was gonna sleep here to-night. That’s why I come. I’d tell myself: “I’m lookin’ after things so when all the folks come back it’ll be all right.” But I knowed that wasn’t true. There ain’t nothin’ to look after. The folks ain’t never comin’ back I’m jus’ wanderin’ aroun’ like a damn ol’ graveyard ghos’.” (Chapter 6, Page 57.)

The above excerpt has the ability to trigger empathy and a feeling of injustice among readers. Steinbeck uses great detail and the native language of the characters to accurately depict the eye opening reality for a majority of farmers in this area at this time. As the book progresses we learn that homelessness has become less of an oddity and it is a rarity for farmers in Oklahoma

and surrounding states to have a stable income and home.

Paragraph Two (Second issue in text):

Prejudice is stronger than ever nowadays, which is why the “The Grapes of Wrath” continues to be a relevant and important text even 81+ years after it was published. Right from the Joads’ first pit stop on their trip we can see the extreme prejudice that they are faced with during their encounter with the service station attendee. They are assumed to be too poor to pay, thieves and dirty before they are even given the chance to prove the stereotype incorrect.

An excerpt from the text that depicts the outright alienation of and discrimination of the “Okies” is:

“The man took two steps backward. “Well, you ain’t in your country now. You’re in California, an’ we don’t want you goddamn Okies settlin’ down.” Ma’s advance stopped. She looked puzzled. “Okies?” she said softly. “Yeah, Okies! An’ if you’re here when I come tomorra, I’ll run ya in.” He turned and walked to the next tent and banged on the canvas with his hand. “Who’s in here?” he said.” (Chapter 7, Page 108).

Through small scenes like the above text. Steinbeck is able to help the reader understand the situation and gather their own opinions of the “Okies” and Californians. In this text excerpt however I believe that Steinbeck is trying to make the reader feel empathetic for the “Okies” and hatred towards the police officer and the way he treats Ma. Through showing Ma’s realization that she is seen a lesser person because of her circumstances, Steinbeck is able to help the reader build a relationship with the character and feel empathy for Ma.

Paragraph Three (Writing skills used by Steinbeck, to make the reader take a certain opinion on the two before mentioned issues (Homelessness and Prejudice)):

Steinbeck uses words carefully to affect the reader in different ways. Steinbeck’s diction varies between chapters, as does the story of the Joad’s journey alternating with the broader story of the migrant masses moving for work. The “Joad” chapters, use a significant amount of dialect or language that is used by people from Oklahoma and surrounding areas. Steinbeck’s use of dialect makes the characters more realistic and therefore creates a deeper connection between reader and characters. Steinbeck is able to develop his characters through dialectal conversations.

On the other hand Steinbeck uses lots of verbs in a short amount of time to quickly, yet effectively to convey the experiences of countless others who are suffering, just like the Joads or who are even worse off. By contrasting the Joads’ journey with the greater population of dispossessed/homeless people, Steinbeck is able to provide an insight of the others suffering just as the Joads are.

Both of these techniques help the reader to build stronger opinions towards and relationships with the characters, which helps to manipulate the reader to feel empathy for the homeless and discriminated families.

Conclusion:

"The Grapes of Wrath" has continued to find new relevance's with each generation since it was published. As long as there are people working there will always be the issue of workers' rights. Today, in Australia we can see this happening to our dairy and cattle farmers who are being under paid by big brand supermarkets and as a result going out of business, just like the "Okies" more than 81 years ago. Also the fact that millions of small farms over time have been bought by multimillion-dollar corporate farms, which has affected and continues to affect a large number of farming families today.

Although the details of the book may not be relatable to some of today's issues. As the modern workers' rights, government welfare programs and funding, unions all protect workers and families from exploitation and poverty. The novel is still able to represent struggle and poverty on a human level, which is still prevalent in many of today's societies.

This text was important in helping to give the tens of thousands of displaced American migrant families a voice. Through both film and book the story has remained conscious to Americans and millions of people worldwide over the following decades. There was a time shortly after the publication of Steinbeck's book when it was labelled as propaganda by left and right-wing organizations. It was publicly burned by people who found the alleged 'socialist' views offensive. This reaction was to be expected at the time as Steinbeck deemed Californian farmers un-empathetic and inhumane at times, towards the migrants seeking a break from the Depression. Steinbeck also challenged banks for the way in which they treated homeowners and employees alike.

Through the completion of this essay, I can conclude that in fact John Steinbeck was and is still able to influence millions of readers worldwide, to take particular views on a variety of issues ranging from homelessness, prejudice, poverty, and modern issues that readers can make connections to from the book. Through the use of his writing techniques and skills.