

## PASSAGE: THE GRAPES OF WRATH

LITERARY NARRATIVE: Adapted from the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinback (©1939 by John Steinback)

The owners of the land came onto the land, or more often a spokesman for the owners came. They came in closed cars, and they felt the dry earth with their fingers, and sometimes they drove big earth augers  
5 into the ground for soil tests. The tenants, from their sun-beaten dooryards, watched uneasily when the closed cars drove along the fields. And at last the owner men drove into the dooryards and sat in their cars to talk out of the windows. The tenant men stood  
10 beside the cars for a while, and then squatted on their hams and found sticks with which to mark the dust. In the open doors the women stood looking out, and behind them the children— corn-headed children, with wide eyes, one bare foot on top of the other bare foot,  
15 and the toes working. The women and the children watched their men talking to the owner men. They were silent... The owner men sat in the cars and explained. You know the land is poor. You've scabbled at it long enough, God knows. The squatting tenant men nodded and wondered and drew figures in the  
20 dust, and yes, they knew, God knows. If the dust only wouldn't fly. If the top would only stay on the soil, it might not be so bad. The owner men went on leading to their point: You know the land's getting poorer. You know what cotton does to the land; robs it, sucks all  
25 the blood out of it. The squatters nodded—they knew, God knew. If they could only rotate the crops they might pump blood back into the land. Well, it's too late... The squatting men raised their eyes to understand. Can't we just hang on? Maybe the next  
30 year will be a good year. God knows how much cotton next year. And with all the wars—God knows what price cotton will bring. Don't they make explosives out of cotton? And uniforms? Get enough wars and  
35 cotton'll hit the ceiling. Next year, maybe. They looked up questioningly. We can't depend on it. The bank—the monster has to have profits all the time. It can't wait. It'll die... The squatting men looked down again.

What do you want us to do? We can't take less share  
40 of the crop—we're half-starved now. The kids are hungry all the time. We got no clothes, torn an' ragged. If all the neighbors weren't the same, we'd be ashamed to go to meeting. And at last the owner men came to the point. The tenant system won't work anymore.  
45 One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take all the crop. We have to do it. We don't like to do it... But you'll kill the land with cotton. We know. We've got to take  
50 cotton quick before the land dies. Then we'll sell the land. Lots of families in the East would like to own a piece of land. The tenant men looked up alarmed. But what'll happen to us? How'll we eat? You'll have to get off the land. The plows'll go through the dooryard...  
55 And now the squatting men stood up angrily. Grampa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away. And Pa was born here, and he killed weeds and snakes...An' we was born here. There in the door—our children born here. And Pa had to borrow  
60 money. The bank owned the land then, but we stayed and we got a little bit of what we raised...It's our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours. That's what makes it ours—being born on  
65 it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it... And now the owner men grew angry. You'll have to go. But it's ours, the tenant men cried. But if we go, where'll we go? How'll we go? We got no money. We're sorry, said the owner men...  
70 You're on land that isn't yours. Once over the line maybe you can pick cotton in the fall. Maybe you can go on relief. Why don't you go on west to California? There's work there, and it never gets cold. Why, you can reach out anywhere and pick an orange. Why, there's always some kind of crop to work in. Why don't  
75 you go there? And the owner's men started their cars and rolled away.