The Pearl
by John Steinbeck

SUMMARY
The Pearl is John Steinbeck’s version of an old Mexican fable about money and greed. In Steinbeck’s story, Kino, a poor Indian Mexican fisherman, goes out in his canoe to find a pearl in hope of getting money to pay the Spanish doctor to cure his baby son, Coyotito, who has been bitten by a scorpion. Kino finds the biggest pearl anyone has ever seen, and believes that his impoverished life will be forever changed. And the pearl does change the lives of Kino, his wife Juana, and Coyotito – but not in the way they expect. When the people in La Paz learn of Kino’s great find, he is quickly visited by a greedy priest, then the greedy doctor. The dishonest pearl buyers try to trick him into selling it to them for very little money. Then twice, thieves come to Kino and Juana’s little house in the night, but they do not get the pearl. Kino kills the second thief in self-defense, and it is then that Juana knows that the pearl is evil and their lives have changed for the worse, forever. Kino is blind to the greed, fear and violence that the pearl brings upon them, and the family suffers a series of disasters. Finally, after several murders and the death of Coyotito, Kino throws the pearl back into the ocean. His tragedy becomes a legend in the town.

ABOUT JOHN STEINBECK
American novelist, story writer, playwright, and essayist, John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902. He was the son of John Ernst Steinbeck, a county treasurer, and Olivia Hamilton, a teacher who encouraged him to read. After graduating from high school Steinbeck went to Stanford University, where he studied marine biology. However, he did not complete his studies. After leaving Stanford he went to New York City where he worked as a reporter, laborer, apprentice painter, caretaker, and surveyor. He returned to Monterey, California in 1930 where he continued to write. Then, in 1943 he returned to New York, his home for the rest of his life.

His first novel, Cup of Gold, was published in 1929. He first received real popular acclaim for his novel Tortilla Flat in 1935, about Mexican-Americans in Monterey who rebel against the materialistic values of society. However, much of his work concerned the plight of America’s dispossessed rural population, as in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book Grapes of Wrath (1939). The Red Pony (1937) is another of his finest works. His last major novel The Winter of Our Discontent was published in 1961.

Steinbeck first tells of a great pearl in Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research (1941), a book that he wrote with his friend, marine biologist, Edward Ricketts. During that trip, Steinbeck heard about an Indian boy in Mexico who found a large pearl. The Pearl (1947) was made into a movie in 1948; the first Mexican movie to receive international distribution. Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, The Red Pony, The Moon is Down, Cannery Row and East Of Eden have all been made into successful movies.

Steinbeck was married three times, had two sons by his second wife, and died in New York City in 1968.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES
Mexico was a country of more than 700 Indian tribes who spoke almost 100 different languages until the Spanish took it in 1521. After that, the national language was Spanish and the population of the Indians declined due to disease, poverty, wars and revolution. As time went by, nearly all of the Indians belonged to the lower class and were not allowed to participate in society. The revolution of 1910 was fought to strengthen the state and weaken the rival forces in society – the Church, the large landowner, the foreign capitalist, and the army. It was fought to give back to the Indians participation in national life, which it did to some extent. However, when The Pearl was written in 1947, the Indian Mexicans were still poorer than the Spanish Mexicans. They had no money for school, and they had to do the worst jobs. In Mexico today, you can see poor fishermen, like Kino. They have to work very hard for very little money. The Pearl, like other Steinbeck novels, is about hard-working people who fight to earn a living.
ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK
1 Give each student a small slip of paper and ask them to write their names on it. Collect the slips of paper, fold them, and put them in an envelope or box. Tell them you are going to pull one name. That person will be the winner — the winner of a great amount of money — $30 million. Before you pull the name, ask them to think about what they will do with the money if their name is pulled. Ask them to work in groups of three and tell each other their plans for the money. Create an atmosphere of excitement. Then, pull the winner’s name. The winner must tell the class what he will do with the winnings. The class should then give their opinions about the winner’s intentions and suggest other ways the money could be spent. Finally, ask the losers to talk about how they feel the money will improve or ruin the winner’s life. This can lead to a discussion about lottery winners and how their lives are affected.

2 Make sure the students know the meaning of oyster and pearl. Ask them to read the first part of the Introduction. Ask the students what they think will happen in the story.

3 Ask students to read the rest of the Introduction, about Steinbeck. Ask if anyone in the class has read a Steinbeck novel. If someone has, did they think they will like this story. Why (not)? If no one has, ask them if they read a Steinbeck novel. If someone has, did they think they will like this story. Why (not)? If no one has, ask them if they think they will like this story. Why (not)?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION
Chapters 1 - 3
1 Ask students to discuss these questions in pairs. How does Kino feel about his life (a) before the scorpion bites Coyotito? (b) when they go to the doctor for help? (c) after he sees the Pearl of the World in his hand?

2 Put students into small groups and ask them to make a list of all the people who grow interested in Kino when they hear about the pearl. Tell them to write next to each, the reason why these people were interested in him. Compare answers and discuss.

Chapters 4 - 6
1 Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss these questions. (a) Who do you think the thieves were? Why?

(b) Why does Juan Tomás tell Kino he has said no to their way of life?

(c) Who do you think is right — Kino or Juana? Why?

2 Put students in pairs and tell them that one is Juana and the other is Juana’s friend. Juana should tell her friend about the scorpion bite and the doctor, about the pearl, the pearl buyers, and Kino’s decision to go to the capital. The friend must ask questions and give Juana advice and “her” opinion. Pairs can then do their role-plays in front of the class. The class then decides which “friend” has given the best advice.

Chapters 7 - 9
1 Tell students that they are going to role-play Kino’s day in court. He has killed several men. Students decide who will be Kino, Juana, Juan Tomás, Apolonia, the doctor, the priest, the pearl buyers, neighbors, and the lawyers. Give them plenty of time to prepare questions and answers. Kino and Juana will need good lawyers and they must decide what they will tell the court. When students are ready, they can role-play Kino’s day in court. Will he go to prison? Students decide.

Glossary
It will be useful if your students know these new words. They are practiced in the ‘Before You Read’ sections at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.)

Chapters 1 - 3
beggar (n) a person who lives by begging (asking people in the street for money)
canoe (n) a long, light narrow boat pointed at both ends, and moved by a paddle
corn (n) the seed of a tall plant grown for its ears of yellow seeds
evil (adj) wicked and harmful, especially in thought or behavior
fisherman (n) someone who catches fish for a job
God (n) the maker and ruler of the world, especially in Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions
oyster (n) a flat shellfish that can be eaten and can produce pearls
pearl (n) a small round, hard white object found inside oysters and used for jewelry
poison (n) a substance that can harm or kill people, animals, or plants
pray (v) to speak to God giving thanks or asking for help
priest (n) a specially trained person in the Christian Church, who performs religious duties
rope (n) a strong, thick cord made by twisting thinner pieces of string together
scorpion (n) a small animal with a poisonous sting in its curving tail
sea (n) a large area of salty water smaller than an ocean
servant (n) a person who is paid to work for another person in their house
worth (prep) having the value mentioned
Chapters 4 - 6
bury (v) to put something under the ground
peso (n) money used in Mexico
track (v) to follow the track of someone or something in order to catch them
Chapters 7 - 9
cave (n) a large natural hole in the side of a hill or mountain
Student's activities

Photocopiable
Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

1. Circle the word that does not belong with the others. You can use your dictionary.
   (a) oyster corn pearl sea
   (b) fisherman priest canoe servant
   (c) rope priest pray God
   (d) beggar peso cave worth

2. Work in pairs. Look at the pictures on pages 3, 9 and 12. Discuss these questions:
   (a) Who are these people and where do they live?
   (b) What do you think happens to the baby?
   (c) How does the woman in the canoe feel when she sees the pearl? How do you know?
   (d) Why is everyone looking at the man, do you think?

Activities while reading the book

Chapters 1-3

1. Kino hears songs in his head. Which song does he hear first, second, third, etc.? Put his songs in the right order. Then match them with the correct sentences below.
   - Song of Evil
   - Song of the Family
   - Song of Hope
   - Song of the Enemy
   (a) Juana was preparing breakfast.
   (b) A scorpion was moving down the rope toward the baby's box.
   (c) Kino pulled the oysters from the ocean floor and put them into his bag.
   (d) Kino killed the scorpion, and Coyotito screamed with pain.

2. What does the word in italics mean in each sentence?
   (a) Kino spoke to him in the old language. (p 5)
   (b) It was the only thing worth money that Kino owned. (p 6)
   (c) ...it will, in time, change into a pearl. (p 7)
   (d) One was tied to a heavy rock, the other to a bag. (p 7)
   (e) It sometimes drives the luck away. (p 8)
   (f) ...strangely, he became every man's enemy. (p 11)

3. Work in pairs. Make a list of all the things Kino wants to buy with the money from the pearl. Discuss why he wants each of these things. Are they all good things? Why does Kino feel afraid? Compare your answers and ideas with another pair of students.

Chapters 4-6

1. Circle the words that you think describe the doctor. Compare your answers with another student and discuss why you have circled these words.
   honest kind greedy thief Indian selfish proud Spanish rich serious skillful terrible wise friendly

2. Write the correct number in each sentence.
   1,000 1,500 500 400 50,000 600
   (a) Strangers from Spain came with their guns .................. years ago.
   (b) “I can give you ..................... pesos,” said the pearl buyer.
   (c) “It is worth ...................... pesos,” Kino told him.
   (d) The third pearl buyer said, “I will offer .................... pesos, and maybe I
can sell it for ...................... pesos."
(e) When Kino refused their offers, the man at the desk said, “I will go to ...................... pesos.”

3 Answer T (true) or F (false). Correct the false sentences.
(a) Some of Kinos neighbors were proud of Kino. ............
(b) Some neighbors thought he was stupid. ............
(c) Kino was not afraid. ............
(d) Juan Tomás was afraid for his younger brother. ............
(e) Someone came to Kino’s house and hit him with a stick. ............
(f) Kino wants Juana to go with him to the capital. ............

Chapters 7–9
1 Put these events in the correct order.
(a) Kino and Juana with Coyotito hide in his brother’s house.
(b) Kino leaves Juana and the baby in the cave and he goes down the mountain.
(c) Kino hits Juana in the face and kicks her in the side.
(d) Kino and his family escape to the mountains.
(e) Kino sees a great hole in his canoe.
(f) The trackers look for Kino and make noises like excited dogs.
(g) Juana finds the great pearl in the path behind a rock and picks it up.
(h) Kino sees his house on fire.
(i) Kino and Juana find water high in the mountains.
(j) Juana sees the dead man that Kino killed with his knife.

2 Match the two parts of the sentence.
(a) Kino was jumping in front of him.
(b) He pushed the knife and Kino shot him between the eyes.
(c) It went through neck when the gun went off
(d) He took the gun while he pulled the knife out of the body.
(e) In the moonlight he saw fear in the eyes and deep into stomach…

Activities after reading the book
1 Work in pairs. Write what Juana was thinking and what Kino was thinking just after their son was killed.
2 Work in small groups. Find places in the story where Steinbeck shows the differences between the lives of the Spanish and the lives of the Indians and how they feel about each other. Make a list of the page numbers. Use this information to write about “The Rich and the Poor in The Pearl.”
3 Do you think that money always changes people for the worse? Do people forget about God and turn to evil? Discuss this with another student, or write your answer.