

ch 1

1. Steinbeck introduces his major characters and their setting in this first chapter. What details suggest that Kino and Juana are good people who live in harmony with their world?
2. Kino's songs are used to reveal his emotions. For example, the Song of the Family says to Kino: "this is the *Whole*." What do you think the word *whole* signifies here?
3. A new song intrudes into the Song of the Family when the scorpion appears. What does Kino identify the scorpion with? What events does the scorpion bite set into motion?
4. The doctor is introduced on page 714. How does he contrast with Kino in appearance, in way of life, and in values? What details does Steinbeck use to make the doctor seem evil?
5. What larger social conflict has existed for centuries between the doctor's people and Kino's? How is this larger conflict underscored by the doctor's saying, "I am a doctor, not a veterinary" (page 715)?

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION ch. 3

1. The poison of the scorpion infected Coyotito in the first chapter, but another kind of poison now infects the town. Steinbeck describes this evil with a metaphor: "the town swelled and puffed with the pressure of it." How would you describe what is actually happening in the town?
2. What are the reactions of these people to Kino's discovery: the priest, the shopkeepers, the doctor, the beggars, the pearl buyers?
3. How do Kino's dreams for the pearl differ from those of the townspeople?
4. Why do you think Kino hears the evil song when the first outsider, the priest, comes to see the pearl?
5. On page 726 we read of the first changes taking place in Kino: "He had broken through the horizons," and he "was already making a hard skin for himself against the world." What do these metaphors mean? How would you explain what is causing the change in Kino?
6. Why does the doctor come to Kino's house after refusing to see the baby that morning? What do you think he actually does to Coyotito?
7. What experiences make Kino realize that his innocence and lack of knowledge have put him at the mercy of other people?

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION ch. 2

1. In the opening paragraphs of this chapter, Steinbeck describes the story's setting. How has the setting become part of the people's ways of seeing and thinking?
2. Why does Juana feel that it is "not good to want a thing too much"? What does this reveal about the villagers' attitude toward life?
3. Two of Kino's and Juana's desires seem to be fulfilled at the end of this chapter. One is the finding of the pearl. What other "miracle" has accompanied the discovery of the pearl? Do you think that Kino links the two events? Why or why not?

ch. 4

1. The central event in this chapter is Kino's attempt to sell the pearl. What details reveal how the pearl buyers have deceived the pearl divers for centuries?
2. The pearl buyer's face is described as "fatherly and benign," but one detail—the way the buyer plays tricks with a coin—reveals the true nature of his character. What does this detail suggest about the pearl buyer? After Kino shows him the pearl, what happens to the coin? How does this show the reader—but not Kino—the buyer's true reaction?
3. Reread the paragraph that opens this chapter. By the end of the chapter, how has Kino broken "walls" and stepped out of "known and trusted patterns"?

ch. 5

1. At the opening of the novel, Kino and Juana were "one thing and one purpose." But the pearl has changed all this. What event dramatizes how greatly they have been divided? How do you account for Juana's reactions to her husband's brutal behavior?
2. Steinbeck frequently uses animal imagery in this story to suggest a cruel world where people prey on one another. What animals are Kino and Juana compared to in the scene on the beach (page 742)?
3. The *turning point* of a story is that moment when the fate of the main character is sealed, when the events of the story must turn in one direction or another. What event marks the turning point of this novel, as Juana realizes the peace of the past is gone forever?
4. Look back at the end of this chapter where Kino says that the pearl has become his "soul." What do you think "soul" means here? If Kino really believes this at this point in the story, what does it reveal about him?

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION Ch. 6

1. In the midst of his perilous journey, Kino looks into the pearl for "his vision." But the pearl reflects only nightmares. What does each nightmare reveal about what has happened to Kino?
2. Is Kino in any way responsible for his little son's death? Why, or why not?
3. What is significant about the fact that the Song of the Family becomes "a battle cry" when Kino and Juana return with the pearl and the body of their son? What images now make the pair seem noble and powerful?
4. How does the melody of the pearl in Chapter 2 (page 721) compare with what Kino now sees in the pearl? What has caused Kino to associate the pearl with evil?
5. Kino at first saw the pearl as a means of gaining a kind of freedom. What would you say he finally gains from his tragic experience? How does Kino change? What does his final act reveal about his values?
6. Why do you think Kino and Juana throw the pearl away?

THE NOVEL AS A WHOLE

Plot

1. The plot of *The Pearl* consists of a series of connected incidents, all related in chronological order. Trace the major events of the plot. What are the *conflicts* in the story? What is the *climax*—that moment of greatest emotional intensity? How are the conflicts finally resolved? Would you describe the resolution as satisfying, or as something else?
2. To create suspense and tension, storytellers often use *foreshadowing*—that is, they drop hints about what is to happen later. Steinbeck often uses imagery from the natural world to foreshadow human conflicts.

What human conflict is foreshadowed by the description of the ant lion on page 710? What human conflict is foreshadowed in the passage on page 728 that begins with the slaughter of the fish?

Irony

1. To show us that life is unpredictable and not always comprehensible, writers often use *irony*. Ironic situations turn out to be just the reverse of what we expect or of what we think would be appropriate. What is ironic about the fact that it is Coyotito who is killed in this story? How did this irony affect you?
2. When Kino and Juana set out to sell the pearl at the opening of Chapter 4, they feel that it is "the morning of mornings of their lives, comparable only to the day when their baby was born. This was to be the day from which all other days would take their arrangement." Given what happens later, what is ironic about the parents' hopes? In what unexpected way does this turn out to be the "morning of mornings"?
3. Kino hoped to win freedom and knowledge through his son. He hoped that Coyotito would "break out of the pot that holds us in" (page 731). Ironically, how does Coyotito help his parents win a kind of "freedom"? What do Kino and Juana come to realize through the baby's death?

Imagery

Kino and Juana are often compared to animals. After Kino finds the pearl, for example, he "howls," as a dog or a wolf would. What images in Chapter 6 compare Kino and Juana, as well as their trackers, to animals? In contrast, what images describe the pair when they return to La Paz on that golden afternoon, after their ordeal is over? How have they changed? What would you compare them to now?

Symbol

A *symbol* is any object, action, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something broader than itself. The pearl in this story seems to stand for more than just an actual pearl. Steinbeck tells us on page 719 that the pearl is an accident, a "coated grain of sand." Find passages that reveal what the pearl symbolizes to various people at various times in the story. Does Steinbeck finally make us see the pearl again for what it really is—a beautiful "accident" of the sea? Explain.

Theme

1. On page 709, Steinbeck says that everyone takes his or her own meaning from this story. *The Pearl* is a simple story, but what it means is anything but simple. One of the themes of the story might be illuminated by this statement made by Steinbeck on page 724:

For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more. And this is said in disparagement, whereas it is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that has made it superior to animals that are satisfied with what they have.

How does this statement apply to Kino and Juana and their quest? What desires eventually distinguish Kino and Juana from everyone else in La Paz? Are there other passages in the story supporting this as a theme?

2. The theme of *The Pearl* also might have something to do with tragic experience, and with the wisdom that can be gained from it. What tragic experience do Kino and Juana undergo? How do they change as a result of the experience? What wisdom do they gain?

3. Many people see the theme of the story as one concerning the dehumanizing nature of

greed. In what passages is greed depicted as an evil? Tell specifically how it has dehumanized certain characters. Are there any major characters in the story who are not tainted at one time or another with greed? Is there a force in the story that finally triumphs over greed?

4. Throughout the story, Steinbeck develops the theme that the rich and powerful can dominate the poor and uneducated. What episodes dramatize this theme? Consider why Kino is unable to deal with the doctor and the pearl buyers. How does the priest's yearly sermon (page 734) relate to this theme? What do you think Steinbeck is saying about those who attempt to overcome this situation?

Style

Because Steinbeck wanted this novel to serve as a parable, he wrote it in a style that is suggestive of a folk tale. Folk literature is usually told in simple, straightforward language; it makes use of repetition, which gives the prose a rhythmic effect; and its characters are often presented as either good or bad—they are not usually the complex individuals we know in actual life. Look back at the final scene of the novel, where Kino and Juana return to La Paz. How does the style here reflect some of the characteristics of a folk tale?

Tone

Tone is the attitude that a writer takes toward the characters and events in a story. It is important to recognize a writer's tone, because if we misinterpret tone, we might misinterpret the entire story. How would you describe Steinbeck's tone in *The Pearl*? What does he think of the events that take place in La Paz? How does he feel about the various characters in the story?