# **Study Notes**

## for

# THE PEARL

New M.S.C.E. Literature in English

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To my son, **Chauncy** 

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## **Key Facts**

Full title - The Pearl

Author - John Steinbeck

Type of work - Novella

Genre - Parable, allegory

Time and place written - 1944-1945, California

Publisher - The Viking Press

**Point of view** - The narrator uses third-person, omniscient narration, meaning he or she not only tells us what various characters think and feel but also provides analysis and commentary on the story

**Setting (place)** - A Mexican coastal village called La Paz, probably on the Baja Peninsula

Protagonist - Kino

**Major conflict** - After finding a magnificent pearl, Kino seeks to sell it to acquire wealth. He wishes for his son's wound to heal, and for his son to obtain an education and become an equal to the European colonists who keep his people in a state of ignorance and poverty. When he tries to sell the pearl, however, Kino quickly meets resistance in the form of other people's greed. Ultimately, his struggle to acquire wealth places him at odds with his family, his culture, and nature, as Kino himself succumbs to greed and violence.

**Rising action** - A scorpion stings Coyotito; Kino discovers a great pearl; Kino's attempts to sell the pearl are unsuccessful, and he is mysteriously attacked; Kino beats Juana for attempting to discard the pearl.

**Climax** - Kino kills a man who attacks him for his pearl, an event that exposes the tension surrounding this object as a bringer of great evil as well as a chance for salvation.

**Falling action** - Kino and Juana flee the village and find themselves chased by trackers; Kino fights with the trackers, not knowing that they have taken Coyotito's cry to be that of a coyote and shot him; Kino and Juana return to the village and throw the pearl back into the sea

**Themes** - Greed as a destructive force; the roles of fate and agency in shaping human life; colonial society's oppression of native cultures.

Symbols - The pearl, the scorpion, Kino's canoe

**Foreshadowing** - Juana and Juan Tomás's warnings to Kino that the pearl is dangerous.

## About John Steinbeck and The Pearl

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, in 1902. He was the third of four children and the only son of John Steinbeck, Sr. and Olive Hamilton Steinbeck. Growing up in a rural valley near the Pacific coast, Steinbeck was an intense reader, and both his father, a local government official, and his mother, a former schoolteacher, encouraged his literary pursuits. In 1919 he graduated from Salinas High School and matriculated at Stanford University, where he studied literature and writing. In 1925, without a degree, Steinbeck left Stanford to pursue work as a reporter in New York City. He returned to California the following year, supporting his endeavors at writing with a steady income from manual labor.

Steinbeck's simple, touching novella The Pearl originally appeared in the magazine Woman's Home Companion in 1945 under the title "The Pearl of the World." The story explores the destructive effect of colonial capitalism on the simple piety of a traditional native culture. Set in a Mexican Indian village on the Baja Peninsula around the turn of the century, the novella tells the story of Kino, an Indian pearl diver who discovers a massive, beautiful, and extremely valuable pearl. The pearl fills Kino with a new desire to abandon his simple, idyllic life in favour of dreams of material and social advancement, dreams that run headlong into the oppressive resistance of the Spanish colonial powers that top the social hierarchy of Kino's world. While less complex than Steinbeck's other works, The Pearl ranks among his most popular, and it is certainly one of his most accessible.

## The Pearl

#### **Plot Overview**

Kino, Juana, and their infant son, Coyotito, live in a modest brush house by the sea. One morning, calamity strikes when a scorpion stings Coyotito. Hoping to protect their son, Kino and Juana rush him to the doctor in town. When they arrive at the doctor's gate, they are turned away because they are poor natives who cannot pay enough.

Later that same morning, Kino and Juana take their family canoe, an heirloom, out to the estuary to go diving for pearls. Juana makes a poultice for Coyotito's wound, while Kino searches the sea bottom. Juana's prayers for a large pearl are answered when Kino surfaces with the largest pearl either of them has ever seen. Kino lets out a triumphant yell at his good fortune, prompting the surrounding boats to circle in and examine the treasure.

In the afternoon, the whole neighborhood gathers at Kino's brush house to celebrate his find. Kino names a list of things that he will secure for his family with his newfound wealth, including a church wedding and an education for his son. The neighbors marvel at Kino's boldness and wonder if he is foolish or wise to harbour such ambitions. Toward evening, the local priest visits Kino to bless him in his good fortune and to remind him of his place within the church.

Shortly thereafter, the doctor arrives, explaining that he was out in the morning but has come now to cure Coyotito. He administers a powdered capsule and promises to return in an hour.

In the intervening period, Coyotito grows violently ill, and Kino decides to bury the pearl under the floor in a corner of the brush house. The doctor returns and feeds Coyotito a potion to quiet his spasms. When the doctor inquires about payment, Kino explains that soon he will sell his large pearl and inadvertently glances toward the corner where he has hidden the pearl. This mention of the pearl greatly intrigues the doctor, and Kino is left with an uneasy feeling.

Before going to bed, Kino reburies the pearl under his sleeping mat. That night, he is roused by an intruder digging around in the corner. A violent struggle ensues, and Kino's efforts to chase away the criminal leave him bloodied. Terribly upset by this turn of events, Juana proposes that they abandon the pearl, which she considers an agent of evil.

The next morning, Kino and Juana make their way to town to sell the pearl. Juan Tomás, Kino's brother, advises Kino to be wary of cheats. Indeed, all of the dealers conspire to bid low on the pearl. Kino indignantly refuses to accept their offers, resolving instead to take his pearl to the capital. That evening, as Kino and Juana prepare to leave, Juan Tomás cautions Kino against being overly proud, and Juana repeats her wish to be rid of the pearl. Kino silences her, explaining that he is a man and will take care of things.

In the middle of the night, Juana steals away with the pearl. Kino wakes as she leaves and pursues her, apprehending her just as she is poised to throw the pearl into the sea. He tackles her, takes the pearl back, and beats her violently, leaving her in a crumpled heap on the beach. As he returns to the brush house, a group of hostile men confronts him and tries to take the pearl from him. He fights the men off, killing one and causing the rest to flee, but drops the pearl in the process.

As Juana ascends from the shore to the brush house, she finds the pearl lying in the path. Just beyond, she sees Kino on the ground, next to the dead man. He bemoans the loss of the pearl, which she presents to him. Though Kino explains that he had no intention to kill, Juana insists that he will be labeled a murderer. They resolve to flee at once. Kino rushes back to the shore to

prepare the canoe, while Juana returns home to gather Coyotito and their belongings.

Kino arrives at the shore and finds his canoe destroyed by vandals. When he climbs the hill, he sees a fire blazing, and realizes that his house has burned down. Desperate to find refuge, Kino, Juana and Coyotito duck into Juan Tomás's house, where they hide out for the day. Relieved that the three did not perish in the blaze, as the rest of the neighbourhood believes, Juan Tomás and his wife, Apolonia, reluctantly agree to keep Kino and Juana's secret and provide shelter for them while pretending to be ignorant of their whereabouts.

At nightfall, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito set out for the capital. Skirting the town, they travel north until sunrise and then take covert shelter by the roadside. They sleep for most of the day and are preparing to set out again when Kino discovers that three trackers are following them. After hesitating briefly, Kino decides that they must hurry up the mountain, in hopes of eluding the trackers. A breathless ascent brings them to a water source, where they rest and take shelter in a nearby cave. Kino attempts to mislead the trackers by creating a false trail up the mountain. Kino, Juana, and Coyotito then hide in the cave and wait for an opportunity to escape back down the mountain.

The trackers are slow in their pursuit and finally arrive at the watering hole at dusk. They make camp nearby, and two of the trackers sleep while the third stands watch. Kino decides that he must attempt to attack them before the late moon rises. He strips naked to avoid being seen and sneaks up to striking distance. Just as Kino prepares to attack, Coyotito lets out a cry, waking the sleepers. When one of them fires his rifle in the direction of the cry, Kino makes his move, killing the trackers in a violent fury. In the aftermath, Kino slowly realizes that the rifle shot struck and killed his son in the cave.

The next day, Kino and Juana make their way back through town and the outlying brush houses. Juana carries her dead son slung over her shoulder. They walk all the way to the sea, as onlookers watch in silent fascination. At the shore, Kino pulls the pearl out of his clothing and takes one last, hard look at it. Then, with all his might, under a setting sun, he flings the pearl back into the sea.

## **Major characters**

#### Juana

Kino's wife, Juana, is more reflective and more practical than Kino. She prays for divine aid when Coyotito's wound leaves Kino impotent with rage, and she also has the presence of mind to salve the wound with a seaweed poultice. Juana is loyal and submissive, obeying her husband as her culture dictates,

but she does not always agree with his actions. Like Kino, Juana is at first seduced by the greed the pearl awakens, but she is much quicker than Kino to recognize the pearl as a potential threat. In fact, Juana comes to view the pearl as a symbol of evil. As the novella progresses, Juana becomes certain that the limitations, rules, and customs of her society must be upheld. Whereas Kino seeks to transform his existence, Juana believes that their lives will be better if they keep things as they are. Kino can see only what they have to gain from the pearl, but Juana can see also what they stand to lose, and she wisely prefers to protect what she has rather than sacrifice it all for a dream. Juana thus serves an important function in the novella—she counterbalances Kino's enthusiasm and reminds the reader that Kino's desire to make money is dangerous. Juana also symbolizes the family's domestic happiness; the scene in which Kino beats her for trying to cast off the pearl thus represents Kino's tragic break from the family he longs to support.

#### Kino

Kino, The Pearl's protagonist, is an extremely simple character, motivated by basic drives: his love for his family, loyalty to the traditions of his village and his people, and frustration at his people's oppression at the hands of their European colonizers. Kino also possesses a quick mind and a strong work ethic, and he feels a close, pure kinship with the natural world, the source of his livelihood

At the beginning of the novella, Kino is essentially content with his life. However, two seemingly chance occurrences—Coyotito's scorpion sting and Kino's discovery of the pearl—open Kino's eyes to a larger world. As Kino begins to covet material wealth and education for his son, his simple existence becomes increasingly complicated by greed, conflict, and violence. The basic trajectory of Kino's character is a gradual decline from a state of innocence to a state of corruption and disillusionment. The forces propelling this decline are ambition and greed. At the end of the novella, Kino's tranquil relationship with nature has been perverted and reversed, a change signified by the fact that Kino finds the sounds of the animals at night threatening rather than reassuring. Because The Pearl is a parable, Kino's character can be interpreted in many ways. It can be seen as a critique of colonial politics, an exploration of how good motives can bring a person to a bad end, or even an attack on the idea of the American dream. But on the most basic level, Kino represents the dangers of ambition and greed. Kino's ruin, caused by his lust for the pearl, illustrates the extent to which ambition and greed poison and jeopardize every aspect of a human's familial, cultural, and personal well-being.

#### The Doctor

Though he does not figure largely in the novella's plot, the doctor is an important character in The Pearl because he represents the colonial attitudes that oppress Kino's people. The doctor symbolizes and embodies the colonists'

arrogance, greed, and condescension toward the natives, whom the colonists do not even try to understand. Like the other colonists, the doctor has no interest in Kino's people. He has come only to make money, and his greed distorts his human values. As a physician, the doctor is duty-bound to act to save human life, but when confronted with someone whom he considers beneath him, the doctor feels no such duty. His callous refusal to treat Coyotito for the scorpion sting because Kino lacks the money to pay him thus demonstrates the human cost of political conquest rooted in the desire for financial profit. As his interior monologue in Chapter 1 shows, the doctor is obsessed with European society, and European cultural values grip his mind so deeply that he doesn't even realize how ignorant he is of Kino and Kino's people.

## SUMMARY FOR THE NOVEL

## **Chapter 1 Summary**

Just before sunrise sometime around 1900, a Mexican-Indian pearl diver named Kino awakens to the sound of crowing roosters. He lives near the village of La Paz, on the Pacific coast of the Baja Peninsula. He watches the day dawning through the crack of the door to his house, which is made of brush—bundles of straw fastened together to form walls and a roof. He then looks to a makeshift cradle, a kind of box hanging from the roof of the hut, where his infant son, Coyotito, sleeps. Finally, still resting on the mat, Kino turns his gaze to the open eyes of his wife, Juana. She looks back at Kino as she always does in the early morning. Hearing the waves rolling up on the nearby beach, Kino closes his eyes again to listen to the sound of an old song in his head. Juana rises to check on Coyotito and starts a fire. Kino also rises, wrapping himself in a blanket and sliding into his sandals. Outside, he regards the climbing sun and the hovering clouds as Juana prepares breakfast.

In the company of a goat and a dog, Kino stares "with the detachment of God" at a group of industrious ants underfoot. Behind him, Kino hears Juana singing and nursing Coyotito. Her song is simple, and it moves Kino to contemplation. As the rest of the neighbourhood stirs, Kino goes back inside the house and finds Juana fixing her hair. As they eat their simple breakfast, there is no speech between them beyond a contented sigh from Kino. A ray of light shines on Coyotito's hanging box, revealing a scorpion crawling down the rope toward the child. Terrified, Juana recites a charm and a prayer to protect Coyotito, while Kino moves forward to capture the scorpion. Coyotito spots the scorpion on the rope, laughs, and reaches up to grab it. Just then, positioned in front of the hanging box, Kino freezes, slowly stretching out his hand toward the scorpion. When Coyotito shakes the rope of the hanging box, the scorpion falls, lands on his shoulder, and stings him. Kino immediately seizes the creature and crushes it in his grasp, beating it to death on the floor for good measure. Kino's payback does no good, though, and Coyotito screams with

pain. Juana grabs Coyotito at once and attempts to suck the venom out of his festering wound. The child's wailing summons several neighbours to Kino's doorstep, including Kino's brother, Juan Tomás, and Juan Tomás's wife, Apolonia.

As Coyotito's cries weaken into moans, Juana asks Kino to summon the doctor. Such a request surprises the neighbours since the doctor has never visited the poor cluster of brush houses. The doctor belongs to the social class of the Spanish colonists of the region, a class far above that of poor natives such as Kino and Juana. When Kino expresses doubt that the doctor will come to Coyotito, Juana resolves to take Coyotito to the doctor. Kino and Juana set out for the center of town, their neighbours trailing behind them. Near the center of town, more people follow, curious to see the outcome of a poor man's plea to a rich doctor.

Arriving at the doctor's house, Kino knocks at the gate. He both fears and resents the doctor, a powerful man not of his own people. Presently, the gate opens to reveal one of Kino's own people, employed in the doctor's service. Kino explains the details of Coyotito's injury in his native tongue; the man ignores Kino's use of the native language and responds in Spanish. He tells Kino to wait while he goes to speak with the doctor.

Indoors, the doctor sits up in bed, surrounded by luxuries. He feasts on biscuits and hot chocolate and thinks nostalgically of Paris. When the servant interrupts the doctor's reverie to announce Kino's visit, the doctor bitterly demands to know if Kino has money to pay for the treatment. Kino gives the servant eight small pearls, but soon the servant returns to Kino with them, explaining that the doctor has been called out to attend to a serious case. With this dismissal, the procession breaks up, leaving Kino furious and ashamed. Standing in shock in front of the closed gate, Kino strikes out in anger, smashing his fist into the barrier and bloodying his knuckles.

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

On the shores of the estuary, a set of blue and white canoes sits in the sand. Crabs and lobsters poke out from their holes, and algae and sea horses drift aimlessly in the nearby currents. Dogs and pigs scavenge the shoreline for sea drift in the hazy morning. Amid this scene, Kino and Juana walk down the beach to Kino's canoe. They are going to search for pearls, desperately hoping to find a pearl of sufficient value to persuade the doctor to treat the poisoned Coyotito. The canoe, an heirloom passed down to Kino from his paternal grandfather, is Kino's sole asset in the world. Kino lays his blanket in its bow. Juana rests Coyotito upon the blanket and places her shawl over him to protect him from the sun. She then wades into the water and collects some seaweed, which she applies gently to Coyotito's wound. Kino and Juana slide the canoe into the water, Juana climbs in, and Kino pushes the boat away from shore. Once Kino boards, the two begin paddling out to sea in search of

pearls. In a short time, they come upon other canoes, which have clustered around the nearest oyster bed.

Kino makes a dive to collect oysters, while Juana stays in the canoe, praying for luck. He stays under water for over two minutes, gathering the largest shells, including one especially enormous oyster that has a "ghostly gleam." Climbing back into the canoe, Kino is reluctant to examine the largest oyster first. After halfheartedly pawing at a smaller one, eagerness overcomes him, and Juana softly urges him to open the prize catch. Kino cuts the shell open to reveal the biggest pearl that either of them has ever seen. Nearly breathless, Juana shrieks in astonishment to find that Coyotito's wound has improved in the presence of the great pearl. Kino, overcome with emotion, tenses his entire body and lets out a resounding yell. Startled by this unexpected display, the other canoes quickly race toward Kino and Juana to uncover the source of the commotion.

## **Chapter 3 Summary**

News of Kino's discovery travels quickly. Even before Kino returns to his brush house, everyone in town knows that he has found "the Pearl of the World." Throughout town, people of every class—from the beggar to the businessman to the priest—dream of how Kino's pearl can help them. Like everyone else, the doctor who turned Kino away desires the pearl. Ignorant of others' jealousy, Kino and Juana delight in their good fortune, inviting family and friends to share their joy in their newfound treasure.

When Juan Tomás asks Kino what he will do with his wealth, Kino details his plans: a proper marriage in the church, new clothing for the family, a harpoon, and a rifle, among other things. Kino's new boldness amazes Juana, especially when he expresses his desire for Coyotito to be sent to school and educated. Kino himself is surprised somewhat by his own resolute statement, and all of the neighbours stare at the mighty pearl with a mixture of hope and fear at the enormous changes that lie ahead.

As dusk approaches, Juana revives the fire, and the neighbours overstay their welcome. Near dark, the priest comes to deliver a benediction. Once he has blessed the household, he asks to see the pearl. Dazzled, the priest implores Kino to remember the church in his new prosperity. Juana announces their intention to be married in the church, and the priest leaves them with a kind word.

A sense of evil overcomes Kino in the wake of the priest's visit. The neighbours disperse to their own suppers, and Juana begins to prepare a meal of baked beans. Kino huddles beneath a blanket in the cold night, keeping the pearl close to his body. Plagued with continued ill feeling, Kino meditates on the former security of his family, and on the menacing uncertainty into which their newfound fortune has cast them.

From the door of his brush house, Kino watches two men approach. The figures prove to be the doctor and his servant, who have come to examine Coyotito's wound. Kino brusquely dismisses the doctor's attentions, but when the doctor makes a sinister insinuation about the lingering potential for infection, Kino relents and allows him to enter. Juana is extremely suspicious of the doctor, but Kino reassures her. When the doctor examines Coyotito, he contends that he has found evidence of complications and produces a capsule of medication that he proceeds to administer. Claiming that the poison will strike within an hour and that the medicine may prove life-saving, the doctor declares that he will return in an hour to check on Coyotito's progress.

As Juana stares at Coyotito with concern, Kino realizes that he has been careless in not guarding the pearl. Without delay, he wraps the pearl in a rag, digs a hole, and buries the pearl in a corner of the brush house, concealing the hiding place from view. As Kino eats his supper, a small black puppy lingers in the doorway and shakes its tail nervously. Afterward, Juana alerts Kino that Coyotito's condition is growing worse, and she sings soothingly in an effort to comfort the baby. When Coyotito becomes visibly ill, an evil feeling fills Kino once again.

The neighbours learn quickly of the doctor's visit and Coyotito's subsequent decline, and they reconvene at Kino's house to provide support. The doctor reappears, and a swiftly administered potion sets Coyotito to rest. The doctor innocuously asks when Kino might be able to pay him. Kino explains that once he has sold his most valuable pearl he will be able to pay. Feigning ignorance about the pearl, the doctor offers to keep it in his safe, but Kino declines the offer, explaining that he intends to sell the pearl in the morning. The doctor expresses concern that the pearl might be stolen, and Kino inadvertently glances with fear at the corner where the pearl is buried.

Later, when the doctor and neighbors depart and it is time to sleep, Kino paces about the house anxiously, listening vigilantly for threatening noises. In a fit of precaution, he digs up the pearl and reburies it beneath his sleeping mat. Finally, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito curl up together on the mat and attempt to sleep peacefully.

At first, Kino dreams of Coyotito's future success, but the evil feeling returns and quickly overtakes him. He stirs restlessly, waking Juana. He wakes and hears an intruder in the house, cowering and scratching in the corner, clearly in search of the pearl. Grabbing his knife, Kino leaps into the corner and struggles with the intruder, stabbing at him wildly. After a violent scuffle, the intruder flees, leaving Kino bloodied as Juana calls out to him in terror. Regaining her senses, she swiftly prepares a salve for Kino's bruised forehead. As she tends Kino's wounds, Juana rails against the pearl, calling it an evil plague upon them. Kino remains adamant about the pearl's virtue, insisting

that it will be their road to salvation. Juana disagrees, declaring that it will destroy their entire family.

As Kino hushes her, he notices a spot of blood on his knife, which he removes. With dawn approaching, he settles down to look at his pearl. In its luminescence, Kino sees his family's chance for the future, and smiles. Juana smiles with him, and they meet the day with hope.

## **Chapter 4 Summary**

News spreads throughout the town of La Paz that Kino will be selling his great pearl. The pearl buyers are especially excited, and the pearl fishers abandon their work for the day to witness the transaction. Over breakfast that morning, the brush-house neighbourhood teems with speculation and opinion. Kino, Juana, and Coyotito wear their best clothes for the occasion, and Kino dons his hat with care, anxious to appear a serious, vigorous man of the world.

As Kino and Juana set out from their brush house, the neighbours fall in line behind them. Juan Tomás walks at the front with Kino and expresses his concern that Kino may be cheated, as Kino has no standard of true comparison to know what his pearl is worth. Kino acknowledges this problem but adds that they have no way of solving it. Juan Tomás tells Kino that another system of pearl-selling used to exist before Kino was born. Pearl-lookers would give their pearls to agents for sale in the capital, but as a result of the rampant corruption of pearl agents who stole the pearls meant for sale, the old system is no longer in place. Kino points out that according to the church, such a system must fail, as it represents a vain effort on the part of the pearl-lookers to exceed their station in life.

Kino and Juan Tomás walk on in silence into the city, drawing stares from assembled onlookers. As Kino, Juan Tomás, and the attending crowd approach, the pearl dealers scramble to put their offices in order, hiding their little pearls and preparing to make offers.

The first dealer is a short, slick man who nervously rolls a coin back and forth in his hand. He explains after a careful examination that the pearl is worthless because of its abnormally large size. Declaring it more of a museum curiosity than a market commodity, the dealer makes an offhand bid of one thousand pesos. Kino reacts angrily to this lowball offer and insists that the pearl is worth fifty times that much. The dealer firmly asserts that his is an accurate appraisal and invites Kino to seek out a second opinion. Kino's neighbours stir uneasily, wondering how Kino can reject such a large sum of money and wondering whether he is being foolish and headstrong by demanding more.

Presently, three new dealers arrive to examine the pearl, and the initial dealer invites them to make independent appraisals. The first two dealers reject the pearl as a mere oddity, and the third dealer makes a feeble offer of five hundred

pesos. Upon hearing this news, Kino quickly removes the pearl from consideration. As he does so, the initial dealer, unfazed by the lower bid, insists that his offer of one thousand pesos still stands. Protesting that he has been cheated, Kino announces a plan to sell his pearl in the capital city. His outburst raises the bid to fifteen hundred pesos, but Kino will have none of it. He fiercely pushes his way out of the crowd and starts the long walk home as Juana trails after him.

At supper, Kino's neighbours debate the day's events. Some suggest that the dealers' appraisals were fair, while others think that Kino is the victim of a scam. Some think he should have settled for the final offer of fifteen hundred pesos; others praise Kino's bravery for insisting on his own terms.

Meanwhile, in his brush house, Kino has buried the pearl under his sleeping mat. He sits brooding, nervous about his upcoming journey to the faraway capital. Juana watches him while she nurses Coyotito and prepares supper. Juan Tomás then enters to try to warn Kino of the dangers involved in going to the capital, but Kino is adamant about selling his pearl to secure a better future for his son. Unable to convince Kino to heed his warning, Juan Tomás returns home. That night Kino goes without supper. He sits awake to protect the pearl and continues to pore over the details of his problem. Juana keeps her own silent vigil, intending to support Kino with her company.

Suddenly, Kino senses an evil presence. He rises, feeling for the knife under his shirt, and moves toward the doorway as Juana stifles a desire to restrain him. From the darkness, a man assaults Kino, and a struggle ensues. By the time Juana reaches the fray, the attacker has fled. Bloodied and cut and with his clothes torn, Kino lies sprawled on the ground, only half conscious. Without delay, Juana helps Kino inside to care for his wounds. Kino admits that in the dark he was unable to tell who attacked him. After Juana washes out his last cut, she begs him in desperation to discard the evil pearl. But, more fiercely than ever, Kino insists that they must capitalize on their good fortune. He explains that in the morning they will set out in the canoe for the capital. Juana dutifully submits to her husband's plan, and they both go to sleep.

## **Chapter 5 Summary**

As a late moon rises outside, nearby motion rouses Kino from his sleep. In the pale light, he is barely able to discern Juana, who moves toward the fireplace, quietly gathers the pearl, and sneaks out into the night. Kino stealthily follows her as she heads toward the shore. When she hears him in pursuit, Juana breaks into a run, but Kino apprehends her just as she is preparing to hurl the pearl into the water. Grabbing the pearl from her, he punches her in the face and kicks her in the side when she falls down.

As Kino hovers over Juana, the waves break upon her crumpled body. He hisses menacingly above her, then turns in disgust and leaves her without a

word. As Kino makes his way up the beach, a group of men assaults him. Kino struggles violently as they paw and prod at him. As Kino drives his knife into one of his attackers, the men knock the pearl from his grasp.

Meanwhile, some distance away from the fight, Juana gets up on her knees and begins to make her way home. Climbing through the brush, she sees the pearl lying in the path. She picks it up and considers returning to the sea to discard the pearl once and for all.

At this moment, Juana spies two dark figures lying in the road and recognizes one of them as Kino. In the next instant, Juana realizes that Kino has killed the man slumped by his side. Juana drags the dead body into the brush and then helps Kino, who moans about losing his pearl. Juana silences him by showing him the pearl and explains that they must flee immediately because Kino has committed a horrible crime. Kino protests that he acted in self-defense, but Juana argues that his alibi won't matter at all to the authorities. Kino realizes that Juana is right, and they resolve to flee.

While Juana runs back to the brush house to grab Coyotito, Kino returns to the beach to ready his canoe for the escape. He finds that someone has punched a large hole in the boat's bottom. Filled with sorrow and rage, he quickly scrambles back to his brush house, moments before dawn. As he arrives in the vicinity of the neighbourhood, he notices flames and realizes that his house is burning. As he runs toward the fire, Juana meets him with Coyotito in her arms. She confirms that their house has been burned down completely. As the neighbors rush to control the fire and to save their own houses, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito duck between the shadows and into Juan Tomás's house.

In the darkness inside Juan Tomás's house, Kino and Juana listen as the neighbors attempt to subdue the fire and speculate that Kino and Juana have been killed in the blaze. The couple can only listen as Juan Tomás's wife, Apolonia, wails in mourning for the loss of her relatives. When Apolonia returns to her house to change head shawls, Kino whispers to her, explaining that they are taking refuge. Kino instructs Apolonia to bring Juan Tomás to them and to keep their whereabouts a secret. She complies, and Juan Tomás arrives moments later, posting Apolonia at the door to keep watch while he talks with Kino. Kino explains that he inadvertently killed a man after being attacked in the darkness. Juan Tomás blames this misfortune on the pearl and advises Kino to sell it without delay. Kino, however, is more focused on his losses, detailing the destruction of his canoe and his house. He implores Juan Tomás to hide them in his house for a night, until they can gather themselves and make a second attempt to flee. Juan Tomás hesitates to bring danger upon himself but ultimately agrees to shelter them and keep silent about their plans.

That afternoon, Kino and Juana crouch together in silence, listening to the neighbours discuss them among the ashes outside. Most of the neighbors assume that Kino and Juana are dead, but Juan Tomás suggests that perhaps the family has fled to the south to escape persecution. As he moves back and forth among the neighbours, he returns to his house from time to time, bringing bits and pieces of provisions that will help Kino and Juana on their journey. That evening, Kino tells Juan Tomás his plan to travel to the cities of the north. Juan Tomás advises him to avoid the coast, as a search party will be on the lookout for him. When Juan Tomás asks if Kino still has the pearl, Kino responds that he does and that he intends to hold on to it.

At dark, before the moon rises, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito exchange parting words with Juan Tomás and Apolonia, and head out into the night.

## **Chapter 6 Summary**

On a clear, windy night, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito begin their long march north, avoiding the sleeping town. Outside of town, they follow a road, carefully walking in a wheel rut to conceal their tracks. They walk all night and make camp in a roadside shelter at sunrise. After eating a small breakfast, Juana rests until midday. Kino spots a cluster of ants and lays down his foot as an obstacle. The ants climb over it, and he keeps his foot in place and watches them scale it. When Juana rises, she asks Kino if he thinks they will be pursued. Juana then begins to doubt Kino's conviction that the pearl is worth far more than the dealers offered, but Kino points out that his attackers would not have tried to steal the pearl were it worth nothing. Kino stares at the pearl to read his future. He lies to Juana, telling her that he sees a rifle, a marriage in a church, and an education for Coyotito. In truth Kino sees a body bleeding on the ground, Juana making her way home through the night after being beaten, and Coyotito's face swollen as though he were sick.

The family retreats farther into the shade for another rest. While Kino sleeps soundly, Juana is restless. As she plays with Coyotito, Kino wakes from a dream and demands that they keep quiet. Creeping forward, he spots a trio of trackers pursuing their trail. Kino stiffens and attempts to be still and silent until the trackers have passed. He watches them grow nearer and prepares to spring on them with his knife if necessary. Juana also hears the approaching trackers and does her best to quiet Coyotito.

The trackers' horse grows excited as the trackers approach the shelter. For a moment, it appears that they are poised to apprehend Coyotito and Juana, but eventually they lose their lead on the trail and move on. Kino realizes that it is only a matter of time before they return, and he runs quickly to Juana, telling her to gather up her things so that they can leave at once. Suddenly, Kino feels their cause to be hopeless and loses his will to flee, but Juana castigates him for giving up on his family.

Finally, Kino suggests that they might be able to lose the trackers up in the mountains. Kino and Juana collect their belongings and flee with Coyotito through the undergrowth, making no effort to conceal their tracks. As they climb the first rises, Kino realizes that the distance he is putting between his family and the trackers offers only a temporary fix to their problem. When Juana takes a rest with Coyotito, Kino proposes that she hide while he moves on ahead. Until the trackers have been diverted, she can take refuge in a nearby town. But, despite Kino's insistence, Juana refuses to split up, so the family moves on together.

As their ascent grows steeper, Kino attempts to vary and double back on their route to mislead the trackers. As the sun begins to set, Kino and Juana reach a nearby cleft and replenish their water supply at a pool and stream, where they drink to contentment, and Juana rinses Coyotito. From the lookout, Kino spies the trackers at a distance below, hurrying up the slope. Juana also realizes that they are still being pursued.

Kino deceives the trackers by creating a false trail up the cliff and descending again to take refuge with Juana and Coyotito in a nearby cave. Kino hopes that the trackers will climb past them, providing a chance for them to climb down the hill and out of range. Kino instructs Juana to keep Coyotito quiet, and they lie silently in the cave as twilight settles over the land. By evening, the trackers arrive at the pool, where they make camp and eat.

In the cave, Coyotito grows restless, and Juana quiets him. Kino notices that two of the men have settled in to sleep, while the third keeps watch. Kino realizes that if he can manage to stifle the lookout, he, Juana, and Coyotito will have a chance to escape. Juana fears for Kino's life, but Kino explains that they have no other choice. He instructs her to run to the nearest town should he be killed, and they part reluctantly.

Kino strips naked to avoid being seen by the watchman, and, after crouching at the cave entrance for a moment to survey his route, he springs forward. As Juana prays for him, Kino slowly moves down the slope toward the pool. Twenty feet from the trackers, he crouches behind a palm tree to ponder his next move. His muscles cramp and tremble, but he knows he must act quickly before the moon rises. He unsheathes his knife and prepares to attack. Just as he is poised to spring, the moon appears, and he realizes that his opportunity has been lost. Waiting for a moment when the watchman's head is turned, Kino gets ready to take a much riskier approach.

Suddenly, Coyotito lets out a cry that wakes one of the sleeping trackers. At first, they wonder if it could possibly be the cry of a human, or whether it is simply the cry of a coyote. The watchman decides to silence the wailer by shooting in the direction of the cry. Unbeknownst to Kino, the bullet hits and kills Coyotito. As the watchman shoots, Kino springs upon the trackers,

stabbing the watchman and seizing the rifle. Knocking one of the other men out with a fierce blow, he watches as the last man attempts to flee up the cliff. The man makes little progress before Kino stops him with a first shot, and then murders him execution-style with another shot between the eyes. In the terrible moment that ensues, Kino notices the silence of the surrounding animals, and finally hears the blood-curdling cry issuing from his wife, mourning the death of Covotito.

Later the next day, toward sunset, Kino and Juana walk side by side into La Paz, with Juana carrying Coyotito's corpse in a sack slung over her shoulder. They walk dazedly through the city, with unmoving eyes, speaking to no one. Onlookers stare wordlessly, and even Juan Tomás can only raise a hand in greeting. Kino and Juana march through the town, past the brush houses, all the way to the sea. At the edge of the water, Kino stops and pulls the pearl from his pocket. Holding it up to the light, he stares into it carefully, and a flood of evil memories washes over him. Kino holds the pearl out in front of him, and then flings it out into the ocean. Kino and Juana watch the pearl as it splashes the surface, and stare at the spot quietly as the sun sets.

Then the column [of ants] climbed over his instep and continued on its way, and Kino left his foot there and watched them move over it.

## **Symbols**

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

#### The Pearl

The pearl represents a stroke of divine providence. Kino's people have a prophecy about a great "Pearl That Might Be," a perfect pearl that exists as a perfect possibility. Kino and Juana's discovery of the pearl seems to fulfill this prophecy, and it fills them with hope for Coyotito's future and for the possibility of a life free from the chains of colonial oppression. The finding of the pearl seems a happy accident, one that corrects the tragic accident of Covotito's scorpion sting. Once the town finds out about the pearl, however, the object begins to make everyone who beholds it, including Kino, greedy. The neighbours call it "the Pearl of the World," and while that title originally seems to refer to the pearl's great size and beauty, it also underscores the fact that having the pearl brings the outside world's destructive influence into Kino's simple life. Juana and Juan Tomás begin to view the pearl as a threat rather than a blessing. The pearl elicits more and more greed on Kino's part, as he begins to devote all his energies and possessions to protecting it. It thus comes to symbolize the destructive nature of materialism. The implication is that Kino's acquisition of material wealth isn't enough to save him from the colonists' oppression, even though such wealth is the foundation of the colonists' capitalist system. The way the pearl is depicted through the course of the novella mirrors the changes that Kino himself undergoes.

#### The Scorpion

The scorpion that stings Coyotito in Chapter1 symbolizes a seemingly arbitrary evil that, because it has nothing to do with human agency, must come from the gods. Biblically, the scorpion generally represents the destruction of innocence, and the fact that Coyotito is a baby compounds the Christian symbolism of the event. Coyotito is touched by evil, and this natural destruction of innocence repeats itself in the novella in the destruction of Kino's innocence by his ambition and greed and in the destruction of the natives' traditional, natural way of life by the colonists.

#### Kino's Canoe

The canoe that Kino uses represents his link to cultural tradition. This culture is deeply spiritual, so it is significant that Kino uses the canoe to find the pearl, which is provided by a divine power that has nothing to do with human agency. It is also significant that Kino's possession of the pearl leads directly to the canoe's destruction, in Chapter 5, an event that symbolizes Kino's devastating decision to break with his cultural heritage because he wishes to pursue material gain.

#### Parable & the Form of The Pearl

A parable is a simple story that communicates a moral lesson. Parables are also allegories, stories in which characters, objects, and events hold fixed symbolic meaning. Steinbeck's focus on the symbolic role the pearl plays in Kino's life is constant, as is his focus on the symbolic importance of Kino himself. Kino is an impoverished native fisherman, but more important is his allegorical role as a man faced with the temptation of wealth beyond his wildest dreams. Because the novella is concerned with Kino's moral obligation and not his public obligation, it concludes with Kino's casting the pearl back into the sea, a renunciation of material wealth that indicates he has learned a moral lesson.

Readers may draw a number of messages from The Pearl, but a few crucial moral lessons do emerge. Some ways of interpreting the allegory of the story include:

## a. The struggle to preserve virtue

Kino's struggle to protect the precious pearl might represent the human struggle to preserve valued qualities —moral virtue, innocence, integrity, the soul—from the destructive forces of the outside world. Just as these destructive forces corrupt and conspire to snatch Kino's pearl, they can work against the virtuous inner qualities that the pearl might represent. Coyotito's death and Kino's voluntary abandonment of the pearl at the end of the novel suggest that the destructive forces of the world are too powerful to be overpowered.

## b. The fallacy of the American dream

Kino's desire to use the pearl to improve his life repeats the traditional narrative of the American dream. He attempts to transform hard work into material wealth, and material wealth into education, comfort, and familial advancement. According to this reading, Kino's gradual corruption and the story's tragic conclusion hint at a fundamental flaw in the American dream: it condones sacrifice of virtue for material gain. Rather than widespread opportunity, Kino finds a world of powerful, greedy men conniving to take his wealth away from him falsely.

#### c. The effects of colonialism on native cultures

The story can be read as a parable about the forces of colonization and the destructive effect those forces have on native cultures and peoples. Kino is initially driven to search for the pearl because of the lack of support of the arrogant Spanish doctor. After he finds the pearl, he is cheated and hunted by cynical descendants of colonials who hope to exploit and control him.

#### d. Greed is the root of all evil

Kino's investment of spiritual value in a pearl, an object of material wealth, may be misguided from the start. Juana and Juan Tomás both suspect that Kino is wrong to try to get more for the pearl than the dealers offer, and Juana tries several times to discard the pearl, believing it to be the source of her family's troubles. This reading interprets the pearl as a symbol of destruction and corruption rather than purity.

## **THEMES**

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

#### Greed as a Destructive Force

Kino transforms from a happy, contented father to a savage criminal, demonstrating the way ambition and greed destroy innocence. Kino's desire to acquire wealth changes the pearl's natural beauty and good luck, from a symbol of hope to a symbol of human destruction. Kino's greed controls him to behave violently toward his wife; it also leads to his son's death and finally to Kino's detachment from his cultural tradition and society.

## The roles of fate and agency in shaping human life

The Pearl portrays two contrasting forces that shape human life and determine individual destiny. The novella depicts a world in which humans shape their own destinies. They provide for themselves, follow their own desires, and make their own plans. At the same time, forces beyond human control, such as chance, accident, and the gods, can sweep in at any moment and, for good or ill, completely change the course of an individual's life. If fate is best represented in the novella by the open sea where pearl divers plunge beneath the waves hoping for divine blessings, human agency is best represented by the

village of La Paz, where myriad human desires, plans, and motives come together to form civilization. Kino and Juana's lives change irreparably the moment the scorpion, a symbol of evil fate, bites their child. Their lives then change irreparably again the moment Kino finds the pearl, a symbol of beneficent fate

### Colonial Society's Oppression of Native Cultures

The doctor who refuses to save Coyotito's life at the beginning of the novel because Kino lacks the money to pay him represents colonial arrogance and oppression. Snide (mean) and condescending (arrogant), the doctor displays a terribly limited and self-centered mind-set that is made frightening by his unshakable belief in his own cultural superiority over Kino, and by the power that he holds to save or destroy lives. The European colonizers that govern Kino and the native people are shown to bring about the destruction of the native society's innocence, piety (holiness), and purity.

**Ambition** – The moment Kino lands on the great pearl, a number of desires flashes his mind. He wants decent marriage in church and wishes a better education for the child who is just a baby. Such great ambitions though good but forces Kino to expect a lot from the sale of the pearl.

**Responsibility** – Juana and Kino take their son, Coyotito, to the doctor for a proper treatment after the boy is stung by the scorpion.

**Selfishness** – the doctor refuses to treat Coyotito because Kino has no money to pay for the treatment. The doctor shows that he loves himself only and doesn't care about others.

**Great expectation makes a frustrated man** – Kino expects to get a lot of money from the sale of the Pearl and is disappointed after the local pearl buyers offer low prices.

**Optimism** – Kino and Juana have the belief that Kino is going to find a pearl in the sea and he indeed finds a great pearl.

**Social gap** – there is huge gap between local people and the Spanish, i.e. Kino and the doctor live in two different worlds. Kino is poor and the doctor is rich.

**Blood is thicker than water** – Juan Tomás hides Kino's family in his house because Kino is a brother to him. When the society is against him for killing a man, Juan Tomás is in support of Kino.

**Opportunism** – Both the priest and the doctor come to Kino because he has found a pearl which will give him money. The two want to enjoy the proceeds of the sale of the pearl.

**Violence** – Coyotito succumbs to the shootings. He is shot and killed at the mountain. Kino also fights with the person that comes to steal the pearl.

### Reference

Steinbeck, J. (1948). The Pearl. The Viking Press: California.