

SYNOPSIS

Set primarily in New England and northern California from the post-Civil War era until World War I, this historical romance chronicles the rise of two families whose fortunes parallel the upward spiral of American prosperity. While Sam Hamilton, a vigorous, idealistic Irish ne'er-do-well, and his pious wife Liza raise nine children in the rich loam of King City, the Trasks pursue a similar lifestyle in the stony outcrops of Connecticut. Cyrus Trask, his leg amputated on October 12, 1862, from a bullet wound on a Civil War battlefield, returns home in January 1863. His family is disrupted by Mrs. Trask's suicide by drowning after she contracts gonorrhea from her infected husband and by Cyrus's obsession with army life. The widower, who quickly marries seventeen-year-old Alice and fathers a second son, raises contrasting children. Adam, his firstborn, accepts his stepmother as well as the birth of Charles, his half-brother who is a year his junior, yet quails before Cyrus's rigid discipline, incessant drilling, and favoritism, which breeds enmity between the two boys.

Cyrus develops a reputation for militaristic bombast by writing letters to the press and the War Department, which offers him a prestigious job. After Charles beats Adam senseless, the boy confronts his father's militarism and accuses him of failing to love Charles. Cyrus admits that he prefers Adam, who is more likely to learn from warfare than the unyielding Charles. Before Adam recovers from the beating, Cyrus forces him to join the cavalry. Despite his unsuitability for the military, Adam serves his hitch during the brutal Indian wars, cohabits with an Indian woman who dies of smallpox, and corresponds with his brother, who lives in self-imposed filth and isolation. Achieving the rank of corporal, Adam musters out of the army in 1885 and avoids returning either to his father's Washington office or his brother's farm. He roams Chicago, Buffalo, Niagara Falls, then, overwhelmed by loneliness, reenlists.

On his way back to his regiment, Adam is summoned from a Kansas City train station to Washington and the office of Cyrus, whom he scarcely recognizes. Cyrus offers an appointment to West Point, which Adam refuses, and threatens to have him assigned to Washington. Adam suggests that Cyrus have Charles join him. Discharged in 1890 in San Francisco, Adam lives hobo style and wanders from San Joaquin to Omaha, Albuquerque to Brownsville. He swings farther south, where he serves six months on a Tallahassee road gang for vagrancy. Escaping from a second term, Adam swims away and telegraphs Charles for \$100 to pay his way to Connecticut.

After Cyrus's death from "galloping pneumonia" in February 1894, Adam reunites with Charles to share a legacy of \$103,000. The two discuss their troubled relationship with Cyrus. Adam recalls how Charles threatened him with a hatchet out of anger over his father's favoritism. Charles weeps and divulges that Cyrus bilked the government by pretending to be a career

soldier. Adam assures him that Cyrus was honest and that he had faith in Charles, even if he didn't love him.

Inured to the daily grind of agriculture, Charles remains centered in farm life. Adam grows resentful, dreams of starting anew in the west, and disappears for an eight-month visit to Boston, returns, then sets out for Rio and Buenos Aires. On his return, he confesses that he is an escaped convict, a fact which removes some of Charles's contempt for his naive, trusting brother.

The two men discover a seriously injured woman on their property. Sweetly attractive Cathy Ames, a psychopathic Massachusetts woman who was sexually promiscuous in her early teens and teased her Latin teacher to the point of suicide, had torched her home to kill her parents. After manipulating the evidence to feign kidnap or murder, Cathy had changed her name to Catherine Amesbury and lived in Boston as mistress to Mr. Edwards, a whoremaster who recruited women to work for his bordello circuit. When she repulsed him and tried to leave, he transported her to Connecticut and battered her so severely that he broke her arm, ribs, teeth, skull, and jaw and left her for dead. She crawls onto the Trask property and collapses. When the sheriff questions her, she pretends to have amnesia. The brothers nurse her to health.

Adam, easily deceived, fails to realize what Charles immediately perceives—that Cathy is no good. In the late 1890s, before Charles can evict her, Cathy lures Adam into a hasty marriage. Charles warns Adam that Cathy is a whore. Delighted with his wife, Adam prepares to move to California, in part to escape Charles's jealousy. That night, Cathy drugs Adam with opium and seduces Charles.

As Part II begins, Adam, none the wiser, concludes that marriage is the perfect impetus to his dream of a new start. He escorts Cathy to New York for new clothes and takes the train to King City, buys the Bordoni ranch south of King City, and anticipates the birth of a child. After Cathy attempts in vain to abort the fetus with a knitting needle, the doctor warns her of the legal and moral consequences. Unaware of the drama around him, Adam busies himself with plans for a well and house.

Attended by Lee, the family's Chinese servant, and Adam, Cathy is unable to find peace in California and vows that she will leave at the end of her pregnancy. Her peculiarities alarm Lee. In fall 1900, while Sam waits to help with the birthing, Lee reveals that he is an educated man and that he senses evil in the Trask household. During labor, Cathy bites Sam's hand before bearing fraternal twin sons, then shoots Adam in the shoulder when he tries to stop her from deserting. For fifteen months, Adam sinks into depression and self-pity. Sam, scandalized by Adam's neglect of the boys, forces him to name the children. Adam selects Bible names—Caleb and Aaron, which he shortens to Aron.

At the beginning of Part III, the Chinese house servant, Lee, a self-taught scholar, tends the boys as he ponders the biblical

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overtones of the book of Genesis, particularly the story of Cain and Abel. He grows obsessive over the Hebrew word *timshel*, which he translates as "thou mayest," indicating that human beings have a choice in confronting and overcoming evil. Meanwhile, Cathy, her name changed to Kate, develops the carnal, manipulative side of her nature, charming the madame, Faye, by calling her mother, then killing her with a series of medicines and poisons to obtain ownership of the Salinas brothel.

Shortly before Sam's death, he divulges to Adam Kate's whereabouts. Intrigued, Adam, while journeying to Sam's funeral, calls at the brothel. He confronts Cathy and sees her as Kate, a sleazy, grasping prostitute. She lashes out at her goodly husband by boasting that Charles fathered the twins. Adam, drunk and at peace with the past, shrugs off her vituperation and returns home, where he deceives the boys into believing that their mother's body was shipped to New England for burial. Lee concurs in the deception.

At the opening of Part IV, in the winter of 1915, Adam decides to move to King City and asks Lee's aid in raising the boys. Just like Charles and Adam, Caleb and Aron develop contrasting personalities. Aron, the sweeter boy, woos Abra Bacon, a local girl. Caleb, the more pragmatic brother, observes their affection from a distance. After Adam fails in a doubtful venture to ship lettuce by refrigerated rail cars to New York, Caleb vows to make up for his father's financial loss. Aron, wrapped up in Episcopalianism, his mentor Mr. Rolf, and Stanford University, puts greater stress on Abra, who cannot comprehend his twisted fervor and distaste for sex.

Caleb, whose tastes run to gambling and loose company, investigates Kate, who welcomes his curiosity. He joins Sam's son Will in the bean market at the beginning of World War I and grows rich. Adam serves on the draft board and follows the progress of the war. At a dramatic Thanksgiving dinner, Caleb reimburses Adam's lost capital; however, the gesture incites his father to rage at his son's blatant profiteering. Because Adam holds Aron up as an example, Caleb avenges himself on his brother by introducing him to Kate. Ever since Ethel, a former brothel employee, threatened to expose her as a murderer, Kate has been crazed and fearful. She wills her property to Aron and commits suicide by swallowing a poisoned capsule. Sheriff George Quinn, who has been keeping tabs on Kate, reports her death to Adam and presents him Kate's envelope containing the will.

Aron, his idealism shattered, joins the army, is shipped to France, and dies in battle in May 1918. Caleb, who has earned Abra's love, faces the quandary of guilt at his brother's death and the imminent death of Adam, who suffers a stroke from overwork and grief. Caleb bends over his dying father and confesses his role in Aron's enlistment and death. Lee, drawing on Bible wisdom, pleads with Adam to forgive Caleb. Adam, paralyzed, but cognizant of Lee's request, blesses his suffering son with the Hebrew word *timshel*.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902, John Ernst Steinbeck published his first fiction in 1929. Although his peak years extended only from 1932-1945, he continued writing short stories, screenplays, essays, speeches, and novels until his death from heart disease on December 20, 1968. He was named for his father, John Ernst Steinbeck, Sr., a county

magistrate. His mother, teacher Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, read to him in childhood. He attended school in Salinas, played sports, wrote for the school paper, and worked each summer on ranches.

Steinbeck was a popular student, wrote for the Stanford *Spectator*, the campus literary magazine, and became class president of his class at Salinas High. In 1920, he enrolled at Stanford University to study English, but pursued a meandering course of study. He failed to complete a degree in marine biology and left in 1925 to take menial jobs, including hod carrier, construction worker, and lodge caretaker. He tried journalism in New York City, but returned to California. His friendship with biologist Ed Ricketts blossomed into a partnership, which led Steinbeck to explore the Baja peninsula, an area which influenced his writing of *The Pearl* (1947).

Through realistic fiction, Steinbeck stirred controversy by emphasizing the exploitation of illiterate workers by land owners, labor organizers, communists, police, and big government. The publication of *Tortilla Flat* (1935) produced the first serious critical attention to his works and recognition from American readers. He interrupted literary work in 1942 to write as a correspondent for the *Herald Tribune* and as propagandist for the war department, then completed "The Pearl of the World" and *Cannery Row* (1945). These works depict the simple life around Monterey and draw heavily on his training as a marine biologist and his friendship with Ed Ricketts.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Steinbeck wrote *The Red Pony*. The four-part version plus twelve other short works appeared in a collection, *The Long Valley*, in 1938, shortly before Steinbeck moved to Los Gatos. He also wrote the script for the 1949 film version of *The Red Pony*. The next year, he married his third wife, Elaine Scott.

In 1951, the couple moved to Sankaty Light near Siasconset, Massachusetts, where Steinbeck began his most ambitious project. Recognizing that his new novel, tentatively named *The Salinas Valley*, was a demanding departure from his earlier style, he began each day by composing a note to Pascal Covici, his publisher. To contain the new work, Steinbeck carved a mahogany box and wrote a personal letter as preface. He dedicated the novel, later named *East of Eden* (1952), to his sons, noting, "they will never know what they came from through me, unless I tell them." He later settled at Sag Harbor, New York, and wrote speeches for President Lyndon Johnson as well as Hollywood screenplays, including *Lifeboat* and *Viva Zapata!* After Steinbeck's death at his New York home, his remains were cremated and his ashes interred in Salinas.

CRITIC'S CORNER

Labeled the "novelist of losers" for his compassion for hopeless working class people, Steinbeck earned a unique place among American novelists. He is best remembered for his novels about social and economic oppression, particularly *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and his Pulitzer Prize-winning saga of migrant workers, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). To prepare himself for writing about labor problems, he traveled with migrant workers and lived in their shacks. Because of his success in chronicling the Depression years, he rose to the status of a major American author.

The public labeled Steinbeck a communist radical and ignored his work through the McCarthy era, although European audiences proved more receptive. He achieved immediate

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success with *Of Mice and Men*. Readers identified with the loneliness and victimization of the wandering farmhands, who dream of a better life. He earned a Book of the Month Club selection and was chosen one of 1937's Ten Outstanding Young Men in America. The Broadway version of *Of Mice and Men* won him a New York Drama Critics' Circle award.

The publication of *East of Eden* (1952), which he chronicled seventeen years later with a collection of letters detailing his method and misgivings, brought a mixed critical response. Most serious were complaints that the work attempted too much within the confines of a single novel. According to the most strident voices, the biblical theme, culled from Genesis, intermeshed with the saga of two nineteenth-century families and the history of the settlement and development of the Salinas Valley, burdened the reader with more freight than the plot could support. Adding to the freight of a single novel is the thread of Olive Hamilton, the character bearing his mother's name and Irish background. For these reasons, Steinbeck, like a puppetmaster with more strings to pull than he can manage, flounders as he tries to yank his fiction into line.

More successful than the novel have been two filmed versions of *East of Eden*. Elia Kazan's 1955 color film, starring Raymond Massey, James Dean, Julie Harris, Jo Van Fleet, and Burl Ives won Van Fleet an Academy Award as well as nominations for best screenplay, direction, and the performance of James Dean. The 1980 Viacom television miniseries, starring Timothy Bottoms, Warren Oates, Howard Duff, Lloyd Bridges, Jane Seymour, Bruce Boxleitner, Karen Allen, Anne Baxter, and Soon Teck-Oh, which revived interest in the work, emphasized the part of Lee, the humble sage who tries to save Adam Trask from destroying his family's future. Dependent upon lush scenery and melodrama, the movie version enhances Steinbeck's sentimental boosterism of his hometown but lacks dramatic intensity, which is weakened by an unsteady linkage between past and present.

Because he struck a resonant chord in readers with *Travels with Charley in Search of America* and *The Winter of Our Discontent* in 1961, the next year Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature honoring his entire canon. The honor was greeted with some critical derision. Steinbeck himself stated publicly that he didn't feel he deserved it, yet the continued reverence for his strongly American themes maintains his place among the nation's best novelists.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To typify both saga and historical romance
2. To identify romantic conventions among naturalistic details
3. To assess the effectiveness of historical information about background events, such as the settlement of the west and the pre-World War I labor movement
4. To cite examples of loyalty, perseverance, dishonesty, cruelty, vengeance, mercy, forgiveness, and deceit
5. To recount family traits in characters
6. To examine the effects of alcoholism, financial loss, disease, physical suffering, racism, and disgrace on the major characters
7. To identify Steinbeck's humanism
8. To evaluate the importance of genealogy
9. To discuss origins of caution, suspicion, jealousy, rage, and vengeance

10. To note the importance of setting to the construction of the plot
11. To characterize the passage of time
12. To discuss the importance of image, allusion, simile, and sense impressions as literary devices
13. To evaluate examples of tone shift, particularly in the closing chapters
14. To contrast the themes of sex and money as human corrupters

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To contrast the title *East of Eden* with the working title *The Salinas Valley*
2. To account for Abra's love for Caleb and Lee, Adam's love for Alice and Charles, and Lee's love for the Trask family as opposed to an inability to love in Cathy and Mr. Edwards
3. To locate examples of parental failures and their ramifications, as with Cyrus's obsession of making Adam into a soldier and Adam's preference for Aron
4. To describe the role of exploitation and ill-gotten money in the plot
5. To contrast Cathy's evil nature with the dark side of Charles and Caleb
6. To delineate Lee's role as sage, surrogate parent, confessor, and adviser
7. To characterize Steinbeck's attitude toward idealists like Sam
8. To account for the serious consequences of rejection and for the healing attained through acceptance and forgiveness
9. To infer a nation's growth and development from the conflicts and catastrophes suffered by individuals and families
10. To pair the actions of major characters with glimpses of Liza, Olive, Will, Joe, and George Hamilton, Mr. and Mrs. Ames, James Grew, Sheriff Quinn, and Ethel
11. To perceive multiple levels of meaning, especially biblical symbolism and national, state, and family history

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Part, chapter, section, and page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. Adam's mother ran the farm, bore Adam, and still had time to embrace a primitive theosophy. (Part I, Chapter 3, Section 1, p. 17)

(Cyrus Trask's unnamed first wife is an intuitive woman whose concept of God and godliness come from a self-victimizing mystical awareness rather than Bible study or education. She harbors fears for her wild, barbarous husband and thinks on their reunion in "the beyond." Her malcontented state develops into a deep pathologic melancholy after Cyrus infects her with gonorrhoea he received in a sexual encounter with a slave during his army days. Almost jubilant that God has rewarded her dark outlook with appropriate punishment, Mrs. Trask spends two weeks penning secret sexual fantasies on a suicide note, dresses in a handmade shroud, and walks into the pond. Kneeling in the muck, she drowns herself while symbolically regretting spilling the white cloth.)

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2. More than that, he was one of those responsible for the organization of the G. A. R. as a cohesive and potent force in the national life. (Part I, Chapter 3, Section 1, p. 23) *(Although Trask expended only one-half hour of frontline service in the Union Army, he, like his deluded wife, spends the remainder of his days evolving a fantasy of glorious dedication to the military. By sheer insistence on his service in magazine articles and letters to the War Department, Trask inveigles his way into the higher echelons of military bureaucracy, secures an influential secretarial post, travels widely, attains the ear of prestigious officials, and ultimately bilks the government of over \$100,000, which he bequeathes to his sons. The ironic fillip on his fraud includes the wreath laid by the Vice President at Trask's grave at Arlington Cemetery, the nation's memorial to military heroes.)*

3. Her mouth was well shaped and well lipped but abnormally small—what used to be called a rosebud. Her ears were very little, without lobes, and they pressed so close to her head that even with her hair combed up they made no silhouette. (Part I, Chapter 8, Section 1, p. 96) *(Cathy Ames, who later marries Adam and gives birth to male twins, is small from early childhood. She fails to develop womanly breasts and maintains a "boy's body, narrow-hipped, straight-legged, but her ankles were thin and straight without being slender. Her feet were small and round and stubby, with fat insteps almost like hoofs." After she resolves to quit school, she alarms her mother by claiming, "I can get to be so tiny you can't even see me." Steinbeck utilizes the pathetic fallacy to let biology determine Cathy's psychosis—the delusion that she, like Alice in Wonderland, can shrink out of the reach of adult moral expectations. The hoof-like feet are a Satanic conclusion to an enticing body that lures men to their doom.*

Utilizing her extraordinary beauty and her more bizarre characteristics to financial advantage, Cathy draws greater satisfaction from manipulative and vindictive power than from sex or money. Cynically, she feeds on Faye's maternal needs by calling her "Mother," then poisons her. As the new madame of Faye's brothel, she veils herself from outside scrutiny, hides her arthritic joints, and screens out natural light. By Chapter 50, her estrangement from reality has grown so obsessive that she can no longer function; Cathy becomes Alice and quotes injunctions to eat the pill and drink from the tea cup that feeds enough poison into her system to kill her.)

4. A man who can't learn from experience is a fool, he said. (Part I, Chapter 9, Section 3, p. 131) *(Continuing his emphasis on derangement, Steinbeck probes the psyche of Mr. Edwards, the Boston whoremaster who maintains a savage but businesslike hold on the 132 women who earn his fortune for him in "thirty-three small towns in New England." While interviewing the entrancing Catherine Amesbury, however, "something in Mr Edwards' body began to feel her." Succumbing to the entrancing beauty, he makes himself vulnerable.*

Because she "reduced him to a pulp," he retaliates in kind and beats her nearly to death, considers burying her, then bolts away, sick with the aftermath of rage. Moving from whore to angel, the stereotypical feminine extremes, he crawls into the loving shelter of his pious wife and

promises to dwell in the realms of business, far from the allure of emotional involvement. Ironically, his brush with murder incites a kind of bravado and macho self-admiration as he perceives himself capable of killing.)

5. An elder man might truly recall through water the delicate doctor-testing of little girls, but such a man forgets and wants to, the acid emotion eating at the spleen so that a boy had to put his face flat down in the young wild oats and drum his fists against the ground and sob "Christ! Christ!" (Part 2, Chapter 1, preface, p. 168)

(This densely packed image recalls the young boys who are lashed for their sexual experiments with Cathy Ames. After Mrs. Ames interrupts their carnal investigations in the barn, Cathy demurely allows the boys to be tormented for her enticement. Just as water wears away stones to a smooth polish, the gentility of the Victorian era gives place to the lusty twentieth century, when virtue takes second place to carnality and the nameless boy who sowed his wild oats in innocent childhood berates himself alone for the "sin" of adolescent sexual curiosity.

This festering self-loathing moves west with the settlers of California. Unable to isolate their loss of innocence, the new generation embraces greed and lust, but fails to answer the gnawing questions of their fall from grace. As Steinbeck notes in closing his intercalary preface, "Oh, but strawberries will never taste so good again and the thighs of women have lost their clutch!")

6. The baby is safe. Your aim was bad. (Part 2, Chapter 13, Section 2, p. 175)

(Housed in a King City hotel, Cathy grows despondent from her faked wifeliness and loathing of pregnancy. Dr. Tilson quickly surmises that she pierced her vagina with a knitting needle in hopes of causing a miscarriage. The botched abortion attempt outrages him, provoking threats of testimony to the police if she tries again to break state law by aborting the fetus. Cathy, an accomplished, facile liar, quickly converts his condemnation into pity by "confessing" that her family carries the taint of epilepsy, which her child could inherit. Dr. Tilson, who may or may not be convinced of this, places the knitting needle in his satchel and departs to give to Adam the "good news" of impending fatherhood.)

7. That reminds me—Mr. Trask here is thinking of buying the Bordoni place—the old Sanchez grant—you remember? (Part 2, Chapter 13, Section 3, p. 187)

(In his joy at the thought of a family to end his aimless wandering and wearisome bachelorhood on Charles's farm, Adam includes Sam Hamilton in the plans for his purchase of rich farmland. Steinbeck implies the "melting pot" history of California by connecting Adam, a New Englander and veteran of the Indian Wars, with Bordoni, a Swiss settler, and the former owner, Sanchez, who obtained the original parcel by royal grant. Symbolic of the goodness of land is the importance of water, which Sam supplies by digging the well. And the success of the farm parallels the beneficence of friendship, which Sam generously offers Adam, the boys, and ultimately Lee, the Chinese servant.)

8. "No names! You're damn right I'll come, Lee."
"When?"
"Tomorrow."

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"I'll kill a chicken," said Lee. (Part 2, Chapter 22, Section 1, p. 335)

(This segment draws heavily on Old Testament ritual, particularly the book of Genesis and the birth of Cain and Abel. Almost as though he intends to adhere to the Hebrew ceremony that Abraham performs by offering Isaac as a sacrifice, Lee secretly initiates the meeting between Samuel and Adam and prepares a chicken for their meal. To Lee, Adam is "a dead man," withdrawn into emotional numbness from the shooting and Cathy's departure and referring to the nameless boys as "they" or "you.")

The bumptious, life-bringing exuberance of Samuel moves beyond friendship as he takes the role of rescuer and bearer of holy sacrament. Like the prophet Samuel, Sam Hamilton carries out acts which supersede mundane importance and approach the divine. In contrast, Lee maintains the role of sage and priest.)

9. Lee glanced down the page. "Thou wilt die soon and thou are not yet simple nor free from perturbations, nor without suspicion of being hurt by external things, nor kindly disposed towards all; nor dost thou yet place wisdom only in acting justly." (Part 4, Chapter 51, Section 1, pp. 730-731)

(Lee, the eclectic Cantonese scholar, sinks into a fond reminiscence of his old friend Sam by rereading Sam's copy of The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. From the stoic's controlled, simplified outlook, the citation, typical of the Roman emperor's epigrammatic style, cautions humankind as did David in Psalm 39: 4-5 "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee." The Roman's quotation proves prophetic of two deaths—Aron and Adam, although Adam's demise is not clearly delineated by the final line of the novel.)

10. I don't now how long you will live, Adam. Maybe a long time. Maybe an hour. But your son will live. He will marry and his children will be the only remnant left of you. (Part 4, Chapter 55, Section 3, p. 777)

(Ironically, Lee, the Cantonese surrogate parent of the Trask twins, takes charge of the family crisis in the final scene. Gently, he reminds his old friend that death is imminent and that Caleb faces a life of guilt unless Adam exerts himself to perform the ritual blessing, thereby exonerating Caleb for his cruel manipulation of Aron. Adam, like Isaac, the Old Testament patriarch, knows that he is partly to blame for preferring one son's gift over the other's. He extends his hand, then manages to speak the word that Lee has taught him—timshel. The word for thou mayest, far more significant than Caleb's name, frees the boy from a godly curse and offers him humankind's god-given opportunity—the right to choose between good and evil.)

This scene, more than any other, orchestrates the multiple themes of East of Eden. Through Steinbeck's artistry, Adam, the victim of parental neglect and manipulation, ends the heritage passed from Cyrus to him and paves the way for a new generation. With vigorous men like Caleb Trask, Salinas will ostensibly thrive. And Adam, relieved of the burden his pride and insensitivity have caused, can sleep, i.e. die, in peace.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. List and explain relationships in the Trask family. *(The Trask family is linked by a peculiar structure. Cyrus, husband of an unnamed religious hysteric, sires his son Adam before departing for the Civil War in 1862. On Cyrus's return, his wife commits suicide, leaving him to care for an infant. For practical and carnal reasons, Cyrus marries and impregnates Alice, seventeen-year-old daughter of a Connecticut farmer. The consumptive girl gives birth to Charles, who torments his gentle-natured older brother.)*

After Adam's return from a meandering course of military service in the Indian Wars, common law marriage to an Indian woman, wanderings about the country, and escape from a second term in a Tallahassee prison camp for vagrancy, the brothers share the Connecticut farm and their father's ill-gotten money. Adam makes months-long jaunts to Buenos Aires and Rio, then returns home. When the brothers discover a badly injured woman, they tend her wounds. Adam naively accepts her story of amnesia; Charles, the more sophisticated of the two, senses an evil nature consistent with his own internal demons.

After Adam abruptly marries Cathy, Charles accuses her of being a whore. That night, Cathy drugs Adam with opium-laced tea, then beds with Charles. Adam and Cathy travel west to New York for clothes, then by train to California. Boarding at the King City hotel while Adam searches for land, Cathy tries to abort her twin sons, whom Charles sired. Forced by the suspicions of Dr. Tilson to carry the pregnancy to term, she delivers her children, shoots Adam in the shoulder, and departs.

Adam lives in misery with two unnamed infants and a Chinese servant. A year and three months after the boys' birth, Lee summons Sam, Adam's neighbor, to help rouse Adam from his despair. With aid from the Bible, Adam names the boys Caleb and Aron. Sam divulges Cathy's whereabouts. Adam visits her at the whorehouse and leaves with the knowledge that Charles fathered his sons.

The family moves to Salinas, northwest of King City in Central California. The boys prosper, but develop contrasting personalities. Caleb, the wilder of the two, consorts with the lower element of King City, keeps late hours, and eventually confronts his mother, now named Kate. A gift of money provokes Adam to spurn Caleb's wartime profiteering on the bean market and to prefer Aron, the obedient, docile "good" son who follows Episcopalian teachings, courts a likely woman, studies at Stanford University, and curries favor with adults.

Caleb, eager to wreak vengeance on the naive Aron, takes him to the whorehouse to see his mother, Kate, who is crippled with arthritis and emotionally twisted by her suspicious, murderous, man-hating nature. Aron, who has held his girlfriend Abra at bay while he ponders the relation between moral goodness and sexuality, bolts from the reality of his mother's profession. He joins the army and is killed in France. Lee, surrogate parent to the twins and

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Abra, tends to Adam, who is paralyzed from a stroke. He explains to Caleb that Aron is dead and Adam probably dying. Caleb, wracked with guilt, searches for release from his sin. Lee obtains from Adam the blessing that Caleb needs in order to accept Abra as wife and to continue the Trask line.)

2. Contrast the settings of the novel.

(Beginning with glimpses of the fertile Salinas Valley, Steinbeck moves directly to New England, land of the Puritans, where religious fervor quickly kills any romantic attachment between Cyrus and his wife and leads to the nameless woman's suicide. Because Cyrus takes refuge in delusions of military greatness, he destroys his more vulnerable son by forcing him into the army. Adam, like the wandering Jew, goes dutifully to war, wanders aimlessly while avoiding a return to the isolated Connecticut farm, then revolts against his father's manipulation by rejoining his regiment rather than accepting a cushy post in Washington. Mustered out a second time, he takes refuge in rootlessness before fleeing a second jail term in Tallahassee and reuniting with Charles on the Connecticut property they have inherited.

The desire for the newness and promise of the West lures Adam to follow his wanderlust one last time and to settle in California. Among the hodgepodge of races and nationalities, such as the Basque Euskadies and the Swiss Bordonis, and poor farmers and rich men like Thorne, Stanford, and Delmar, Adam makes lasting friendships with a Chinese servant and an Irish tinker and well driller. The failure of Adam's marriage destroys his ties with the soil and sends him to Salinas, a growing coastal metropolis which inspires him to attempt an entrepreneurial venture by shipping chilled lettuce back east.

A comparison of the two settings brings singular American sins into focus. The decadence, greed, and obsessive fundamentalism of Connecticut suggests the background causes of the Civil War, which costs Cyrus a leg and destroys his family and morals. As certain as gonorrhea poisons Cyrus's wife, the East's moral contagion spreads west as land-hungry settlers and gold diggers give Washington ample reason to send cavalry against the Indians, whom Adam recalls as victims of a relentless and dirty genocide. Thus the West in general and Salinas in particular, ostensibly Edenic in its newness and fertility, proves no purer than Connecticut. Once the Indian matter is "settled," white immigrants exploit Chinese labor and whites profit on railroads, agriculture, and the war effort, which again drags young men to slaughter.)

3. What events give time structure to the saga?

(Steinbeck offers pegs on which to hang this saga of the Trask family. The following dates give some idea of the background events as well as the passage of time:

- 1862** *In June, Cyrus Trask joins the army. By September, Cyrus marches south. On October 12, Cyrus Trask's leg is amputated. In December, Adam is born.*
- 1863** *In January, Cyrus returns home to Connecticut. His wife drowns herself. He marries a seventeen-year-old girl and fathers a second son, Charles.*
On May 4, Lee defeats Hooker at Chancellorsville, Virginia.
On July 3, Meade defeats Lee at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

1864 *On May 4, Lee engages Grant in the Wilderness and Spotsylvania, Virginia.*

1865 *In April, Richmond falls to the Union army and the city's business district is burned.*

On April 9, Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia.

On April 14, "the death of Lincoln caught Cyrus in the pit of the stomach."

1880 *Charles beats Adam. Before he can recover, Adam is forced to join the cavalry.*

1885 *Adam musters out of the cavalry.*

Leland Stanford begins a five-year reign over the Southern Pacific Railroad.

1886 *Chicago is disrupted by a packinghouse strike.*

1888 *A Seminole uprising stirs the cavalry to the alert.*

1890 *Late in the year at the Presidio in San Francisco, Adam leaves the army for the last time and wanders California.*

1891 *By spring Adam is broke and bedding down with bindlestiffs.*

1894 *In February, Cyrus Trask dies of "galloping pneumonia." Some weeks later, Adam returns to Connecticut and shares with Charles the questionable legacy of \$103,000.*

1899-1900

Cathy lures Adam into marriage. Charles sires the twins. Unaware of his wife's adultery, Adam takes her to California. He buys the Bordoni farm. After attempting abortion with a knitting needle at a King City hotel, Cathy is impeded from ending her pregnancy.

That fall, she gives birth to twins, shoots Adam, and deserts.

1901-1902

Lee summons Sam Hamilton to urge Adam to name the boys.

1905 *The Industrial Workers of the World organize a radical labor movement in Chicago.*

1915 *In February, Adam, Lee, and the twins move to a new home in Salinas. Itchy for work, Adam conceives his plan to ship chilled lettuce. Late in the year, the plan fails.*

1916 *Black Jack Pershing pursues Pancho Villa.*

In fall, Caleb is arrested in a raid at Shorty Lim's. Aron dates Abra Bacon.

1917 *Caleb joins Will Hamilton in the bean business and makes a small fortune by trading with the British Purchasing Agency.*

On April 16, the U.S. enters World War I. Adam assumes a role in the draft board. Aron attends Stanford. At Thanksgiving, Adam rejects Caleb's money. Caleb retaliates for Adam's rejection by introducing Aron to their mother, Kate, a prostitute. Kate kills herself. Aron runs away and joins the army.

1918 *On May 28, American troops under General Bullard take Cantigny. Aron dies in France. Adam suffers a stroke. Lee persuades Adam to forgive and bless Caleb so that Caleb and Abra can marry and continue the Trask line without the strain of guilt.)*

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4. How does Steinbeck honor his mother?

(The creation of a role for Olive Hamilton allows Steinbeck to write family history. In Chapter 14, Olive, who embodies some of Liza's strengths with little of her starchy primness, is rescued from the dreary role of "work-destroyed farm wives." Along with Sam and Liza's other daughters, Olive exhibits Celtic pride, breeding, and education that outstrips most of her peers. After leaving home at fifteen to attend secondary school, Olive achieves a teaching degree in three years and finds a post at Peach Tree, where she boards with various families.

A multitalented woman, Olive succeeds at teaching "reading to the first grade and algebra to the eighth." She also leads singing and composes a social column for the Salinas Journal. She heads the community social calendars and enjoys high church embellishments such as vestments, which she would not have known if she had remained on the farm.

In time, Olive selects the right suitor, the owner of a flour mill, marries, gives birth to four children, and lives in Los Robles, King City, and Salinas. Steinbeck, her only son, graces the portrait of his mother with a singular episode—her refusal to let him die of pleural pneumonia. Calling on the forces of Episcopalianism, Catholicism, Christian Science, magic, herbs, and "two good nurses and the town's best doctors," she rescues her boy. Steinbeck tempers this show of maternal devotion with the flip side of Olive Hamilton Steinbeck: "She had a terrible eye which could blanch the skin off a bad child as easily as if he were a boiled almond." Likewise, she hated debt and war, but courageously flew in an airplane. The pilot, safely on earth after intricate air maneuvers, complimented her—"Goddamest woman I ever saw.")

5. Discuss Lee's role in the novel.

(As Steinbeck's spokesman for America, Lee, the Cantonese with the taste for Aurelian stoicism, serves a multiple role—as cook, nurse, and parent, Adam's confidante, Abra's foster father, and Sam's philosophical sounding board. In his confrontation of Caleb, the repository of the Trask curse, Lee puts a universal touch on the question of moral choice. "We're a violent people," he tells Cal. "Does it seem strange to you that I include myself? Maybe it's true that we are all descended from the restless, the nervous, the criminals, the arguers and brawlers, but also the brave and independent and generous." He concludes that this mongrel mix of human traits was necessary to roust settlers from their "home plots" so that they could escape starving on "squeezed-out soil."

As the universalist, Lee brings about the amelioration of Trask family relations. He continues in his lecture to the guilt-ridden Cal, "All colors and blends of Americans have somewhat the same tendencies. It's a breed—selected out by accident." By warning Cal about going from "barbarism to decadence without an intervening culture" he tries to soothe the roiling emotions that impel Cal to wrestle a dangerously uncontrolled guilt.)

Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. Discuss the significance of character names.

(In the Old Testament tradition, many of the characters in this novel bear significant names. Cyrus's name, which implies tyrannic usurpation through its two meanings of

"sin" or "throne," dates to the great Persian monarch of the sixth century B.C.E. Trask's firstborn, however, receives a Hebrew name derived from "adamah" or "earth," linking him to his tenure as first man in Eden, the earthly paradise and his role as first human to make his living from the soil.

Adam, like his Hebrew predecessor, is deceived by woman. Cathy Ames, a psychopathic seductress enamored of Alice in Wonderland, changes her name to Catherine Amesbury, ironically the name of the rural location of Stonehenge, a prehistoric Celtic worship center linked to the uncivilized sacrifices that Cathy performs on the chicken shortly before she steals the tannery payroll. The name Catherine has spawned diametrically opposing interpretations—"torture" and "pure," both arising from the martyrdom of St. Katherine. Steinbeck's Cathy, adept at blending both elements in her murderously schizoid personality, feigns amnesia and remains nameless when she first arrives at the Trask farm. Later, as Cathy Trask, she pretends to marry Adam out of love and continues her life of pretense until the birth of her sons, who were sired by Charles, a reclusive farmer whose name derives from the Old English meaning "husbandman," "churl," or "serf."

After Cathy adopts the professional name of Kate, murders a whorehouse madam, and steals the business for her own perverted revenge against the "fat slugs" who frequent prostitutes, Adam sinks into a state of suspended animation. Through the forceful camaraderie and biblical injunctions of Samuel Hamilton, Adam revives. Samuel, whose name mirrors the Old Testament prophet who was schooled by the doughty Eli, guides Adam through the process of naming the boys. Spurning Cain and Abel as inappropriate choices, Adam settles for Caleb and Aron.

Caleb, whose name derives from "dog" and "fidelity," proves his worthiness by making up to his father the financial loss of his scheme to ship chilled lettuce to eastern markets. Aron, whose name suggests lofty aspirations and the halo of light that marked the Greek god Apollo, yearns for a priestly, celibate life at the same time that he debates his fleshly lust for Abra. The charmingly normal Abra, whose name derives from the Spanish word for "path through a mesa," clearly delineates the nature of the two boys. Aron, drawn to the piety of Mr. Prior, flees King City and takes service in the army. As Abra's name suggests, she separates the two boys according to their nature, clarifies who and what they want to become, and selects the one most suited to carrying on the Trask line.)

7. Why is religious fanaticism an important issue in the novel? (Much of the novel reflects the desperate and misguided acts of people caught up in religious fanaticism. Sam Hamilton is married to Liza, "a tight hard little woman humorless as a chicken. She had a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do." Like firebrands who claim to be inspired by biblical injunction, Liza "never studied the Bible or inspected it; she just read it. The many places where it seems to refute itself did not confuse her in the least.")

Crucial to Liza's strength as moral wife and mother is her abhorrence of alcohol, which she regards as "a crime against a properly outraged deity." Ironically, not only do her boys take to drink, but she too falls into regular

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consumption of spirits after her doctor prescribes them for her "elimination" problems after she reaches her seventies. As a humorous fillip, Steinbeck remarks that she increased her intake to "a quart a day and she was a much more relaxed and happy woman."

Significant to her religiosity is her distaste for sex, which "she looked upon as a tiresome and sometimes painful duty." Similarly, Cyrus marries an oppressive hysteric, an "inside-herself woman," whose self-destructive piety contrasts with his wild gambling, whoring, hard-driving devil-may-care. As Steinbeck describes her end, "Her god of communication became a god of vengeance—to her the most satisfactory deity she had devised so far—and, as it turned out, the last."

For Steinbeck, the matter of religion coalesces in Lee's philosophy, an amalgam of years of study and stoic contemplation. When Sam admits that the story of Cain and Abel has always puzzled him, he notes that, because Lee is a Presbyterian, he should have some response. Lee's reply, part humor and part criticism of religious contention, reveals much of his eclectic nature: "People like you to be something, preferably what they are." Steinbeck develops to a magnificent irony Lee's understanding of the principle of acceptance of free will. As Adam nears the end of his troubled life, it is Lee who gives him the gift of understanding. Through Lee's insistence, Adam musters enough strength to bless his son Caleb and forgive his cruelty to Aron.)

8. Discuss Steinbeck's championship of the underdog. (In delineating the feisty, creative nature of Sam Hamilton, Steinbeck imbues love, admiration, and a kind of blessing on his ne'er-do-well prosperity. Sam is rich in community prestige, but loses out to unscrupulous patent attorneys and industrial sharks who rob him of his improved threshing machine. To Steinbeck's way of thinking, "without money you cannot fight money." Like the Joads of *The Grapes of Wrath*, who are "tractored out" of their Oklahoma farm, Sam is doomed to a life of seeing other people profit off his genius.

In contrast, Cathy deceives, murders, and steals to get her own bordello, then profits from it by operating with a ruthless fervor which Faye lacked. Unlike Sam, Cathy achieves her commercial goal, yet lives in darkened rooms, her arthritic hands wrapped in bandages. The true contrast of the two characters comes at their ends. Just as Croesus's question of Solon indicates, the measure of Sam is the outpouring of love and respect at his funeral. Cathy, bitter as windfall fruit, poisons herself and leaves behind a writhing nest of suspicion, innuendo, and gossip about her predations on Faye, Adam, and their sons.)

Questions 9 and 10—Critical Level

9. Discuss Steinbeck's rhetorical skills. (Steinbeck sticks to a straightforward telling of the plot, but adds enough literary touches to prove him worthy as both philosopher and poet. Some of the rhetorical techniques which raise the novel above melodrama include the following:
- intercalary chapters — brief sermonettes, such as the introduction to Part II, which links the coming of the twentieth century with Adam Trask's settlement in Salinas.
 - simile — And there we were, like a man scratching at his

own face and bleeding into his own beard.

- symbolism — They shook hands at the station, and Charles watched the train pull out and rubbed his scar.
- hyperbole — The Aguita boys, three of them, nearly clawed each other to death over Olive Hamilton.
- pidgin — "I bling litt table," he said, bowed slightly, and shuffled away.
- metaphor — In a few minutes I don't think you'll find a loose bar I've missed in a lifetime of search.
- parallelism — Liza sniffed. "Not sewing, not mending, not knitting?"
- comic relief — "Where've you been, Rabbit?"
"Went prospecting, Mr. Hamilton."
"Find anything, Rabbit?"
"Hell, Mr. Hamilton, I couldn't even find the mule I went out with."
- omen — "What's that, Mr. Hamilton?"
"A shooting star that fell a million years ago."
- mythological allusion — She found her house a stable of filth and abomination and she set to cleaning it with the violence and disgust of a Hercules at labor.
- aphorism — You can't make a race horse of a pig.
- biblical allusion — "My name is Caleb," Cal said. "Caleb got to the Promised Land."
- slang — This is a frame.
- apostrophe — And Mother of God! that wasn't true either.
- euphemism — She is—well—the owner of a house of ill fame.

10. Discuss the theme of choice as depicted in the Trask family.

(Steinbeck centers on choice as the key issue of good and evil. With the introduction of Lee as a pivotal figure, the question of what kind of parent Adam will become falls under the jurisdiction of an outsider. Lee, mimicking the white man's version of Chinese pidgin, shucks his servile persona and slips into his true self—facile philosopher and sage. As he studies the deteriorating situation at the Trask ranch, he realizes that Adam must outgrow his naivete and assume the role of patriarch.

Through the intervention of Sam, whom Lee summons, Adam comes to a fuller knowledge of choice as the full measure of human civilization. Undefeated by evil, Sam, symbolically bitten on the hand as he attempts to examine Cathy during labor, perseveres, delivers the twin sons, and offers his hand to Lee for medical care. Together, the two men grow in mutual respect for each other through the contemplation of the Trask family's need for spiritual succor.

Lee battles the issue of the translation of *timshel*, the key to the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel. At length, Lee determines that the word indicates an opportunity to control willful, self-destructive behaviors. Quietly, firmly, Lee counsels Caleb, who suffers the same rejection that made Charles an ethical cripple. Lee hones and smooths Adam's paternal skills right up to the last of Adam's strength. The blessing that Adam performs with his stroke-weakened hand demonstrates the importance of choice. Through Lee, Adam comes to value his son, offspring of a prostitute mother and Adam's half-brother. With patriarchal seriousness, Adam ends the curse of the Trask family by uttering the one word that gives Caleb a chance at redemption.)

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Questions 11-14—Creative Level

11. Lead a panel discussion of why Cathy is unable to overcome her discontent. Decide whether she is a victim of fate or madness. Discuss similar attitudes in her sons.
12. Explain in a short oral presentation the significance of each of these scenes:
 - a. Abra's admission of fondness for Lee
 - b. Kate's visits to the Episcopal church
 - c. Faye's decision to write a will
 - d. Cathy's seduction of Charles on her wedding night
 - e. Adam's escape from the prison camp
 - f. Cyrus's confrontation of Adam in Washington
 - g. Adam's reunion with Charles
 - h. Caleb's success in the bean market
 - i. Lee's plea that Adam bless and forgive Caleb
 - j. Adam's mother's suicide
13. Contrast Adam's attitude toward war with that of Cyrus, Charles, Aron, and Will.
14. In a theme, discuss how the story would change if Adam had refused to forgive Caleb.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Math

Using the scale of miles on a U.S. map, estimate the distance from Connecticut to Salinas, California. Make an additional approximation of the miles Adam travels to and from his two army assignments and the intervening miles he covers on his way to Tallahassee and home.

Social Studies

1. Draw a map delineating the territories covered by the Indian Wars of the late nineteenth-century. Point out forts where cavalry were stationed. List major engagements, particularly Sand Creek, Wounded Knee, and Little Big Horn.
2. Make a report on laws governing prostitution. Determine why prostitution is called a "victimless crime."
3. Make an oral report on the importation of oriental servants and laborers to the west coast. Use census figures to determine the racial mix in California near the end of the nineteenth century.
4. Collect lines from the novel which disclose the relative ages of the characters. For example, note that Charles and Adam are a year apart in age and that Cathy's twins are born in late September 1900. Create a time line of historical events and place the characters in it, for instance Private Adam Trask in his late teens during the Indian wars and Aron only eighteen when he is killed in France.
5. Discuss turn-of-the-century attitudes toward blacks, Indians, gypsies, Irish, and Chinese.
6. Comment on Dr. Tilson's views on abortion.
7. Discuss the significance of puritanism in the settlement of New England.

History

1. Discuss why Steinbeck emphasizes Chancellorsville, Wilderness, Appomattox, Gettysburg, Arlington Cemetery, G.A.R., Lincoln's death, Articles of War, Seminoles, Indian Wars, Southern Pacific Railroad, Leland Stanford, IWW, Black Jack Pershing, Kaiser, [Pancho] Villa, "Stars and Stripes Forever," and World War I draft boards as significant backdrops to the plot.

2. Contrast the settlement of the state of Connecticut with that of California. How do racial, religious, economic, and social differences affect the scope of the novel?

Cinema

1. Contrast the movie and video versions of *East of Eden* with the novel. Comment on how effectively the parallels of sibling rivalry are portrayed by the casts.
2. Make a list of dramatic scenes from the novel which would require intense use of lighting, costume, makeup, music, props, and stunts, particularly Charles's fistfight with Adam, Caleb's first visit to Kate's house, the baptism of Caleb and Aron, Kate's murder of Faye, the scar on Adam's shoulder, or Adam's blessing of Caleb.

Science

1. Discuss the novel's emphasis on the fertility of the Salinas Valley. Explain why fallow land produces ample crops. Contrast California's varied agricultural output with that of Connecticut.
2. Discuss the problems faced by shippers of fresh vegetables. Explain how technology has relieved farmers of extensive losses.
3. Explain why the live oak and mustard are useful symbols.

Foreign Language

1. Locate examples of foreign terms and their significance, such as Topo, Los Gatos, Tassajara, Laguna Seca, Corral de Tierra, Paraiso, Bolsa Nueva, Morocojo, uisquebaugh, Weltschmerz, and ng-ka-py.
2. Discuss the importance of the Hebrew *timshel* to the plot.

Art

1. Create a signboard for Adam Trask's farm, a handbill announcing his lettuce business, a business card for Will Hamilton, a poster encouraging young men to enlist in the army, a plaque designating Lincoln's grave, and an invitation to Caleb and Abra's wedding.
2. Join with a group to design a mural depicting various lifestyles of turn-of-the-century Salinas. Include Adam, Caleb, Will, Aron, Sam, Liza, Abra, Faye, and Kate.

Health

1. Discuss diseases pertinent to the plot, particularly Alice's consumption, Liza's alcoholism, Cyrus's gonorrhea, the Indian's smallpox, Adam's stroke, and Cyrus's first wife's delusions. Name improvements in prevention and care for these diseases, for instance antabuse for alcoholism, antibiotics for consumption and gonorrhea, inoculation to prevent smallpox, blood pressure medicines and anti-coagulants to prevent stroke, and anti-depressants and counseling for mental disorders.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Compose a theme in which you compare the sibling rivalry in *East of Eden* with similar situations in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Judith Guest's *Ordinary People*, and William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*.
2. Write a series of letters illustrating the following situations: Charles's weariness of bachelorhood and Adam's distaste for the cavalry, Aron's experiences in France and Abra's growing interest in Caleb, Cyrus's discomfort in a Union Army infirmary and Mrs. Trask's difficulties in raising Adam alone on a Connecticut farm, and Lee's letters home to Cantonese relatives and friends.

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3. Lead a discussion of biblical allusions to Genesis. Explain how the enmity between Cain and Abel, Isaac's preference for Jacob over Esau, and Jacob's intense love of Joseph lead to disaster. Parallel the biblical texts with Steinbeck's themes and settings.
4. Create a glossary for the novel in which you explain crucial terms and allusions, such as theosophy, Promised Land, self-absorption, opium, yearning, impulse, culture, horizons, Presbyterian, Episcopal, wormwood, virtue, vice, frailty, erratic, nux vomica, memoirs, and assertiveness.
5. Relate the following terms to *East of Eden*: saga, biblical allusion, historical romance, chronicle, parallel plots, literary foils, social consciousness, naturalism, and realism.
6. Compose an extended definition of translation. Explain why Lee becomes obsessed with the Hebrew term *timshel*. Fit the word into the context of the conclusion.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Compose a list of every death described in detail in the novel. Give justification or explanation for each, including Mrs. Trask's drowning, Alice's consumption, the Ames murders, Faye's poisoning, Kate's suicide, Aron's battlefield death, and Adam's stroke. Decide whether Steinbeck disposes of characters as a matter of convenience or as an essential outgrowth of the plot.
2. Make a list of scenes from the novel which express contrasting attitudes toward worship, friendship, pride, manhood, motherhood, individuality, loyalty, forgiveness, and mercy. Next to each, indicate what you think is the author's personal philosophy.
3. Compose an extended character sketch of Adam. Express how he relates to other Steinbeck heroes, particularly Ma and Tom Joad from *The Grapes of Wrath*, Kino and Juana from *The Pearl*, George Milton and Slim from *Of Mice and Men*, and Doc from *Cannery Row*.

OTHER WORKS BY JOHN STEINBECK

A Cup of Gold, 1929
The Pastures of Heaven, 1932
To a God Unknown, 1933
Tortilla Flat, 1935
In Dubious Battle, 1936
Of Mice and Men, 1937
The Red Pony, 1938
Their Blood Is Strong, 1939
The Long Valley, 1938
The Grapes of Wrath, 1939
Sea of Cortez, 1941
Bombs Away!, 1942
The Moon Is Down, 1942
Lifeboat, 1944
Cannery Row, 1945
The Pearl, 1947
The Wayward Bus, 1947
A Russian Journal, 1948
Burning Bright, 1950
Sweet Thursday, 1954
The Short Reign of Pippin IV, 1957
Once There Was a War, 1959
The Winter of Our Discontent, 1961

Travels with Charley in Search of America, 1962
America and Americans, 1962
Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters, 1969
Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights, 1976 (posthumous)

RELATED READING

James Agee's *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men* and *A Death in the Family*
Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*
William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*
Alex Haley's *Roots*
Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*
Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*
James Michener's *Centennial*
Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*
O. E. Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*
Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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VOCABULARY

In this passage from the last chapter, pair the underlined words with synonyms from the list below. You will have answers left over when you finish.

ambitions
arouse
avarice
cohesive
contest
dormant
egotistical
eminence

exorcised
fallow
frailty
generosity
genius
harrow
horizon
impose

influence
intelligence
monuments
pantomime
plucky
principality
pummeled
respawn

scrupulously
topmost
venerable
vestments
vice
virtue
warp
woof

Humans are caught—in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and goals (1) _____, in their greed (2) _____ and cruelty, and in their kindness and unselfishness (3) _____ too—in a net of good and evil. I think this is the only story we have and that it occurs on all levels of feeling and awareness (4) _____. Merit (5) _____ and corruption (6) _____ were foundation (7) _____ and substance (8) _____ of our first consciousness, and they will be the fabric of our last, and this despite any changes we may force (9) _____ on field and river and mountain, on economy and manners. There is no other story. A man, after he has brushed off the dust and chips of his life, will have left only the hard, clean questions: Was it good or was it evil? Have I done well—or ill? . . .

And in our time, when a man dies—if he has had wealth and prestige (10) _____ and power and all the adornments (11) _____ that stir (12) _____ envy, and after the living take stock of the dead man's property and his majesty (13) _____ and works and memorials (14) _____—the question is still there: Was his life good or was it evil? . . . Envy is gone, and the measuring stick is: "Was he loved or was he hated? Is his death felt as a loss or does a kind of joy come of it?"

In uncertainty I am certain that underneath their upper (15) _____ layers of weakness (16) _____ men want to be good and want to be loved. Indeed, most of their vices are attempted short cuts to love. When a man comes to die, no matter what his talents and influence and inventiveness (17) _____, if he dies unloved his life must be a failure to him and his dying a cold horror. It seems to me that if you or I must choose between two courses of thought or action, we should remember our dying and try so to live that our death brings no pleasure to the world.

We have only one story. All novels, all poetry, are built on the never-ending strife (18) _____ in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that evil must constantly regenerate (19) _____, while good, while virtue, is immortal. Vice has always a new fresh young face, while virtue is august (20) _____ as nothing else in the world is.

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COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Identify the character who is described below. Choose from the list of names that follows. You may use some names more than once.

Abra	Caleb	Ethel	Mr. & Mrs. Bacon
Alice	Cathy	Faye	Mr. Prior
Aron	Charles	James Grew	Olive
Adam	Cyrus	Lee	Sam
Adam's mother	Dr. Tilson	Liza	Sheriff Quinn
Bordoni	Edwards	Mr. & Mrs. Ames	Will

- _____ 1. finds small, simple gifts which she believes come from Charles.
- _____ 2. turns to his wife for comfort after his affair with Cathy.
- _____ 3. finds the dropper that held the poison.
- _____ 4. informs Aron of Kate's profession.
- _____ 5. teaches Caleb wartime economics.
- _____ 6. takes paregoric for pain.
- _____ 7. die locked in a burning house.
- _____ 8. is moved by Abra's filial love.
- _____ 9. contracts gonorrhoea from a slave.
- _____ 10. teaches Latin.
- _____ 11. attends Stanford University.
- _____ 12. puts a knitting needle into a satchel.
- _____ 13. drinks tea spiked with opium.
- _____ 14. makes a shroud.
- _____ 15. looks forward to marrying Aron.

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Part II: Completion (20 points)

Fill in each blank with a setting from the story. Choose from the list that follows.

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Arlington | France | Salinas Valley |
| Buenos Aires | Gabilan Mountains | Sanchez place |
| Chancellorsville | Kansas City | Stanford |
| Connecticut | King City hotel | Tallahassee prison camp |
| Boston | New York | Valdosta |
| Episcopal church | Rio | Washington |

1. While escaping jail, Adam stops in _____ and telegraphs Charles for money.
2. The men in the _____ smile at Adam's concern for his pregnant wife.
3. Cathy learns the location of the _____ whoremaster.
4. Aron pays greater heed to the _____ than to his girlfriend.
5. While Adam serves on the draft board, Aron leaves for _____.
6. Sam approves of Adam's decision to buy the _____.
7. Cyrus summons Adam from a _____ station to Washington.
8. Adam finds it hard to believe that a man buried in _____ could invent a military career and steal over \$100,000.
9. Adam swims away from a _____.
10. Charles has no desire to leave _____.

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F for false.

- _____ 1. Olive Hamilton strips naked and confesses to a revival minister her work for Mr. Edwards.
- _____ 2. Adam cowers in a ditch when Charles comes after him with a hatchet.
- _____ 3. After the birth of the twins, Lee dresses the bite on Sam's hand.
- _____ 4. Caleb longs to confess his sins to his father.
- _____ 5. Will dislikes the idea of wartime profiteering.
- _____ 6. Before her suicide, Kate curls up with a copy of *Alice in Wonderland*.
- _____ 7. Lee and Adam ship the children's mother's body to New England for burial.
- _____ 8. Sam divulges to Adam the place where Cathy works.
- _____ 9. Cathy Amesbury and Kate are the same person.
- _____ 10. Mr. Edwards tries to bury Cathy's body to hide his crime.

EAST OF EDEN

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply an answer to each of the following questions.

- _____ 1. What disease does Mrs. Trask contract from Cyrus?
- _____ 2. Whom does the sheriff suspect of shooting Adam?
- _____ 3. Where do the Adam Trasks buy new clothes?
- _____ 4. Who tells Adam that Charles fathered the twins?
- _____ 5. Who takes nux vomica to fake illness?
- _____ 6. What Bible name is totally unacceptable for the twins?
- _____ 7. What product does Adam ship under refrigeration?
- _____ 8. What does Charles give Cyrus for his birthday?
- _____ 9. Which character lives with an Indian who dies of smallpox?
- _____ 10. What mechanical devices does Sam build for Adam?

Part II: Description (30 points)

Place an X by every statement that is true of Adam.

- _____ 1. refuses to believe Cyrus's discharge papers.
- _____ 2. refers to his children as "they" and "you."
- _____ 3. hides whiskey from his wife.
- _____ 4. goes with Charles to visit prostitutes at the local inn.
- _____ 5. carries a quilt.
- _____ 6. wants to raise his family in King City.
- _____ 7. offers Mr. Sanchez money for his place.
- _____ 8. accepts a place on the draft board.
- _____ 9. shares Lee's love of philosophy.
- _____ 10. summons Sheriff Quinn to examine bloodstained photos.
- _____ 11. believes Joe Hamilton will never amount to much.
- _____ 12. lies to Caleb about the scar on his shoulder.
- _____ 13. recognizes Kate during an Episcopal service.
- _____ 14. visits his wife at the whorehouse.
- _____ 15. divulges to Charles that he has served time for vagrancy.

EAST OF EDEN

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline an answer to complete each statement below.

1. Adam leaves Cathy in (Buenos Aires, King City, Tallahassee, Valdosta) while he looks for land.
2. Cyrus marries (Olive, Una, Liza, Alice) and fathers a second son.
3. While viewing (the Salinas Valley, Bordoni's farm, Niagara Falls, Kansas City), Adam is overwhelmed by loneliness.
4. Adam scolds Caleb for (profiteering, taking Aron to Kate's place, leaving Stanford, taking his brother's girl).
5. Cyrus bilks the government by pretending to be (an Indian fighter, a career soldier, a member of the War Department, a veteran of the Civil War).
6. After Adam divulges his hobo wanderings, (Cathy proposes marriage, he serves a second hitch with his regiment, Sheriff Quinn warns him about Cathy, Charles respects him more).
7. A (ribbon, key, copy of *Alice in Wonderland*, medicine dropper) suggests that the Ames's daughter has been kidnapped and possibly murdered.
8. Lee warns Sam about (drinking whiskey, evil, consumption, a woman with amnesia) at the Trask house.
9. Lee is touched and flattered by (Caleb's hard work, Aron's good grades, Abra's admiration, Liza's cleanliness).
10. The word *timshel* indicates (God's love, choice, punishment, oriental philosophy).

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answer any TWO in complete sentences.

1. Contrast how Adam and Charles perceive evil and good.
2. Give evidence that Steinbeck wrote *East of Eden* to depict the development of the Salinas Valley.
3. Explain why Aron joins the army.
4. Describe Cyrus's attitude toward family.
5. Discuss why Caleb wants to join Will in the bean business.

EAST OF EDEN

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Test

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. ambitions | 11. vestments |
| 2. avarice | 12. arouse |
| 3. generosity | 13. eminence |
| 4. intelligence | 14. monuments |
| 5. virtue | 15. topmost |
| 6. vice | 16. frailty |
| 7. warp | 17. genius |
| 8. woof | 18. contest |
| 9. impose | 19. respawn |
| 10. influence | 20. venerable |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Identification (30 points)

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Alice | 9. Cyrus |
| 2. Edwards | 10. James Grew |
| 3. Ethel | 11. Aron |
| 4. Mr. Prior | 12. Dr. Tilson |
| 5. Will | 13. Adam |
| 6. Faye | 14. Adam's mother |
| 7. Mr. & Mrs. Ames | 15. Abra |
| 8. Lee | |

Part II: Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Valdosta | 6. Sanchez place |
| 2. King City hotel | 7. Kansas City |
| 3. Boston | 8. Arlington |
| 4. Episcopal church | 9. Tallahassee prison camp |
| 5. France | 10. Connecticut |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. F |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. gonorrhea | 6. Cain |
| 2. Cathy | 7. lettuce |
| 3. New York | 8. knife |
| 4. Kate | 9. Adam |
| 5. Kate | 10. windmills |

Part II: Description (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| 1. X | 6. X | 11. |
| 2. X | 7. | 12. X |
| 3. | 8. X | 13. |
| 4. | 9. X | 14. X |
| 5. | 10. | 15. X |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- King City
- Alice
- Niagara Falls
- profiteering
- a career soldier
- Charles respects him more
- ribbon
- evil
- Abra's admiration
- choice

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

TEACHER'S NOTES

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