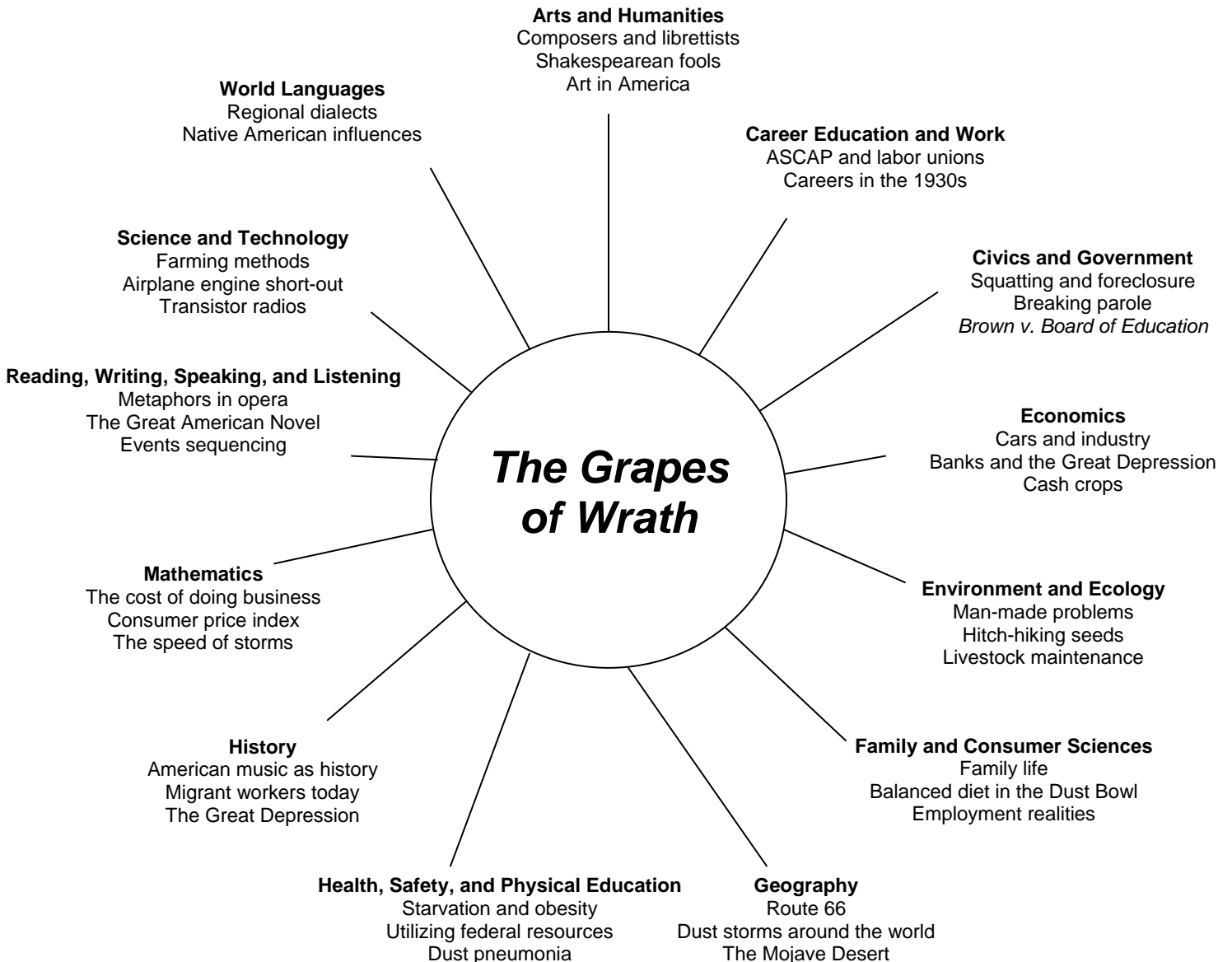


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## Curriculum Circle

How does the opera *The Grapes of Wrath* intersect with all academic content areas?  
Begin with the opera and brainstorm connections to all curricula.



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## Lesson Plan Stems for *The Grapes of Wrath*

How does the opera *The Grapes of Wrath* intersect with all academic content areas?  
Begin with a lesson plan stem and connect the opera to classroom curricula.

### Arts and Humanities

National Standards: Dance 1-5; Music 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9; Theater 1, 6, 8; Visual Arts 1, 3, 4, 5, 6  
State Standards: 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4

How was *The Grapes of Wrath* chosen to become the subject for a new opera? Did the composer, Ricky Ian Gordon, choose the text or did the opera company assign the text to him? Why might this text have been chosen?

Michael Korie is listed as librettist and lyricist for *The Grapes of Wrath*. What is the difference between a librettist and a lyricist?

*The Grapes of Wrath* opera was first conceived as a series of songs. Identify the songs that are the core of this opera. How are most other operas written?

Pittsburgh Opera will be the third company to perform *The Grapes of Wrath* and this production represents the East Coast Premiere of the opera. What is a premiere? Why are premieres special?

*The Grapes of Wrath* is a contemporary opera. Both the composer and the librettist are living. Develop questions and comments you would like to share with them. For example: How do you compose an opera? Is it more difficult to write an opera or a musical?

Ricky Ian Gordon is a very skilled composer and writes operas, musicals, and song cycles. Compare these genres. Are there different compositional techniques used for each? What are the guidelines for classifying music into genres?

Ricky Ian Gordon is a composer-in-residence at the *Bravo! Vail Music Festival*. What tasks does a composer-in-residence perform? Is Gordon paid for this position?

John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* takes place in the 1930s. What music was popular at that time? Research and perform samples of popular music from that era.

How would people have listened to live and recorded music back then? Compare the popular music of the 1930s to the music that was popular in 1956, the year that Ricky Ian Gordon, composer of the opera, was born.

Research American folk music. Gather examples of songs that deal with the topic of the Dust Bowl or the Great Depression. Perform a sample of the songs for an audience. Who were some American folk music artists? What instruments did they use?

Listen to the opera *The Grapes of Wrath* and identify several character motifs. How does the musical motif reflect the personality traits of the characters in the opera? How do the musical motifs interact in the opera?

In the prologue of the opera, people sing about the destruction of their land by the weather. What kind of music reminds you of good or of bad weather? What kind of music or instrumentation speaks to the elements of weather, such as rain and wind?

In Act III of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the composer lightens the mood. How is this accomplished? Compare other mood-lightening devices used in performance art, such as the "Shakespearean fool".

Around the same time that Korie was writing the lyrics to the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, he was also working on *Grey Gardens* for Broadway. Compare the two works. What thematic similarities exist between the works?

Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* uses a structure of alternating narrative chapters with historical context chapters. How might this kind of story-telling structure challenge a librettist when writing the lyrics for an opera? How can a non-narrative chapter be incorporated into an opera? Consider how different media might be used to convey the historical context and information from those sections of the novel's text.

Rogers and Hammerstein wrote the famous musical *Oklahoma!* that opened in 1943 and was eventually made into a movie. Compare the music that Gordon wrote for *The Grapes of Wrath* to the music that Rogers and Hammerstein wrote for *Oklahoma!* Would the story of *Oklahoma!* make a good basis for an opera?

Dance often plays a vital role in opera and musical theater. Who is responsible for planning these scenes? How does dance enrich the story?

In *The Grapes of Wrath* opera, the Joad family attends a hoedown and a square dance. Research the history of square dancing. Learn some square dances and teach them to others. Do people still square dance today? What other types of folk dances exist in the U.S. today? Where do the folk dances originate?

Look at several of the Dust Bowl era and Great Depression era artworks by Alexandre Hogue. Discuss Hogue's use of color and shape to create the art. What do you see and

feel when you study the pieces? What other American artists produced pieces about this time period? What are the differences and similarities in the artists' styles?

Jackson Pollock, an American Abstract Expressionist painter, died the year Gordon was born. Create an abstract artwork using *The Grapes of Wrath* opera or the Dust Bowl era as subject matter.

What federally funded programs supporting art and artists existed during the Great Depression? Research the Work Projects Administration (WPA) and the kinds of art that were created as a result of this program. Were any famous pieces created? Do the works still exist? What public art programs exist today? How are they funded? What are the criteria for an artist to enter a public art program?

Dorothea Lange gained notoriety for photographs taken in the Dust Bowl and during the Great Depression. Find several examples of Lange's work. Who are the people in the photographs? What is the importance of this visual history?

### **Career Education and Work**

National Standards: Civics 1; Economics 2, 7, 11, 13, 19

State Standards: Career Education and Work 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.4

What types of jobs are represented in the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*? What skills would a person need to perform these jobs? What would people do if they did not have the skills necessary to do a job? How did people find work during this time period?

Discuss some career options that existed in the 1930s that do not exist today. Consider the big industries of that time and what kinds of jobs those industries created. What kinds of skills were needed to do those jobs? Are those skills still needed in other fields?

In *The Grapes of Wrath* opera, character Jim Casy is called a "lapsed preacher". What does this term mean? Did he not want to continue his ministry or did someone stop his ministry? What character traits would define a "lapsed teacher", a "lapsed lawyer", or a "lapsed student"?

In the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Joad family put its hope in handbills announcing work in California. Create your own handbills announcing wonderful opportunities. How could someone determine if these opportunities are valid or worthless?

During the Great Depression, labor unions were formed. Compare the attempts to unionize migrant workers to the birth of labor unions in the U.S. What is a scab?

Ricky Ian Gordon is a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). What is ASCAP? Why do many composers join this organization? What are the pros and cons of joining associations such as this?

In 1956, the birth year of Ricky Ian Gordon, Hollywood movies and movie stars were shown for the first time on television. What effect did this have on television

programming? What was shown on TV before this change? What would TV be like today if movies and movie stars were not allowed on TV? Do you think that TV has affected Ricky Ian Gordon's style?

### **Civics and Government**

National Standards: Civics 1, 2, 5

State Standards: Civics and Government 5.1, 5.2

In the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, a neighbor is squatting in the Joads' abandoned house because the bank has foreclosed on the neighbor's property. What is squatting and foreclosure? How many farms were foreclosed in the 1930s and throughout the Great Depression? Is foreclosure also a problem today?

To go to California with his family, Tom Joad, a lead character in *The Grapes of Wrath*, must break his parole. What does that mean? How is the parole system enforced today? What are the limitations placed upon parolees?

In 1956, the same year that composer Ricky Ian Gordon was born, Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as a leader against segregation. What is segregation? In what ways were the Joads segregated? What creates segregation in a given area or time period? Give examples and facts to prove the existence of segregation in the U.S. today.

Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were the sitting American presidents during the Great Depression. Dwight D. Eisenhower was president when composer Ricky Ian Gordon was born. List the presidents of the United States throughout Ricky Ian Gordon's lifetime up to the present day. How have presidential policies shaped the lives of American farming communities? How have presidential policies shaped the lives of American artists?

In 1956, birth year of Ricky Ian Gordon, a Supreme Court challenge to segregation was heard, in the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education*. What was the result of this case? What effect did the ruling have on American education?

### **Economics**

National Standards: Economics 2, 8, 10, 13, 14, 19

State Standards: Economics 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5

In the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Joads drove an "ancient" car across the countryside. In the opera they drive a truck. How did the mass production of cars impact the American economy and environment? What industries arose because of the car?

In 1929, nearly one-in-four people worked on farms. Is that still the case? Has another type of work taken over that ratio? Is physical labor still a large part of the economy?

Create a role-playing game by picking one of these parts: banker, ranch owner, employed factory worker, and unemployed worker. Using M&Ms or Skittles to represent the wealth of each group, engage in scenarios that demonstrate the movement of

money. After the role-playing is complete, write a reflective journal describing connections to *The Grapes of Wrath*.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is set in the 1930s. What were the prices of household staples such as bread, milk, eggs, and cheese during that era? What do those items cost today? Research price index formulas and estimate the cost of those items 70 years from today. What is inflation? How is it related to the law of supply and demand?

Compare the economy of the Dust Bowl era to the economy of Rust Bowl areas today. What creates financial problems in different eras? In different areas?

Tom Joad can't find work because of economic conditions, not as a result of his criminal past. Would his criminal record affect his ability to find work in better economic times? How does a criminal record hinder employment?

What's a "bank run" as it is described in the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*? What happened to the banking industry during the Great Depression? What measures were taken by the federal government to secure the banking industry? Back then, was it better to save your money "in your mattress" or save it in a bank?

During the Dust Bowl era, farmers chose to plant wheat as a cash crop. The resulting failure of wheat as a commodity was caused, partially, by a glut in the market. Who had authority to set the price of wheat during that time? What was the outcome of the financial decisions made and where did it have the greatest effect?

### **Environment and Ecology**

National Standards: Geography 1-6

State Standards: Environment and Ecology 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9

The Joads marvel at a flush toilet because they've never seen one before. At what point in American history were public sanitation laws put into effect? Before these laws were in effect, how was human waste disposed of? What problems came from improper sanitation? What sanitation laws are in effect today?

One of the contributing factors to the creation of the Dust Bowl was drought. What is a drought? Are other areas of the world similarly affected by drought, so much so that people have been forced to relocate? Where have these people gone? What problems does this migration create?

The Dust Bowl disaster was blamed on the farmers who moved into Oklahoma, plowed under the native grass, and planted non-native wheat. At that same time the buffalo herds were hunted to near extinction. Can dramatic change to an environment create such large scale problems? How is the destruction of the plains connected to the dust storms suffered by the farmers?

During the Dust Bowl era, immigrants from Russia unknowingly brought seeds for Russian thistle hidden among seeds for a hard winter wheat known as Turkey Red.

When thistle seeds fell onto soil in the American West, they flourished, producing tumbleweeds. What other plants or animals have come to North America accidentally? Are there laws in place to prevent this from happening today?

During the Dust Bowl era the topsoil blew away to become the dust storms and dunes that buried homes and machinery. Did this area of the U.S. ever recover? What farming practices are in place today to prevent other ecological disasters from happening?

For decades, ecologists have been studying the clearing of the rain forest, predicting disaster in the form of global warming. Consider the Dust Bowl era problems and the effect farming had on the weather. What would have been the weather patterns if the land had remained untouched? Will the destruction of the rainforest have a similar, predictable effect? Support your research with facts.

During the drought of the Dust Bowl era people fed tumbleweeds to their livestock. What are some alternative feeding solutions for ranchers who must survive a drought or flood? Has the production of commercial feed enabled ranchers to rely on world supplies of feed instead of locally produced products?

The Sydney Opera House was built in 1956, the same year that Ricky Ian Gordon was born. How well has this building survived the test of time? Has it been affected by the environment? Have there been any major changes in its structure or usage?

### **Family and Consumer Sciences**

National Standards: Health 6

State Standards: Family and Consumer Science 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4

How many members were in the Joad family? Why were there so many people living as a family unit? Compare how your family members live to the Joads. Had Rosasharn's baby lived, there would have been four generations living together. Where do four generations of your family live?

Draw a family portrait of the Joads. How would they dress in the 1930s? Draw a portrait of your own family and compare. Create a family tree for the Joads and one for your own family. What are some notable differences between the two?

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Rosasharn's husband, Connie Rivers, abandons the family. Might the outcome be different if Connie had died? How did his abandonment affect the Joad family members? What legal documents do we use today in the event of the death of a family member?

In Act I of the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, a Ragged Man reports that jobs are few, but the Joads still choose to follow their dreams. Discuss the difficulty of planning when faced with new information, of letting go of dreams, and taking action during uncertainty.

In the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, there is a song, “Fried Dough”, which alludes to starvation caused by a diet of flour and shortening. Why were these foods so available to the people of the Dust Bowl era? Where might the farmers find fruits and vegetables? What is the biggest health problem in that time period?

At the end of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Rosasharn offers to feed a starving man with the only thing she can give him—her breast milk. How is kindness like this shown in everyday life? How can we offer aid to people who have less than we do?

Using a variety of sources, research the typical diet of a sharecropper in the 1930s. How many calories would that diet have given that worker? How many calories are needed to sustain a healthy life? At what level of caloric intake is a person considered to be starving? Graph your results.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is set in the 1930s, and Ricky Ian Gordon was born in the 1950s. Compare family house sizes from the 1930s, 1950s, and present day. Create a chart showing the percentage of change in square footage. Did families want garages in the 1930s, 1950s, and today? How many bedrooms? How many bathrooms? Discuss the standard of living in the United States and its shifting definition.

### **Geography**

National Standards: Geography 1-6

State Standards: Geography 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4

The Joads travel on Route 66. Find that highway on a current map. What states does it traverse? Is there a faster way now to drive from Oklahoma to California? What else is famous about Route 66?

Map out the Joads’ 1500 mile trek from Oklahoma to California. Design postcards from the various stops the Joad family make along their journey. Include information about the local environment and geographical details on your postcards.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, there is a shanty town called Hooverville. There were many shanty towns in America during the Great Depression. Why were many called Hooverville? What is a shanty town and how do they come into being? Why do some areas have more shanty towns than others?

Malnutrition as a result of environmental disaster is still a problem today. What regions of the world are experiencing famines? Compare the geography of these areas to that of the American Midwest in the 1930s. What steps have been taken to relieve famine? What factors have contributed to the problem of food distribution?

The phenomenon of dust storms is neither restricted to the Dust Bowl era, nor to the U.S. Where else in the world do dust storms occur? Are they the result of man-made changes in landforms or are they a natural part of weather patterns?



The Mojave Desert plays a part in the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*. Find it on a map. What is a desert? What created the Mojave Desert? What kind of desert is the Mojave? What life forms live in the Mojave Desert?

Before farming and ranching became the industry of the Dust Bowl, the land was used by a different culture. Who were these people? How did they use the land? Why did they leave the Oklahoma panhandle?

### **Health, Safety, and Physical Education**

National Standards: Health 2, 3, 7; Physical Education 4, 5, 6, 7

State Standards: Health, Safety and Physical Education 10.1, 10.2

In the final scene of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Rosasharn meets a starving man. What does it mean to be starving? Look up different definitions of starvation and malnutrition. Can someone be obese and malnourished at the same time?

Today, unlike the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath*, poor and hungry Americans can utilize the services of a food bank. What is a food bank? What purpose do food banks serve in a community? On average, how many Americans use food banks?

Natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods, and man-made disasters, such as warfare, are equally destructive. Was the Dust Bowl a man-made or natural disaster? In your opinion, do natural or man-made disasters create more damage? What are some facts to support your claim?

As the land dried up and the crops withered, people in the Dust Bowl began eating the things they could grow and hunt such as tumbleweeds and rabbits. What other kinds of things might Dust Bowl families have resorted to eating to avoid starvation? Build a balanced meal plan using the dramatic limitations of the Dust Bowl area offerings.

In the Dust Bowl, many people suffered from dust pneumonia, a condition brought on by the dust storms. What was dust pneumonia and how was it cured or treated? Does it exist today? Have other disasters, natural or man-made, created new diseases or conditions?

In the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, Noah is called slow-witted. What educational resources were available, during the Great Depression, to help children like Noah? What agencies are available today? Are they federally funded or part of private enterprise?

### **History**

National Standards: U.S. History 3; World History Era 9

State Standards: History 8.1, 8.3

What effect does name-calling have on Tom and the Joad family? How does name-calling lead to discrimination? Are there other points in history when name-calling has created social conflict? Is it against the law to insult another person?

*The Grapes of Wrath* is one of many very sad American stories. Why can America be depicted as a country of victory, freedom, and wealth, but widely accepted books depict defeat, bondage, and poverty? What does this say about freedom of speech in the U.S.?

*The Grapes of Wrath* is set in 1930s Oklahoma with many references to Americana, such as cars and square dancing. What changes would be necessary if the story were placed in another culture? What dances would be used? What songs would be sung? What clothes would be worn?

Explore the history of Route 66 in America. Consider the concept of manifest destiny. How does this road exemplify American road myths? Read samples of other authors such as Jack Kerouac and Jerry Seeger. Trace the path of Route 66. What cities does it join? How did building the highway impact settlement in the American west?

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, many people blame the banks and the President of the United States for the poor condition of the country and its people. Why do citizens sometimes blame some person or persons as the source of complex economic problems? Who is being blamed for the high price of gas today? Are there facts to prove this assertion?

Like the Joads, many migrant workers live in sub-standard conditions. Where are large numbers of migrant workers located in the U.S. today? What countries do these workers come from? Are migrant workers citizens of the United States?

How does *The Grapes of Wrath* opera compare to other forms of American music, and how does it reflect American history? Use the music of Aaron Copland and Elvis Presley as points of contrast. Does the music reflect American history?

Ricky Ian Gordon was 52 when *The Grapes of Wrath* opera premiered. How does his age compare to the ages of other opera composers at their first opera performances? Was the premiere of *The Grapes of Wrath* a big break for Ricky Ian Gordon?

### **Mathematics**

National Standards: Mathematics 1, 4, 6,  
State Standards: Mathematics 2.2, 2.3, 2.7,

Producing *The Grapes of Wrath* opera requires many hours of preparation by a workforce of many people. Calculate the cost of employing a group of people for a project of your own design. What are the job descriptions and salaries of your employees? Calculate their paychecks using a standard 40 hour workweek.

The set of an opera is built by carpenters, artists, and technicians. Design a set for *The Grapes of Wrath* using a ground plan, drawn to scale. What scale did you choose? How did you calculate the measurements?

The Joads drove 1500 miles from Oklahoma to California. Research the miles per gallon (MPG) of a car built in the 1930s, and calculate the amount of fuel needed to

make the trip. Compare it to the MPG of a car built in recent years and calculate the amount and cost of the fuel needed to travel that same distance today.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is set in a time of severe economic hardship. To relieve the financial hardship of American citizens of the Dust Bowl era and the Great Depression, the federal government gave aid to the farmers in the form of subsidies. Define this practice and chart the relationship of acres owned to money received. How many dollars per acre were given? How many farmers benefitted from this practice?

*The Grapes of Wrath* illustrates the real effect of poverty on American farmers in the Dust Bowl. Poverty exists today and is calculated using a specific guideline. Compare average incomes and poverty levels from several points in recent history. How would the Joads be described, from a financial perspective?

Today, economists use a consumer price index (CSI) to calculate and predict the cost of consumer goods in a given time period. Find a current index table and study its implications on the price of goods. Can you predict inflation using the CSI? What defines inflation? Can you estimate the cost of basic goods during the time period in which *The Grapes of Wrath* is set?

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, dust storms plagued the people of the Dust Bowl. How is the strength of a storm calculated? How is the volume of dirt moved by these storms measured? How is the speed of a storm calculated and predicted?

### **Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening**

National Standards: Language Arts 1, 2, 8,

State Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8

Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* is often referred to as the Great American Novel. What makes a novel "great" or "American"? Given this title, could the opera *The Grapes of Wrath* be considered the Great American Opera?

With the number of complex characters in this opera, it may be confusing to follow their interactions. Create character outlines or a flowchart of events sequenced for clarity. Draw small character representations. Recreate the main scenes of the opera using the drawings to build comprehension of important events in *The Grapes of Wrath* plot.

Writers use foreshadowing to build suspense and allow readers to question what might happen next. How is foreshadowing used in *The Grapes of Wrath*? What events help to foreshadow what happens to the characters?

In Act II of *The Grapes of Wrath*, a waitress initially looks with contempt at the Joads. Later we know that she has changed her opinion. How did this happen? How does her action illustrate the waitress' change of heart?

The dilemma of the Joad family has an unusual effect on Tom's brother Noah. How does Noah show strength? What other characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* react in surprising ways? In your opinion, what is the driving force behind Noah's actions?

In Act II of the opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, Grandpa dies offstage during the night. Map the sequence of death in the opera. Based on the number of deaths, would you call this opera a tragedy? What is the classic definition of tragedy and comedy?

Write a poem from the viewpoint of one of the main characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Express how the characters may feel in the situations in which they find themselves.

Rosasharn's stillborn infant is treated differently in the opera and the novel. In the novel the baby is buried, but in the opera its body is placed in a crate and set adrift. Explore this literary allusion to Moses and what it signifies. What other differences exist between the opera and the novel?

The final scene in Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* depicts Rosasharn breastfeeding a malnourished old man. Consider this image a metaphor for America, and compare this image to Fitzgerald's "green breast" of America imagery in *The Great Gatsby*. What might both authors be saying about the American dream? Fertility?

The Joad family crosses the desert on their way to California. Desert and dessert are often confused and misused. What other word pairs are misused and confused? List words where changing one letter changes the meaning.

Learn some vocabulary words related to *The Grapes of Wrath*:

Agitated	Despondent	Famine	Optimistic	Refuge
Amorous	Distraught	Great Depression	Perished	Share cropper
Autonomy	Evicted	Inflated	Ravaged	

The novel *The Grapes of Wrath* was made into a very famous movie starring Henry Fonda. What other movies have been made about the Depression and the Dust Bowl era? What are the main differences in the storylines of those movies?

Billie Holliday's book *Lady Sings the Blues* was published in 1956, the year that Ricky Ian Gordon was born. She had previously recorded a song by the same name. How does her book relate to *The Grapes of Wrath*? What are thematic similarities? Find other lyrics or poetry that connect or contrast thematically.

### **Science and Technology**

National Standards: Science 6

State Standards: Science and Technology 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Rosasharn and Connie sing about a car called the Lincoln Zephyr. What kind of car was this? Who would have driven it? What did it cost to purchase one in the 1930s? What special features did it have that set it apart from other cars of that era?

In the 1830s, it took 58 hours of work to plant and to harvest a single acre. By 1930, just prior to the Dust Bowl era, it took only three hours to do the same job. What technology was available then that enabled this change? How has farming technology advanced since the 1930s until today? Today, how long does it take to plant and harvest one acre?

Compare agricultural practices in Oklahoma in the 1930s to agricultural practices in Oklahoma now. What farming practices led to the creation of the Dust Bowl? What crops were raised? Who owns the land? What new technology has changed the Oklahoma landscape?

In 1933, during the Dust Bowl era, Charles Lindbergh flew into a storm in the Texas Panhandle and the dust was so thick it clogged his engine, forcing him to land. What other things over land or over water can clog or short-out an airplane engine? Do these items also impact car engines?

In 1956 transistor radios were introduced, so Ricky Ian Gordon could have heard the news by radio or television. What were the sources of news and information available to the Joads? Is the technology still in use today?

The Sydney Opera House is a performance space with a colorful history. Research the construction plan, methods, and problems. How were the difficulties overcome? What other solutions might the architects have chosen?

### **World Languages**

National Standards: Foreign Language 1-5

State Standards: World Languages 12.3, 12.5

“Rosasharn” is a dialectical pronunciation of Rose of Sharon. What are the etymologies of other names? How are names abbreviated? How are nicknames formed? What is a regional dialect? What are the various dialects found around the United States and in Western Pennsylvania?

The name “Oklahoma” is a combination of two Native American Choctaw words: Okla, which means “people”, and Humma, the Choctaw word for “red”. What other state or location names are derived from Native American words? What local names are based on Native American words?

*The Grapes of Wrath* is sung in English. How would translation of the opera into a different language change the tone of the opera? How would a term like “Okies” translate literally and culturally?

The opera *The Grapes of Wrath* is written in English. What other operas have been written originally in English? Why? Do composers and librettists choose the language of their creations or is it mandated? How does this compare to literature around the world?

## **Character Themes for *The Grapes of Wrath***

The Heartwood Institute lists seven universal character attributes: Courage, Loyalty, Justice, Respect, Hope, Honesty, and Love.

Discuss two attributes—hope and respect—after reading the synopsis of *The Grapes of Wrath*:

- *Hope guides our future through faith and aspiration, helping us to rise above selfishness and despair.*
- *Respect is regard for all life on earth. It calls us to value all people and their contributions, viewpoints, and differences, such as culture, religion, age, race, and ability.*

1. Do the Joads have hope for their future when they make the decision to keep traveling? How are Rosasharn's actions a metaphor for hope?

2. What purpose can hope serve during trying times in our lives? Is it difficult to choose hopeful action in the face of disaster, or is it human nature?

3. Does Ma show respect for her family when she takes the lead and makes decisions?

4. Is self-respect possible without ownership of money or possessions? Does the negativity faced by the Joads illustrate a warped sense of self-respect by Californians?

5. Native Americans exhibit respect for the earth. Do objects require our respect? Is it appropriate to respect inanimate things?

Heartwood Institute, [www.heartwoodethics.org](http://www.heartwoodethics.org), 1-800-432-7810