

## Intercalary Chapters

*You say the inner chapters were counterpoint and so they were—that they were pace changers and they were that too but the basic purpose was to hit the reader below the belt. With the rhythms and symbols of poetry one can get into a reader—open him up and while he is open introduce—things on an intellectual level which he would not or could not receive unless he were opened up. It is a psychological trick if you wish but all techniques of writing are psychological tricks.*

-John Steinbeck to Herbert Sturtz, 1953

John Steinbeck recognized that one of the most criticized elements of *The Grapes of Wrath* was his alternating use of inner (also known as intercalary) chapters that interrupt the narrative of the Joads.

Steinbeck noted, in his response to a Columbia University student's letter, that the inner chapters "...have been pommelled. You are the first critical person who seems to have suspected that they had a purpose." Steinbeck is clear. "Its [The Grapes of Wrath's] structure is very carefully worked out." [See: John Steinbeck, "A Letter on Criticism," *Colorado Quarterly* 4 (Autumn 1955): 218–219.] The way the book is put together is no accident. The inner chapters were designed by the author.

*The Grapes of Wrath* opens with a brief ecological look at the Plains drought in the first inner chapter.

1. Why did he include them?
2. What purpose does this chapter's "inner" narrative serve?
3. What is the function of Steinbeck's opening chapter which acts as the first "inner chapter"?
4. What is the relationship between inner chapters and the Joad narrative chapters throughout the novel?

In addition:

Article to read:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/06/opinion/the-author-on-grapes-of-wrath.html?pagewanted=print>

Handouts for Students:

[http://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/edsitement.neh.gov/files/worksheets/steinbeck\\_chapters\\_2.pdf](http://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/edsitement.neh.gov/files/worksheets/steinbeck_chapters_2.pdf)

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