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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

# *The Good Earth*

by Pearl Buck

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ISBN 10: 1-58049-083-2  
ISBN 13: 978-1-58049-083-2  
Reorder No. 300400

# *The Good Earth*

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:*

1. point out and discuss the realistic and naturalistic elements found in *The Good Earth*.
2. discuss the extent to which this novel is deterministic. Consider the degree of individual initiative and possible free will for characters.
3. point out and discuss the Chinese customs and history presented in the novel.
4. point out incidents and comments that demonstrate Buck's realistic portrayal of both the comic and tragic aspects of life.
5. respond to experiences, characters, and events in the novel.
6. identify examples of characterization, figurative language, imagery, point of view, foreshadowing, contrast. Point out how these features further develop meaning in the novel.
7. define the term *objectivity* and point out how the term relates to this novel.
8. discuss the universality of the human struggle presented in this novel.
9. point out and discuss the significance of the novel's title and its relationship to the major themes.
10. to cite specific incidents and/or comments in the novel to support the following themes found in the novel:
  - Both physical and emotional sustenance exists in having one's own land.
  - There are natural cycles of life evident in birth and death, growth and decay, etc.
  - There is a constant struggle between the wealthy and the poor in society.
  - Humans struggle to survive in the midst of harsh environments.
  - There is a value to hard work that goes beyond the immediate rewards.
  - Wealth and pride may corrupt one's values.
  - In Chinese society prior to the revolution, the position of a woman was one of subservience.
  - There are obligations that exist in relationships between family and community members.

## Background Lecture

Note to Teacher: In the novel, Buck addresses the issues of prostitution and rape. These issues are culturally relevant and are significant to themes in the novel.

*The Good Earth*, published in 1931, was instrumental in changing Western attitudes toward the people of China. In telling the story of ordinary believable Chinese people, Buck shattered the Western stereotype of the Chinese as being cruel, backward, opium addicts.

Buck, who grew up in China with her missionary parents, based the novel on her experiences there. With an evident sense of admiration and concern for the Chinese peasants, *The Good Earth* chronicles the life and struggles of the farmer Wang Lung and his family. The circumstances of Wang Lung's life reflect Buck's knowledge of the suffering of the Chinese people at the hands of abusive governments, bandits, landlords, floods, and famine. In addition to historical events in China, the reader learns of Chinese customs pertaining to religion, marriage, death, male and female roles, birth, and family relations. However, the author also creates vivid scenes of what is universal in the human experience: marriage, child rearing, poverty, sickness, family quarreling, a father's pride, and catastrophes of nature.

The following terms have been used to describe *The Good Earth*.

**Realism** - a literary movement that has at its core the depiction of life as it really is, with no attempt to hide or gloss over the problems, hardships, or ugliness of life. **Example:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

**Naturalism** - a literary movement that began in the late nineteenth century, which emphasized that man was as much a prisoner of instinct, environment, and heredity as animals; man has no free will in the theory of naturalism. **Examples:** *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*; *The Call of the Wild*.

# *The Good Earth*

## TEST

1. Which of the following characteristics associated with naturalism are found in this novel?
  - A. Uncontrollable forces of nature can be overwhelming to humans.
  - B. Humans struggle to survive in a harsh societal and physical environment.
  - C. The outcomes in life are often determined by forces beyond control.
  - D. There is an inability to achieve satisfaction from the land.
  - E. A, B and C
2. Pearl Buck's style of writing is marked by
  - A. emotionally charged words that condemn and/or praise.
  - B. unemotional words that describe but do not praise or condemn.
  - C. concrete detailed descriptions.
  - D. Both B and C
  - E. Both A and B
3. This book is said to have "universality" because
  - A. it describes with a universe of detail, the life of a Chinese peasant.
  - B. the story of Wang Lung, stripped of its culture and tradition, could be in its essentials, the story of any poor farmer.
  - C. it has been translated into 26 languages.
  - D. it is as popular today as when it was written.
4. From this novel, China in the early 1900s is depicted as
  - A. a land of great wealth and advances social programs for the less fortunate.
  - B. a land in which no great wealth exists.
  - C. a country with a weak federal government that cannot control lawlessness.
  - D. a country that welcomes foreign trade and encourages foreign investments.
  - E. Both B and C
5. We are told of the cawing crows that circle Wang Lung's head, we see an example of
  - A. figurative language.
  - B. foreshadowing.
  - C. personification
  - D. metaphor.

6. We are told that “the men were ashamed before her...for they were not evil men except when they starved.” What element of the author’s style is reflected in this quote?
  - A. poetic sensibility
  - B. use of figurative language
  - C. objectivity
  - D. personification of nature
7. Of the many themes and motifs in this novel, the main theme is
  - A. the class struggle between the rich and the poor.
  - B. that the land provides both a physical and emotional sustenance.
  - C. that the presence of excessive pride and/or wealth corrupts one’s values.
  - D. that the females in Chinese society were unfairly treated.
8. Of the characters in this story, it could be said that in terms of their personal destinies
  - A. that they had no free will.
  - B. that they had complete free will.
  - C. that they had some free will, but most of their fate was determined by forces outside of their control.
  - D. that only the wealthy people controlled their fates completely.
9. Which of the following characters could be said to have brought beauty into Wang Lung’s life?
  - A. O-lan
  - B. Lotus
  - C. Ching
  - D. The second son
10. Which of the following ran away and joined the army because of an interest in the revolution?
  - A. The eldest son
  - B. The second son
  - C. The third son
  - D. The nephew
  - E. Both B and D
11. During the famine, when O-lan gives birth to the fourth child, Wang Lung feels
  - A. pride because he, at least, did not have to steal.
  - B. sympathy for O-lan.
  - C. intense anger because his neighbors took his food.
  - D. hope for another son.

12. Wang Lung suffers in the southern city because
- A. no matter how hard he works, he can earn only enough to barely survive.
  - B. he was not able to communicate with anyone.
  - C. he was in continual fear of foreigners.
  - D. All of the above
13. Wang Lung's second son's desire to save money was *first* apparent when
- A. he did not want to part with the money he received while begging.
  - B. he refuses to overspend on his wedding.
  - C. he advises Wang Lung not to sell his crops until he can get the highest market price.
  - D. he does not approve of the money spent on opium to keep his uncle quiet.
14. The reader knows that Wang Lung will take extreme measures to keep as much control of his life as possible when
- A. he forces his aunt and uncle to leave his home.
  - B. he attempts to kill his uncle.
  - C. he beats the locusts that attack his crops.
  - D. he forces O-lan to allow Cuckoo use of the kitchen.
15. O-lan believes that she could not be loved because
- A. she is unable to smile.
  - B. she is not beautiful.
  - C. she was scared from the many beatings she received as a slave.
  - D. All of the above
16. Wang Lung's view of the earth gods
- A. is one of constant reverence throughout the novel
  - B. is comical when he refuses to dress them in red because he believes they sent him a female child
  - C. fluctuates according to his level of success is identical to the views of his father and Ching.
17. Wang Lung recalls the Ancient Mistress of the House of Hwang when
- A. he considers renting the inner courts of the House of Hwang.
  - B. he gives the slave who had been fathered by the son of Wang Lung's uncle to the poor man who had caused Ching's death.
  - C. when he tells his sons that they should never sell the land.
  - D. Both A and B

18. Wang Lung first realizes that O-lan is capable of detailed plans when she
  - A. is dying and asks to have her oldest son married before she dies.
  - B. tells him what their first child will wear, even before the child is born.
  - C. tells Wang Lung to sell all their furniture so that they can go south until the drought is over.
  - D. tells his sons to bring their cups so that they can beg in the city.
19. Wang Lung tolerates his uncle because
  - A. in Chinese society a man must show respect to his father's brother.
  - B. he fears his uncle's wife's anger.
  - C. he relies of his uncle's wife for advice.
  - D. Both B and C
20. Wang Lung's third son is angry with his father because Wang Lung
  - A. has grown too rich and cares nothing for the poor.
  - B. takes Pear Blossom.
  - C. refuses to allow him to attend school as his brothers had.
  - D. forces him to manage the lands.

## II. Short Answer (Answer any two)

1. Describe the scene that you find most realistic. Give at least two reasons and support with details.
2. Select two characters that contrast each other, citing at least three examples.
3. Discuss to what degree this novel is naturalistic; discuss at least three aspects of naturalism.
4. Discuss the choices of three characters and explain to what extent these choices are within the characters' control.
5. Who, in your opinion, is the most admirable or interesting character in the novel? Use specific incidents in the novel for support.
6. Discuss universal ideas that are present in the novel and compare them to Chinese culture. In what ways are these ideas and experiences similar and different?



# *The Good Earth*

## TEST

## ANSWER KEY

1	E	2	D	3	B	4	C	5	B
6	C	7	B	8	C	9	B	10	C
11	B	12	A	13	A	14	C	15	B
16	C	17	D	18	B	19	A	20	B

## Questions for Discussion and Essay

1. Compare and contrast the Chinese customs that are present in the novel to American customs. Some topics include: obligations to family, the position of women, foot binding, wedding and burial ceremonies, child rearing, and marriage.
2. Discuss the relationship of Wang Lung and O-lan. Compare and contrast the relationship he has with his wife to the relationships he has with Lotus and Pear Blossom.
3. Tell the story of one day in Wang Lung's life. Consider what he does first, where he goes and what the place looks like, and how he deals with people.
4. Why can Wang Lung not take part in the city life? Compare and contrast the ways of city life to Wang Lung's.
5. How does Wang Lung feel about his life? How do these opinions change throughout the story? Discuss the relationships he has with his wife and family members, farming conditions, and his financial situation.
6. Make a list of at least four reasons for the fall of the House of Hwang.
7. What universal experiences do the characters in the novel go through? How can you relate to their experiences and circumstances?
8. Describe the personality traits, attitudes, and values of two characters.
9. In what ways does Wang Lung demonstrate his pride?

## Terms and Definitions

*Figurative Language*- words and phrases that have meanings different from their usual ones in order to create a poetic and/or literary effect. **Examples:** Love certainly has its own seasons; crumbling cities made of matches.

*Naturalism* - a literary movement that began in the late nineteenth century, which emphasized that man was as much a prisoner of instinct, environment, and heredity as animals; man has no free will in the theory of naturalism. **Examples:** *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*; *The Call of the Wild*.

*Objective View* - third-person narration in which the author is recording action from a neutral point of view. **Example:** Most nonfiction.

*Personification* - a figure of speech in which an object, abstract idea, or animal is given human characteristics. **Examples:** The wall did its best to keep out the invaders.  
“Because I could not stop for Death,  
He kindly stopped for me.”  
—Emily Dickinson

*Point of View* - the position or vantagepoint, determined by the author, from which the story seems to come to the reader. The two most common points of view are First-person and Third-person. **Examples:** First-person point of view occurs in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; the reader receives all information through Huck's eyes. An example of third-person point of view is Dickens' *Hard Times*, in which the narrator is not a character in the book.

*Realism* - a literary movement that has at its core the depiction of life as it really is, with no attempt to hide or gloss over the problems, hardships, or ugliness of life. **Example:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

*Simile* - a comparison between two different things using either *like* or *as*. **Examples:** I am as hungry as a horse. The huge trees broke like twigs during the hurricane.

# The Good Earth

## Study Guide Teacher's Copy

### Chapters 1 and 2

#### Vocabulary

**fruition**-accomplishment; bearing fruit

**thatched**-roofing made of plant material

**cauldron**-vessel used for boiling water

**gruel**-thin, watery porridge

**guffaw**-burst of laughter

**impudence**-offensive, bold behavior

**obeisances**-body movements or gestures

**volubly**-fluently

**demurring**-voicing objection

**articulate**-to express with words

**zenith**-summit; upper region in the sky

**contrived**-obviously planned

**stolid**-impassive

1. What is the setting for the novel? Describe the images you have of Wang Lung's farm, his house, the city, and the House of Hwang.

*The Story takes place in a small village in Southern China during the years 1890-1927.*

*Answers may vary on images.*

2. What is the point of view in the novel? What effect does knowing these thoughts have on the reader?

*It is told from the third person, omniscient, point of view. Since the focus is on Wang Lung, the reader gets insight to his thoughts, feelings, and motivations.*

3. Characterize Wang Lung by his personality traits, his attitude and his values. How do you feel about Wang Lung?

*Wang Lung's personality is mild, meek, and shy. He cares about what people think and wants people to like him. He is responsible as a farmer and a father. He demonstrates generosity in his actions but is frugal with his money. His attitude is optimistic and positive as he looks for good omens, works hard, and appreciates O-lan. He values the land, success, and tradition. Answers will vary on whether students like the character.*

4. How has Wang Lung's poverty as a farmer influenced his character?

*It has contributed to his striving and to his frugality.*

5. Describe Wang Lung's relationship with his father.

*Their relationship exemplifies the traditional manner in which the young honor and respect their elders.*

6. What is your opinion of the wife's role at this time in China?

*The story reflects the social position of women in China at this time, as the wife holds a subordinate position and is required to be submissive.*

7. Do you think that O-lan and Wang Lung love each other?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung and O-lan are helpmates to each other and there is a team-like unity between them. They do not appear to have romantic feelings for each other.*

8. What is the cause for the sadness in O-lan's eyes and her silence?

*O-lan was sold into slavery by her parents during a time of starvation. She must have been mistreated in the house of Hwang.*

9. Point out parts in these chapters that you found humorous.

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung's self-conscious preparations for marriage and the way in which Wang Lung appears to people in the village can be seen as humorous.*

10. What aspects are realistic in these chapters?

*There are many realistic, ordinary details of Wang Lung's grooming, buying food, being economical, thinking about what others think, and his reaction to meeting O-lan.*

## Chapters 3 and 4

### Vocabulary

**mar-**to inflict disfiguring damage

**gilded-**covered to make attractive

**malignant-**inclined to do evil

**flails-**manual threshing tools

**chaff-**worthless matter

**frugal-**careful spending

**hemp-**cord or cloth made from the cannabis plant

1. How can Wang Lung's prosperity be explained?

*It is through hard work, cooperation, thrift, and practicality that he succeeds. They repair rather than buy new, and they hold crops and sell them after harvest time to get a higher price.*

2. As O-lan and Wang Lung plan for the birth of their child, in what ways is O-lan like most women; in what ways is she unusual?

*Like most women, O-lan visualizes her child before it is born and wants to provide the best she can. O-lan's ability to give birth alone and work before and after childbirth is unusual by today's customs.*

3. Characterize O-lan's personality, attitudes, and values.

*O-lan is hard working, supportive, patient, and silent, until she is compelled to defend her position. She is also strong, resourceful, determined, practical, and fearful. Her attitude is positive and cooperative, as she accepts her role as a wife. She values survival, her husband, and family.*

4. Name several Chinese customs that are evident in the novel. Which of these activities and attitudes are similar to what Americans express and share?

*Answers may vary. Example: The idea that too much good luck is dangerous, the use of red sugar, and the birth celebration are some of the Chinese customs. All cultures have practices and superstitions about luck, birth, etc.*

5. What, if anything, is there about Wang Lung and O-lan's life and marriage that appeals to you?

*Answers may vary. Example: The ability to cooperate, plan together, and live in agreement are appealing characteristics of their marriage.*

6. Explain Wang Lung's thoughts on his silver.

*Wang Lung sees his surplus as coming from his labor on the land. It is significant that they jointly hide the silver and share the sense of well being that having a reserve provides. However, Wang Lung feels more confident with others now that he has extra.*

7. In the description of O-lan nursing the baby in the field, what image comes to your mind's eye?

*Answers may vary. Example: In the description, the "earth goddess" or fertility motif is suggested.*

## Chapters 5 and 6

### Vocabulary

**mottoes**-brief statements

**millstones**-stones used to grind grain

**haws**-fumbles in speech

**concubine**-a woman who is contracted to a man as a second wife, often having low status and few rights

**consternation**-paralyzing dismay

**maliciously**-deliberately spiteful

**hoary**-ancient; grey or white

**arduous**-strenuous

**placid**-calm

1. As you read these chapters, what pleased you?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung and O-lan experience prosperity and happiness together.*

2. What image do you have of Wang Lung's good luck rituals? Do you believe in the concept of good luck? What, in your opinion, creates success?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung paints red squares with symbols for happiness and riches on his farm utensils and dresses the earthen gods, burns incense, and candles. While luck may contribute to good fortune, success is created by hard work.*

3. The people in the village are now treating Wang Lung in a much different way, especially the gatekeeper. How do you explain their change in attitude?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung's prosperity brings respect from the villagers.*

4. What changes do you see in Wang Lung? State how your feelings toward him have changed.

*Wang Lung is proud of his success and, as a result, is more confident.*

5. What are O-lan's responses to the following: Wang Lung's insistence on buying land from The House of Hwang; Wang Lung's attitude toward O-lan's second pregnancy; Wang Lung's desire for O-lan to work in the fields?

*Initially, O-lan does not agree with him about buying the land because it is too far away, but she later agrees. Wang Lung is irritable and fatigued from his work, and consequently becomes annoyed with her about the pregnancy. O-lan willingly works by his side in the fields.*

6. At this point what is your opinion of O-lan?

*Answers may vary.*

7. What is your opinion of the Ancient Mistress and the Old Master?

*Answers may vary. Example: The Ancient Mistress and the Old Master have become wasteful.*

8. Contrast the way things are run in Wang Lung and O-lan's household with the way things are run in The House of Hwang. Points of comparison could include attitude toward money, activities, and marriage.

*Wang Lung and O-lan are thrifty and are appalled by the wasteful spending that goes on in the House of Hwang.*

9. What conclusions may be drawn about the House of Hwang?

*Their wastefulness has led to loss. The family of Hwang is now in a position of having to sell their land, which is the source of their income.*



## Chapters 7 and 8

### Vocabulary

**lout**-an awkward, stupid person

**brazen**-loud sound

**berate**-to scold

**unctuous**-insincere earnest

**scanty**-insufficient

**beseeching**-begging for

**filial**-parent-child relationship

**piety**-showing reverence

**ardent**-strong enthusiasm

1. Describe your image of Wang Lung's uncle's wife.

*Answers may vary. Example: She is lazy and intimidating.*

2. How has Chinese custom influenced Wang Lung's response to his uncle? If you were in Wang Lung's position, how would you deal with this uncle? Explain how American custom influenced your response.

*The uncle was the younger brother of Wang Lung's father, and by all the claims of relationship he might depend on Wang Lung if he had not enough for himself and his family.*

3. Explain the foreshadowing at the end of chapter seven.

*The evil omen of crows circling over his head and cawing suggests that Nature, in her great power, will mock Wang Lung's plans.*

4. Explain the figurative language in the following description:

"But before sufficient clouds could gather for promise, a bitter wind rose out of the northwest, the acrid wind of the distant desert, and blew the clouds from the sky as one gathers dust from a floor with a broom. And the sky was empty and barren, and the stately sun rose each morning and made its march and set solitary each night. And the moon in its time shone like a lesser sun for clearness." (Pg. 70)

*Personification and simile are evident as the clouds gather and promise rain but are swept away by the wind. The sun marches across the clear sky where the moon is lit as bright as the sun.*

5. Wang Lung recognizes his dependence on the earth, yet tells himself that he is determined to succeed despite gods and drought, and buys more land from The House of Hwang. What contradiction do you see between what Wang Lung recognizes and what he tells himself?

*Wang Lung recognizes that in the force of nature humans lack control. He realizes that humans are acted on by nature and gods, yet he is determined to exercise control, and to exert his will in spite of circumstances. His actions suggest that humans do not easily accept being powerless.*

6. Given the situation, what do you predict will be the outcome of Wang Lung buying this land?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung's determination and willpower may be enough to conquer the fate of nature and gods. Hopefully he will be successful with the new land.*

7. Explain how Buck's description of the villagers coming to Wang Lung and O-lan's house is objective. Find another description that is objective and explain the objectivity.

*The narrator explains that when they visited, the men were ashamed and were not evil, except for when they starved. Answers may vary. Other objective descriptions include: Wang Lung's anger with his uncle, his secret purchase of land, O-lan's killing of the ox, and Wang Lung's sentimentality.*

8. Contrast Wang Lung and O-lan's ability to cope with the difficult circumstances. Points of comparison could be: attitude, knowledge, or strength. Considering your information, how do you explain their differences?

*O-lan has lived through a drought before; she is simply determined to survive. Wang Lung's response seems angrier because his great plans and dreams are being frustrated.*

9. Consider O-lan and Wang Lung's reaction to having a female child. What is your opinion of this attitude toward females?

*A sense of evil struck him when he learns he has a female child. O-lan calls the female child a slave and claims that she is not even worth mentioning.*

10. Comment on anything that disturbs you in these chapters.

*Answers may vary. Example: The reactions the couple has to having a female child may be disturbing considering current customs. There are also many horrors and effects of starvation.*

## Chapters 9 and 10

### Vocabulary

**imperturbable**-calm and composed

**scant**-inadequate

**quavered**-trembled

**desponding**-becoming discouraged

**hoarding**-reserving more than necessary

**allayed**-relieved

**retorted**-answered in a quick manner

**respite**-short period of rest

1. By the end of chapter ten, with what hopes are you left?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung hopes to return to his land, which may foreshadow prosperity in his future.*

2. In the narration of the birth of the fourth child, O-lan is described as creeping around the room afterwards, hiding the birth stains as an animal does. How do you react to that statement?

*Answers may vary. Example: O-lan is given animal characteristics in regards to her birthing behaviors. These traits may be seen as natural, since all female creatures give birth and demonstrate similar behaviors in the process. The traits may also be seen as offensive since she is creeping and hiding the birth.*

3. How does Buck's repeated mention of the impenetrable stillness that is everywhere create the atmosphere of this section?

*The atmosphere is one of despair and death; there is nothing anyone can do against the forces of nature.*

4. Read again the section that tells of the birth, death, and burial of the fourth child. The focus of the narration is Wang Lung's thoughts and feelings about what is happening. What effect does this focus have on you?

*Answers may vary. Example: The focus arouses sympathy for Wang Lung since he also sympathizes for his wife.*

5. What details indicate that O-lan killed the fourth child? What details indicate that the uncle has eaten his own children? Do you find these actions to be realistic?

*The child's bruised and broken neck indicate O-lan's involvement in the death. The uncle says that his three youngest children are gone, possibly meaning that he has eaten them.*

*Answers may vary to realism. Example: During times of crisis people appear to act irrational when making such drastic decisions. There are examples throughout time of family members sparing children for various reasons, such as during the Depression.*

6. What image do you have of the fire wagon?

*The fire wagon suggests box-like rooms that are moving, powered by fire and smoke.*

## Chapters 11 and 12

### Vocabulary

**bumpkin**-a country person

**caravan**-pack of animals

**haughty**-scornfully proud

**perpetual**-lasting forever

**haranguing**-giving a long speech

**millet**-a type of grass

**gorge**-throat

1. While reality reports life as it actually is, the comic is often mixed with the sad. Comment on what may be considered comical and what may be sad.

*Answers may vary. Examples: Wang Lung's father's comments about eating, the description of Wang Lung's father on the train, and Wang Lung's lack of sophistication as he deals with the city may all be considered comical. The fact that there were still wealthy people who had food, but did not share may be considered sad. There is enough food in the world for everyone, therefore, no person should be hungry.*

2. What, if anything, intrigues you about the great Chinese city?

*Answers may vary.*

3. Give specific details from the chapters to prove the following four statements about Wang Lung: living in the city is disturbing, the job of rickshaw-puller is extremely difficult, he is confused and uncomfortable about what goes on in the city, and ultimately seems to be in a hopeless position.

*Answers may vary. Examples: Living in the city is disturbing because while there is so much wealth in the city poverty persists and his sons are being corrupted. The job is difficult because he is not accustomed to pulling anything and he has no knowledge of the city, the fares, or the money. He is confused and uncomfortable because he also has little understanding of the people and thinks of himself as a foreigner. He does not fully understand that rice is available in public kitchens to prevent the poor from rebelling. Ultimately he is in a hopeless position since he can earn very little money, has difficulty communicating, and all doors and gateways are closed to him.*

4. Although O-lan and Wang Lung continue to work together, there are now differences between them. State how O-lan is different from Wang Lung in their approaches to getting things done, their attitudes, and their values.

*Answers may vary. Examples: In their approaches to getting things done, O-lan is more practical as she knows how to construct the hut from mats. In regards to their attitudes, O-lan seems better able to accept their situation. She is willing to beg while Wang Lung will not. Wang Lung questions the rule that prevents him from bringing rice home from the public kitchens. When it comes to values, O-lan is opposed to her sons stealing and she is determined to survive in any way she can.*

5. What details in these chapters foreshadow the Boxer Rebellion?

*Wang Lung hears people speaking about fighting against the hated foreigners.*

6. Briefly point out the difference between Wang Lung's sons.

*The older son is timid and ashamed to beg while the younger son is pleased with his ability to steal. The younger son likes having money.*

7. Comment on the following description of the wall against which Wang Lung's hut leans. "It stretched out long and grey and very high, and against the base the small mat sheds clung like fleas to a dogs back." (Pg. 97)

*The size difference between the wall and the shed is similar to that of a dog and a flea. The image suggests that the sheds cling like parasites to the wall. From the description, the reader infers that the proximity of the poor people is an annoyance to the rich, as they are like fleas to a dog.*

## Chapters 13 and 14

### Vocabulary

opulence-great abundance

sumptuous-suggesting great expense

repose-being at a state of rest

thrice-three times

indifferently-having no interest or concern

leprous-relating to the disease leprosy

scythe-tool used for cutting

rebuking-punishing; scolding

downtrodden-oppressed

cur-cowardly person; an undesirable dog

1. Buck provides the reader with contrasting images of wealth and poverty. Find words and images that describe both the rich and poor people on the following points: physical appearance, facial expressions, clothing, food, activities, and homes.

*Answers may vary. Examples: The rich are depicted as fat, while the poor are bony and have knotted muscles. One rich person's eyes are lost in fat, oily, yellow skin, while the eyes of the poor are twisted from straining. The rich wear clothing made of silks, furs, and colored cloth while the poor wear barely enough to cover their bones. The rich have food spilling out of markets while the poor eat rice and cabbage. The rich are sitting while the poor push, pull, and work. The rich live in walled palaces while the poor have hovels of mats.*

2. List five details that increase Wang Lung's desperation.

*Answers may vary. Examples: His desperation increases as he agonizes over the idea of selling his daughter, when he sees soldiers seize men, during his night job pulling wagon, as he weeps and longs for his land, and at the sight of the rich fleeing the city while there is no food nor work for the poor.*

3. In chapter 14 Wang Lung listens to a group of ragged men who discuss what they would do if they had money. What would they do, and why do they rebuke Wang Lung?

*The men say that if they were wealthy, they would do all the things the rich are presently doing, such as eating, sleeping, gambling, and visiting prostitutes. They rebuke him when Wang Lung says he would continue to work the land.*

4. They tell Wang Lung that he is ignorant because he does not understand the view that if the rich would share what they have, all have money or food. What do the impoverished men not understand?

*None of the men seem to have the slightest conception of their dependence on nature for food while Wang Lung does.*

5. What do the impoverished men see as the solution to their poverty and oppression? What does Wang Lung see as the solution?

*The poor are planning to storm the gates of the rich; Wang Lung wants to return to his land.*

6. What is your opinion of the solution presented here?

*Answers may vary. Example: Some of the men who are storming the gates don't realize it is a temporary solution.*

7. What action did Wang Lung take? In your opinion, did he go too far?

*It was in desperation that Wang Lung stole. Answers may vary on opinion. Example: In demanding all of the gold that the man had, he goes too far.*

8. What is your reaction to the practice of forcing men to become soldiers?

*In taking men against their will, their families are left to starve or survive in anyway possible.*

9. What is your opinion of O-lan for her willingness to sell her daughter into slavery? What in your cultural background influences your opinion? How might having the Chinese cultural background of this era be influencing Wang Lung and O-lan?

*Selling female children into slavery was a common practice. In many cases, these girls and their families would have died otherwise. Answers may vary on opinions.*

10. Wang Lung is given two pictures, which he puzzles over. What are the pictures? What does Wang Lung's reaction to these pictures suggest to you?

*Wang Lung is given a picture of the crucifixion of Christ and a picture depicting a fat wealthy man stabbing a poor worker. It is difficult to convey ideas, political or religious, to a person struggling for survival.*

11. What is there about the way Buck reports these activities that lead us to say her style is objective?

*Pearl Buck makes no judgment on any of the activities and reports the actions of the rich and the poor. Events are shown as a causal chain in which people are swept up.*

## Chapters 15 and 16

### Vocabulary

**castrated**-an animal removed of its sexual organs (testes or ovaries)

**cultivate**-to prepare land for crops

**furrow**-a trench made from a plow

**agape**-with the mouth open

**shrewish**-ill-tempered

**contempt**-treating someone as inferior

**musings**-engaging in meditation

**proverb**-a widespread saying used to express truth or teaching

1. Give examples to prove that Wang Lung is no longer as frugal as he once was. How can this change be explained?

*Answers may vary. Example: He doesn't bargain for the ox and he buys furniture, a fancy teapot, and red candles. Perhaps, since Wang Lung did not earn this gold, he is careless with it.*

2. What about Wang Lung's character has stayed the same? Consider the focus of his activities and his relationship with Ching.

*Wang Lung still loves to work on his land. He is determined that his sons will learn to love the land and to know their dependence on it. Wang Lung took the jewels to the House of Hwang to purchase more land. Wang Lung is still responsible and thoughtful. He shares seeds with Ching and helps Ching plow his land.*

3. Explain what is significant about the interaction between O-lan and Wang Lung over the jewels. Do you think Wang Lung was right to take them?

*Wang Lung indulges O-lan in allowing her to keep the two pearls. We are told he looks into her heart, and is moved by something he does not understand. This may be seen as an act of love or appreciation. O-lan's submission is natural due to the culture and time. Wang Lung seems to have no problem taking the stolen property; this is something he had objected to earlier.*

4. What do you learn about the bandits that roamed China at this time?

*The war and famine lead to lawless chaos, making a person's property insecure. The description of the bandits' actions in the House of Hwang reveals that they did more than steal, since women were raped and carried off while the Old Lord was hung by the thumbs and beaten.*



5. What is your opinion of Cuckoo? Point out details that characterize her.

*Wang Lung's conclusion is that Cuckoo was a woman who clung to an old and dying man because of what last thing she might get from him. Her sharpness and shrill voice are distinctive features.*

6. Why does Wang Lung allow O-lan to have the jewels she wanted?

*Although he would not be able to explain or understand it, Wang Lung recognized O-lan's faithfulness and rewarded it with the jewels.*

## Chapters 17 and 18

### Vocabulary

boisterously-loudly

subsist-to exist

paltry-lacking worth

proprietor-an owner of a business

dotard-person experiencing mental deterioration

pendulous-hanging loosely; swinging

reproach-to express disparagement

tendril-structure that supports vine-like plants

1. What in these chapters may be disturbing?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung is harsh and critical to O-lan, as he has become arrogant and restless. He starts to visit the new teahouse in town and Cuckoo entices him with the idea of a prostitute upstairs.*

2. What factors lead to Wang Lung and his sons losing their connection to the land?

*Wang Lung took his sons out of the fields and put them in school. Flooding prevents Wang Lung from working, so he is idle in his house.*

3. Cite incidents or observations from the novel to prove the following statement: at this point, Wang Lung's pride motivates much of his actions.

*Answers may vary. Examples: He is humiliated in town when he transacts business because he can't read or write. As a result of his humiliation, he stops his sons from working in the fields and sends them to school. He soon believes that he is too good for the teahouse he has always gone to. He feels that as a prosperous landowner he should have a prettier wife and has become dissatisfied with his simple life.*

4. As a parent, what mistake does Wang Lung make with his second son?

*Wang Lung allows his second son to leave work in the fields and go to school with his brother because the boy cries and complains. Wang Lung cannot bear the noise of crying and would give the child anything if he cried loudly enough. In the future the boy will cry to get his way.*

5. What similarity do you notice between Ching and O-lan?

*They have suffered great sorrow and are completely faithful to Wang Lung. They also work gladly and prefer silence.*

6. After being angry with O-lan over her lack of beauty, Wang Lung says, “Well, and I will go to the tea shop and see if I can hear anything new. There is nothing in my house except fools, a dotard and two children!” (Pg. 171) What does he mean? What is your reaction to Wang Lung’s comment?

*Wang Lung’s father is senile, his oldest daughter is retarded, and O-lan is foolish. He is disappointed with his wife’s lack of beauty and his simple life so he searches for something more to satisfy himself.*

7. At the end of Chapter 18, what does it appear will happen?

*It seems that Wang Lung is going to start cheating on his wife.*

8. In your opinion, is Wang Lung in control of the circumstances of his life? What is determining his circumstances?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung can not control the floods, and as a vigorous man he can’t help his restlessness. He exercises control by acting selfishly.*

## Chapter 19 and 20

### Vocabulary

**imploringly**-urgently begging

**slavishly**-having the characteristics of a slave

**repine**-to be discontented; to complain

**superintended**-supervised

**comfit**-a sugar-coated pastry

**loafers**-people who are habitually idle

**indolent**-lazy

**prodigally**-extravagantly wasteful

1. What, in your opinion, determines Wang Lung's decision to have an affair with Lotus?

*Answers may vary. Examples: The land stays flooded, and Wang Lung has nothing to occupy his time. When Cuckoo says he is only a farmer, he wants to prove that he has enough money to do as other men. Lotus is beautiful; Wang Lung had desired a pretty wife, but until now, had been too poor to have what was beautiful.*

2. The reader describes Wang Lung's love affair with Lotus as a sickness. "It was though a man, dying of thirst, drank the salt water of the sea which, though it is water, yet dries his blood into thirst and yet greater thirst so that in the end he dies, maddened by his very drinking. He went in to her and he had his will of her again and again and he came away unsatisfied." (Pg. 183) How does Wang Lung's love affair with Lotus contrast to his relationship with O-lan? Explain Wang Lung's misery. What resolves this sickness? What is your opinion of the resolution?

*Answers may vary. Examples: There is no real commitment between Lotus and Wang Lung as there was between O-lan and Wang Lung. The union between O-lan and Wang Lung was based on mutual respect and an ability to work together. He only hires Lotus and must buy her with silver and jewels. Wang Lung's attraction to Lotus is superficial, as he is fixated by her beauty. Wang Lung is finally satisfied when he buys Lotus and moves her into his house at great expense.*

3. What does the incident with the pearls suggest to you?

*Answers may vary. Examples: Wang Lung's betrayal of O-lan is complete and he has hardened his heart to her. Wang Lung has become so obsessed with Lotus that he will do anything to buy her continued love.*

4. What is your response to Wang Lung's uncle? Why does Wang Lung support him?

*Answers may vary on response. Wang Lung is obligated to care for his uncle according to Chinese custom and supports the uncle because he does not want to lose the respect of the people in the village.*

5. When Wang Lung seethes with anger over having to take in his uncle and his uncle's wife and son, what wisdom does O-lan offer him? In what way does O-lan follow her own advice? What is your opinion of this advice?

*O-lan tells him not to be angry. Although O-lan is deeply pained by Wang Lung's love of Lotus, she goes on with her work, accepting what can't be changed.*

6. How do you feel about O-lan?

*Answers may vary. Example: For the first time O-lan weeps aloud, causing the reader to feel sympathy for her.*

7. What images do you have of Lotus and her apartment?

*Answers may vary. Examples: Images of royalty appear in the description of Lotus in her apartment. There is a large goldfish pool and delicate foods. She is bathed in perfume and oils. Lotus is supported when she walks or carried on a sedan chair because of her little feet.*

8. What is your opinion of Wang Lung's uncle's wife?

*Answers may vary. Example: She makes insightful comments about Wang Lung's behavior and about Lotus' age, as well as to the perfume and paint.*

## Chapters 21 and 22

### Vocabulary

sundered-broken into parts

harlot-female prostitute

petulant-peevisish

betrothed-engaged

melancholy-gloomy

1. Point out the reason for O-lan's anger and how she deals with her problem. Why is O-lan's method effective?

*O-lan is angry because Cuckoo has come into her home. Cuckoo had been abusive to O-lan when they were both slaves in the House of Hwang. When O-lan confronts Wang Lung and tells him how she feels, he cannot answer, and as a result, O-lan makes the kitchen unavailable to Cuckoo. When Wang Lung tries to force O-lan into compliance, she reminds him of the pearls, and he is filled with shame. Wang Lung builds a separate kitchen for Cuckoo so that O-lan does not have to deal with her.*

2. Give several of the reasons that Wang Lung's love for Lotus cools.

*Answers may vary. Examples: He has to spend money continuously to keep Cuckoo, Lotus, and his uncles' wife supplied with delicate foods. Lotus and his uncle's wife become friends. Lotus considers Wang Lung's children a plague and is especially cruel to the poor fool. Lotus is prone to temper fits and Wang Lung feels anxiety as he tries to keep his father and children from angering her. The floodwaters recede and Wang Lung returns to working his land and is healed of his obsession with Lotus.*

3. What do you find comical in these chapters?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung's father demonstrates his hatred of Lotus.*

4. What wisdom does O-lan offer Wang Lung about the melancholy of their older son? What is Wang Lung's solution?

*O-lan points out that the older son is like a young lord who is idle in the house and, consequently, his energy is often directed toward the female slaves. Wang Lung recognizes the truth of what she says, but is proud that his son can be idle. He decides to arrange an early marriage for his son.*

5. Cite details to support the following statements: Wang Lung is constantly struggling to find peace in the midst of family conflict, and he is proud as a result of his achievements.

*Answers may vary. Examples: Wang Lung has to continually appease Lotus as he tries to control his son to prevent conflict. The people in the village admire Wang Lung's prosperity and possessions, especially the beautiful woman in his inner court. They now seek his counsel. He is proud of his scholarly son and feels that Ching's daughter would not be good enough for his son.*

6. What contradictions do you find in Wang Lung's attitude toward his son?

*Wang Lung finds health in his labor and continues to value life close to the land. At the same time, he feels that his son is above this lifestyle. Wang Lung has a woman for pleasure, but refuses O-lan's suggestion to buy a slave for his son as the Old Lord in the House of Hwang did to quiet the melancholy of his sons.*

## Chapters 23 and 24

### Vocabulary

**begrudging**-giving with reluctance

**tallow**-fat from animals or plants

**fermented**- alcohol which is produced by chemical reactions

**scampish**-like a rascal

**marauded**-raided

**magistrate**-a civil officer

**pinning**-desiring

**gaunt**-bony

1. What are the causes of Wang Lung's displays of anger? Do you think his anger is justified? Does he accomplish anything with his rage?

*Wang Lung displays anger when his uncle's son leads Wang Lung's oldest son to a prostitute. Wang Lung tells his uncle to leave. Wang Lung's uncle intimidates him with the fact that he is a member of a band of robbers. Without his uncle's protection, Wang Lung's home would be raided. He also furiously beats the locusts that attack his crops. When Wang Lung finds his son with Lotus, he beats them also and sends his son away. In his rage against the locusts, he spares the best fields.*

2. Compare Wang Lung's response to the locusts and the responses of the other men in his attitude, behavior, and outcome.

*Wang Lung is determined to destroy the locusts while the other men felt hopeless from the start. Wang Lung and his men set fields on fire to burn the locusts. Then he beat and trampled on the locusts and his men flailed them with fire while the other men did nothing. Wang Lung saved his best crops while the others did not.*

3. What is your opinion of Wang Lung's oldest son and Wang Lung's treatment of him?

*Answers may vary. Example: He may be seen as spoiled or justified in his rebellion against his controlling father.*

4. For which character do you have the most sympathy?

*Answers may vary. Example: O-lan appears to be sick although Wang Lung doesn't even notice. Wang Lung is betrayed by people whom he treated with generosity. Wang Lung's oldest son, because his father, will not allow him to leave and study in the southern city.*

5. From your own life experiences, what are the common issues Wang Lung deals with that many people share?

*Answers may vary. Example: Some possible common issues are: betrayal by relatives and loved ones, conflict with his sons, an unwillingness to face the possibility that his lover was unfaithful, and a desire for peace in his home.*

6. Give details to prove that Wang Lung's continued pride is apparent in his changed attitude toward the earth gods.

*He no longer pays attention to them or feels he needs them. We are told that he stopped burning incense to them.*

## Chapter 25 and 26

### Vocabulary

apprentice-learner of a trade

dowry-money or items a bride takes to her husband for marriage

wretch-a miserable or despicable person

acquiescent-without protest

zeal-enthusiastic devotion

abbot-the superior at a monastery

distraught-deeply agitated

1. What detail of Chinese burial and wedding ceremonies are present? What similarities and differences do you see between American and Chinese ceremonies?

*Answers may vary. Examples: In the wedding, brides wear red dresses with white undergarments. Hair is removed to create a high forehead and eyebrows are drawn on. The bride is submissive while the older women prepare her. Marriage is signified by the mingling and eating of rice and wine. In the burial, geomancers are used to find a lucky day for burial. Mourning is indicated by wearing coarse white cloth while priests chant and beat drums through the night for the dead. In a procession to the burial place, family members are carried in chairs. Answers may vary on similarities and differences. Examples: Rituals are observed, specific preparations made, religious ceremonies used, and elaborate food was served at weddings. On the day of the wedding, it is considered bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the ceremony.*

2. What other Chinese customs are brought out in these chapters?

*Other customs include the father's participation in vocational and marriage arrangements. The oldest son had not even met his bride before the marriage. The painful practice of foot binding to be deemed attractive.*

3. What about O-lan's death saddens you?

*Answers may vary. Example: When O-lan was dying and delirious, she expressed the pain and rejection that she felt during her life. Wang Lung tried to comfort O-lan but even in his sorrow, he was repulsed by her. He did not realize the comfort O-lan had given him and the family until after she was dying.*

4. What was Wang Lung's greatest regret about O-lan?

*He wished he had not taken the two pearls from O-lan. When Wang Lung reflects on his lack of love for O-lan and his feeling of unease about her, he tells himself that he had always been a good husband to her and better than most because he had not beat her. He also gave her silver when she asked for it.*

5. What is your opinion of Wang Lung's kindness to O-lan as she dies?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung is attempting to make up for the fact that he feels no tenderness for O-lan. It is unfortunate that he waited this long to be kind. It is possible to act kindly without feeling attraction, love, or tenderness.*

6. At this point in the novel, what do you predict the future will hold for each of Wang Lung's family members?

*We are told that the eldest son and his wife seem content with each other. The second son was placed as an apprentice to Liu in the grain market. The poor fool must be cared for by Wang Lung because the others don't care for her.*

*The third son is to be the farmer, according to Wang Lung's plan, and the second daughter is betrothed to Liu's son. Lotus has become submissive to Wang Lung since he beat her. Wang Lung's uncle's wife enjoys her involvement in the family affairs.*



## Chapters 27 and 28

### Vocabulary

eddies-currents of water that move in opposition to the main current

dykes-barriers blocking water

goaded-urged

serf-laborer who works on the land of a lord in return for certain rights

vigor-enthusiasm

buxom-healthy, plump figure

verandas-partially enclosed porch

dais-a raised platform

1. Over Wang Lung's lifetime, one of his greatest desires was for peace in his house. What causes the trouble in Wang Lung's house?

*During the present famine, Wang Lung had to cut back on Cuckoo's spending, which led to quarrels.*

*Since Wang Lung's uncle's wife did not have the delicacies she had previously enjoyed, she complained to her husband, who put pressure on Wang Lung to provide them with more. Wang Lung had no choice but to give in because he realized robbers would attack him if he were without his uncle's protection.*

*Wang Lung's eldest son and his cousin, the son the son of Wang Lung's uncle, had become enemies because the cousin was continually peeping at the eldest son's wife.*

*The uncle's son groped Wang Lung's 13-year-old daughter, forcing Wang Lung to ask Lui if the girl could stay in his home for protection.*

*The uncle's son continued to cause dissension in the house by lounging about and peeping at the women in the inner courts, which now included slaves that Wang Lung had bought from starving families.*

2. Compare and contrast the response of Ching and Wang Lung toward an expected flood.

*Ching's attitude is timid and fearful. He has left the consequences to heaven and accepts the flood and drought with meekness.*

*Wang Lung is determined to plant and save whatever rice crops he can. He is angry and curses the old man in heaven.*

3. Wang Lung's oldest son presents Wang Lung with suggestions for dealing with his uncle and cousin. Evaluate the three suggestions.

*First, the oldest son suggests killing them, but Wang Lung refuses. The second solution, which Wang Lung chooses, is to buy them opium, making them harmless. Third, the eldest son persuades his father to rent the inner courts of the house of the Hwangs.*

4. Evaluate Wang Lung as a parent. Consider how Wang Lung deals with each of his children.

*It seems that Wang Lung has paid more attention to the oldest son. Wang Lung feels sorry that he had neglected to arrange a marriage for his second son. However, he is impressed by this son's wisdom and business sense; Wang Lung consults the second son about renting the inner courts. Wang Lung had decided that his third son would be a farmer and took him whenever he went on the land. He did not notice that his son walked with his head downcast and had a sullen look on his face. Wang Lung is protective and caring toward both his daughters.*

5. What is realistic about the story of the magistrate?

*Answers may vary. Example: The magistrate story demonstrates realistic qualities as it mentions stories of public officials who do not keep promises and keep funds for their own use.*

6. Do you think Wang Lung should rent the Hwang inner courts?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung and his sons are moving away from the land, and although he reminds the oldest son that the land has made him better than a farmer's son, Wang Lung is secretly proud of him.*

## Chapters 29 and 30

### Vocabulary

repented-having felt remorse

unduly-excessively

stout-fat

lagging-failing

lewdness-lustful; obscene

urn-container used to hold a person's remains

inheritance-land or money that is given after death

paltry-lacking worth

parsimony-extremely frugal

1. Support the following statements: Wang Lung and his family have left their old life close to the land, and Wang Lung's oldest son does not seem to grasp the meaning of his father's view of their dependence on the land.

*Answers may vary. Examples: They have left the ways of the land since they all live in the Hwang house. Wang Lung has given his third son permission to go his own way, away from the land. Wang Lung has rented out all of his land because Ching has died and Wang Lung is too old to care for things.*

*Answers may vary. Examples: The oldest son continues to focus on spending money to impress others and his greatest concern is doing what great families do in terms of customs and outward appearances.*

2. Give reasons for the following statements: Although Wang Lung yearns for peace, he cannot have peace in his own household, and Wang Lung's sons manipulate him.

*Answers may vary. Examples: The older son continues to make demands on his father. The older son and the second son do not get along, and they bring their differences to Wang Lung.*

*Answers may vary. Examples: His sons have become too much for him in his old age and now he lets them have their way once his anger passes. The older son realizes Wang Lung's concern for the opinions of others.*

3. Compare the scene of the birth of Wang Lung's first grandchild with the scene of the birth of his first child. Points of comparison could be the activity in the household, Wang Lung's response, and the behavior of the woman who is giving birth.

*O-lan insisted on being alone and was quiet, while Wang Lung's daughter-in-law had many in attendance and cried out in pain. During both births Wang Lung was anxious. O-lan had prepared meals for Wang Lung before she gave birth. However, while his daughter-in-law gave birth, Wang Lung's needs went unmet.*

4. What do you find sad in these chapters?

*Answers may vary. Examples: The death of Ching, Wang Lung's inability to find peace, and the sons' lack of recognition of the source of their wealth are sad occasions.*

5. What is your opinion of the pride Wang Lung and his sons feel?

*Answers may vary. Example: The older son expresses feelings of superiority.*

6. Compare and contrast the first and the second son of Wang Lung. Identify three points of comparison.

*Possible points of comparison are attitude toward others, attitude toward money, and interactions with Wang Lung.*

*The elder son uses money to assert authority; he enjoys spending to impress others. The second son is practical and enjoys saving money. In spite of their differences, both love money. They go to Wang Lung with their problems, although the older son is far more emotional in his attempts to influence his father.*

## Chapters 31 and 32

### Vocabulary

horde-a large group; swarm

implement-tool; equipment

uncomely-not keeping with the accepted standards of society

pertly-boldly

coquettishly-in a flirtatious manner

wench-peasant girl

expenditure-an expense

awry-amiss or askew

rapt-enchanted

1. What is your reaction to the situations with Pear Blossom?

*Answers may vary. Example: Pear Blossom has no rights and is only protected by Wang Lung's pity for her. Wang Lung is attracted to her.*

2. In a conversation with his father, the third son says he has dreams and wishes for glory. Describe the importance of these goals and how they relate to his character.

*The boy is an idealist. He wants to join the army and fight for freedom. He will not be pacified by his father's offer as his brothers were.*

3. Explain the following figurative language: “in his courts the [the soldiers] poured like evil filthy water, filling every corner and crack...” (Pg. 324)

*The language compares the soldiers to water, depicting them as evil, dirty, and inescapable.*

4. Describe your impression of these soldiers in Wang Lung's courts.

*They are ignorant, destructive, and dangerous.*

5. Why, again, is Wang Lung unable to find peace in his home?

*The elder and second sons are at odds with their wives. Lotus is angry because Wang Lung protected Pear Blossom. The third son is angry because his father does not understand his dreams and rebukes his interest in Pear Blossom.*

6. The narrator tells us that Wang Lung was just to all. What is your opinion of this view of Wang Lung?

*Answers may vary. Example: Wang Lung is too indulgent and softhearted. He may also be viewed as controlling.*

7. What do you find comical or pleasing in these chapters?

*Answers will vary.*

## Chapters 33 and 34

### Vocabulary

**begrudge**-to give with reluctance

**interest**-payment for borrowed money

**tenant**-occupant

**requited**-made repayment

**vaguely**-indistinctly

1. What was Wang Lung's focus during his last years? What is the significance of this focus?

*Wang Lung returns to his original home on the earth. His work and closeness to the land brought him more joy than the wealth he acquired.*

2. What do you see as the significance of the final scene of the novel in which Wang Lung overhears his sons plan to sell land?

*Wang Lung could not make them understand their dependence on the land, and they never acquired the same love for it that he had.*

3. Why might Pearl Buck's description of Wang Lung's relationship with Pear Blossom be described as objective? Consider the novel's point of view.

*The reader sees the relationship from many perspectives as the reader is told what Wang Lung thinks of his own behavior and hears the dialogue between Wang Lung and Pear Blossom, Wang Lung and Cuckoo, and Wang Lung and his sons about the relationship.*

*As a result, Wang Lung sees himself as disgraceful, but at the same time, he is proud and he reminds himself that as a rich man, he can do as he wishes. He tries to release Pear Blossom from the quiet life with an old man, but she insists that he is what she wants. Only the youngest son refuses to accept the relationship.*

4. Do you think Pear Blossom's relationship with Wang Lung is her choice? What is your opinion of this relationship?

*Answers will vary.*

5. What is foreshadowed by the elder son's response to Wang Lung's relationship to Pear Blossom?

*He is touched with envy and eventually takes a second wife.*

6. Why is Wang Lung content with the idea of his own death?

*He would return to the land and the cycle of life would be complete.*

7. During the last years of his life, Wang Lung gets his information about his family from Cuckoo and Pear Blossom. What conclusions can you draw from this fact?

*Wang Lung is lonely, as he is not close to his children or to Lotus. His age creates a distance.*

8. Do you think the choices Wang Lung's sons have made in their lives are a result of their own will? Explain.

*Answers may vary. Example: Each son has a distinct set of concerns, goals, and motivations. As a result, this can be seen as exercising choices and their own free will.*

# *The Good Earth*

## Study Guide Student Copy

### Chapters 1 and 2

#### Vocabulary

**fruition**-accomplishment; bearing fruit  
**thatched**-roofing made of plant material  
**cauldron**-vessel used for boiling water  
**gruel**-thin, watery porridge  
**guffaw**-burst of laughter  
**impudence**-offensive, bold behavior  
**obeisances**-body movements or gestures  
**volubly**-fluently  
**demurring**-voicing objection  
**articulate**-to express with words  
**zenith**-summit; upper region in the sky  
**contrived**-obviously planned  
**stolid**-impassive

1. What is the setting for the novel? Describe the images you have of Wang Lung's farm, his house, the city, and the House of Hwang.
2. What is the point of view in the novel? What effect does knowing these thoughts have on the reader?
3. Characterize Wang Lung by his personality traits, his attitude and his values. How do you feel about Wang Lung?

4. How has Wang Lung's poverty as a farmer influenced his character?
5. Describe Wang Lung's relationship with his father.
6. What is your opinion of the wife's role at this time in China?
7. Do you think that O-lan and Wang Lung love each other?
8. What is the cause for the sadness in O-lan's eyes and her silence?
9. Point out parts in these chapters that you found humorous.
10. What aspects are realistic in these chapters?



## Chapters 3 and 4

## Vocabulary

mar-to inflict disfiguring damage

gilded-covered to make attractive

malignant-inclined to do evil

flails-manual threshing tools

chaff-worthless matter

frugal-careful spending

**hemp-cord** or cloth made from the cannabis plant

1. How can Wang Lung's prosperity be explained?
2. As O-lan and Wang Lung plan for the birth of their child, in what ways is O-lan like most women; in what ways is she unusual?
3. Characterize O-lan's personality, attitudes, and values.

4. Name several Chinese customs that are evident in the novel. Which of these activities and attitudes are similar to what Americans express and share?
5. What, if anything, is there about Wang Lung and O-lan's life and marriage that appeals to you?
6. Explain Wang Lung's thoughts on his silver.
7. In the description of O-lan nursing the baby in the field, what image comes to your mind's eye?

## Chapters 5 and 6

### Vocabulary

**mottoes**-brief statements

**millstones**-stones used to grind grain

**haws**-fumbles in speech

**concubine**-a woman who is contracted to a man as a second wife, often having low status and few rights

**consternation**-paralyzing dismay

**maliciously**-deliberately spiteful

**hoary**-ancient; grey or white

**arduous**-strenuous

**placid**-calm

1. As you read these chapters, what pleased you?
2. What image do you have of Wang Lung's good luck rituals? Do you believe in the concept of good luck? What, in your opinion, creates success?
3. The people in the village are now treating Wang Lung in a much different way, especially the gatekeeper. How do you explain their change in attitude?
4. What changes do you see in Wang Lung? State how your feelings toward him have changed.

5. What are O-lan's responses to the following: Wang Lung's insistence on buying land from The House of Hwang; Wang Lung's attitude toward O-lan's second pregnancy; Wang Lung's desire for O-lan to work in the fields?
6. At this point what is your opinion of O-lan?
7. What is your opinion of the Ancient Mistress and the Old Master?
8. Contrast the way things are run in Wang Lung and O-lan's household with the way things are run in The House of Hwang. Points of comparison could include attitude toward money, activities, and marriage.
9. What conclusions may be drawn about the House of Hwang?

## Chapters 7 and 8

### Vocabulary

**lout**-an awkward, stupid person

**brazen**-loud sound

**berate**-to scold

**unctuous**-insincere earnest

**scanty**-insufficient

**beseeching**-begging for

**filial**-parent-child relationship

**piety**-showing reverence

**ardent**-strong enthusiasm

1. Describe your image of Wang Lung's uncle's wife.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How has Chinese custom influenced Wang Lung's response to his uncle? If you were in Wang Lung's position, how would you deal with this uncle? Explain how American custom influenced your response.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Explain the foreshadowing at the end of chapter seven.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Explain the figurative language in the following description:  
  
"But before sufficient clouds could gather for promise, a bitter wind rose out of the northwest, the acrid wind of the distant desert, and blew the clouds from the sky as one gathers dust from a floor with a broom. And the sky was empty and barren, and the stately sun rose each morning and made its march and set solitary each night. And the moon in its time shone like a lesser sun for clearness." (Pg. 70)

5. Wang Lung recognizes his dependence on the earth, yet tells himself that he is determined to succeed despite gods and drought, and buys more land from The House of Hwang. What contradiction do you see between what Wang Lung recognizes and what he tells himself?
6. Given the situation, what do you predict will be the outcome of Wang Lung buying this land?
7. Explain how Buck's description of the villagers coming to Wang Lung and O-lan's house is objective. Find another description that is objective and explain the objectivity.
8. Contrast Wang Lung and O-lan's ability to cope with the difficult circumstances. Points of comparison could be: attitude, knowledge, or strength. Considering your information, how do you explain their differences?
9. Consider O-lan and Wang Lung's reaction to having a female child. What is your opinion of this attitude toward females?
10. Comment on anything that disturbs you in these chapters.

## Chapters 9 and 10

### Vocabulary

**imperturbable**-calm and composed

**scant**-inadequate

**quavered**-trembled

**desponding**-becoming discouraged

**hoarding**-reserving more than necessary

**allayed**-relieved

**retorted**-answered in a quick manner

**respite**-short period of rest

1. By the end of chapter ten, with what hopes are you left?
2. In the narration of the birth of the fourth child, O-lan is described as creeping around the room afterwards, hiding the birth stains as an animal does. How do you react to that statement?
3. How does Buck's repeated mention of the impenetrable stillness that is everywhere create the atmosphere of this section?

- S-10



## Chapters 11 and 12

### Vocabulary

**bumpkin**-a country person

**caravan**-pack of animals

**haughty**-scornfully proud

**perpetual**-lasting forever

**haranguing**-giving a long speech

**millet**-a type of grass

**gorge**-throat

1. While reality reports life as it actually is, the comic is often mixed with the sad. Comment on what may be considered comical and what may be sad.
2. What, if anything, intrigues you about the great Chinese city?
3. Give specific details from the chapters to prove the following four statements about Wang Lung: living in the city is disturbing, the job of rickshaw-puller is extremely difficult, he is confused and uncomfortable about what goes on in the city, and ultimately seems to be in a hopeless position.

4. Although O-lan and Wang Lung continue to work together, there are now differences between them. State how O-lan is different from Wang Lung in their approaches to getting things done, their attitudes, and their values.
5. What details in these chapters foreshadow the Boxer Rebellion?
6. Briefly point out the difference between Wang Lung's sons.
7. Comment on the following description of the wall against which Wang Lung's hut leans. "It stretched out long and grey and very high, and against the base the small mat sheds clung like fleas to a dogs back." (Pg. 97)

## Chapters 13 and 14

### Vocabulary

**opulence**-great abundance

**sumptuous**-suggesting great expense

**repose**-being at a state of rest

**thrice**-three times

**indifferently**-having no interest or concern

**leprous**-relating to the disease leprosy

**scythe**-tool used for cutting

**rebuking**-punishing; scolding

**downtrodden**-oppressed

**cur**-cowardly person; an undesirable dog

1. Buck provides the reader with contrasting images of wealth and poverty. Find words and images that describe both the rich and poor people on the following points: physical appearance, facial expressions, clothing, food, activities, and homes.
2. List five details that increase Wang Lung's desperation.
3. In chapter 14 Wang Lung listens to a group of ragged men who discuss what they would do if they had money. What would they do, and why do they rebuke Wang Lung?
4. They tell Wang Lung that he is ignorant because he does not understand the view that if the rich would share what they have, all have money or food. What do the impoverished men not understand?

5. What do the impoverished men see as the solution to their poverty and oppression?  
What does Wang Lung see as the solution?
6. What is your opinion of the solution presented here?
7. What action did Wang Lung take? In your opinion, did he go too far?
8. What is your reaction to the practice of forcing men to become soldiers?
9. What is your opinion of O-lan for her willingness to sell her daughter into slavery?  
What in your cultural background influences your opinion? How might having the Chinese cultural background of this era be influencing Wang Lung and O-lan?
10. Wang Lung is given two pictures, which he puzzles over. What are the pictures? What does Wang Lung's reaction to these pictures suggest to you?
11. What is there about the way Buck reports these activities that lead us to say her style is objective?

## Chapters 15 and 16

### Vocabulary

**castrated**-an animal removed of its sexual organs (testes or ovaries)

**cultivate**-to prepare land for crops

**furrow**-a trench made from a plow

**agape**-with the mouth open

**shrewish**-ill-tempered

**contempt**-treating someone as inferior

**musings**-engaging in meditation

**proverb**-a widespread saying used to express truth or teaching

1. Give examples to prove that Wang Lung is no longer as frugal as he once was. How can this change be explained?
2. What about Wang Lung's character has stayed the same? Consider the focus of his activities and his relationship with Ching.
3. Explain what is significant about the interaction between O-lan and Wang Lung over the jewels. Do you think Wang Lung was right to take them?
4. What do you learn about the bandits that roamed China at this time?
5. What is your opinion of Cuckoo? Point out details that characterize her.
6. Why does Wang Lung allow O-lan to have the jewels she wanted?

## Chapters 17 and 18

## Vocabulary

boisterously-loudly

subsist-to exist

paltry-lacking worth

proprietor-an owner of a business

dotard-person experiencing mental deterioration

pendulous-hanging loosely; swinging

reproach-to express disparagement

tendrils-structure that supports vine-like plants

1. What in these chapters may be disturbing?
2. What factors lead to Wang Lung and his sons losing their connection to the land?
3. Cite incidents or observations from the novel to prove the following statement: at this point, Wang Lung's pride motivates much of his actions.
4. As a parent, what mistake does Wang Lung make with his second son?

5. What similarity do you notice between Ching and O-lan?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. After being angry with O-lan over her lack of beauty, Wang Lung says, “Well, and I will go to the tea shop and see if I can hear anything new. There is nothing in my house except fools, a dotard and two children!” (Pg. 171) What does he mean? What is your reaction to Wang Lung’s comment?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. At the end of Chapter 18, what does it appear will happen?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. In your opinion, is Wang Lung in control of the circumstances of his life? What is determining his circumstances?





4. What is your response to Wang Lung's uncle? Why does Wang Lung support him?
5. When Wang Lung seethes with anger over having to take in his uncle and his uncle's wife and son, what wisdom does O-lan offer him? In what way does O-lan follow her own advice? What is your opinion of this advice?
6. How do you feel about O-lan?
7. What images do you have of Lotus and her apartment?
8. What is your opinion of Wang Lung's uncle's wife?

## Chapters 21 and 22

### Vocabulary

sundered-broken into parts

harlot-female prostitute

petulant-peevisish

betrothed-engaged

melancholy-gloomy

1. Point out the reason for O-lan's anger and how she deals with her problem. Why is O-lan's method effective?
2. Give several of the reasons that Wang Lung's love for Lotus cools.
3. What do you find comical in these chapters?
4. What wisdom does O-lan offer Wang Lung about the melancholy of their older son? What is Wang Lung's solution?
5. Cite details to support the following statements: Wang Lung is constantly struggling to find peace in the midst of family conflict, and he is proud as a result of his achievements.
6. What contradictions do you find in Wang Lung's attitude toward his son?

## Chapters 23 and 24

### Vocabulary

**begrudging**-giving with reluctance

**tallow**-fat from animals or plants

**fermented**- alcohol which is produced by chemical reactions

**scampish**-like a rascal

**marauded**-raided

**magistrate**-a civil officer

**pinning**-desiring

**gaunt**-bony

1. What are the causes of Wang Lung's displays of anger? Do you think his anger is justified? Does he accomplish anything with his rage?
2. Compare Wang Lung's response to the locusts and the responses of the other men in his attitude, behavior, and outcome.
3. What is your opinion of Wang Lung's oldest son and Wang Lung's treatment of him?
4. For which character do you have the most sympathy?
5. From your own life experiences, what are the common issues Wang Lung deals with that many people share?
6. Give details to prove that Wang Lung's continued pride is apparent in his changed attitude toward the earth gods.

## Chapter 25 and 26

### Vocabulary

apprentice-learner of a trade

dowry-money or items a bride takes to her husband for marriage

wretch-a miserable or despicable person

acquiescent-without protest

zeal-enthusiastic devotion

abbot-the superior at a monastery

distraught-deeply agitated

1. What detail of Chinese burial and wedding ceremonies are present? What similarities and differences do you see between American and Chinese ceremonies?
2. What other Chinese customs are brought out in these chapters?
3. What about O-lan's death saddens you?
4. What was Wang Lung's greatest regret about O-lan?
5. What is your opinion of Wang Lung's kindness to O-lan as she dies?
6. At this point in the novel, what do you predict the future will hold for each of Wang Lung's family members?

## Chapters 27 and 28

### Vocabulary

**eddies**-currents of water that move in opposition to the main current

**dykes**-barriers blocking water

**goaded**-urged

**serf**-laborer who works on the land of a lord in return for certain rights

**vigor**-enthusiasm

**buxom**-healthy, plump figure

**verandas**-partially enclosed porch

**dais**-a raised platform

1. Over Wang Lung's lifetime, one of his greatest desires was for peace in his house. What causes the trouble in Wang Lung's house?
2. Compare and contrast the response of Ching and Wang Lung toward an expected flood.
3. Wang Lung's oldest son presents Wang Lung with suggestions for dealing with his uncle and cousin. Evaluate the three suggestions.
4. Evaluate Wang Lung as a parent. Consider how Wang Lung deals with each of his children.
5. What is realistic about the story of the magistrate?
6. Do you think Wang Lung should rent the Hwang inner courts?

## Chapters 29 and 30

### Vocabulary

repented-having felt remorse

unduly-excessively

stout-fat

lagging-failing

lewdness-lustful; obscene

urn-container used to hold a person's remains

inheritance-land or money that is given after death

paltry-lacking worth

parsimony-extremely frugal

1. Support the following statements: Wang Lung and his family have left their old life close to the land, and Wang Lung's oldest son does not seem to grasp the meaning of his father's view of their dependence on the land.
2. Give reasons for the following statements: Although Wang Lung yearns for peace, he cannot have peace in his own household, and Wang Lung's sons manipulate him.
3. Compare the scene of the birth of Wang Lung's first grandchild with the scene of the birth of his first child. Points of comparison could be the activity in the household, Wang Lung's response, and the behavior of the woman who is giving birth.
4. What do you find sad in these chapters?
5. What is your opinion of the pride Wang Lung and his sons feel?
6. Compare and contrast the first and the second son of Wang Lung. Identify three points of comparison.

## Chapters 31 and 32

## Vocabulary

horde-a large group; swarm

implement-tool; equipment

uncomely-not keeping with the accepted standards of society

pertly-boldly

coquettishly-in a flirtatious manner

wench-peasant girl

expenditure-an expense

awry-amiss or askew

rapt-enchanted

1. What is your reaction to the situations with Pear Blossom?
2. In a conversation with his father, the third son says he has dreams and wishes for glory. Describe the importance of these goals and how they relate to his character.
3. Explain the following figurative language: “in his courts the [the soldiers] poured like evil filthy water, filling every corner and crack...” (Pg. 324)

4. Describe your impression of these soldiers in Wang Lung's courts.
5. Why, again, is Wang Lung unable to find peace in his home?
6. The narrator tells us that Wang Lung was just to all. What is your opinion of this view of Wang Lung?
7. What do you find comical or pleasing in these chapters?



## Chapters 33 and 34

### Vocabulary

**begrudge**-to give with reluctance

**interest**-payment for borrowed money

**tenant**-occupant

**requited**-made repayment

**vaguely**-indistinctly

1. What was Wang Lung's focus during his last years? What is the significance of this focus?
2. What do you see as the significance of the final scene of the novel in which Wang Lung overhears his sons plan to sell land?
3. Why might Pearl Buck's description of Wang Lung's relationship with Pear Blossom be described as objective? Consider the novel's point of view.
4. Do you think Pear Blossom's relationship with Wang Lung is her choice? What is your opinion of this relationship?

5. What is foreshadowed by the elder son's response to Wang Lung's relationship to Pear Blossom?
6. Why is Wang Lung content with the idea of his own death?
7. During the last years of his life, Wang Lung gets his information about his family from Cuckoo and Pear Blossom. What conclusions can you draw from this fact?
8. Do you think the choices Wang Lung's sons have made in their lives are a result of their own will? Explain.

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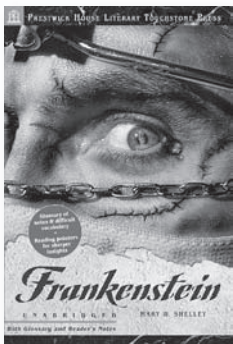
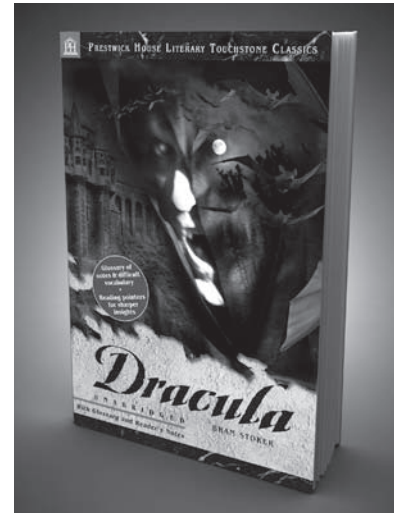
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