

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Part III

*"In '34 I had I reckon four renters and I didn't make anything. I bought tractors on the money the government give me and get shet o' [rid of] my renters. You'll find it everywhere all over the country thataway. I did everything the government said – except keep my renters. The renters have been having it this way ever since the government came in. They've got their choice – California or WPA."*

*". . . the dust storms that swept across the southern plains in the 1930s created the most severe environmental catastrophe in the entire history of the white man on this continent . . . Not even the Depression was more devastating economically."*

*"Across the nation the only states that had fewer residents at the end of the decade than at the beginning were all on the plains. South Dakota's drop was the highest rate in the country, at 7.2 percent followed by North Dakota, Kansas, and Oklahoma. In net loss through migration – outflow minus inflow – Oklahoma was the easy leader: 440,000. . . . Almost a million plains people left their farms in the first half of the decade, and 2.5 million left after 1935. Not all were dusted out, but all were uprooted – a generation of human tumbleweeds, cut loose from the soil."*

The opening chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath* deal with life in the Dust Bowl. What historical facts does the novel reflect?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## The Grapes of Wrath and the "Okie" Migrants

**August, 1936** *San Francisco News* asked a young California writer, John Steinbeck, to investigate and report on migrant conditions in California. He visited various Hoovervilles and the Arvin Sanitary Camp, also called Weedpatch. There he met the capable and compassionate camp manager, Tom Collins.

**September, 1936** Steinbeck visited Weedpatch again.

**October, 1936** *San Francisco News* printed Steinbeck's articles.

**October, 1937** Accompanied by Tom Collins, Steinbeck took a trip to research the migrant experience by actually living it.

**February, 1938** In a letter to a friend, Steinbeck wrote:

*"I must go to Visalia. Four thousand families, drowned out of their tents are really starving to death. . . . The newspapers won't touch the stuff but they will under my byline. The locals are fighting the government bringing in food and medicine. I'm going to try to break the story hard enough so that food and drugs can get moving. Shame and a hatred of publicity will do the job to the miserable local bankers. . . ."*<sup>1</sup>

**March, 1938** In a letter after another trip, Steinbeck wrote:

*"It is the most heartbreaking thing in the world. . . . I break myself every time I go out because the argument that one person's effort can't really do anything doesn't seem to apply when you come on a bunch of starving children and you have a little money. . . . I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this but I can best do it through newspapers."*<sup>2</sup>

Later, he commented:

*"I'm trying to write history while it is happening and I don't want to be wrong."*<sup>3</sup>

**May–December, 1938** Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*.

1. Jackson J. Benson, *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck* (New York: The Viking Press, 1984), p. 368.

2. Benson, pp. 370–371.

3. Benson, p. 375.