The Pearl

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For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more.

—John Steinbeck, The Pearl

John Steinbeck’s novella, The Pearl, focuses on a single central question: Is there danger in wanting to improve one’s lot in life? In this parable, Kino is an impoverished Indian who lives near the town of La Paz, Mexico, on the Gulf of California; when he discovers “the greatest pearl in the world,” his life is irrevocably changed. Though the plot is simple, the themes in The Pearl touch on many fundamental aspects of human nature and human experience; ambition, obsession, oppression, greed, reason, instinct, trust, and self-preservation are all addressed in the narrative.

As the story opens, Kino’s simple life fulfills him. He loves his wife, Juana, and his baby, Coyotito. He lives in harmony with the natural world around him, satisfied and at peace. When Kino finds a great pearl, he is overjoyed and begins to aspire to a better life. He announces that he will send his son to school, which will liberate Coyotito from the oppressive yoke of colonialism. However, evil begins to assert itself. Kino becomes mistrustful, suspicious, and isolated. Consumed by greed, he strikes his wife and kills a man. Eventually, he and his family must leave town in the dark of night. The family is tracked like animals until they are discovered in the mountains. In the novella’s dramatic climax, one of the hunters kills Coyotito, destroying all of Kino’s hopes and dreams for the future. Carrying the body of their dead child, he and Juana return to town, where Kino throws the pearl back into the sea.

Steinbeck’s parable seems to suggest that ambition is inherently evil. The idea negates the desire to reach for the American Dream, a dream that has traditionally linked happiness to prosperity. Modern readers can relate to questions raised in The Pearl: Is it better to be satisfied or to aspire to more? What if trying to improve our standard of living means that we can no longer appreciate what we already have? How do ambition and greed change our relationships with others and alter our attitudes and actions? Since ambition is generally accepted as being a positive character trait and achieving prosperity is deemed by most to be a worthy pursuit, The Pearl offers interesting insights that many students may not have considered.

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1962) and the author of classics such as The Grapes of Wrath, Cannery Row, and Of Mice and Men, Steinbeck wrote extensively about the oppressed, the disenfranchised, and the destitute. Having already been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for The Grapes of Wrath, he was a well-established writer by the time he wrote The Pearl, which originally appeared in Woman’s Home Companion in 1945, at the end of World War II. The Pearl reflects the great disillusionment in humanity Steinbeck felt as a result of the war. The Holocaust had revealed unimaginable human evil, and the terrors of the atomic bomb had been imprinted on the human psyche. In its simple story and elemental themes, The Pearl is a powerful cautionary tale about the physical and spiritual destruction that ensues when man’s baser instincts prevail.
By the end of the unit the student will be able to:

1. Explain the central lesson of the parable.
2. Discuss the role that colonialism plays in the novella.
3. Cite examples that demonstrate Kino’s gradual loss of humanity.
4. Describe Juana’s outlook on life and how she differs from Kino.
5. Explain the changing symbolism of the pearl.
6. Describe the complex relationship between ancient and colonial ways.
7. Discuss the role of knowledge: the quest for it, the manipulation of it, and the power associated with it.
This eNotes lesson plan is designed so that it may be used in numerous ways to accommodate ESL students and to differentiate instruction in the classroom.

**Student Study Guide**
- The Study Guide is organized for a chapter-by-chapter study of the novella. Study Guide pages may be assigned individually and completed at a student’s own pace.

- Study Guide pages may be used as pre-reading activities to preview for students the vocabulary words they will encounter in reading each chapter and to acquaint them generally with the chapter’s content.

- Before chapter Study Guide pages are assigned, questions may be selected from them to use as short quizzes to assess reading comprehension.

- Study Guide vocabulary lists include words from the novella that vary in difficulty.
  1. The vocabulary lists for each chapter are sufficiently comprehensive so that shorter lists of vocabulary words can be constructed from them.

  2. Working from the lesson plan’s chapter vocabulary lists, the teacher also may construct vocabulary studies for individual students, choosing specific words from each chapter that are most appropriate for them.

**Discussion Questions**
The discussion questions vary in degree of difficulty.

  1. Some questions require higher levels of critical thinking; others engage students with less challenging inquiry.

  2. Individual discussion questions may be assigned to students working in pairs or in small study groups; their contributions may then be added to a whole-class discussion.

**Multiple-Choice/Essay Test**
Test questions also vary in degree of difficulty.

  1. Some multiple-choice questions address the factual content of the novella; others require students to employ critical thinking skills, such as analyzing, comparing and contrasting, and drawing inferences.

  2. The teacher may select specific multiple-choice questions and one or more essay questions to assess an individual student’s understanding of the novella.

  3. The essay portion of the test appears on a separate page so that it may be omitted altogether in testing.
Before students read through the book, point out to them the following themes, or universal ideas, that will be addressed in the novella:

- Colonialism
- Loss of innocence
- Greed
- Ambition
- Illusions
- Humanity and reason vs. animalism and instinct
- Traditional ways vs. modern ways
- Community
- Knowledge
- Power and obsession

Talk with your students about how a motif is a recurring pattern or repeated action, element, or idea in a book. As they read, have them pay attention to the following motifs:

- Light and dark
- Nature
- Music (Song of the Family, Song of Evil)
- The weather

A symbol is a concrete object or place that has significance in a literary work because it communicates an idea. Have your students talk about how the author uses the following symbols and look for other symbols on their own as they read:

- The scorpion
- The pearl
- The town
- The canoe
- The rifle
- Oysters
1. Juana believes that “it is not good to want a thing too much.” Why does she think so? What does she mean? What is the negative side of wanting something? How does this contrast with the concepts of the American Dream?

2. Kino is compared to an animal several times, especially toward the end of the novella. What is the author suggesting by these comparisons? What qualities are more human? What qualities are more animalistic?

3. Nature plays an important symbolic role throughout the narrative. Why do you think Steinbeck includes so many references to nature?

4. Stylistically, what does Steinbeck do to make this a universal story? What makes The Pearl a parable? Consider the language, the lack of distinct setting or time period, and the lack of proper names for white people.

5. The native community functions throughout the story as a group—they come running when they hear Coyotito crying, and they all accompany the family to the doctor. The white townspeople are quite different. Can you cite a few examples of how the townspeople are more isolated and explain the significance?

6. How are Juana and Kino different? How do they react differently to the pearl, and what do their feelings about it reveal about their outlook on life?

7. Do you agree with Juana’s assessment that men are “half insane and half god”? What does she mean by this? Do you agree with her assessment of women, whom she thinks to be driven by reason, caution, and self-preservation?

8. Do you think it is better to be satisfied with what you have in the present or to try to improve your circumstances? What if trying to improve your circumstances means that you can no longer appreciate what you have? How do ambition and greed change our relationships with those around us?

9. Examine the power of knowledge in the story. Kino wants his son to have knowledge, a lack of which keeps his people in a state of oppression. How do the townspeople take advantage of their knowledge—and use it to manipulate Kino’s people?

10. Consider the changing symbolism of the pearl and the many ways the physical creation of the pearl is a metaphor for other elements in the story.

11. Discuss the examples of ancient vs. colonial traditions in the novella. What does this reveal about the loyalty to their heritage felt by Kino and his people?
12. Discuss the role of illusions in the story. What is the significance of illusions? Can you name several examples of people and situations that are not as they first appear?

13. Consider the role of fate vs. agency in the story. What is accidental? What do people control?
Chapter 1

Vocabulary
alms: charity
chittered: twittered, chattered
civilized: socially or culturally advanced
feinted: moved deceptively in an attempt to mislead or distract, often in a fight
fiesta: Spanish a party
flanks: sides or edges
flicked: moved lightly, sharply, and quickly
fragment: a part, a piece
indigent: poor, needy
parable: a simple story that illustrates a moral lesson, an allegory
pulque: a fermented milky drink made from the juice of a desert plant
puncture: a perforation, a hole
rutted: with grooves, often as in a road
sparingly: with a light touch, barely; with restraint
stout: heavily built, sturdy
subsequent: following, next in a sequence
suppliant: pleading, imploring
trifle: a thing of no value

1. What is the reason for the epigraph that appears before Chapter One? How does it frame the story? The author accomplishes two things with this opening. First, he establishes that this story is a legend and that it will be told in the tone and style of the story-telling tradition. Second, it explicitly describes the story as “a parable” from which readers will take their own meaning. The author wants the reader to understand that the story contains a larger moral lesson that transcends the story’s time and place. The author is effectively handing the reader tools for interpreting the story.

2. What is the Song of the Family? What does it tell us about Kino? Kino’s people have a long tradition of making songs. Kino thinks of the morning sounds—the waves, Juana’s grinding the corn, and Juana’s own ancient song—as the Song of the Family. The song reflects the importance of family to Kino. The routine sounds of his family’s waking up in the morning are dear to his heart. The music says “this is safety, this is warmth, this is the Whole.”
3. What do we learn about the setting and the characters from the opening pages? What do we not learn? Why do you think that is the case?

Kino and Juana are the two main characters. They live in a brush house and sleep on a mat. Their baby son, Coyotito, sleeps in a hanging box. They live in a rural area, with pigs and goats nearby. From the mention of the sound of the waves, we know that they live by the water. Although they are clearly very poor, their family life seems harmonious. We do not learn the specific town or the precise time period. The author likely has two reasons for this. First, we are seeing the world from Kino’s point of view, and his world view is very small. The name of his town is not important, as it is all he knows, and he lives in the present. The author also wants to establish the universal qualities of the story and convey that the story transcends time and place.

4. “It was a morning like other mornings and yet perfect among mornings.” How do you interpret this passage? What does it tell us about Kino?

Kino clearly appreciates the simple and natural routines in his life: his family, the beauty of the sunrise, the dog resting at his feet. He derives great pleasure from the present moment. Although he is poor, he appreciates the blessings of family, a hot breakfast, and the natural world around him.

5. What is the general mood that the author conveys in the opening pages?

Kino and his family lead a simple but harmonious life. Kino is deeply satisfied with his place in the world and looks at the world around him with appreciation. The simplicity of Kino’s life and the natural beauty in which he lives creates a mood of peace and tranquility.

6. What is Kino’s impression of his wife, Juana? How does she surprise him?

Kino considers Juana to be a perfectly “obedient and respectful and cheerful and patient” wife. He is surprised by how tough she is, “the iron” in her. She can withstand hunger, pain, and fatigue with great fortitude. She is practical, focused, and stronger than he would have thought.

7. What does Juana do when she sees the scorpion? Why?

Juana repeats “an ancient magic to guard against such evil, and on top of that she muttered a Hail Mary.” She believes that Coyotito’s fate is in the hands of God or the gods and that she can do nothing directly to prevent what is going to happen.

8. What does the scorpion symbolize?

Scorpions have long been associated with evil or pain. In the Bible, they also represent loss of innocence. In this case, the scorpion also represents the random nature of evil.

9. Why is Juana’s request for the doctor so surprising?

It is considered by everyone to be an audacious request. No one in Kino and Juana’s community has ever dared to ask for the doctor. He has never once come to the brush houses to treat any of the Indians who live on the outskirts of town.
10. The town is described as being made of “stone and plaster” with “harsh outer walls and inner cool gardens where a little water played . . . . They heard from the secret gardens the singing of caged birds and heard the splash of cooling water on hot flagstones.” Although this is a literal description of the town, it is full of symbols. Identify and explain several of them. 

Unlike the natural surroundings in which the Indians live, the town is a place of deliberate, unnatural containment. The harsh walls are meant to suggest the isolation and privacy of those who live behind them. The caged birds, the secret gardens, and the water contained in fountains represent the taming of nature. The town is rigid, all-powerful, controlling, secretive, and constructed to keep outsiders out.

11. How are the beggars in front of the church described?

The beggars are said to know everything. They can assess a person’s wealth, the sins of the girls going to confession, and the crimes of the townspeople by the way they enter and leave the church.

12. When Kino is about to knock on the door of the doctor’s house, he “felt weak and afraid and angry at the same time.” Why is he feeling so many conflicting emotions?

Kino is angry because of the long history of colonialism. The white people have terrorized his people for hundreds of years, and he feels this injustice acutely as he approaches the door. He is weak and afraid because he must ask a favor of the white doctor, and no one in Kino’s community has dared to do such a thing before. The white people are cruel and condescending to them, and he is afraid of what might transpire. He knows that he has no power or influence in this situation.

13. Kino speaks to the doctor’s servant in their own native language. The servant, however, replies in the doctor’s language. Later, when the servant asks Kino for money, he speaks in the old language. What is the significance of language here?

Kino considers the servant to be an ally and speaks to him as one who relates to him, one who is on his side. The servant, however, thinks he is superior to Kino and prefers to ally himself with the doctor, disavowing his connection to his own people. He does so by speaking the doctor’s language. Later though, when the servant must return to Kino to ask for money, he is shamed by the doctor’s callous response and feels sorry for Kino; he expresses his sympathy by speaking to him in their native language.

14. Contrast Kino’s and the doctor’s breakfasts, and explain what they reveal about each man.

The doctor’s breakfast is served on a silver tray, with a silver chocolate pot and a small, delicate china cup. The china cup is fragile and pretentious, suggesting the doctor is self-indulgent. He consumes his sweet breakfast in bed. Despite this luxury, “his mouth drooped with discontent.” Kino's breakfast, in contrast, is a simple corn cake dipped in sauce; his morning drink is pulque, made from the juice of a desert plant. He eats simply, with his hands, but he enjoys his meal; it is the only breakfast he has ever known, and he finds no fault with it. By describing the content of the men’s breakfasts and the starkly different ways they are consumed and experienced, the author establishes an essential difference in the characters of Kino and the doctor.
15. Name several details used to describe the doctor and what they reveal about his character. The author states that the doctor’s wife paid for her own funeral and that he had a mistress when he lived in Paris, both of which indicate his selfishness. His discontent and yearning for Paris reveal his sense of entitlement. The fact that he is stout, indulges in a second hot chocolate, and seems to live exclusively on sweets suggests that he is self-indulgent. His luxurious goods—the red silk dressing gown and the silver breakfast tray—reveal his greed and materialism.

16. What is ironic about the doctor’s response to Kino? Doctors are supposed to care about the health and well-being of others regardless of their status, but this doctor cannot be bothered with the Indian villagers who cannot pay. He does not care whether Coyotito lives or dies.
Chapter 2

Vocabulary
botete: a poisonous fish
braced: put weight against something to hold it steady or balanced
bulwark: a defensive wall, a stronghold
deftly: skillfully
estuary: the mouth of a river, where the tide meets a river
gloat: self-satisfied, displaying selfish pleasure
hummock: a small hill, a mound
incandescence: the light formed by an object’s heat
lately: a sail
poultice: a wet, soft mass designed to remedy a wound
speculatively: done with the risk of being wrong
undulating: moving in a wavelike motion
unsustained: insignificant, lacking solidity
writhed: squirmed, twisted

1. What is Kino’s only valuable possession, and why does it mean so much to him?
Kino’s only valuable possession is his canoe, which was passed down from his grandfather to his father and then to him. It is not only property, but a “source of food, for a man with a boat can guarantee a woman that she will eat something.” The boat enables Kino to support his family, and that makes it his most prized possession.

2. Juana puts a seaweed poultice on Coyotito’s wound. The narrator then states that it “was as good a remedy as any and probably better than the doctor could have done. But the remedy lacked his authority because it was simple and didn’t cost anything.” Why do they go to the doctor if Juana could just as easily have put seaweed on the wound?
The Indians have been subjugated by white people; they have been taught that white people have greater knowledge. Because the doctor has been educated, Juana assumes he has healing powers unknown to her. The value of ancient traditions and practices has been diminished. Although Juana’s poultice is likely just as effective, she has been trained to believe that the white people’s more sophisticated solutions are better. The narrator suggests that this is a false belief, that the ancient traditions are just as effective.
3. What does it mean that the oyster bed was “the bed that had raised the King of Spain to be a great power in Europe”? Why is this ironic?

Oysters are the source of pearls, and pearls are a source of great wealth. The passage suggests that pearls taken from this oyster bed had enriched Spain, the nation that had colonized Kino’s land. The king used this wealth to wage war and impress his people with glorious churches. It is ironic that the pearls from Kino’s native village only bring wealth and power to a faraway king, not to the people who do the work of finding them.

4. As Kino collects the oysters, a song runs through his head. How is his song like the pearls and oysters themselves?

Kino’s song contains a “secret little inner song” that is “sweet and secret and clinging.” His Song of the Pearl That Might Be is hidden and secret, just as the pearls are. The song clings to him the way the oysters cling to the rocks.

5. What does Kino find in the water? Why does he not open it first?

Kino finds a large oyster. When it was in the water, he believed that he saw something gleaming inside it before it snapped shut. When he is in the canoe, he is reluctant to open it. While the oyster is still shut, there is still hope that they will find a valuable pearl, one they can sell in order to pay the doctor to treat Coyotito so that he might live. Kino is frightened that he might not find what he and Juana desperately need. When he does open the oyster, he discovers “the greatest pearl in the world.”

6. A pearl is described as a “foreign body” that has the power to destroy the oyster. How is this like colonialism?

Pearls start out as small grains of sand that “irritate the flesh” and disturb the natural life of an oyster. Similarly, colonialists disturb the way of life and natural rhythms of a native population. Pearls are destructive to oysters and can kill them, just as colonialism dominates and destroys native cultures.

7. What is the state of Coyotito’s health after the pearl is discovered? How do Kino and Juana react when they look at their baby?

Juana discovers that Coyotito is much improved. His shoulder is not as swollen; the poison is receding from his body. Kino and Juana suddenly feel hopeful. When Juana first sees that Coyotito is much better, she cries out “shrilly”; when Kino realizes his son is not likely to die, “emotion broke over him”: “He put back his head and howled.”

8. The narrator describes the mirage over the water and then says, “There was no certainty in seeing, no proof that what you saw was there or was not there.” How is the mirage—and the idea of illusions—an example of foreshadowing?

The mirage implies that all will not be as it appears, that the people of the Gulf do not trust what they see: “All sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted.” As the story unfolds, the reader should be aware that not all will be as it appears.
Chapter 3

Vocabulary
almmsgiver: one who gives to those in need
benediction: a blessing
brooding: moody, unhappy
cozened: deceived
curtly: abruptly, briefly
disparagement: criticism, degradation
dissembling: concealing, hiding
distillate: a condensed form of a liquid
inaudible: unable to be heard
judicious: sensible, wise
lucent: luminous, filled with light
prophecy: a prediction
subjugation: forced submission, control
threshed: jumped about
transfigured: transformed

1. What are the various townspeople’s reactions to the pearl?
   Everyone in town begins to think about how they can benefit from Kino’s pearl. The priest considers
   the repairs that the church needs, the merchants think about the men’s clothes that haven’t sold, and
   the doctor suddenly claims Kino’s son as a patient. The pearl buyers think of how they will advance
   professionally, and the beggars imagine the generous alms they will receive. Everyone’s response is
   entirely self-serving, an early indication of the greed that the pearl instills in people.

2. Why is Kino suddenly “every man’s enemy”?
   Kino suddenly has something that all the townspeople want, and he is all that stands between
   themselves and their chance to fulfill their hopes and dreams. Kino has become an obstacle and a
   hindrance.
3. How is the pearl like the scorpion?
*Like the scorpion, the pearl is poisonous. It “stirred up something infinitely black and evil in the town.” It creates its own venom that spreads throughout the town, which “swelled and puffed” with the pressure of it.*

4. What is the pearl buyers' trick?
*The pearl buyers have separate offices to create the illusion of competition, but all of the agents work for a single owner. They are not really in competition with each other at all; they conspire to cheat Kino’s people by buying their pearls for far less than their value.*

5. What does Kino want to do with the money from the sale of the pearl? What is ironic about his dreams?
*Kino’s first thought is that he wants to marry Juana in the church. He dreams of having fine new clothes for the ceremony. He goes on to dream of getting a harpoon—and then a rifle. Finally, he dreams of sending his son to school. Although Kino hates the white people, he dreams of becoming like them, of enjoying the same advantages that they do.*

6. In what way is the scene in which Kino describes his dreams for the future a turning point? How is it like a rebirth for Kino?
*This marks a turning point for Kino in that it is the first time that he experiences desire. Until this moment, he has been satisfied with his lot in life and has not dared to hope for anything beyond what he has. Possessing the pearl changes him. Suddenly, he is ambitious, hopeful, and greedy. This change is like a rebirth for Kino; much like a day of birth, Kino’s life now will be dated by the finding of the pearl, and he has an entirely new vision of the world.*

7. “Humans are never satisfied.” The narrator points out that this is both a positive and negative trait. How is that the case? Can the same be said of the colonizing countries?
*Humans are always striving to better themselves. Their ambition is precisely what has made them superior to other animals and led to their advancement. However, it also means that they are incapable of being happy and appreciative of what they already have. Colonialism is also founded on greed, ambition, and a never-ending desire to expand.*

8. Why do you think the music of evil sounds in Kino’s head when the priest arrives?
*The priest pretends that he is on a benevolent mission, but in reality, his motives are selfish. The music represents Kino’s instincts, which are warning him that the priest’s kindness is deceptive. Kino glances suspiciously at his neighbors, but it is the priest that has rattled Kino and brought the music of evil into his head.*
9. In the evening, Kino goes to stand in the doorway. He ignores the dog that comes up to him: “Kino looked down at it and didn’t see it.” That morning, however, he had spoken softly to it. How has Kino changed since morning?

**Kino is distracted. He is no longer living in the present; he is caught up in his dreams of the future. He is isolated now, not communicating with the world as he had communicated before finding the pearl; he is disconnected from nature. He is not at peace with his life anymore.**

10. “By saying what his future was going to look like, he had created it.” According to the narrator, what does this mean, and why is it dangerous?

The narrator says that “a plan is a real thing, and things projected are experienced.” He goes on to explain that a plan becomes a reality “never to be destroyed but easily to be attacked.” Plans represent ambition, desire, and a vision of the future, and “the gods do not love men’s plans.” Kino’s plans for his son’s future are dangerous because they represent his own ambition, and having stated his dreams aloud, they develop a momentum and force beyond his control.

11. How does the doctor manipulate Kino? How does Kino feel about the doctor?

When the doctor arrives, he preys on Kino’s fear and ignorance. The doctor looks at Coyotito and says that sometimes the poison can go inward and strike again, leaving the baby with “a withered leg or a blind eye or a crumpled back.” Kino knows that the doctor may be taking advantage of his ignorance, but he cannot know for certain and cannot take the risk. Kino is well aware that he is easy prey for the doctor, and it infuriates him. However, “the trap was set. He couldn’t take the chance.”

12. Does the doctor intentionally make the baby sick? What evidence suggests that he does? Is Kino suspicious of the doctor? If so, why does he let him treat Coyotito?

Although the narrator does not confirm it, we can very reasonably infer that the doctor deliberately makes Coyotito sick so that he can then take credit for curing him. From what we know of the doctor, he is very likely to act in such a selfish and despicable way to serve his own interests, and his actions are very specific. He gives Coyotito some kind of white powder and predicts that “the [scorpion] poison will attack within the hour.” He says his medicine may save the baby, and he will return in an hour. The doctor then goes home; he checks the time on his watch—and waits. After eating supper, he checks his watch again and returns to Kino’s house. Coyotito has begun to vomit. When he gives the baby three drops of ammonia in water, the vomiting stops, and the doctor takes credit for “curing” him of the scorpion bite. Kino does not trust the doctor. He eyes the bottle of white powder in the doctor’s bag, but he has no way of proving that the doctor is manipulating him. He is aware of the limits of his knowledge.

13. In speaking of the pearl Kino has found, why does the doctor look at Kino’s eyes when he says, “It would be a shame to have it stolen”?

The doctor knows that Kino is likely to look where he has hidden the pearl, and the doctor then will know where it is.
14. How is Kino like an oyster with a pearl growing inside?
*Kino feels a “shell of hardness drawing over him.” Like an oyster, Kino is protecting himself. He is not yet aware the pearl is a source of destruction, but he is already trying to harden himself against forces of evil all around him.*

15. What happens in the night?
*Someone tries to steal the pearl. With his knife, Kino attacks the thief; Kino is injured when he is hit on the head. Kino does not see who the thief was.*

16. How does Juana react? How is this an example of foreshadowing? What is Kino’s response?
*Juana wants to get rid of the pearl. She already can see that the pearl has the power to destroy them, even Coyotito. Kino is adamant that the pearl is the key to their future, their “one chance.” He does not listen to her.*
Chapter 4

Vocabulary
appraiser: one who assigns a price to something of value
coagulating: thickening, solidifying
collusion: a conspiracy, a secret cooperation
countenanced: tolerated, accepted
crafty: tricky, deceitful
defied: rebelled against, stood up to
entranced: mesmerized, captivated
freshet: a flood from heavy rain or fresh water flowing into the sea
graft: to attach to
legerdemain: a coin game of deception
lethargy: a laziness, a lack of energy
receding: pulling back (as in a tide)
spurned: rejected, scorned
stalwart: sturdy
tithe: a portion, an allotment, a payment
wary: cautious, skeptical

1. Why are the pearl buyers excited to buy a pearl at the lowest price even if they do not stand to profit directly from the sale? What does this reveal about human nature?

The narrator explains that it is part of human nature for men to want to do their best, regardless of the nature of the task. In the same way that Kino wants what is best for his son, the pearl buyers want to be the best they can be at their job: “The best and happiest pearl buyer was he who bought for the lowest prices.”

2. How did the pearl divers try to get better prices for their pearls? What happened? What lesson did they take from this experience?

On two occasions, the pearl divers sent an agent to the capital with all of their pearls in order to try to fetch a better price for them. Both times, the agents took their pearls and never returned. The message they took from this experience was that the loss of the pearls was a punishment for wanting more than they were offered.
3. The pearl buyer is playing a game of legerdemain with a coin before Kino enters his office. How is this apt?

Legerdemain is a game of deception and trickery, as is the buying of pearls.

4. What is the pearl buyer's real reaction to the pearl? How can we tell? What does he say to Kino?

When Kino puts the pearl down on the velvet square, the pearl buyer falters with the coin game he is playing in his hand and the coin falls into his lap. We also learn that his fingers tighten into fists. However, the pearl buyer has a great deal of experience and does not reveal any reaction in his face. He tells Kino that the pearl is like fool's gold, so large there is no market for such a thing; it will be of no interest. He offers Kino a thousand pesos.

5. How do the other buyers respond to the pearl?

One of them claims to be unwilling to make any offer at all, while another concedes that it may be worth five hundred pesos. Another intimidates Kino by pulling out his magnifying glass and studying the surface of the pearl with a critical eye. He offers to show Kino what is “wrong” with its surface. All of these men are taking advantage of Kino. Kino knows this, but he can do nothing to prove it.

6. What does Kino decide to do? What do his neighbors think of his decision?

Kino takes the pearl back and refuses to sell it to any of the pearl buyers in town. He says that he will take it to the capital to sell it. Some of the neighbors think that he is very brave and right to hold out for more, while others think that he was foolish to turn down an offer of one thousand five hundred pesos. Still others hope that the pearl will not destroy Kino.

7. Kino’s brother, Juan Tomás, says to him, “You have defied not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life, and I am afraid for you.” What does Juan Tomás mean?

By daring to refuse the pearl buyers’ offers, Kino is defying the way pearl buying has always been done in the village. It is dangerous to challenge the economic system. By standing up to the pearl buyers, Kino has upset the balance in the relationship between the Indians and the town. The “whole structure” that Juan Tomás alludes to is the power structure of this society. There is danger in inciting the wrath of the colonialists. As Juan Tomás says, “It is new ground you are walking on, you do not know the way.”

8. What happens to Kino that night?

Kino is attacked when he walks outside. There is evil all around.

9. What is Juana’s reaction? Contrast Juana’s and Kino’s actions and their feelings about the pearl.

There is a new lack of harmony between Juana and Kino. Juana remains adamant that the pearl will destroy them, while Kino continues to grow angrier and greedier. Juana’s actions remain unchanged. Anchored in the present, she continues to tend to the fire, to cook, and to care for the baby. Kino, however, lies on his mat, feeling the evil lurking outside and listening to “the dark creeping things waiting for him to go out in the night.”
Chapter 5

Vocabulary
edifice: a building
forestalled: prevented
interval: a gap or pause (as in time)
lament: a cry of grief, a wailing
leprosy: a contagious disease of the flesh
scuttling: scurrying, hurrying
uneasily: anxiously

1. What does Juana do in the dark of night? How does Kino react? What do his actions reveal about him?
Juana goes down to the water and starts to throw the pearl back into the ocean. Kino chases after her and retrieves the pearl just before she throws it. Then he hits her in the face and kicks her in the side. He has lost all sense of what is important. The pearl has changed him and made him cruel. Just as the pearl can destroy the oyster, greed has overpowered the innate goodness within him.

2. How does Juana interpret Kino’s statement, “I am a man”?
Juana knows that Kino will not surrender to the forces that oppose him, regardless of their strength—even if defeat is assured. She accepts this truth, although Kino may destroy himself. She needs a man to provide for her; she “could not live [literally] without a man.” Although she does not fully understand him, she accepts their differences and Kino’s need to stand up for himself. Even after he has beaten her, she feels no anger and knows that she will follow him.

3. What are some examples of what Juana considers to be the “quality of woman”? How does Juana embody those qualities?
Juana considers the “quality of woman” to be reason, caution, and a sense of preservation. She counsels Kino to avoid danger. She does not get distracted by principles, pride, or greed; instead she remains practical, consistent, and dependable throughout. In many scenes, she continues to look after Coyotito, tend the fire, and do what needs to be done in the present moment. She is quietly holding the family together while Kino becomes increasingly obsessed with the pearl.

4. How do Kino and Juana differ? What do they each respect, accept, and need in each other?
Kino respects and relies on Juana’s iron core. He derives strength from her. Juana, in turn, needs Kino to provide for her and their baby and to protect them. She respects Kino’s pride and his unwillingness to accede to what is demanded of him. Each accepts what is different in the other.
5. The pearl is in motion throughout this chapter. Describe its trajectory.

Juana brings the pearl to the ocean; Kino retrieves it and brings it back toward the house. When Kino is attacked, the pearl rolls behind a rock. Juana finds it, and deciding not to throw it into the ocean, she returns it to Kino.

6. What event makes Juana realize that “the old life was gone forever”? What does she decide they must do?

On her way back to the house from the beach, Juana sees a man lying next to Kino on the path. His throat has been slit. She realizes that Kino has killed a man and that their former life is now irretrievable. They can only “save themselves.” To do so, they must leave as soon as possible, in the dark of night.

7. Several dramatic events take place in this chapter. Name the events that make Kino realize that “the darkness was closing in on his family.” How does the weather reflect Kino’s changing fortunes?

A hole has been made in the bottom of Kino’s canoe, destroying his livelihood. He has beaten his wife. He has been attacked, and he has killed a man. His house has been burned. Just as Kino’s life is unraveling, the weather takes an ominous turn. Storm clouds are gathering on the horizon. There is a “nervous, restless wind” and “change and uneasiness in the air.”

8. How do these events transform Kino? To what is he compared, and why?

Kino is compared to an animal; he “lived only to preserve himself and his family.” His trust in the people around him and his enjoyment of his old life are gone. Now he must think like hunted prey. He also compares himself to “a leprosy” when he speaks to Juan Tomás about hiding in his house until nightfall.

9. When their house is burning, Kino pulls Juana into the shadows, as “light was danger to him.” How does this contrast with Kino’s experience of light in the beginning of the story?

In the opening pages, Kino welcomes the dawn. He feels at peace and goes outside to welcome the new day. Kino has nothing to hide; his heart and his emotions are benevolent and open for all to see. In the later scene, however, he is cowering with his family in the “shadow of a house away from the light.” He no longer feels safe. He has secrets and cannot risk exposure.

10. “The killing of a man was not so evil as the killing of a boat.” Why does Kino think that?

The boat represents a livelihood; a man can support an entire family with a boat and provide them with enough to eat. Without a boat, he is nothing. While death is an endpoint, a boat gets passed down from generation to generation. To damage his boat is to cripple his family and render their lives far more precarious than before.

11. Where do Kino and Juana go when they discover that their house is burning?

They hide in Juan Tomás’s house and plan to escape that night when no one will be able to see them leave.
12. Kino says that, “This pearl has become my soul.” What does he mean? Why does he not simply get rid of it?

*Kino knows that his fate is linked to the pearl. Even if he were to throw the pearl back into the sea, too much has happened. He has killed a man. He has lost his house. He cannot escape the pearl’s evil influence and must bear the burden of it and move forward. The past is lost to him. As he says to Juana, “I am a man”; to him it is an expression of pride and dignity. It means he cannot back down; he must stand up for himself and fight for what he wants.*
Chapter 6

Vocabulary

apprehensively: nervously, fearfully
cleft: a gap
covert: noun a shelter
distorted: bent out of shape, twisted
erosion: a wearing down, a gradual destruction (as land is eroded by water)
escarpment: a steep slope
germane: relevant
glint: a gleam, a sliver of light
goading: prodding, provoking
immune: resistant, unsusceptible
intercession: an intervention
irresolution: uncertainty
malignant: malicious, dangerous
monolithic: solid and massive
monotonously: repeatedly, tediously
resinous: tar-like
rubble: small stones
rupture: a rip, a tear
sentinel: a guard who keeps watch
sinister: boding ill, ominous
telltale: revealing, betraying
ulcerous: diseased
weary: tired
wrenched: grabbed, pulled loose
1. How has Kino’s relationship with nature changed since the beginning of the story? 
   In the beginning, Kino enjoys a trusting and open relationship with the animals around him. He speaks softly to a dog that curls up by his feet. He enjoys observing the new day coming to life around him. In this chapter, however, the animals are menacing: “The coyotes cried and laughed in the brush, and the owls screeched and hissed over their heads.” The path to the mountains is scorched, harsh, and arid. Kino no longer exists in harmony with nature; he is fearful of it. Instead of deriving comfort from the natural world around him, it makes Kino feel isolated and endangered.

2. How is Kino like an animal in this chapter? 
   Much like animals, Kino is moving by instinct, in “a panic of flight.” Also like animals, he is being hunted and must try to evade his hunters. To do so, he heads for a high place—the mountains—“as nearly all animals do when they are pursued.”

3. When Kino looks into the pearl, what he sees and what he describes are entirely different. Give two examples of this difference, and explain the significance of the disparity. 
   Kino says that when they sell the pearl, he will have a rifle, but when he looks into the pearl, he only sees the bloody body on the ground. He says that he and Juana will marry in a church, but he only sees Juana, beaten, crawling home in the darkness. He says their son will learn to read, but he only sees Coyotito’s feverish face. The contrast between what Kino says and what he sees reflects the great chasm between hope and truth. While Kino still clings to the illusion that all will turn out well, the disturbing images in the pearl foreshadow a different conclusion.

4. Why is Kino uneasy as they rest by the side of the road? What decision does he make? 
   Kino knows they will be followed and senses that something is amiss. When he sneaks out to the road to look, he sees three men, one of whom is on horseback, carrying a rifle. They stop before his and Juana’s covered tracks and then move on. Kino decides they must go into the mountains.

5. What does Kino propose once they get into the mountains? Do they go through with his plan? 
   Kino proposes that he go on alone while Juana hides with the baby. He plans to divert the trackers so that his wife and child can get to safety. Juana refuses to part with him. Kino sees the resolution in her face and draws strength from her. They continue on together.

6. The pools of water “were places of life because of the water, and places of killing because of the water, too.” Why is that the case? How is this a metaphor for Kino’s experience with nature in this chapter? 
   Every animal in the area—from the tiny frogs to the pumas and deer—drinks from these pools of water, so they are a source of life. However, the big cats also come to hunt their prey here because they know that the other animals gather here. Nature is both benevolent and dangerous. This is the case for Kino and his family, who also drink the water and manage to find refuge in the cave; however, they are also at the mercy of the moonrise that may expose Kino.
7. What is “the only way” that Kino proposes to resolve the situation in which they find themselves by the pools?

*Kino plans to sneak down the mountainside and kill the trackers. Juana is fearful and reluctant but ultimately gives her assent.*

8. “But the Song of the Family had become as fierce and sharp and feline as the snarl of a female puma.” Why?

*Kino is prepared to risk everything for his family. He does not hear the beautiful Song of the Family that once played in his mind each peaceful morning. Now it represents the climactic moment in his attempt to save Juana and Coyotito. It is a metaphor; Kino is now driven completely by animal instincts. He will kill to protect his mate and his young.*

9. What happens just as Kino is about to attack the trackers?

*The man holding the rifle hears a small cry from somewhere above. He stands up, and one of the sleepers awakens. They debate whether it was a human cry or not.*

10. What is Kino and Juana’s final act in the story?

*Kino and Juana return to their home together, carrying their dead child. They go to the sea, and Kino throws the pearl into the ocean. Just as Juana predicted, it has effectively destroyed their lives.*

11. What is ironic about the fact that Kino is carrying a rifle when he returns?

*When Kino first finds the pearl and dreams of what he can do with his newfound wealth, he dreams of getting a rifle. At the end of the story, he has indeed acquired a rifle but at the expense of his son, who has died. He has achieved his dream, but it has been distorted into a nightmare.*

12. What is the significance of the fact that Juana and Kino are walking side by side as they return to town?

*They have cast cultural tradition aside; they are united in their grief as equal partners.*

13. Why does Juana encourage Kino to throw the pearl into the ocean instead of doing it herself?

*Ever wise, Juana knows that since it is Kino who has been demonized by the pearl, he must be the one to get rid of it. He will only be liberated from it if he takes an active role in exorcizing it from their lives.*

14. What are some of the lessons to be drawn from this parable?

*It is a mistake to want too much . . . and to lose appreciation for all we have. Desire is dangerous; even hopes that are rooted in goodness, such as Kino’s wanting his son to learn to read and wanting to formalize his marriage to Juana, can become distorted. There is simultaneously a message about the invasive nature of colonialism, how it disturbs the natural social order and leads to evil and unrest.*
The Pearl
Chapter Guide - Student Edition

Chapter 1

Vocabulary
alms: charity
chittered: twittered, chattered
civilized: socially or culturally advanced
feinted: moved deceptively in an attempt to mislead or distract, often in a fight
fiesta: Spanish a party
flanks: sides or edges
flicked: moved lightly, sharply, and quickly
fragment: a part, a piece
indigent: poor, needy
parable: a simple story that illustrates a moral lesson, an allegory
pulque: a fermented milky drink made from the juice of a desert plant
puncture: a perforation, a hole
rutted: with grooves, often as in a road
sparsely: with a light touch, barely; with restraint
stout: heavily built, sturdy
subsequent: following, next in a sequence
suppliant: pleading, imploring
trifle: a thing of no value

1. What is the reason for the epigraph that appears before Chapter One? How does it frame the story?

2. What is the Song of the Family? What does it tell us about Kino?

3. What do we learn about the setting and the characters from the opening pages? What do we not learn? Why do you think that is the case?
4. “It was a morning like other mornings and yet perfect among mornings.” How do you interpret this passage? What does it tell us about Kino?

5. What is the general mood that the author conveys in the opening pages?

6. What is Kino’s impression of his wife, Juana? How does she surprise him?

7. What does Juana do when she sees the scorpion? Why?

8. What does the scorpion symbolize?

9. Why is Juana’s request for the doctor so surprising?

10. The town is described as being made of “stone and plaster” with “harsh outer walls and inner cool gardens where a little water played . . . . They heard from the secret gardens the singing of caged birds and heard the splash of cooling water on hot flagstones.” Although this is a literal description of the town, it is full of symbols. Identify and explain several of them.

11. How are the beggars in front of the church described?

12. When Kino is about to knock on the door of the doctor’s house, he “felt weak and afraid and angry at the same time.” Why is he feeling so many conflicting emotions?

13. Kino speaks to the doctor’s servant in their own native language. The servant, however, replies in the doctor’s language. Later, when the servant asks Kino for money, he speaks in the old language. What is the significance of language here?

14. Contrast Kino’s and the doctor’s breakfasts, and explain what they reveal about each man.

15. Name several details used to describe the doctor and what they reveal about his character.
16. What is ironic about the doctor’s response to Kino?
Chapter 2

Vocabulary
botete: a poisonous fish
braced: put weight against something to hold it steady or balanced
bulwark: a defensive wall, a stronghold
deftly: skillfully
estuary: the mouth of a river, where the tide meets a river
gloating: self-satisfied, displaying selfish pleasure
hummock: a small hill, a mound
incandescence: the light formed by an object’s heat
lateen: a sail
poultice: a wet, soft mass designed to remedy a wound
speculatively: done with the risk of being wrong
undulating: moving in a wavelike motion
unsubstantial: insignificant, lacking solidity
writhed: squirmed, twisted

1. What is Kino’s only valuable possession, and why does it mean so much to him?

2. Juana puts a seaweed poultice on Coyotito’s wound. The narrator then states that it “was as good a remedy as any and probably better than the doctor could have done. But the remedy lacked his authority because it was simple and didn’t cost anything.” Why do they go to the doctor if Juana could just as easily have put seaweed on the wound?

3. What does it mean that the oyster bed was “the bed that had raised the King of Spain to be a great power in Europe”? Why is this ironic?

4. As Kino collects the oysters, a song runs through his head. How is his song like the pearls and oysters themselves?
5. What does Kino find in the water? Why does he not open it first?

6. A pearl is described as a “foreign body” that has the power to destroy the oyster. How is this like colonialism?

7. What is the state of Coyotito’s health after the pearl is discovered? How do Kino and Juana react when they look at their baby?

8. The narrator describes the mirage over the water and then says, “There was no certainty in seeing, no proof that what you saw was there or was not there.” How is the mirage—and the idea of illusions—an example of foreshadowing?
Chapter 3

Vocabulary
almmsgiver: one who gives to those in need
benediction: a blessing
brooding: moody, unhappy
cozened: deceived
curtly: abruptly, briefly
disparagement: criticism, degradation
dissembling: concealing, hiding
distillate: a condensed form of a liquid
inaudible: unable to be heard
judicious: sensible, wise
lucent: luminous, filled with light
prophecy: a prediction
subjugation: forced submission, control
threshed: jumped about
transfigured: transformed

1. What are the various townspeople’s reactions to the pearl?

2. Why is Kino suddenly “every man’s enemy”?

3. How is the pearl like the scorpion?

4. What is the pearl buyers’ trick?

5. What does Kino want to do with the money from the sale of the pearl? What is ironic about his dreams?
6. In what way is the scene in which Kino describes his dreams for the future a turning point? How is it like a rebirth for Kino?

7. “Humans are never satisfied.” The narrator points out that this is both a positive and negative trait. How is that the case? Can the same be said of the colonizing countries?

8. Why do you think the music of evil sounds in Kino’s head when the priest arrives?

9. In the evening, Kino goes to stand in the doorway. He ignores the dog that comes up to him: “Kino looked down at it and didn’t see it.” That morning, however, he had spoken softly to it. How has Kino changed since morning?

10. “By saying what his future was going to look like, he had created it.” According to the narrator, what does this mean, and why is it dangerous?

11. How does the doctor manipulate Kino? How does Kino feel about the doctor?

12. Does the doctor intentionally make the baby sick? What evidence suggests that he does? Is Kino suspicious of the doctor? If so, why does he let him treat Coyotito?

13. In speaking of the pearl Kino has found, why does the doctor look at Kino’s eyes when he says, “It would be a shame to have it stolen”?

14. How is Kino like an oyster with a pearl growing inside?

15. What happens in the night?

16. How does Juana react? How is this an example of foreshadowing? What is Kino’s response?
Chapter 4

Vocabulary

appraiser: one who assigns a price to something of value
coagulating: thickening, solidifying
collusion: a conspiracy, a secret cooperation
countenanced: tolerated, accepted
crafty: tricky, deceitful
defied: rebelled against, stood up to
entranced: mesmerized, captivated
freshet: a flood from heavy rain or fresh water flowing into the sea
graft: to attach to
legerdemain: a coin game of deception
lethargy: a laziness, a lack of energy
receding: pulling back (as in a tide)
spurned: rejected, scorned
stalwart: sturdy
tithe: a portion, an allotment, a payment
wary: cautious, skeptical

1. Why are the pearl buyers excited to buy a pearl at the lowest price even if they do not stand to profit directly from the sale? What does this reveal about human nature?

2. How did the pearl divers try to get better prices for their pearls? What happened? What lesson did they take from this experience?

3. The pearl buyer is playing a game of legerdemain with a coin before Kino enters his office. How is this apt?

4. What is the pearl buyer’s real reaction to the pearl? How can we tell? What does he say to Kino?
5. How do the other buyers respond to the pearl?

6. What does Kino decide to do? What do his neighbors think of his decision?

7. Kino’s brother, Juan Tomás, says to him, “You have defied not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life, and I am afraid for you.” What does Juan Tomás mean?

8. What happens to Kino that night?

9. What is Juana’s reaction? Contrast Juana’s and Kino’s actions and their feelings about the pearl.
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uneasily: anxiously

1. What does Juana do in the dark of night? How does Kino react? What do his actions reveal about him?

2. How does Juana interpret Kino's statement, “I am a man”?

3. What are some examples of what Juana considers to be the “quality of woman”? How does Juana embody those qualities?

4. How do Kino and Juana differ? What do they each respect, accept, and need in each other?

5. The pearl is in motion throughout this chapter. Describe its trajectory.

6. What event makes Juana realize that “the old life was gone forever”? What does she decide they must do?

7. Several dramatic events take place in this chapter. Name the events that make Kino realize that “the darkness was closing in on his family.” How does the weather reflect Kino’s changing fortunes?

8. How do these events transform Kino? To what is he compared, and why?
9. When their house is burning, Kino pulls Juana into the shadows, as “light was danger to him.” How does this contrast with Kino’s experience of light in the beginning of the story?

10. “The killing of a man was not so evil as the killing of a boat.” Why does Kino think that?

11. Where do Kino and Juana go when they discover that their house is burning?

12. Kino says that, “This pearl has become my soul.” What does he mean? Why does he not simply get rid of it?
Chapter 6

Vocabulary

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rubble: small stones
rupture: a rip, a tear
sentinel: a guard who keeps watch
sinister: boding ill, ominous
telltale: revealing, betraying
ulcerous: diseased
weary: tired
wrenched: grabbed, pulled loose
1. How has Kino’s relationship with nature changed since the beginning of the story?

2. How is Kino like an animal in this chapter?

3. When Kino looks into the pearl, what he sees and what he describes are entirely different. Give two examples of this difference, and explain the significance of the disparity.

4. Why is Kino uneasy as they rest by the side of the road? What decision does he make?

5. What does Kino propose once they get into the mountains? Do they go through with his plan?

6. The pools of water “were places of life because of the water, and places of killing because of the water, too.” Why is that the case? How is this a metaphor for Kino’s experience with nature in this chapter?

7. What is “the only way” that Kino proposes to resolve the situation in which they find themselves by the pools?

8. “But the Song of the Family had become as fierce and sharp and feline as the snarl of a female puma.” Why?

9. What happens just as Kino is about to attack the trackers?

10. What is Kino and Juana’s final act in the story?

11. What is ironic about the fact that Kino is carrying a rifle when he returns?

12. What is the significance of the fact that Juana and Kino are walking side by side as they return to town?
13. Why does Juana encourage Kino to throw the pearl into the ocean instead of doing it herself?

14. What are some of the lessons to be drawn from this parable?
Part I: Multiple Choice

1. What does Juana do as the scorpion approaches Coyotito?
   A. She leaps at the scorpion.
   B. She chants her ancient magic and says a Hail Mary.
   C. She tries to flick it away with a stick.
   D. She turns away, unable to watch.
   E. She moves toward it very slowly.

2. The beggars in front of the church are
   A. very knowledgeable about everyone in the town.
   B. despised by all for their lack of willingness to work.
   C. pitied by the natives but not by the white people.
   D. often approached because they are thought to be fortune-tellers.
   E. considered a valuable source of information.

3. What does Kino give to the servant when the doctor asks for money?
   A. A giant pearl
   B. A few crumpled pesos
   C. Eight small gray pearls
   D. Three coins he had been saving
   E. Nothing

4. Kino describes Juana as being which of these?
   A. Practical and stubborn
   B. A loving mother
   C. Frail, submissive, and tender
   D. Fragile with an iron core
   E. Overbearing and not aware of her place

5. What is Kino’s most valuable possession, and why?
   A. A few small pearls because they were given to him by his father
   B. His home because it means he can shelter his family
   C. A rifle that doesn’t work but can be repaired
   D. His canoe because it allows him to feed his family
   E. His oyster basket because it is the only way he can improve his chances of finding pearls
6. What is Kino thinking about when he is diving for oysters?
   A. He is thinking about the cruelty of the doctor.
   B. He is praying for his son.
   C. He is hearing the Song of the Sea.
   D. He is thinking that there must be an easier way to make a living.
   E. He is panicked at not finding any large oysters.

7. Of what does Kino dream when he fantasizes about what he can purchase with his newfound wealth?
   A. Buying Juana a wedding ring
   B. Building a separate church for the native community so that they need not rely on the white people
   C. Building a new home in the town so that his son can be proud
   D. Marrying Juana in the church, buying a rifle, and sending his son to school
   E. Making a generous donation to the church so that God may restore his son to health

8. Why does the priest come to visit Kino in his home?
   A. He wants to see the pearl for himself.
   B. He reminds Kino to thank God for his good fortune and hopes he will donate to his church.
   C. He offers to hide the pearl in a safe place in the church.
   D. He comes to warn him of the insidious nature of greed.
   E. He encourages Kino to donate the pearl to the church, thereby assuring a place for himself and his family in Heaven.

9. Why does the doctor come to see Coyotito after refusing to see him earlier in the day?
   A. The doctor has been chastised by the priest and is attempting to redeem himself.
   B. The doctor has heard that Kino has found a pearl of great value and wants to find out where it is.
   C. The doctor did not have time earlier in the day, but now he does.
   D. The doctor wants to make an offer on the pearl before Kino visits the official pearl buyers.
   E. The doctor has heard that Juana is a witch and that she will put a curse on him if he does not tend to her child.

10. How do the pearl buyers trick the natives who come to sell them their pearls?
    A. They keep their offices open only a few hours each week.
    B. They pretend they do not speak the natives' language.
    C. Though they are all employed by the same company, they pretend to be separate agents to create the illusion of competition.
    D. They pad the scales so the pearls' weight is inaccurate, and they can pay less for them.
    E. They claim that pearls are no longer prized in high society.
11. What does the pearl buyer tell Kino about his pearl?
A. He dismisses it as a fake, as there is no way that such a large pearl could be real, and he then accuses Kino of trying to trick him.
B. He suggests that Kino take the pearl to one of the other buyers, as he is not interested.
C. He tells Kino that there is no market for such a large pearl.
D. He offers to bring it to the capital to fetch a better price for it, pretending to be an ally to Kino.
E. He offers to keep it in his safe until Kino decides what to do.

12. What act marks Kino’s irretrievable break with the past?
A. He turns his back on his brother.
B. He strikes his infant son.
C. He allies himself with the doctor against the pearl buyers.
D. He kills a man.
E. He is condescending to his neighbor.

13. What do the songs in Kino’s head symbolize?
A. They represent his ties to his native heritage.
B. They are the songs his mother used to sing to him, and the memory of her gives him strength.
C. They represent his rational self and help him think clearly about what he must do.
D. Their rhythm is a source of calm for him. They enter his head to combat the rage he feels at his people’s unjust treatment by the colonialists.
E. Featuring the sounds of nature, they remind him of his connection to the natural world.

14. How does Juana defy her husband?
A. She attempts to throw the pearl into the ocean.
B. She threatens to leave him if he does not throw the pearl back into the ocean.
C. She will not let him go to the capital alone.
D. She attempts to sell it to the doctor without Kino’s knowledge.
E. She tries to run away with her baby since Kino has become so cruel.

15. What does Juana want do with the pearl?
A. She wants to hide it in the mountains.
B. She wants to donate it to the church.
C. She wants to sell it in the capital.
D. She wants to throw it in the ocean because it is evil.
E. She wants to sell it to the pearl buyers for one thousand five hundred pesos.
16. How does Kino change with the discovery of the pearl?
   A. He becomes more generous with those around him.
   B. He becomes more humble and grateful in the face of his good fortune.
   C. He is suddenly condescending to his neighbors.
   D. He becomes angry at God for giving him this new responsibility.
   E. He becomes greedy and ambitious.

17. What does Kino mean when he says, “I am a man”?
   A. It is up to him to decide what to do. Juana has no right to an opinion.
   B. His pride and dignity are at stake. He must see this through no matter what.
   C. As the provider for his family, he is responsible for the pearl’s sale.
   D. He says it as an insult to Juana, implying that she does not understand his needs.
   E. He is implying that he is smarter than she is and that he can outwit the pearl buyers.

18. What upsets Kino’s plan in the mountains?
   A. The moon comes up.
   B. The tracker holding the rifle sees Kino clambering down the mountainside.
   C. Kino trips over a vine.
   D. A puma attacks Coyotito and Juana in the cave.
   E. Coyotito utters a cry.

19. What does the pearl look like at the end of the story?
   A. It has turned black now that its magic has wrought evil.
   B. It is gray and ulcerous, like a malignant growth.
   C. It is as lustrous as ever, immune to the disaster it created.
   D. It is as opaque, impenetrable, and mysterious as ever.
   E. It has a crack running down one side; its perfection has been marred.

20. Why does Juana have Kino throw the pearl back into the sea?
   A. Juana will not touch it because it is evil.
   B. She cannot bear to look at it after losing her son.
   C. She believes Kino deserves the punishment of throwing away such a precious thing.
   D. She believes that by throwing it himself, Kino can restore some of his lost humanity.
   E. She does not care anymore who throws it.
**Part II: Essay**

1. How does the pearl change Kino? He is compared several times to an animal, especially toward the end of the novella. How does this relate to his transformation?

2. Illusion—the false perception of truth or reality— is a motif that appears frequently in *The Pearl*. Discuss several examples of illusion, and explain their significance in developing the themes of the novella.

3. The pearl is obviously the central symbol in the novella. Its appearance and significance change during the course of the story, and it means different things to different characters. Describe the pearl’s differing representations in the story.

4. Using examples from the text, discuss Steinbeck’s presentation of colonialism. How is the town described? Which characters represent the town, and how are they described? How does Kino feel about those who exercise power over him and his family? How has white colonial rule affected the lives of his people?
Part I: Multiple Choice

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

Part II: Essay

1. How does the pearl change Kino? He is compared several times to an animal, especially toward the end of the book. How does that relate to his transformation?

In the opening of the story, Kino is satisfied with his life. Although this morning is no different from any other, it is nevertheless “perfect among mornings.” Despite his family’s precarious and impoverished life, Kino is grateful for the warmth and love of his small family, and he lives in harmony with his community. He is also at one with nature and basks in the simple pleasure of the rising dawn and the sound of Juana preparing breakfast. The overall impression is one of satisfaction and peace. He feels “whole.”

This all changes abruptly with the discovery of the pearl, which he believes will bring him great wealth. The original need for finding a valuable pearl—paying the doctor to heal Coyotito—has been resolved, as Coyotito has recovered. Kino basks in his good fortune and its promises. Dressed in fine clothes, he and Juana can marry in the church. He dreams of having a harpoon, even a rifle. Then he dares to imagine the greatest dream of all: He will send their son to school where he will learn to read. Coyotito will not be imprisoned by ignorance; others will not be able to take advantage of him because he lacks knowledge. These intentions are noble and good, but the evil has already begun its work: Kino has dared to hope for more, to desire the impossible, to feel the potential of power and wealth. This scene is like a rebirth for Kino. The neighbors “knew that time would now date from Kino’s pearl.” They would talk about this moment when Kino had become “a man transfigured.”

As the story continues to unfold, Kino begins to feel the isolation, mistrust, and cruelty that accompany his newfound wealth. He has suddenly become “every man’s enemy,” as everyone now wants something from him; he is now an obstacle who stands in their way. He is no longer part of the community. He is visited by the priest and the doctor, who each want to benefit from his new wealth. During the night, a thief attempts to steal the pearl, and Kino attacks him. Kino’s peace has been shattered; he has nightmares and listens for suspicious sounds in the darkness. Feeling trapped and wary, he begins to make “a hard skin for himself against the world.”
The pearl continues to wreak havoc with Kino’s humanity. He strikes Juana; he kills a man. He becomes obsessed with selling the pearl. He turns down the offers of the pearl buyers in town, furious at their trickery. “He felt the evil coagulating about him, and he was helpless to protect himself.” He announces that he will go to the capital to sell the pearl. Greed and anger have become the driving forces within him, blinding him to reason.

As Kino’s obsession with the pearl grows, he is frequently compared to an animal. He is losing his humanity—the civilized qualities that enable him to be a good husband and neighbor. He has become “as dangerous as a rising storm.” He experiences the uneasiness of being tracked like an animal and the “panic of flight.” By the climactic scene, he has shed his clothing and clambers down the mountain “like a slow lizard” in his natural state. He has lost all sense of reason and self-control, and, like an animal, acts from instinct.

By the end of the story, the pearl has completely destroyed his life. Kino has paid the ultimate price for his greed: his son is dead, his home is burned, and his canoe is destroyed. Although Kino cannot go back to who he was before, as readers, we can absorb the lesson of the pearl as he throws it back into the sea.

2. Illusion—the false perception of truth or reality—is a motif that appears frequently in *The Pearl*. Discuss several examples of illusion, and explain their significance in developing the themes of the novella.

The illusion motif is introduced early in the novella in Steinbeck’s description of the ocean. He writes of mirages that appear over the water: “The uncertain air that magnified some things and blotted out others hung over the whole Gulf so that all sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted.” Other passages address the idea of illusion directly: “In this Gulf of uncertain light there were more illusions than realities”; “Perhaps this has all been an illusion.”

Illusion is also a metaphor for trickery and treachery, of which there are many examples in the book. The doctor has false motives when he comes to visit Coyotito at home; he deliberately creates the illusion that he has healed the baby of his scorpion bite. The pearl buyers create the false impression of representing several buyers in competition with each other; in reality, they work for only one buyer and conspire to buy pearls well below their value. Significantly, Kino observes one of the pearl buyers playing legerdemain, a game of deception. The pearl buyers try hard to create the illusion that Kino’s beautiful pearl is worthless. Its surface is marred, they say—there is no market for it.

Spiritual and emotional illusions are also found in the text. Terrified Coyotito will die, Juana does not pray “directly for the recovery of the baby”—she had prayed that they might find a pearl with which to hire the doctor to cure the baby.” Even God is illusory and undefined. The narrator mentions several times that Juana prays to “God or the gods.”
In the last chapter, Kino looks at the pearl. There is a great disparity between what he envisions and what he actually sees in it. He says to Juana that they will “be married in a great church,” but in the pearl he sees “Juana with her beaten face crawling home through the night.” He says his son will learn to read, but he sees in the pearl only Coyotito’s feverish face. The chasm between hope and truth underscores Kino’s illusions of what the future will bring.

Finally, the nature of the pearl itself is an illusion. To Kino, it appears to be a great treasure, a blessing in “its music of promise and delight, its guarantee of the future . . . a poultice against illness.” The pearl, he believes, will make his impossible dreams possible. In reality, however, possessing the pearl serves only to destroy Kino’s and Juana’s lives, to take from them all that had made them content. Kino should have remembered that “there was no certainty in seeing, no proof that what you saw was there or was not there.” Instead, he stares often at the pearl, seeing what he wants to see, and in doing so, imbues it with great power over him. Truth and reality are hidden, and Kino’s life is destroyed by his illusions.

3. The pearl is obviously the central symbol in the novella. Its appearance and significance change during the course of the story, and it means different things to different characters. Describe the pearl’s differing representations in the story.

Early in the story, Kino’s discovery of the pearl is considered by one and all to be a stroke of great fortune. The divers usually find only small pearls, generally by accident: “The finding of one was luck, a little pat on the back by God.” Kino and Juana are amazed and overwhelmed when Kino finds “The Pearl of the World.” At this point, the pearl represents Kino’s hope for the future—an education for his son and a chance to improve life for his family. That night, Kino stares at it and marvels at its “music of promise and delight, its guarantee of the future, of comfort, of security. Its warm lucence promised a poultice against illness and a wall against insult.” Everyone feels the pearl is a blessing—Kino’s brother, the doctor, the priest, the merchants, and even the beggars.

As the story unfolds, the pearl comes to mean different things to different people; its significance changes. The prescient Juana sees the evil that lurks beneath its milky surface and asks Kino repeatedly to throw it back into the sea. The pearl is likened to the scorpion, poisoning the town. The neighbors, too, fear the power of the pearl and worry that Kino’s new wealth may “graft onto him the evil limbs of greed and hatred and coldness.” They wait for the pearl to corrupt Kino, “as riches turn all people’s heads.” Kino’s head is turned by the pearl and its possibilities; he becomes consumed by greed and ambition. The symbolism of the pearl has changed; no longer a blessing, it now represents evil.

The pearl itself—the way a pearl is formed in the first place—also serves as a metaphor throughout the story. In the beginning, Kino is like an oyster. Kino’s discovery of the pearl is like the grain of sand that infiltrates an oyster in that it disrupts the harmony, or irritates the flesh, of his life. As the pearl
begins to disrupt their lives, Kino tries to protect himself from the irritant, gradually coating himself with “a hard skin for himself against the world.” Eventually, Kino is transformed, and the pearl comes to dominate his life, just as a large pearl can dominate an oyster. Finally, the pearl destroys him, just as a pearl can destroy an oyster.

The pearl metaphor operates at yet another level: initially a pearl is just a grain of sand like all the other grains of sand in the sea, in much the same way that Kino is an ordinary man. By some accident of fate, the grain of sand is gradually transformed into something desirable, just as Kino is transformed into someone of importance. And just like the pearl, he can never revert to being an ordinary man living a life of simplicity. He is irrevocably changed.

On a broader level, the pearl also serves as a metaphor for the destructive power of colonialism. Much like a grain of sand, the colonialists arrived in the community some four hundred years before and disrupted the life of the original Indian community. They have continued to develop and overpower the community ever since. Despite their fancy trappings and perceived culture, the white people have proved to be a cold, impenetrable force of destruction and evil that cripples the healthy growth of the native community.

4. Using examples from the text, discuss Steinbeck’s presentation of colonialism. How is the town described? Which characters represent the town, and how are they described? How does Kino feel about those who exercise power over him and his family? How has white colonial rule affected the lives of his people?

When Kino and Juana enter town to visit the doctor, the town is described in terms that suggest a prison. It is a place of stone and plaster with “harsh outer walls.” Birds are caged and gardens are enclosed from view; in the town, people are isolated, secretive, and private, separated from one another. Unlike where Kino and his people live by the sea, there is no sense of community in the town. Even nature has been tamed, confined, and controlled.

The first white person to appear in the story is the doctor. Much like the contrast between Kino’s neighborhood and the town, the difference between Kino’s home and the doctor’s is very striking. The doctor’s home is not described in appealing terms; it is heavy and gloomy, and the doctor’s Oriental gong and eggshell china make it pretentious and silly. The doctor himself is a parody of self-indulgence, consuming only sweets as he reclines in his ill-fitting red-silk dressing gown. He embodies greed and selfishness. He is presented in such a grotesque light that his hateful denigration of Kino’s people and his refusal to help a dying baby are not surprising. In their own way, the pearl buyers are as disgusting as the doctor. Deceitful and corrupt, they conspire to cheat the Indians, including Kino, who are fortunate enough to find pearls, knowing the young men cannot know their real value and have nowhere else to sell them. Even the priest has self-serving motives when he goes to visit Kino about the pearl; he wants money for his church.
Kino has conflicting emotions with regard to the townspeople. As he approaches the doctor’s door, he feels “weak and afraid and angry at the same time . . . He could kill the doctor more easily than he could talk to him.” He feels intimidated by the doctor and angry that he should feel that way. He does not know how to talk with this man, since “all of the doctor’s race spoke to all of Kino’s race as though they were simple animals.” He hates having to ask anything of the doctor, of having to be submissive toward him, knowing this is exactly how he is expected to behave and how he must behave to get the doctor’s help in saving Coyotito’s life. Kino is powerless to do anything but beg; white colonial rule strips him of his dignity.

The pearl buyers also engender rage in Kino. They are condescending to him, and although he cannot prove his suspicions, he knows they are cheating him when he is told his pearl is of little or no value. He surmises correctly that all the pearl buyers represent only one buyer and conspire to pay as little as possible for the pearls they buy. They exploit the native pearl divers shamelessly, keeping them in poverty, while it was pearls from their beds that “had raised the King of Spain to be a great power in Europe.” In fact, every white person in the story is selfish. The narrator effectively distances the reader from them by not assigning them proper names. To Kino, they are forces of oppression that subjugate his people, acting to ensure they remain uneducated, poor, and powerless.

Although Kino feels rage, anger, and weakness, he also feels a certain respect for the white colonialists; their rule has influenced some of the practices and traditions of his own heritage, making them seem inferior. He and Juana assume the doctor can treat Coyotito more effectively than they can; they assume his medicine is superior. It is not, but they lack confidence in the seaweed poultice she applies to Coyotito’s shoulder: “[It] lacked [the doctor’s] authority because it was simple and didn’t cost anything.” When the doctor comes to visit Coyotito, he intentionally “shifted his small black doctor’s bag about so that the light of the lamp fell upon it, for he knew that Kino’s race love the tools of any craft and trust them.” Even when they are not, Kino believes the European colonialists are superior to him and his people because they have education.

Furthermore, the colonialists’ spiritual beliefs have infiltrated the Indians’ native culture. The Indians draw on both their own ancient religion and the colonialists’ Roman Catholicism. This is evident in Juana’s practice of religion. When Juana prays for her son while the scorpion is descending the rope toward him, she repeats “an ancient magic to guard against such evil, and on top of that she muttered a Hail Mary.” She prays to both the Christian God and to the ancient gods of her people. Also, after finding the pearl, Kino’s first dream is that he and Juana will be married in the church.

Kino’s feelings about the white colonialists are complex—hatred, fear, envy, and even respect. He despises their power over him and his family, but he respects it and seeks to empower his family—especially his son—in similar ways. For himself, he wants a rifle, and for Coyotito, he wants an education, knowing that ignorance is a prison. As a poor man who must work hard to give his family only food and shelter, Kino no doubt has seen and envied what white men can provide for their families. It brings him joy to imagine Coyotito dressed in “a blue sailor suit from the United States.” The colonial influence is indeed pervasive.