

From "I" to "We"

"Times are changing, mister, don't you know?" (ch. 5)

"Seems to me we don't never come to nothin'. Always on the way." (ch. 13)

"Thus they changed their social life—changed as in the whole universe only man can change."

"The Western land, nervous under the beginning change. The Western States nervous as horses before a thunder storm. The great owners, nervous, sensing a change, knowing nothing of the nature of the change." (ch. 14)

"They's gonna come a thing that's gonna change the whole country." (ch. 16)

"For here 'I lost my land' is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate—'We lost our land.' . . . This is the beginning—from 'I' to 'we.'" (ch. 14)

From the first pages of this novel, the reader senses a change has come over the land. The red earth is turned to gray dust. The tenant farmers are pushed off their land and onto Highway 66 by debts and greedy owners. We see characters change, such as the service station owner of chapter 13, who begins as a whining worrier and ends up showing compassion when the Joads' dog is run over, offering to "bury 'im out in the corn field."

But one of the biggest changes is in the "family" unit itself. For Ma, this is the one constant in a world of change. Yet the changes in the family have already begun—and will continue.

1. List first a few changes you have seen in the Joads' circumstances, family structure, etc. from the time the novel opens.
2. List any changes you have noted in the *attitudes* of any of the Joad family.

Name _____

Date _____

3. The final quotation above captures the major theme of Steinbeck's novel (the movement from "I" to "we"). Can you summarize briefly what you think this quotation means?

4. Does Mae have a change of heart in chapter 15? Will she treat future poor people who enter the restaurant any differently? Why or why not?