

The Pearl



BACKGROUND INFO

AUTHOR BIO

Full Name: John Steinbeck

Date of Birth: 1902

Place of Birth: Salinas, California

Date of Death: 1968

Brief Life Story: John Steinbeck grew up in and around Salinas, California. Steinbeck's comfortable California upbringing instilled in him a love of nature and the land, but also of the diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups featured throughout his fiction. He attended Stanford University, but never completed his degree. Instead he moved to New York in 1925 to become a freelance writer. He returned to California after that plan failed and earned his first real recognition for *Tortilla Flat* (1935), a collection of stories about peasant workers in Monterrey, California. He published many more novels throughout his lifetime and today is best known for the novella *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962 and died six years later.

KEY FACTS

Full Title: *The Pearl*

Genre: Novella/ Parable

Setting: La Paz, Baja California Sur

Climax: Kino's beating of Juana and his killing of a man in protection of the pearl

Protagonist: Kino

Antagonists: the Doctor, the pearl dealers, the nighttime attackers, the trackers

Point of View: Third person (from the perspective of the villagers who pass down the tale through generations)

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

When Written: 1944

Where Written: California

When Published: 1947

Literary Period: Modernist novel

Related Literary Works: Steinbeck derived some aspects of *The Pearl* from his screenplay for the 1941 documentary, *The Forgotten Village*, which depicts the contentious coexistence of modern and folk medicine in a Mexican town. The novel's central plot, however, is based on the Mexican legend of a young boy who discovers a great pearl, which Steinbeck later narrated in his 1951 *Log from the Sea of Cortez*. *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, whose simple prose resembles Steinbeck's, might also be considered a related work. Published five years after *The Pearl*, it likewise deals with themes of nature, dignified work, ambition, and ruined dreams.

Related Historical Events: In the early 1940's, race riots were erupting in Los Angeles due to the discrimination of Mexican and Mexican-American teenagers. In 1942, for example, twenty-four Mexican gangs were tried in a murder case that lacked evidence of their guilt. A year later, US Navy servicemen attacked a group of Mexicans, but escaped any criminal charges while the Mexicans they attacked were persecuted. This period of racial conflict was reminiscent of the Spaniards' colonization of parts of Mexico and their subjugation of native Mexicans in the 16th century. The white oppression of Mexicans both historically and in Steinbeck's California, greatly informed his writing of *The Pearl*.

EXTRA CREDIT

From Kino to Kino. It is assumed that Kino was named after Eusebius Kino, a Jesuit missionary who explored the Gulf region in the 17th century.

From Film to Fiction. Steinbeck wrote *The Pearl* on an invitation from Emilio Fernandez, a well-known Mexican filmmaker, to write a screenplay depicting Mexican life. In consequence, *The Pearl* features few characters, simple and intense action, and cinematic viewpoints.



PLOT OVERVIEW

The Pearl takes place in a small village on the outskirts of La Paz, California. It begins in the brush house of **Kino, Juana**, and their baby, **Coyotito**, a family of Mexican Native Americans. In the midst of Kino and Juana's morning routine, Coyotito is stung by a **scorpion** that has fallen into his hanging box.

Aware of how poisonous the scorpion's sting is, Juana orders that **the doctor** be gotten and when the doctor refuses to come to them, insists they go to the doctor themselves. Kino, Juana, Coyotito, and **their neighbors** proceed together to the city. When **the servant** reports their arrival at his gate, the doctor, lounging indulgently in bed, is insulted by the mere notion that he would "cure insect bites for 'little Indians'" without compensation. The servant informs Kino that the doctor will not be able to see them and Kino punches the gate, infuriated by the doctor's evident discrimination.

Kino and Juana set off in **their canoe** to search for pearls. Kino dives down to the seafloor and finds one oyster lying alone, gleaming from within. Upon returning to the canoe, Kino opens this oyster last and finds within it the most perfect **pearl** in the world.

News of Kino's pearl spreads rapidly through the town, inspiring desire and envy in everyone who hears of it. When **Juan Tomas** asks Kino what he will do as a rich man, he responds that he and Juana will be married in a church, that they will have new clothes, that he will have a rifle, and that his son will receive an education.

The priest visits the brush house to remind Kino and Juana to thank God. Then the doctor, inspired by the news of the pearl, arrives in order to treat the baby. He administers a first treatment and predicts that the poison will strike within the hour. Within the hour, Coyotito indeed becomes ill and the doctor administers a second treatment to cure him. Kino promises to pay the doctor after selling the pearl, which the doctor feigns not to have heard about.

That night, after dark, Kino hears noises in the house and manages to strike a thief looking for the pearl with his knife, but is also struck in return. Juana begs, to no avail, that they get rid of the pearl.

The next day, Kino and Juana, followed by their neighbors, go to visit **the pearl dealers**. The first dealer Kino visits assesses the pearl at a mere 1000 pesos, declaring it too big and clumsy to be worth anything more, though it is clearly more valuable than he lets on. Kino accuses the dealer of cheating him, so the dealer instructs Kino to ask around for other appraisals, which are even worse than the first. Kino concludes that he's been cheated and decides to go to the capital for a better estimate.

That night, Kino fights off another attacker. Juana tries to throw the pearl into the ocean, but Kino follows her, rips the pearl away from her, and beats her to the ground. Some minutes later, Juana rises to discover that Kino has been attacked yet again, and, this time, has killed his attacker. Now that Kino is guilty of murder, Kino and Juana truly must leave the town.

As Kino approaches the canoe to prepare for their departure, he sees that someone has made a hole in its bottom. Then, upon seeing that their house is engulfed in flames, the family seeks refuge in Juan Tomas's house. They flee north at nighttime, pursued by **trackers** who have followed them from the village.

The family retreats into a cave on a mountainside, under which the trackers come to rest at night. When it's completely dark, Kino prepares to attack them but, as he is about to, Coyotito lets out a cry, provoking one of the trackers to shoot at what he assumes to be a coyote. Though Kino succeeds in killing the men, Coyotito has already been shot dead.

Juana and Kino, united and beleaguered, walk back to the village side-by-side with Coyotito's dead body in Juana's shawl. Kino throws the pearl back into the sea.



CHARACTERS

Kino – A strong, young Native American, Kino is *The Pearl's* protagonist and the head of its central family. He lives with his wife, **Juana**, and their son, **Coyotito**, in a brush house near the Gulf Sea. They lead a simple and dignified life, and Kino works hard to keep his family nourished and protected. In the beginning of the novel, Kino is deeply connected to the culture of his ancestors—to their musical customs, their intimacy with nature, and their veneration of the family structure. When he finds **the pearl**, however, Kino develops grand ambitions and lofty aspirations, which distract him from these traditional values and lead him to commit uncharacteristic acts of violence in protection of the pearl—against his own wife as well as his greedy neighbors and others. By the end of the novel, after his efforts to keep the pearl have resulted in the disaster of Coyotito's death, Kino demonstrates a renewed respect for his wife and a return to his initial values, particularly when he allows Juana to walk by his side and then offers her the honor of throwing the pearl into the ocean.

Juana – Like her husband, **Kino**, **Juana** is hard-working, serious, and able to endure great physical and emotional strain. She nurses **Coyotito**, builds fires for corncakes, prays in times of distress, and attempts to heal her baby's **scorpion** sting. Though she defers to her husband as a wife is expected, Juana is also strong-willed, and it is she who insists that Coyotito see **the doctor**. When she takes initiative and tries to get rid of the evil pearl, however, Kino beats her into submission. Yet even Kino's violence Juana accepts rationally, reminding herself of the necessity of man for woman.

Coyotito – Perhaps the most important, though most silent, character in the novel, **Coyotito** is **Juana** and **Kino's** infant son. He is a naïve instigator of action: in the beginning of the novel, he shakes the rope of his hanging box, causing **the scorpion** to fall on his shoulder and sting him. It is to pay for his treatment that Kino searches for **the pearl**, and in the end, his cries awaken **the trackers** and cause them to shoot in his direction and kill him.

The doctor – **The doctor** is the ultimate embodiment of evil and greed in *The Pearl*. The opposite of what one would expect of a doctor, whose job is to care for others, he is selfish, indulgent, and malevolent, and cares only about his own wealth and pleasure. He lives alone (his wife is dead) and lies in bed all day, eating candies and chocolate. When he is first asked to care for **Coyotito**, he refuses and cruelly proclaims that he is not a "veterinarian." As soon as he hears of **Kino's pearl**, however, he falsely claims that he always intended to treat the baby. It is not clear, then, whether the treatment he uses on Coyotito is effective, or if he just manipulates Coyotito's condition to worsen and then improve, making himself look good. All he cares about is getting Kino's pearl and it can be assumed, given that he watches Kino's eyes so closely to see if they indicate the pearl's location, that he is responsible for at least one of the violent nighttime theft attempts in Kino's house.

The pearl-dealers – While **the pearl-dealers** appear to be individual buyers, each providing estimates independently of one another, they are, in fact, all operating under a single master buyer, who controls their bids and wages. Unbeknownst to **Kino's** family or his **neighbors**, before Kino comes in with **the pearl**, the buyers have conspired to give him the lowest estimate possible. Their underestimation infuriates Kino, making him feel powerless and cheated, and forces him to go to the capital for a fairer assessment.

The neighbors – **Kino** and **Juana's neighbors** often assemble as a unified chorus or procession to follow and support the family. For the most part, they unite only in times of particular excitement and, even then, their primary function is to listen, observe, and spread news. Some townspeople, however, after hearing of Kino's **pearl**, peel away from the passive chorus of villagers

and turn against Kino, raiding his house, injuring him, and finally lighting his house on fire. These attacks occur at night, when Kino cannot see the faces of his attackers. So, while the neighbors present a unified front in the daylight, at night they attempt to realize their individual desires, in the privacy of darkness.

The trackers – These are the three men, two on foot and one on horseback, who come from the town to capture **Kino's** family and **pearl**. In defense, Kino kills **the trackers** while they are resting around a fire during. Before he does, however, one of them mistakes **Coyotito's** cries for those of a coyote, and shoots and kills him.

The priest – The priest plays an active colonizing role in La Paz by spreading the Christian faith of the Europeans to the natives of the land. While **Kino** and **Juana** are persuaded by his benevolence—they follow his advice and repeat his sermons and prayers—he may not be as virtuous as they assume. It seems at times, as when he reminds Kino and Juana to thank God for their discovery, that he, too, is only interested in the wealth that **their pearl** promises.

Juan Tomas – **Juan Tomas** is **Kino's** older brother, who provides his younger sibling with shelter, wisdom, and support. He articulates important truths in the novel: that **the pearl** is evil, that mankind is innately selfish and greedy, and that **the pearl-dealers** are likely to cheat Kino.

Doctor's servant – **The Doctor's servant** is an example of someone who shares **Kino's** race and ancestry but does not share Kino's drive to resist the influence of European colonizers. When Kino tries to speak to him in the old language, he responds in the language of **the doctor**.

Apolonia – **Apolonia** is **Juan Tomas's** wife and **Kino's** sister-in-law.



THEMES

In LitCharts each theme gets its own color. Our color-coded theme boxes make it easy to track where the themes occur throughout the work.

COMMUNITY

Social structures such as the family, village, and town, are central to *The Pearl*. The central unit, for **Kino** and **Juana**, is the family. Their daily lives and routines are organized around the family, and they make sacrifices for each other and for their son, **Coyotito**.

Outside the family's hut is the village, which is small and generally comes together to follow and support Kino and his family when they are in need. The "Pearl of the World," however, brings worldly concerns of wealth and self-advancement into the village and town, and brings out the worst in **the neighbors**. It inspires the individualistic greed of the neighbors who try to rob Kino's home, and the communal conspiring of the **pearl dealers** who attempt to cheat Kino of his deserved money. In the end, the one unit that remains united and strong and full of mutual love, even after loss and injury, is the family: Kino, Juana, and their dead son, Coyotito.

GOOD VS. EVIL

The plot of *The Pearl* is driven by a constant struggle between the morally opposite forces of good and evil. Evil in *The Pearl* can appear in both man (**the doctor**) and nature (**the scorpion**); both evil man (the doctor) and good man (**Kino**); both ugly shape (the scorpion) and beautiful shape (**the pearl**). While the scorpion's evil takes the form of lethal poison, man's evil throughout the novel takes the form of overriding greed. The doctor, for instance, is evil because he acts upon greed over human care and professional responsibility. Similarly, **the neighbors** are evil when they act upon greed over neighborly respect, and Kino is evil when he acts upon greed over love for his wife.

Evil in the novel is an omnipotent, destructive force. One must either bear it (as in the case of the scorpion) or avoid it (as in the case of the pearl), because to combat it only breeds more evil. When Kino tries to fight off the thieves and protect the pearl, for instance, he ends up committing acts of evil himself, on both the thieves and his wife. Kino does destroy the evil-bearers that act to harm his family—he squashes the scorpion, kills the trackers, throws the pearl into the ocean—but he only succeeds in doing so after the evil has run its course and the poison has already seeped in.

RACE, TRADITION, AND OPPRESSION

Kino and **Juana**'s racial heritage both provides them with the grounding force of ritual and tradition and deprives them of power under the reign of European colonizers. They continue to sing the songs they have inherited from their ancestors, but they also continue to be oppressed as their ancestors were, by white people like **the doctor** and by people with economic influence like **the pearl-dealers**. Their oppression is brought increasingly to light throughout *The Pearl*, as Kino attempts to cooperate with the people who have the power (the money, the expertise) to help his son recover, but are the very same people that traditionally oppress people of Kino's race.

In the end, dealing in the world of White wealth and medicine leaves Kino and Juana in a worse condition than they set out in: they end up without a son, home, or **canoe**. By throwing **the pearl** back into the ocean, it seems, Kino is attempting to free himself of the colonizers' influence and escape their system of evaluation, to return to his own set of traditions and values. As readers, we might also take a step back and wonder whether Steinbeck might himself be guilty of the kind of racial discrimination that Kino attributes to the colonizers, in consistently describing him with animalistic characteristics and by making generalizations about "his people."

VALUE AND WEALTH

The value and evaluation of material entities is a central theme in *The Pearl*. The value of **the pearl**, for example, requires reassessment throughout the novel: at the moment of its discovery, it seems to be worth **Coyotito**'s life. That **the pearl-dealers** then so underestimate the price the pearl reveals how distant the monetary worth of something can be from its perceived value, and how much value is determined by those in power. Moreover, the determination of the pearl's value has little to do with anything inherent to the object itself. As the narrator describes, a pearl forms by a natural "accident": "a grain of sand could lie in the folds of muscle and irritate the flesh until in self-protection the flesh coated the grain with a layer of smooth cement."

Kino's **canoe**, on the other hand, is described as the "one thing of value he owned in the world." Kino prizes his canoe not as a possession but as a "source of food," a tool that allows him to fish and dive for pearls. It seems, therefore, that Kino values things that can help him provide for his family. Unlike the pearl, whose sole function is to be possessed and looked at and whose value is assigned (arbitrarily) by people in power, the canoe is valuable because of its functionality and tradition, and its association with the dignity of work.

The Pearl reveals the slipperiness of value and evaluation: often, value is assessed by those who are already wealthy and powerful. What is valuable to one man (the canoe to Kino) may not seem valuable to another. Moreover, wealth in the novel is, in fact, not a source of well being, but of bad fortune or malicious greed. In the end, what remains of value to Kino and **Juana** is immaterial and has no price: love and the family.

NATURE

Nature is a powerful force in *The Pearl*. Natural elements often serve to instigate crucial plot-points. Sometimes they protect (as in the plants that keep **Juana** and **Kino** temporarily hidden from the trackers) and feed (as in the fire that cooks the corncakes); while at other times, they destroy (as in **the scorpion** that poisons **Coyotito** and the fire that burns down Kino's house). And throughout the novel, Kino is described as being, like his ancestors, intimately connected with nature. He is said to have "the deep participation with all things, the gift he had from his people. He heard every little sound of the gathering night, the sleepy complaint of settling birds...and the simple hiss of distance."

Though powerful, however, nature's force is essentially neutral, despite the meaning that mankind, here Kino and Juana, confer upon it. As described above, **the pearl** in itself is worthless—a mere cement-wrapped grain of sand—but, in the course of the novel, it represents for Kino and Juana first prosperity and hope, and then evil and despair. In attributing the pearl such meaning, Kino drifts away from his practice of "deep participation with all things" and into a system of valuation that is not his own, and that ultimately ends up backfiring. Finally, ridding himself of the pearl and all of the

significance it's been overlaid with, Kino is free to return to his truly meaningful, ancestral relationship with nature.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **red text** throughout the Summary & Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE PEARL

The pearl is a complicated symbol. It highlights different themes and gathers new meaning as the plot progresses. When **Kino** first opens the oyster in which it lies, the pearl seems to signify that God is looking favorably on Kino and **Juana**. It soon becomes clear, however, that finding the pearl is not good fortune at all. Rather, it surfaces the evil and greedy impulses of everyone that comes into contact with it and thus symbolizes the materialism and selfishness of man's desires. It represents, too, the arbitrariness of value and the capacity of an economic system to prevent those who are powerless from rising above their present state. Created by an accident with a grain of sand, the pearl is assigned a price—the lowest price possible—by conspiring **pearl-dealers**. Kino is cheated in this system because he is not powerful enough (and is assumed to be too ignorant) to see through the scandal and fight it.

THE SCORPION

The scorpion is a figure of pure evil, whose sole function in the novel is to do harm to the most innocent and powerless character, **Coyotito**. The scorpion symbolizes the evil that is found in nature, which is seemingly arbitrary and unmotivated, in contrast to the evil that is found in mankind, which is generally the result of selfish desire and greed.

KINO'S CANOE

Passed down through three generations, the canoe symbolizes for **Kino** the tradition and culture of his ancestors. Its importance to him demonstrates how much Kino values both his ancestry and the ability to provide for his family.



QUOTES

The color-coded boxes under each quote below make it easy to track the themes related to each quote. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

"In the town they tell the story of the great pearl—how it was found and how it was lost again. They tell of Kino, the fisherman, and of his wife, Juana, and of the baby, Coyotito. And because the story has been told so often, it has taken root in every man's mind...If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it. In any case, they say in the town that..."

—Narrator



CHAPTER 1

Juana sang softly an ancient song that had only three notes and yet endless variety of interval. And this was part of the family song too. It was all part. Sometimes it rose to an aching chord that caught the throat, saying this is safety, this is warmth, this is the *Whole*.

—Narrator



This doctor was of a race which for nearly four hundred years had beaten and starved and robbed and despised Kino's race, and frightened it too, so that the indigene came humbly to the door.

—Narrator



CHAPTER 2

There was no certainty in seeing, no proof that what you saw was there or was not there. And the people of the Gulf expected all places were that way, and it was not strange to them.

—Narrator



Every year Kino refinished his canoe with the hard shell-like plaster by the secret method that had also come to him from his father. Now he came to the canoe and touched the bow tenderly as he always did.

—Narrator



She gathered some brown seaweed and made a flat damp poultice of it, and this she applied to the baby's swollen shoulder, which 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.

—Narrator



But the pearls were accidents, and the finding of one was luck, a little pat on the back by God or the gods or both.

—Narrator



In the surface of the great pearl he could see dream forms. He picked the pearl from the dying flesh and held it in his palm, and he turned it over and saw that its curve was perfect.

—Narrator



CHAPTER 3

A town is a thing like a colonial animal... And a town has a whole emotion How news travels through a town is a mystery not easily to be solved.

—Narrator



The essence of pearl mixed with the essence of men and a curious dark residue was precipitated. Every man suddenly became related to Kino's pearl, and Kino's pearl went into the dreams, the speculations, the schemes...of everyone, and only one person stood in the way and that was Kino, so that he became curiously every man's enemy.

—Narrator



It was the rifle that broke down the barriers. This was an impossibility, and if he could think of having a rifle whole horizons were burst and he could rush on. For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more.

—Narrator



"I hope thou wilt remember to give thanks, my son, to Him who has given thee this treasure, and to pray for guidance in the future."

—The Priest



But now, by saying what his future was going to be like, he had created it. A plan is a real thing, and things projected are experienced. A plan once made and visualized becomes a reality along with other realities—never to be destroyed but easily to be attacked...He knew that the gods take their revenge on a man if he be successful through his own efforts. Consequently Kino was afraid of plans, but having made one, he could never destroy it.

—Narrator



And he could not take the chance of pitting his certain ignorance against this man's possible knowledge. He was trapped as his people were always trapped, and would be until, as he had said, they could be sure that the things in the books were really in the books.

—Narrator



[The doctor] held the eyelid down. "See—it is blue." And Kino, looking anxiously, saw that indeed it was a little blue. And he didn't know whether or not it was always a little blue. But the trap was set. He couldn't take the chance.

—Narrator, The Doctor



"Who do you fear?" Kino searched for a true answer, and at last he said, "Everyone." And he could feel a shell of hardness drawing over him.

—Juana, Kino, Narrator



CHAPTER 4

All of the neighbors hoped that sudden wealth would not turn Kino's head, would not make a rich man of him, would not graft onto him the evil limbs of greed and hatred and coldness. For Kino was a well-liked man; it would be a shame if the pearl destroyed him.

—Narrator



The gathering procession was solemn, for they sensed the importance of this day.

—Narrator



But there was no sign, no movement, the face did not change, but the secret hand behind the desk missed in its precision. The coin stumbled over a knuckle and slipped silently into the dealer's lap.

—Narrator



Kino had lost his old world and he must clamber on to a new one. For his dream of the future was real and never to be destroyed, and he had said "I will go," and that made a real thing too.

—Narrator, Kino



His senses were burningly alive, but his mind went back to the deep participation with all things, the gift he had from his people.

—Narrator



"I am afraid. A man can be killed. Let us throw the pearl back into the sea."
"Hush," he said fiercely. "I am a man. Hush."

—Juana, Kino



CHAPTER 5

He had said, "I am a man," and that meant certain things to Juana. It meant that he was half insane and half god. It meant that Kino would drive his strength against a mountain and plunge his strength against the sea...Juana had need of a man; she could not live without a man.

—Narrator



A dead man in the path and Kino's knife, dark bladed beside him, convinced her. All of the time Juana had been trying to rescue something of the old peace, of the time before the pearl. But now it was gone, and there was no retrieving it.

—Narrator



The killing of a man was not so evil as the killing of a boat. For a boat does not have sons, and a boat cannot protect itself, and a wounded boat does not heal.

—Narrator



CHAPTER 6

Some ancient thing stirred in Kino. Through his fear of dark and the devils that haunt the night, there came a rush of exhilaration; some animal thing was moving in him so that he was cautious and wary and dangerous; some ancient thing out of the past of his people was alive in him.

—Narrator



And Kino ran for the high place, as nearly all animals do when they are pursued.

—Narrator



"Juana," he said, "I will go and you will hide...if I can escape them, I will come to you. It is the only safe way." She looked full into his eyes for a moment. "No," she said. "We go with you."

—Kino, Juana



And then Kino stood uncertainly. Something was wrong, some signal was trying to get through to his brain. Tree frogs and cicadas were silent now. And then Kino's brain cleared from its red concentration and he knew the sound—the keening, moaning, rising hysterical cry from the little cave in the side of the stone mountain, the cry of death.

—Narrator



Everyone in La Paz remembers the return of the family; there may be some old ones who saw it, but those whose fathers and whose grandfathers told it to them remember it nevertheless. It is an event that happened to everyone.

—Narrator



The two came from the rutted country road into the city, and they were not walking in single file, Kino ahead and Juana behind, as usual, but side by side.

—Narrator



The people say that the two seemed to be removed from human experience; that they had gone through pain and had come out on the other side; that there was almost a magical protection about them.

—Narrator



They trudged past the burned square where their house had been without even looking at it...And they did not look toward Kino's broken canoe.

—Narrator



And then Kino laid the rifle down, and he dug among his clothes, and then he held the great pearl in his hand. He looked into its surface and it was gray and ulcerous. Evil faces peered from it into his eyes, and he saw the light of burning.

—Narrator



And the pearl settled into the lovely green water and dropped toward the bottom. The waving branches of the algae called to it and beckoned to it.

—Narrator



SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

The color-coded boxes under "Analysis & Themes" below make it easy to track the themes throughout the work. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

A quoted passage frames *The Pearl* as a story told again and again, and known by everyone in the town. It has become a parable, with stark contrast between good and evil and no in-between. Everyone that hears it considers the tale in relation to his or her own life.

The prologue sets up the townspeople as the collective narrator of the tale to come. It also establishes the story's universal nature, and thus invites every reader to find connections in it to his or her own life.



CHAPTER 1

Kino awakes in the early morning and looks around him to see his son still asleep in the hanging box, and his wife lying next to him with her eyes open, as though she'd been watching him as he slept.

In the very opening scene, we get a layout of the family hut, and a sense of the caring relationship between Kino and Juana.



He hears in his head the “Song of the Family,” like the songs of his ancestors before him, and then steps outside of his brush house to watch the sun rise. **Juana**, meanwhile, begins to make a fire in the pit and to grind corn for morning corncakes.

Juana and Kino begin what appears to be their daily morning routine. Nature and Kino’s ancestors are introduced as significant background characters.



Kino watches a crowd of industrious ants and coaxes a shy dog that has wandered over to their hut, as **Juana** makes the cakes and sings to **Coyotito**. It is a morning like all others, safe and whole.

The crowd of ants, quietly working together, resemble Kino’s family and the town at large. A tone of safety, quiet, gentleness, and mutual care is established.



Breakfast sounds come from neighboring huts. Two roosters look to be about to fight.

Kino and Juana’s routine is echoed by that of their neighbors.



Kino goes back into the hut and eats his corncake with **Juana**, both of them silent because they need not speak, as sun streams in through the hut’s crevices.

The couple’s relationship is so strong that words are superfluous. Their hut is permeated by natural sunlight.



Suddenly, **Kino** and **Juana** freeze as they see a movement from **Coyotito**’s hanging box and turn their heads to determine its source: a **scorpion** is climbing slowly down the rope of the hanging box, toward **Coyotito**.

While nature so far (the ocean, sun, ants) has been a source of peace and quiet, here it becomes a source of danger, in the form of a poisonous creature.



Kino gets a determined look in his eyes and begins to approach the hanging box, the “Song of Evil” playing in his ears.

Kino steps up as protector of the family as he seeks to take on the scorpion.



As the **scorpion** moves further down the rope, **Juana** prays in a whisper, an ancient prayer as well as a Hail Mary.

Juana’s spiritual invocation combines the faiths of their ancestors and colonizers.



Kino is reaching for the **scorpion** when it freezes in place and flicks its tail. **Coyotito** then laughs and shakes the hanging box’s rope, causing the scorpion to fall on him and sting his shoulder, despite **Kino**’s attempts to grab it in the air.

Coyotito, naïve to the forces of evil, doesn’t realize the animal’s danger; Kino, who does, still cannot prevent the injury. The scorpion’s sting precipitates the rest of the action in the story.



From **Coyotito**’s shoulder, **Kino** takes the **scorpion** and squashes it angrily. **Juana**, meanwhile, tries to suck the poison out of **Coyotito**’s shoulder. **Kino** stands by, feeling helpless.

The family was powerless to the attack of evil; all they can do now is try to cure its effects.



All the **neighbors** flock to the brush house at the sound of the baby’s cries. They all know that a **scorpion** bite can easily kill a baby, if sufficient poison has seeped in.

This scene is the first to reveal the unity and proximity of the community surrounding Kino’s hut.



Just as **Kino** is admiring her fortitude, **Juana** demands that the **doctor** be gotten.

Kino respects his wife’s strength and authority.



Her request, both wonderful and surprising (because the **doctor** never visits their neighborhood), spreads quickly through the **neighbors**. When word gets back that the doctor will not come, **Juana** decides that the family will go to the doctor themselves.

That her request is considered wonderful, because rarely fulfilled, reveals just how marginalized the brush-house community is from the city. It also illustrates Juana’s remarkable dedication to her family.



The **neighbors** follow at the heels of **Kino** and **Juana** as they walk to and arrive at the city, replete with plaster, stone, and fancy gardens.

Again, the community’s chorus-like quality is illustrated. So, too, is the economic inequality between the city and Kino’s brush-house town.



Beggars in front of the church there, who know everything about the town—the sins of its inhabitants, the bad ways of the **doctor**—pin **Kino** and **Juana** down as “poverty people,” and look on to see what will come of their visit.

The beggars—a new kind of community—give the reader an outside perspective on Kino and Juana. That the beggars see Kino and Juana as poor truly highlights just how poor and powerless they must be.



At the **doctor**’s gate, **Kino** hesitates, recalling that the doctor’s people had historically oppressed his own people. Finally, still enraged by the recollection, he knocks the iron ring against the gate and reports **Coyotito**’s sting to the **servant** who opens it, speaking in the old language because the servant is of his race. The servant does not reply in the old language, and heads inside to call on the doctor.

Kino’s ancestral history of oppression weighs heavily on him. He groups the doctor together with all the white colonizers that have come before him. The servant is an example of someone whose native traditions and language have been replaced by those of the colonizers.



The **Doctor**, fleshy and stout, is in his bed, drinking chocolate in a Parisian dressing gown and dreaming of returning to France. Religious pictures, including a photograph of his dead wife, line his walls.

Kino’s suspicions about the doctor’s evil are confirmed by the doctor’s rich, luxurious, selfish lifestyle.



When the **servant** tells the **doctor** about **Kino** and **Juana**, and **Coyotito**’s **scorpion** bite, the doctor becomes angry, insulted by the notion that he would deign to “cure insect bites for ‘little Indians’” for no money. He says, derogatorily, “I am a doctor, not a veterinary.”

The doctor—whose job it is to care for people—now vocalizes his great racial prejudice. He refers to Kino and Juana as though they are animals and not worthy of his time and attention.



The **Doctor** asks if **Kino** has any money, so the **servant** returns to the gate and asks how **Kino** planned to pay. When **Kino** pulls out eight ugly, flat pearls, the servant reports that the doctor had to rush out and would not be able to see them.

In the city, a person is only worth as much as his money, especially if that person is not white. Kino’s worthless pearls here foreshadow the perfect, though still value-less, pearl that he will find later on.



Shame settles over the group of **neighbors** and beggars that has followed **Kino** and **Juana**; they disperse to save Kino from the humiliation.

The neighborhood procession can only follow Kino and Juana passively. The most they can do when misfortune strikes is to leave the scene.



Kino stands for a while at the gate, before putting back on his hat. In a sudden lash, he punches the gate, and then looks down at his bloody knuckles in wonderment.

After remaining quiet and collected, and then submissive, throughout this stressful first chapter, Kino lets his frustration show in an uncharacteristic strike of rage. This foreshadows how his further encounters with the values and individuals of the oppressors will drive and corrupt him to violence.



CHAPTER 2

The narrator describes the town, located on an estuary. Canoes line the beach, constructed according to an old, secret method. Sea animals and algae populate the floor of the ocean, and dogs stalk its shore.

Passages like this emphasize the town's sense of unity between past and present, between humans and nature, and between humans and animals.



An "uncertain air" hangs over the Gulf. Its haziness, the narrator suggests, might account for the Gulf peoples' trust in imagination.

The natural setting of the Gulf is an important character throughout the novel. Here it's suggested that it even has the power to subtly determine the mindset of its residents.



Kino and **Juana** walk to the beach, in the direction of **their canoe**. Kino had inherited the canoe from his father, who inherited it from his own father. It keeps the family from starving, and is described as Kino's only valuable possession.

The canoe, which is more valuable than it might appear, foreshadows the arrival of another possession that turns out to be less valuable than it appears.



On **Kino's** blanket, **Juana** sets down **Coyotito**, who's calmed but still swollen. Juana treats his sting with seaweed, which is effective but not as authoritative as a doctor's treatment.

That the doctor's treatment is considered superior for its "authority" reveals that Kino and Juana have become subtly dependent upon and convinced by the powerful persons who oppress them.



The narrator notes that **Juana** has directed her prayers not toward **Coyotito's** survival, but toward **Kino's** finding a pearl with which to pay a doctor, because her mind is "as unsubstantial as the mirage of the Gulf."

Here, as elsewhere in the novel, the narrator steps back and judges Kino's people, suggesting their simplicity and ignorance.



Kino and **Juana** take off in **the canoe**, and look down at the oyster bed, which, it's suggested, funded the power and wars of the King of Spain.

Kino and Juana are entering the very system of wealth and evaluation that historically allowed for the Europeans to displace their own people.



The narrator describes that a pearl is created through an "accident," when a grain of sand irritates an oyster's flesh, and that to find one is to be in God's favor.

The value of a pearl is arbitrary. Created accidentally, it's nothing but cement-coated sand. Only God's will, and not the seeker's, can assure that the seeker will find one.



Kino dives into the water with his basket. Filling it with oysters, he hears in his head the song of his ancestors and, quieter, the Song of the Pearl that Might Be.

The mingling of the ancient song with the song of the pearl represents the larger mingling at work, between Kino's traditional values and the values of the white Europeans.



Young and able, **Kino** stays for a long time underwater, carefully selecting the largest and most promising oysters.

Kino's own qualities—his strength and fitness—do have some impact on his success in this pearl-seeking venture.



He finds one oyster lying alone, with a partly opened shell, revealing a gleam within. **Kino's** heart beats excitedly and he hears loudly the Song of **the Pearl**.

The great consequence of this pearl is immediately tangible.



Kino reaches the water's surface and places that final oyster at the bottom of **the canoe**. Both **Kino** and **Juana** try not to get too attached or dwell on Kino's apparent excitement. Kino opens all the small oysters first, saving the hopeful one for last.

Kino and Juana understand one another without vocalized expression. They can both feel something great but, superstitiously, don't want to ruin it by acknowledging it.



When it comes time to open the promising oyster, **Kino** hesitates, afraid its glint was an illusion, but **Juana** encourages him.

Kino's fear that the pearl's been an illusion confirms the narrator's description of the Gulf people's (sometimes deceptive) trust in imagination.



Finally he pries the shell apart, revealing inside a perfect **pearl**, moon-like—"the greatest pearl in the world."

In this moment, the pearl is appreciated for its pure, visual beauty. It's not yet complicated by external assessments of value.



Kino hears the Song of **the Pearl** that Might Be resonant and warm and sees dream forms in his lucky find. **Juana** comes to look at the pearl, which **Kino** holds in the hand with which he had punched the doctor's gate.

Now Kino imagines all that the pearl might bring their family—it reflects his hopes and dreams. The pearl's location in Kino's injured hand draws attention to the contrast between Kino's previous sense of powerlessness and his newly gained sense of power.



Juana goes over to check on **Coyotito** and finds that the swelling of his shoulder has gone down. **Kino** clenches **the pearl** and howls.

Kino and Juana's situation seems to be in a trend of improvement: they've found a great pearl, and Coyotito appears to be healing.



Men in neighboring canoes paddle quickly toward **Kino's**.

The neighbors are never far away.



CHAPTER 3

The narrator describes the town as a "colonial animal": it works as a unit, separate from all other towns, and circulates a uniform emotion. News travels through the town at an inexplicably rapid pace. It takes, therefore, no time at all for everyone in the town to learn that **Kino** has found "the Pearl of the World."

It has already become apparent that the town functions as an intimate unit, but this passage foreshadows the downside of this intimacy, which will become apparent in the rest of this chapter.



When **the doctor** hears of **Kino's pearl**, he openly declares that Kino is his client and that he is treating Kino's son. He then luxuriates in dreams of Paris.

The doctor cares not for the people that he treats, but for their money. All he wants is more wealth and to return to Paris.



The beggars at the foot of the church are also pleased by the news, hopeful for alms.

While before they looked at Kino as a "poverty" person, now the beggars see him otherwise. Everyone thinks of how they can profit from Kino's wealth.



The **pearl-dealers** sit at their desks, waiting for the pearls to come in. The dealers always assess at the lowest feasible price before there is danger of the pearl-owner giving his treasure somewhere else (once a fisherman, deterred by the low price, donated his pearls to the church). While it appears that each buyer is working as an individual buyer, there is, in fact, only one buyer who stages the dealers separately in order to create the illusion of competition.

The pearl dealers prevent anyone who isn't already wealthy or powerful from becoming wealthy or powerful. Their assessments have nothing to do with the pearls themselves. The dealers therefore epitomize a society in which those in power remain in power and deny anyone the opportunity for social mobility.



When **the pearl-dealers** hear of **Kino's pearl**, their fingers burn with anticipation, scheming of how they might become more powerful than their boss, "the patron", or use the wealth for themselves to leave the trade altogether.

Even the dealers reside under the control of a higher power (their patron) and the pearl inspires them, too, to hope for a chance to escape a system of oppression.



People in the town begin associating **the pearl** with their own dreams and desires. **Kino**, who stands in the way as the pearl's true owner, becomes the obstacle to the satisfaction of these desires. The town swells with something "black and evil."

As always, the town shares a common emotion, but now their unity works for the worse, creating a communal sense of envy and greed. Everyone sees the pearl as something that can help them, change their lives, and that separates the townspeople from each other.



Kino and **Juana**, unaware of the envy that surrounds them, assume that everyone feels the joy that they feel, as **Juan Tomas** and **Apolonia** do. In the afternoon, **neighbors** gather in their brush house and stare in awe at the beautiful **pearl**, and consider Kino's luck in finding it.

There are still some, like close family members, who feel happy for Kino and Juana to have found the pearl, but most do not. Kino and Juana at this point to do not realize the extent of the town's envy and malice.



The music of the family and the music of **the pearl** combine, each making the other more beautiful.

Kino relishes in a moment of peace, at which the family and pearl exist harmoniously. When Kino still thinks the pearl will help him, he sees beautiful things in its reflection.



When **Juan Tomas** asks **Kino** what he will do as a rich man, **Juana** covers her excitement with her shawl and Kino quietly states that he and Juana will be married in a church. He sees visions of their marriage in **the pearl**—Juana in a new skirt and shoes, he in a new felt hat. **Coyotito** in an American sailor outfit—and adds that they will have new clothes.

The pearl sparks many dreams that Kino had not dared to consider before he had the financial means. Many of the things he desires are Western—a Christian marriage, a felt hat, a sailor outfit—which suggests that he associates riches with American and European culture, rather than his own.



Kino continues to look into **the pearl**, seeing new desirable forms in its translucent surface. He sees a harpoon, and then a carbine, and finally says aloud that he will also, perhaps, have a rifle. Kino's desire for a rifle, which is the greatest impossibility of all, breaks down the floodgates to whole new territories of desire. Kino has become like all other humans, never satisfied and always wanting more.

The rifle surpasses everything else that Kino has mentioned he wants. The most infeasible of all, it opens the door to a limitless realm of infeasible desires. The rifle, too, is like an upgraded and westernized version of the canoe, Kino's most valuable possession, in that it helps with daily work and hunting. But unlike the canoe it also carries with it the threat of violence, showing the connection between wealth and power and violence.



The neighbors echo that **Kino** will have a rifle.

The neighbors are always there, at the ready to echo and spread the word.



Juana looks admiringly at **Kino** while he sees in **the pearl** visions of ever-grander dreams. He pictures **Coyotito** at a desk and says aloud that his son will go to school. **Juana** is startled by this and looks to Kino to see if he means it.

Kino aspires not only for material objects, but also for his son's intellectual elevation. With wealth, one can learn. And with knowledge, one can think for oneself and not depend upon the wisdom of the colonizers. At the same time, the desire for education is the desire to escape one's current situation, one's current culture.



Kino continues to prophesy, declaring that his son will read and write and make numbers, and that he and **Juana** will know things through him. Never having spoken so much in his life, Kino stops, afraid of what he has spoken unknowingly.

Kino is used to listening and being told what to do. It is unusual for him to have declared so much without knowing whether it will come to pass.



The neighbors acknowledge the marvelousness of this moment and imagine how it will be remembered in years to come. If **Kino** accomplishes these things, they muse, it will be recalled as a moment of empowerment; if he fails to, it will be recalled as a moment of foolishness.

It is clear that this moment is significant for Kino's family, whether or not Kino's prophecies are realized. His speech is a turning point, either to brilliant success or to devastating failure. He has made his dreams known; that is something he can't take back.



Kino looks down to see that his knuckles are scabbing.

Kino's healing hand reflects that he is overcoming the powerlessness he felt at the door of the doctor's.



Juana begins to make a fire and the neighbors remain. Word comes that **the priest** is coming to the brush house. The Father, who treats the villagers like children, enters, and reminds **Kino** that he is named after a "great man."

The priest represents the colonial influence of evangelism (preaching with the intention of converting natives to Christianity). Now that Kino is wealthy, the priest seems to want him even more to remember Christianity. Perhaps he hopes for a donation?



Kino begins to hear the song of evil, but knows not what brought it on.

Greed and danger begin to surround the family, without a single identifiable source. It seems that everyone wants something from him.



The priest tells **Kino** that he's heard of **the pearl**, and that he hopes that **Kino** will thank God for it and pray to Him for guidance. **Kino** nods obediently and **Juana** reports that they plan to be married. The priest blesses them approvingly and leaves.

Kino and Juana perform their obedience to the Father and to his Christian values, like good native subjects.



The neighbors leave to go to their own houses, and **Kino** stands outside, feeling alone and unprotected though hearing the Song of the Family from behind him. Now that he has made plans for his family's future, he begins to steel himself against the attacks that will surely come to prevent him from realizing these plans.

Kino is no longer ignorant of the town's envy or of the possibility that others might get in the way of his realizing his plans for the betterment of his family. He recognizes that even his fellow townsmen have become possible sources of harm.



The doctor arrives at the brush house, proclaiming his intention to see the baby, with his **servant** in tow. **Kino's** eyes burn with hatred for the years of subjugation that the doctor represents.

The doctor is already shown to be untrustworthy, as he falsely pretends that he always wanted to treat Coyotito and that he hasn't been motivated by the pearl. Kino feels this too, and yet he feels powerless in the face of the doctor's knowledge.



Kino replies that **Coyotito** is almost all better, but **the doctor** retorts that there often appears an improvement before a worsening. He shows his doctor's bag, confident that **Kino's** people trust the tools of medicine.

The doctor knows his power over Kino's people, and the ease with which he can gain their trust in his expertise. He is manipulative, always looking for ways to assure Kino that he knows how to treat a scorpion sting.



Kino feels trapped between rage and fear, but finally lets **the doctor** enter. The doctor goes to **Coyotito** and points to the blueness of **Coyotito's** wound, as though an indication that the poison has seeped into the body. **Kino** can see the blue, and feels he must trust that the doctor knows what it means and that it means anything.

Kino does not want to submit to the white doctor as his ancestors had, but he also does not want to deny his son the proper treatment that the doctor might provide. He opts for giving in to the doctor, because how can he deny his son care? But the story implies that the doctor may be manipulating Kino and Juana.



The doctor feeds **Coyotito** a capsule with white powder and gelatin, predicts that the poison will attack before an hour is over, and promises to return then.

Like Kino and Juana, the reader is left uncertain about the doctor's treatment. Is the doctor healing Coyotito, or is Coyotito already healed and the doctor is poisoning him just to be able to take credit for later saving him?



When **the doctor** has gone, **Kino** wraps the pearl in a rag and hides it in the floor in the corner of the house.

The pearl is too dangerous, too valuable to keep exposed.



The neighbors speak of the events of the day. A school of fish glitter in the estuary. The shy dog watches the brush house.

Things outside the brush house go on as normal—the neighbors gossip, the fish swim—but meanwhile Kino's life is becoming complicated now that he has the pearl.



Juana calls to **Kino** to show him **Coyotito's** stomach spasms and flushed face, which convince the couple that **the doctor** knew what he was talking about. The neighbors gather when they hear of the sickness.

The reader is left unsure about whether Coyotito's new symptoms are indeed the delayed effect of the scorpion poison, or if they were brought on by what the doctor administered.



The doctor returns and declares that he is able to defeat the effect of the poison. He feeds **Coyotito** ammonia as **Kino** watches the doctor and his doctor's bag carefully. The doctor claims that the baby will improve and **Juana** looks at him admiringly.

The doctor at this point has won Juana's admiration and the family's trust in his medicinal expertise, while the reader remains skeptical.



Kino says that he will pay **the doctor** once he's sold **his pearl**. The doctor feigns to not have heard about the pearl, and offers to secure it in his safe. When **Kino** refuses, the doctor looks closely at **Kino's** eyes to see if they might dart to the pearl's location.

The doctor pretends that he has come to treat Coyotito out of professional duty and care—as a doctor should—but his true intentions are revealed by his attention to Kino's eyes—he wants the pearl.



When everyone has left, **Kino** listens to the sounds of the night and then reburies **the pearl** in a hole under his sleeping mat. To **Juana's** inquiry about who Kino fears, he responds, "everyone."

Kino has become fully awakened to the danger of the circumstance of owning such a valuable item. He now sees that it makes them a target to all others, who want it for themselves.



As **Kino** and **Juana** try to fall asleep, Kino's mind continues to work, dreaming of a learned **Coyotito** and hearing the music of evil. Then he hears a small sound from the corner of the house, which he recognizes as the sound of feet and fingers. He is taken with fear and grabs the knife from his neck and springs for the source of the sounds. He strikes and misses and then strikes successfully, when he feels explosive pain in his head and blood stream down his face.

Kino's dreams, symbolized by his hopes for Coyotito, once so pure, are now mixed with a sense of danger and foreboding (the song of evil). Kino's predictions about future attacks now begin to be realized. He was right to have been fearful. This fight sets Kino against everyone else that covets the pearl and therefore isolates Kino and Juana from the rest of the town.



Kino assures **Juana** that he is alright, and Juana begins to make a fire and clean Kino's head wound. She decries **the pearl** as evil, a sin, and begs Kino to throw it into the sea before it destroys them. Kino refuses, prizing the pearl as their only chance.

This is the first time that the pearl itself is acknowledged as a source of evil. Kino wishes to keep it despite the bad things it's wrought because it also promises hope and the potential for greatness. Now that he has a chance at a "better" life, he does not want to give it up.



Kino cleans his knife by plunging it into the earth. Morning sounds enter the house and Kino pulls out **the pearl** to admire it, full of promise and comfort. Kino and **Juana** smile together, as one, and greet the morning full of hope.

Kino and Juana return momentarily to the rhythm with which the book opened, grounded in the earth and aware of the nature around them. They try to feel hopeful.



CHAPTER 4

The narrator remarks on the marvel of the little town's interconnectedness, how it keeps track of everything within it. A regular pattern has developed in the town, and whenever one person disturbs this pattern, everyone hears about it. So, it's quickly known by all that **Kino** intends to sell his **pearl**.

Kino has disturbed the natural flow of the town by finding such an inordinate treasure. He becomes, therefore, the subject of attention throughout the town.



The pearl dealers have heard word of **Kino's** intention and they sit in their offices and fantasize. All under the control of a single buyer, they all know ahead of time what they'll offer and how much they'll bid. Though they will not earn more than their regular wages, they are still excited for the pure thrill of the task of bidding down a worthy seller.

While Kino and Juana's trip into the town is a momentous, once-in-a-lifetime occasion, for the pearl dealers, it is their day job, which they always go about in the same way, with no surprises, and with the sole intention of cheating the seller.



The air is yellow and thick, but through it, a tall mountain two hundred miles away can be seen.

In the midst of commerce and economic valuation, nature beckons. The thick yellow air may symbolize the "pollution" of the corruption of the town, while the mountain symbolizes Kino's hopes.



The fishermen will not look for fish today. All the **neighbors** talk of **the pearl** and what they would do if they'd found it. Most of them fantasize about religious deeds and donations, and they hope that the pearl will not do bad things to **Kino** and his family.

The selling of the pearl is an event not only for the family but for everyone in the town. It occupies everyone's days and thoughts. All the town people sense that the pearl might bring great joy, but could also lead to great sadness.



The importance of this day for **Kino** and **Juana** is felt very strongly. Juana dreams of a baptism for **Coyotito**.

That Juana dreams of baptism represents how thoroughly she's internalized a Christian vision of wealth and happiness.



All the **neighbors** go, as expected, to follow **Kino** and **Juana** to the **pearl dealers**.

Again, the neighbors follow the family in a supportive procession, just as they did to the doctor's.



Juana and **Kino** prepare to go with **Coyotito**, Kino tilting his hat forward to convey his serious intentions. **The pearl** lies in a leather bag in Kino's pocket.

The family gets ready to face what they expect to be a very important day.



Juan Tomas walks next to **Kino**, warning his brother that **the dealers** might cheat him, because Kino doesn't know what buyers in other places would offer for the same. He tells him that there was a time when there was only one agent who collected all the dealers' pearls and brought them to the capital, but that the system was changed back when one such agent kept all the pearls for himself.

Juan Tomas demonstrates his wisdom, warning Kino against the very thing that will come to pass. He describes the current pearl-dealing system, with all dealers operating under one buyer, but as though it existed in the past. He does not realize that the pearl dealers have simply become more sophisticated in hiding their corruption.



Kino posits that that old system was a good idea, but that it went against the priest's sermons, which dictate for every man to act faithfully and like a soldier for God.

Kino doesn't realize that while he follows the ideals preached by the priest, the white men who brought the priest in feel no such compunction, and simply hide their non-Christian activity. Kino has internalized the Father's values as his own, indicating his increasingly Christian convictions.



The brothers resemble their ancestors and **Kino** uses his only defense—a stolid facial expression.

Without power or wealth, Kino has learned to gain respect with his face, the only possession that cannot be taken from him.



The procession moves slowly, under the weight of the significant event to come, and townspeople look on. **The pearl dealers** prepare their offices.

Suspense grows as the procession savors the significance of this journey.



Kino goes in to one particular **dealer**, a “jolly man” capable of laughter and sorrow. He is rolling a coin over his knuckles, performing a swift and mindless visual trick. When **Kino** walks in the man hides the coin.

The dealer's facility with the coin symbolizes his general smoothness, quickness, and trickiness, which he can presumably use in his trade to cheat clients.



The dealer continues to play with the coin behind his desk as he speaks to **Kino**, asks to see **the pearl**, and promises the best price. Kino brings out the bag slowly, with great suspense, and removes the pearl. When the dealer sees it, his face does not change but his coin slips in his hand.

The dealer is able to keep a straight face, but his slip of the hand reveals his astonishment at the pearl's magnificence. Of course he has hidden his hand behind the table, so Kino cannot see it.



The neighbors whisper to each other as **the dealer** fingers **the pearl**, before throwing it back into the tray and declaring the pearl worthless because it is too big and clumsy. He assesses it at a mere 1000 pesos. **Kino** tries to defend the pearl and accuses the dealer of cheating him. The dealer, now a little fearful, instructs Kino to ask around for other appraisals.

All the anticipation of the pearl's great appraisal has led to this disappointment. The distance between how much the pearl seems to be worth and how much it's deemed worth is so great that Kino feels he must have been cheated. And in fact Kino is being cheated, but if the only people who buy pearls are all trying to cheat you, then the pearl isn't really worth what it's "worth." This makes the pearl different from Kino's canoe, the value of which does not depend on the assessment or power of another.



The neighbors confirm under their breaths that they had been wary of something like this, but comment, too, that 1000 pesos isn't nothing.

The pearl had, indeed, seemed almost too good to be true. The neighbors also realize how quickly Kino has absorbed the expectations of a man with money. A thousand peso's could improve Kino's life, just not in the way he had dreamed. But he has stated his dreams, and cannot go back.



Kino feels evil swell about him, but gains strength when he looks at **Juana**.

Even as evil surrounds them, the family remains strong and united.



Three neighboring **pearl dealers** enter the office and the one sitting at the desk tells them that he has made an offer but wants to see how they will assess the pearl without knowing his own offer. One calls **the pearl** a monstrosity and won't offer any money. Another says that “better pearls are made of paste.” A third offers 500 pesos.

The fact that these individual dealers all come to say the same thing about the pearl is supposed to reinforce the first dealer's appraisal, but the reader knows already that it's all a scheme to deny Kino what he deserves—to keep the poor poor and the rich even richer.



Kino grabs **the pearl** and cries that he's been cheated and will go to the capital. In order not to lose his pearl, the first **dealer** quickly interjects that he will raise his offer. Kino leaves, furious.

Kino sticks to his instincts and his principles, refusing to let his family and his dignity be cheated. That the pearl dealer rushes to re-bid reveals that he was in fact withholding the pearl's true worth.



In the evening, all **the neighbors** analyze the event. They consider the possibility that **the dealers** had spoken and plotted beforehand, but dismiss the notion. Some think that **Kino** has destroyed himself. Others think that Kino is brave.

Kino has acted boldly, and no one can know what will come of his boldness. The observant neighbors can only speculate upon it. As it turns out, all the neighbors are right. He is both brave and has destroyed himself.



In his house, **Kino** mulls over the possibility of going to the capital, at first wary of the idea and then determined. **Juana** watches him bury **the pearl** and feeds **Coyotito**.

Having rejected the pearl-dealers, Kino has nowhere to turn but the capital. It is a place he fears, but his last remaining hope.



Juan Tomas comes in and is silent for a long time, before expressing fear for **Kino** now that has acted against **the dealers** and the whole system they represent. Juan encourages Kino to leave the town, but suggests that the capital may not be the best place to go because, there, Kino and **Juana** will have no one to rely on.

Juan articulates the reality of the situation: Kino has disturbed not just the flow and pattern of town, but the whole system of power and money of which the town is a part. He must beware the consequences of his rebellion against these forces.



Kino insists that he must go, at least to give his son a chance, and proclaims that his friends will protect him. **Juan** corrects this, suggesting that his friends will only help him if it doesn't discomfort them.

Kino remains hopeful about the promise of the pearl and the capital, but Juan, the wiser older brother, knows of the selfishness of mankind.



Kino says “Go with God” and, when **Juan** leaves, Kino sits observing all the sounds that surround him. **Juana** sits with him for comfort and sings the song of the family.

For a moment, Kino returns to his traditional way of communing with nature and feeling the comfort of family.



Kino senses something outside the house and clutches his knife as he walks outside. **Juana** hears a struggle and when she goes outside, Kino is on the ground with no one around.

Despite any temporary semblance of comfort and calm, danger is always lurking just outside. When it is dark, when no one can see who is attacking, those motivated by greed make their moves.



Juana brings **Kino**, half conscious, into the house and wipes off his blood. Kino reports that he could not identify the attacker, and Juana tries again to convince him to destroy **the pearl** before it destroys them.

Juana uses this most recent attack as further evidence that the pearl only breeds evil. She realizes that the family was happy even without the wealth offered by the pearl, and that the promise isn't worth the cost.



Kino insists that he will defeat the evil forces, declaring himself “a man.” He confirms the plan to go to the capital the next day, and the couple prepares for sleep.

Kino is too proud to get rid of the pearl. He cites his masculinity as reason for his strength.



Kino begins to complain of having lost the pearl, but **Juana** silences him by presenting it. She tries to explain to Kino that they have to leave, particularly now that he has killed a man. Even if it was in self-defense, the murder will turn even more people against them.

Kino's murder necessitates that Kino and Juana become fugitives. It distances them from the sympathy and values of their neighbors. It also shows how the power structure victimizes the poor. The powerful attempt to steal the pearl anonymously, and then when Kino kills to protect what is his he exposes himself to legal danger in a way that the rich—the aggressors here—do not.



CHAPTER 5

Kino awakes in the middle of the night to see **Juana** arise from the bed mat, go over to the fireplace, pause by **Coyotito**, and then exit through the door. Kino, enraged, quietly trails behind her. When Juana hears him, she begins to run towards the water and lifts her arm with the intention of throwing the pearl. Kino jumps on her, grabs the pearl from her hand, and then hits her face and kicks her side.

Juana, strong-willed, tries to take initiative and get rid of the evil pearl. To preserve the pearl, Kino acts cruelly against the person he loves the most, revealing the full extent to which the pearl indiscriminately inspires greed and evil in those who encounter it.



Kino instructs **Juana** to get **Coyotito** from the house while he brings the corn and prepares the canoe. But as he approaches the boat, he sees that someone has damaged it with a large hole in the bottom. He thinks that this is an “evil beyond thinking.”

Kino's only truly valuable possession, his canoe, has been destroyed because of the pearl—the possession of Kino's that appears most valuable but has only brought the family destruction.



Kino hisses at his wife with bared teeth, while **Juana** looks back with brave eyes. She is familiar with and unafraid of Kino's murderousness. Kino feels disgusted and walks away, up the beach.

The pearl has awoken a savage rage in Kino. Juana, demonstrating the strength of the family bond, loves Kino in spite of his rage. She recognizes his violence against her as part of his temperament and accepts it.



Kino does not think to steal a neighbor's canoe.

Despite the effect of the pearl, Kino keeps his respect of propriety intact. He has not completely abandoned his respect for tradition and neighbors.



He stabs at something lurking and engages in a fight with another body whose fingers search through his clothes for the pearl. The pearl is forced from **Kino's** hand and lands upon the ground.

Everywhere Kino turns, another danger is lurking. To protect the pearl, Kino has entered into an endless series violent defensive attacks.



The sounds and smells of morning activity arrive and **Kino**, determined, runs towards the house, only to find it engulfed in flames. **Juana** comes towards Kino, carrying **Coyotito**, and says that the house had been torn up by “the dark ones.”

The burning of Kino and Juana's home reinforces their rootlessness. Now there is nothing keeping them in the town, and their enemies seem to be growing in number and force.



Juana, meanwhile, lifts herself up and reassures herself that **Kino** is necessary for her survival. She acknowledges and appreciates the differences between the values of man (strength, sacrifice) and the values of woman (reason, caution) without entirely understanding them.

Juana transcends Kino's immediate violence and recognizes his importance to her, and the general importance of a man to a woman. She recognizes and does not question the fact that she and Kino fall into customary gender roles, with wife subservient to husband.



Kino is afraid and then slips into **Juan Tomas's** hut, pulling his family in behind him. From inside, they hear the cries of their friends watching their burning house outside, including **Apolonia**. Apolonia returns to the house to exchange her shawl and finds them there. Kino quietly demands that she bring Juan Tomas to the house.

They seek shelter with their family, the only people who they are sure they can trust.



Following after **Kino**, **Juana** comes across the pearl. She is considering whether she ought to try disposing of it again when she sees Kino and a stranger in the aftermath of a fight.

Even when the pearl is knocked away, it comes back into the paths of Kino and Juana, as though destined to be in their hands.



Kino tells **Juan** about the attacks and the murder he committed in self-defense, to which Juan replies that the pearl contains a devil and that it must be gotten rid of. Without house, canoe, or a virtuous track record, Kino despairs, and begs that Juan allow them to hide out there. Juan permits it, promising that he will protect them, but only for a day.

Juan agrees with Juana that the pearl brings only evil with it, but Kino insists that it's all they have. At this point, the family is trapped: the pearl has destroyed everything the family once had, but it's also, therefore, the only thing left to them.



Seeing that **Kino** has killed the other figure, **Juana** recognizes that she and Kino have left the life they'd led before, and that there's no turning back now. She drags the dead body into the brush and dabs Kino's face.

The pearl has turned Kino not only into a violent man, but into a killer. His killing of a man brings him and Juana completely outside of their old way of life.



Kino and **Juana** sit in silence during the day and hear what the neighbors are saying about them outside. **Juan Tomas** deceives the neighbors with false accounts of Juana and Kino's whereabouts. After a storm occurs, he announces that Kino must have drowned.

Juan contributes to the proliferation of evil by creating lies surrounding Juana and Kino. The fact that it's desirable for Kino and Juana to be considered dead reveals how extreme their circumstance has become.



Kino says that he intends to go north and **Juan** informs him that men from the city will be searching the shore, but that the strong wind will hide their tracks.

Now Kino and Juana have become wanted persons. The people who tried to steal the pearl now feel free to act more openly now that they have forced Kino to kill.



Kino and **Juana** leave the house before the moon has come out. Juan calls to his brother, "Go with God," and asks if he might give up **the pearl**. To this, Kino responds that the pearl has become his soul.

The pearl is not only Kino's sole remaining possession. It has become him. The consequences of this transformation, on the basis of his violence toward Juana, are not promising.



Juana and **Kino** discuss the likelihood of whether they are being followed. Kino is certain that they will be. When **Juana**'s says that **the pearl** is actually worthless after all, Kino reasons that it must be valuable or else people would not have tried to steal it.

Not knowledgeable about the system of evaluation in which the pearl plays a part, Kino and Juana can only interpret how valuable their pearl is from the reactions it has provoked.



Kino declares aloud that he will have a rifle, but can see in **the pearl** only the man he's killed. He declares that he and **Juana** will be married, but he sees in the pearl **Juana**'s beaten body. He declares that **Coyotito** will read, but he sees in the pearl only Coyotito's sick face.

The dreams that the pearl once inspired have now been replaced by the terrible consequences the pearl has actually caused. When Kino looks into the pearl, he sees not hopeful dreams but devastating realities—and yet he can't give up the dreams.



CHAPTER 6

In strong wind and under a black sky, **Kino** and **Juana** begin to follow the sandy road that leads to Loreto, the home of a statue of the Virgin. The wind, Kino hopes, will erase their tracks.

Kino and Juana set out in the direction of the statue of the Virgin, as though they are embarking on a religious pilgrimage, when really they are escaping after an irreligious crime of killing (even if in self-defense).



Something ancient and animal awakens within **Kino** and exhilarates him.

Connecting with nature and with his ancestors reinvigorates Kino.



The moon rises and the wind has calmed. Without the wind to erase their tracks, **Kino** tries to follow an existing wheel rut.

Kino and Juana seek to cooperate with nature to facilitate their invisibility.



Coyotes and owls make their night noises. Evil lurks about. **Kino** and **Juana** walk all night, and **Kino** hears the song of the pearl and the song of the family.

Evil noises haunt Kino and Juana, but now they are the noises of nature, not of greedy humans. And Kino feels that he is acting to protect his family and the hopes symbolized by the pearl.



At dawn, **Kino** finds a clearing by the road to sleep in for a bit. While **Juana** nurses **Coyotito**, Kino covers up the tracks they've made. A wagon passes by and hides their footprints.

It's best to sleep at dawn, because it's too dangerous to walk in broad daylight. Traffic and natural elements aid their hiding.



Kino watches ants at his feet as he eats a corncake **Juana** has offered him. The sun rises high and hot. **Kino** instructs **Juana** not to touch the tree that bleeds, nor the tree that blinds, and his wife nods knowingly.

Kino demonstrates to Juana his intimate familiarity with the surrounding nature. She, too, is familiar, but assumes a subservient position in allowing him to teach her.



Kino puts **the pearl** back and the music of evil interweaves again with the music of the pearl.

Kino recalls the evil of the pearl as he sees these saddening forms in its surface.



Juana is playing with **Coyotito** and **Kino** is lightly asleep when **Kino** cries out in a bad dream and then sits up sharply as though he's heard something. He tries to eat a corncake to calm himself and then tells **Juana** to silence **Coyotito**.

A jolt in Kino's dream seems to alert Kino that something bad is happening in reality that he must be ready for.



He looks onto the road and sees one man on a horse and two men walking close to the ground, inspecting like hounds. **Kino** tries to hold his breath as he recognizes these men as inland **trackers**, out to hunt **Kino** and his family.

Kino has become like an animal. He is powerless to do anything but violently attack in defense or run away.



Kino decides that he must lunge for the horseman and grab his rifle, and digs his feet into pits in the sand to prepare himself. **The trackers** pause at the place on the ground where **Kino** had swept their tracks away and the horse snorts. **Kino** tenses, but then the trackers move on.

A moment of suspense is deflated when the trackers leave, making it unnecessary for Kino to attack just yet. And yet by delaying the climax it only builds suspense for the real climax to come.



Kino backs up, considering it hopeless to cover his tracks, and suggests to **Juana** that maybe he should just surrender himself. **Juana** challenges him, doubting that the trackers would let him live once they stole **his pearl**. **Kino** is overwhelmed with despair. Finally **Kino** proposes that they go into the mountains to try to lose the trackers. They do so in a "panic flight." **Kino** seeks elevation, like all pursued animals.

After days of fighting off attack and pursuit, Kino's hope and will are temporary worn down. He has a moment of weakness, but then comes back to himself and creates a plan, getting in touch with his animal instincts.



Kino pictures **the trackers** coming up the mountain after them, once they find **Kino** and **Juana**'s previous resting ground, but he cannot see them from where they are.

The trackers are never far from Kino's mind. He is constantly aware of their approach.



The land that they travel over is dry, waterless.

Natural elements, like a lack of water sources, provide an additional obstacle to Juana and Kino's survival.



Kino tells **Juana** to go north to Loreto or Santa Rosia while he leads **the trackers** into the mountain, and that he will join her and **Coyotito** if he is able to escape. Juana refuses to leave his side. They move on, no longer in a "panic flight."

Juana demonstrates how much she cares for her family and considers Kino integral to her life when she insists that they remain together. Kino, too, is empowered by the family bond.



Kino walks in a zig-zag to throw off **the trackers**, and sets out for the spot of foliage that might mark a water source, despite the danger of going to such an obvious and commonly needed destination.

Thirst overpowers all other concerns as Kino and Juana decide to go to water even though that's likely where the trackers will look for them, or come themselves to drink. Nature and need prevails over strategy.



Kino and **Juana** arrive at a little spring, with water bubbling out of the stone and falling into a pool on a stony platform, where all the animals come to drink. They look at the Gulf from afar as Juana washes and nurses **Coyotito** and Kino drinks.

Kino and Juana join the animals they've come to resemble in their flight from the hunters, and unite with nature in this brief moment of calm and replenishment.



Kino looks down the mountain and sees **the trackers** scurrying up, ant-like. He estimates that they'll catch up by evening and suggests that they go west. He orders **Juana** to go hide in a cave up the hill, where she'll be more hidden. Kino climbs up the brush cliff past the cave, pulling at the shrubs along the way, and then walks back down the hill to join her, making sure there's no sign of his tracks.

Kino acts as head of the family in determining everyone's course of action. He displays his intelligence and craftiness, thinking not only how to run away from the trackers, but how to deceive and deter them along the way.



Kino tells **Juana** the plan—when **the trackers** follow Kino's path uphill, Kino and Juana will go back down the mountain—and reminds Juana that **Coyotito** cannot make a sound. Kino watches the trackers climb up the hill and rest by the water beneath Kino and Juana while darkness descends. Juana coaxes Coyotito to remain silent. Two of the trackers are sleeping while a third watches, and then their match is extinguished, leaving the scene completely dark, but printed in Kino's memory.

Kino and Juana prepare for the trackers' arrival and Kino plots his plan of attack. Kino is extremely alert and takes note of the details of where the trackers are. Darkness hides everyone in mystery and suspense.



Kino pictures the position of the men, and then returns to **Juana** and informs her that he plans to attack the **tracker** with the rifle first. She warns him that they'll see his white clothing in the dark but he insists that he must go, before the moon comes up. He tells her to go on to Loreto if he's killed. He lays a hand on **Coyotito's** head, touches Juana's cheek, and then takes off his white clothing and slithers out of the cave.

In his final moment before he goes to face the trackers, Kino shows care for his family and promises that they will be together in the end, as long as he makes it through alive. After discrediting Juana's advice to remove his white clothing, he obeys it, showing how much he respects Juana and considers her intelligent.



He crouches carefully and quietly, with his knife hanging down his back, hearing strongly the Song of the Family. He finally reaches the level of **the trackers**, twenty feet away, and crouches. He tries to remember whether there are any obstacles that will obscure his attack, and then reaches for his knife, intending to attack before the moon rises.

Kino thinks of his family as he prepares to perform an act of potential sacrifice for them. He demonstrates his skillful swiftness as he creeps along noiselessly and strategically.



The moon comes up before **Kino** had hoped, and **Coyotito** cries a little from the cave. **The trackers** hear the cry and stir from their sleep, guessing first that the sound comes from a baby, and then deciding instead that it must be a coyote. The tracker on watch lifts his rifle to shoot at the crying coyote.

Just as Kino creeps like an animal and is hunted like an animal, Coyotito's cries sound like those of his animal namesake. His cries often serve momentous narrative moments, either marking an important event (as in the scorpion sting) or precipitating an important event (as here.)



Kino leaps out and the gun fires. Kino digs his knife into the watchers' neck and chest and grabs the rifle. He knocks the head of the sitting man and shoots the third, first to the ground, and then between the eyes. Kino stands, sensing that something is wrong. The cicadas are quiet. Suddenly he becomes aware of a moaning from the cave, the "cry of death."

Kino attacks savagely and successfully, but any sense of relief or accomplishment is overridden by the sounds he hears from the caves. Along with the trackers, it seems that Coyotito, too, has been killed. Kino attacks only in self-defense, to fight against evil, but every time he does so the evil only grows.



The narrator reports that all the people of La Paz remember the moment when **Kino** and **Juana** came back to the town as the sun was setting. They walked not in single file with Kino ahead, but side by side, Juana carrying a dead Coyotito in her bloody shawl. Their faces were tired and tight and seemed as though protected by magic, having surpassed human emotion. They walked straight ahead through the town.

As in the introduction to the novel, Kino and Juana's story is placed within the context of the villagers' narration, as a tale that's been told again and again. The tragedy that they've been through has leveled their relationship, equalizing man and woman (as indicated by their walking side-by-side) and numbing and blinding them to all that surrounds them. Since they found the pearl, their lives have been so affected by the community and world around them, but now they are like witnesses against that world, forcing it to see what it has done.



They reach the Gulf shore, not looking towards the ruined canoe, and Kino lays down the rifle and takes out the pearl, offering it to Juana. She insists that he do the deed. He flings the pearl back into the ocean, and it settles to the bottom among the plants and crabs.

Finally, now that the pearl has run its course of evil, has destroyed Coyotito for whom they held all those dreams the pearl might have made possible, Kino and Juana rid themselves of the pearl and all its associations. Now the pearl returns to nature, where it belongs, and Kino and Juana symbolically reject the world into which the pearl thrust them. The way that Kino offers Juana the opportunity to throw the pearl, and her insistence that he throw it, shows both how they have reached more of an equality between each other, but also how each recognizes the way that the pearl has injured the other. Ultimately, it is Kino who must throw the pearl because it is he who must reject the dreams it inspired in him.



Kino and Juana stand next to one another and the music of the pearl fades away.

Exhausted, Kino and Juana are left only with one other. They have given up on the dreams of the pearl.

