Inevitably, the crash called “Black Thursday” came on the 24th of October 1929. The Dow Jones plummeted and prices fell. In minutes, millions of investors lose their life’s savings. The storm spares no one, neither the private holdings nor the thousands of banks that close their doors. The depression will last until 1933 and will have a definite influence on world events for the next twenty years.

The crash of 1929 was due to unleashed speculation, but the first to be hurt are those without access to wealth. In agricultural areas farmers will sell everything to pay off their loans. Everyone, even children, go hungry. The workers’ misery is appalling. There are 12 million people out of work in 1932 in America, 1/4th of the active population. In three years the national product diminishes by half. Poverty and despair invade the land. People live on welfare. 85,000 free meals are served everyday in New York during the winter of 1930-1931.

**ANALYSIS**

1. What is “Black Thursday”?
2. What is the “Dow Jones”?
3. Match the following words:
   - a) to plummet 1) richness, financial resources
   - b) savings 2) shocking
   - c) storm 3) strong atmospheric disturbance
   - d) to spare 4) to omit
   - e) holdings 5) decisive
   - f) definite 6) unemployed
   - g) to unleash 7) to let loose
   - h) wealth 8) to become smaller
   - i) to pay off loans 9) breakfast, lunch, dinner, supper
   - j) appalling 10) money that has been set aside
   - k) out of work 11) stocks and bonds
   - l) to diminish 12) to fall sharply
   - m) welfare 13) financial assistance for the needy
   - n) meals 14) to pay a debt in full
4. What influence on “world events” will the Great Depression have?
5. What are the causes of the crash of 1929?
6. Who will be the first to be hurt?

**WORDS**

The following words can be found in the text p. 2: borrow, fall, hit the ceiling, ownership, ragged, relief, snakes, squatting, tenants, weeds.

Use them to translate these sentences:

a) Les métayers, qui portaient des habits en lambeaux, étaient accroupis près de la charrue.

b) Si le prix du coton bat les records en automne et s'ils vendent bien leur récolte, ils n'auront besoin ni d'emprunter, ni de demander une aide de l'État.

c) Ils considéraient que le fait d'avoir éliminé les serpents et les mauvaises herbes et d'avoir cultivé la terre leur donnait des droits de propriété.
At the time of the Great Depression, families living on rented land in Oklahoma tried to grow crops and scrape a meager living. However, because of draught, the land was not profitable and the owners were forced by the banks to do something about it. Here, the owners have just arrived in their cars.

The squatting men raised their eyes to understand. Can't we just hang on? Maybe the next year will be a good year. God knows how much cotton next year. And with all the wars — God knows what price cotton will bring. Don't they make explosives out of cotton? And uniforms? Get enough wars and cotton'll hit the ceiling. Next year, maybe. They looked up questioningly.

We can't depend on it. The bank — the monster has to have profits all the time. It can't wait. It'll die. No, taxes go on. When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can't stay one size. [...] The squatting men looked down again. What do you want us to do? We can't take less share of the crop — we're half-starved now. The kids are hungry all the time. We got no clothes, torn an' ragged. If all the neighbors weren't the same, we'd be ashamed to go to meeting.

And at last the owner men came to the point. The tenant system won't work any more. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take all the crop. We have to do it. We don't like to do it. But the monster's sick. Something's happened to the monster.

But you'll kill the land with cotton.

We know. We've got to take cotton quick before the land dies. Then we'll sell the land. Lots of families in the East would like to own a piece of land.

The tenant men looked up alarmed. But what'll happen to us? How'll we eat?

You'll have to get off the land. The ploughs'll go through the dooryard.

And now the squatting men stood up angrily. Grampa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians to drive them away. And Pa was born here, and he killed weeds and snakes. Then a bad year came and he had to borrow a little money. An' we was born here. There in the door — our children born here. And Pa had to borrow money. The bank owned the land then, but we stayed and we got a little bit of what we raised.

We know that — all that. It's not us, it's the bank. A bank isn't like a man. Or an owner with fifty thousand acres, he isn't like a man either. That's the monster.

Sure, cried the tenant men, but it's our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours. That's what makes it ours — being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it.

We're sorry. It's not us. It's the monster. The bank isn't like a man.

Yes, but the bank is only made of men.

No, you're wrong there — quite wrong there. The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control it.

The tenants cried: Grampa killed Indians, Pa killed snakes for the land. Maybe we can kill banks — they're worse than Indians and snakes. Maybe we got to fight to keep our land, like Pa and Grampa did.

And now the owner men grew angry. You'll have to go.

But it's ours, the tenant men cried. We —

No. The bank, the monster owns it. You'll have to go.

We'll get our guns, like Grampa when the Indians came. What then?

Well — first the sheriff, and then the troops. You'll be stealing if you try to stay, you'll be murderers if you kill to stay. The monster isn't men, but it can make men do what it wants.

But if we go, where'll we go? How'll we go? We got no money.

We're sorry, said the owner men. The bank, the fifty-thousand-acre owner can't be responsible. You're on land that isn't yours. Once over the line maybe you can pick cotton in the fall. Maybe you can go on relief. Why don't you go on west to California? There's work there, and it never gets cold. Why, you can reach out anywhere and pick an orange. Why, there's always some kind of crop to work in. Why don't you go there? And the owner men started their cars and rolled away.

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)
THE GRAPES OF WRATH

ANALYSIS

1. Where is Oklahoma? In the east, in the west or in the center of the USA? Find two sentences in the text to justify your answer.

2. Where exactly does the scene take place?
   a. in a car
   b. in a tenants house
   c. in a bank
   d. in front of a tenants house
   e. in the middle of the cotton fields?
   Justify.

3. In what precise physical postures are the "tenant men" and the "owner men"? Does this change during the conversation? If so, what triggers off this change?

4. What link can you make between the postures they adopt and the balance of power between the two parties?

5. Who or what is "the monster"? What "human" characteristics does Steinbeck give it? What is its current situation? Can you find a historical explanation for this?

6. Pick out several contradictions in the composition and the behavior of the "monster". How and why do the owners use this image?

7. At different stages of the conversation, the tenants show the following attitudes: furious, puzzled, threatening, totally desperate, very worried. Map out their evolution by indicating in what order these feelings appear in the text. Justify in each case by quoting a relevant expression.

8. Show in the same way how the owners' attitudes change: apologetic, avoiding responsibility, direct, furious, skeptical, threatening.

9. There are several references to hunger and death made by both the owners and the tenants. Copy the chart and fill it in with all relevant references.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>hunger</th>
<th>death</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the owners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>the tenants</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Show how Steinbeck uses them to illustrate the tragic situation of one group and the unfeeling cruelty of the other.

10. Find three arguments that the tenants use for staying on the land. Which is the most hopeful? The most emotional? The most down-to-earth? What desperate solution do they propose?

11. How do the owners refute each argument? What is their reaction to the tenants' desperate solution? What advice do they give?


13. In your opinion, what principally is being criticized here?
1. Tick in the chart the quantifiers which are used by Steinbeck to talk about the words in the left hand column:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantifiers</th>
<th>all (the)</th>
<th>every</th>
<th>a lot of</th>
<th>enough</th>
<th>a little</th>
<th>less</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wars</td>
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<td>share of the crop</td>
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<tr>
<td>man in a bank</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Which words are defined by negative quantifiers?

3. What does this tell us about the tenants' situation?

4. Which other quantifiers in the chart would be grammatically correct?

5. Rephrase, using the beginnings provided:

   a) We have to do it. We don't like to do it.
      ➔ I wish...

   b) One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve families.
      ➔ Instead of...

   c) They took the cotton. They sold the land at once.
      ➔ No sooner...

   d) We were born on the land. So it is ours.
      ➔ The fact that...

   e) Maybe you can pick cotton in the fall.
      ➔ You just might...

   f) Why don't you go on west to California?
      ➔ I suggest...