**Investigating musicality and tone in *The Grapes of Wrath***

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**Common Core Standard:**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/4/) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

**When to Deliver in Unit**:

After reading approximately first 8 chapters (at least through chapter 5)

**Materials:**

* Copies of P. 22-25 of *Working Days: The Journals of* The Grapes of Wrath (ed. by Robert DeMott)*,* which covers entries #6-12 (June 4, 1938 – June 11, 1938). It should be just one page, front and back.
* Copy of “Swan Lake”, ballet by Peter Tchaikovsky (available on Youtube)

**Directions:**

1. Teacher instructs students to read the excerpt from *Working Days* silently for 5 minutes and annotate 5 lines in the journal that show insight into Steinbeck’s writing process.
2. Teacher can have students pair and share, then report out, or have a full class reporting out of what was found. Specific note should be taken about the following insights into the writing of Chapter 5:
   1. “But since the next chapter [Ed. – Chapter 5] tellso fthe coming of the tractors and must have a symphonic overtone, and, moreover, may not be more than four or five pages long…” (Entry #6)
   2. “Have to make the sound of the tractors and the dust of the tractors. I’ll have to have music before that…” (Entry #7)
   3. “Today’s work is the overtone of tractors, then men who run them, the men they displace, the sound of them, the smell of them. I’ve got to get this over. Got to because this one’s tone is very important—this is the eviction sound and the tonal reason for the movement. Must do it well.” (Entry #8)
3. Share with students the fact revealed in Entry #20: “I think I’ll play *The Swan* before because there too is the loss of a loved thing of the past” and use it to introduce the ballet by Tchaikovsky.
4. Have students freewrite or discuss: Why would Steinbeck want to achieve a “symphonic overtone”? Why would he want it to share “the loss of a loved thing of the past” with the ballet?
5. Play the score of the ballet while teacher begins reading the first few sentences, emphasizing the musicality of the words. Then, call on a couple of volunteers to read a few lines. Model for students where the “symphonic” tone may be captured by the words (for example, the long sentences built by commas in the first two sentences, ended with the short “They were silent.” sentence that rests that particular rhythm before it builds again in next paragraph.)
6. Continue playing ballet while students read along silently, with the instructions to mark the text for where the symphonic overtones of the music seem particularly well represented by the words and syntax.
7. Students discuss and record, in small groups, the questions:
   1. In what lines of text was Steinbeck especially successful at capturing a “symphonic overtone”?
   2. What is the cumulative impact of Steinbeck’s choices for this chapter? What is his purpose for the goals he describes in the journal? What evidence best supports this cumulative impact?
   3. (Optional) In the other inter-chapters read so far, what seems to be Steinbeck’s purpose for each? What evidence shows he achieved it? [perhaps divide into groups depending on where in novel class is]

And report out to the class using, if possible, a document camera for the annotated lines.

**Assessment**

Students will investigate the effect of a different type of music, their choice, on their own writing, as they write their own “inter-chapter” (Steinbeck called them “general”) about people involved in a struggle or social issue of their choice. Like Steinbeck, students will describe the tone they are trying to reach with their writing, and why the music helps them do that. Students share their writing via publication or reading.

This may be done in class (with students allowed to use headphones) or at home for homework.

In *Working Days*