

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF PEDAGOGY

**Socioeconomic Conditions during the
Great Depression as Depicted in Steinbeck's
Dustbowl Trilogy**

Diploma Thesis

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ABSTRAKT

Diplomová práce se zabývá vyličením socioekonomických podmínek v období Velké hospodářské krize v trilogii Johna Steinbecka a následným užitím tématu ve výuce anglického jazyka v devátých třídách základních škol. Teoretická část poskytuje informace o Velké hospodářské krizi v USA a událostmi, které předcházely tomuto období. Následně jsou poskytnuty informace o životě a díle Johna Steinbecka společně s analýzou vybraných novel, které se zabývají problematikou Velké hospodářské krize. Poslední kapitola teoretické části se zabývá užitím tématu ve výuce anglického jazyka. Praktická část diplomové práce se zabývá dotazníkovým šetřením jakožto metodou kvalitativního výzkumu. Cílem výzkumu je objasnit, do jaké míry mají studenti devátých ročníků základních škol zájem o výuku tohoto tématu v hodinách anglického jazyka prostřednictvím vybraných novel Johna Steinbecka. Výzkumná zjištění a limity výzkumu jsou uvedeny ve finální kapitole praktické části.

Klíčová slova

Velká hospodářská krize, John Steinbeck, výuka anglického jazyka

ABSTRACT

The diploma thesis deals with the depiction of socioeconomic conditions during the Great Depression in John Steinbeck's Dustbowl trilogy and further integration in ELT in the ninth grades of lower secondary schools. The theoretical part provides information on the Great Depression in the USA and the events that preceded this period. Subsequently, information about the life and work of John Steinbeck is provided together with an analysis of selected novels that deal with the issues of the Great Depression. The last chapter of the theoretical part deals with the usage of this topic in EFL classes. The practical part of the diploma thesis deals with questionnaire survey as a method of quantitative research. The aim of the research is to clarify to what extent are students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools interested in learning about this topic through John Steinbeck novels in English lessons. Research findings and research limits are presented in the final chapter of the practical part.

Keywords

The Great Depression, John Steinbeck, English language teaching

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the sources listed in the References section.

Olomouc, 20 June 2023

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Adam Kochwasser

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Depression was an economic disaster that spread across the world and caused enormous troubles to whole economies including banks, businesses, and most prominently, to ordinary people and the working class. Knowledge of past events comes from historians and writers of a specific period; however, writers possess the ability to use a variety of tools to narrate such events from many different perspectives, and the bitterness of the Great Depression was probably best portrayed by John Steinbeck, one the most important authors of the Great Depression. History is a great teacher and knowledge of the impacts on the socioeconomic conditions during the Great Depression can be still relevant for the 21st century. The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to explore the events of the Great Depression in the United States and their depiction in John Steinbeck's literary works, namely in *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*, and further clarify, to what extent are the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools interested in learning about this topic through John Steinbeck's novels and how can be literary texts integrated in English lessons.

This thesis is divided into a theoretical and a practical part. The aim of the theoretical part is to provide information about the events of the Great Depression, John Steinbeck's life and literary works, and also methods of integrating literary texts in English language teaching. The first chapter deals with the events that preceded the period of the Great Depression, namely World War I followed by the period called the Roaring Twenties. The second chapter provides information about the Great Depression itself, its causes, and living conditions during this period. The third chapter deals with life and work of John Steinbeck, and the fourth chapter provides an analysis of the selected works. The fifth and final chapter of the theoretical part provides possible usage and methods of implementing literary works in ELT and EFL classrooms.

The aim of the practical part is to clarify to what extent are the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools interested in learning about this topic through John Steinbeck novels in English lessons, and whether they consider this topic important. Students were provided with a questionnaire that was distributed electronically. The research objectives and questions were based on hypotheses, and research findings and results can be found in the last chapters of the practical part.

I. THEORETICAL PART

1 BEFORE THE GREAT DEPRESSION

To fully understand the socioeconomic situation during the Great Depression, this thesis has to start with the depiction of World War I and the period called the Roaring Twenties. This chapter, therefore, focuses on these two important periods of the American history that directly preceded the Great Depression era. World War I divided the American society but brought an opportunity to strengthen American economy. The aftermath of this event led to a short period of economic recession but quickly transformed to years of economic prosperity during the Roaring Twenties. However, the socioeconomic conditions were about to change in the 1930s.

1.1 World War I

World War I, one of the worst events in world history, started in 1914 and lasted until 1918. A conflict that originated in Europe eventually broke out to the entire world and brought some unexpected opportunities for some world economies. The United States, then going through the *Progressive Era*, remained neutral until April 6, 1917, when eventually declared war on Germany due to Germany's reckless behaviour. The United States was, however, a major player in the war since the beginning in 1914. The United States had been supplying the Allied Powers¹ with military materials, raw materials, food, and money. The export numbers to Europe rose to historical highs, "the total for the year 1916 being nearly double the average amount for the years 1911 and 1914." (Jefferson, 1917, p. 474)

The exports to Europe in 1914 amounted to \$1,339 million whereas in 1915, it amounted to \$2,573 million. The exports in 1916 were even higher, amounting to \$3,814 million. An important fact is that in 1915 and 1916 the prices were high in comparison with 1914, therefore, the increase in exports of goods was not significantly higher than the prices Europe had to pay. (Jefferson, 1917, pp. 474-475)

Jefferson (1917) further explores the export numbers and the overall increase in exportations of goods from the United States by dividing the world into four groups: Allies¹, Central Powers², Near Neutrals³, and Far Neutrals⁴. (p. 477) The numbers show that in 1915 and 1916 the biggest increase in the exports were to the Allies, which is obvious as the

¹ The Allied Powers comprised France, Russia, and Britain

² The Central Powers comprised Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey

³ Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland

⁴ Spain, Cuba, Argentina, and Brazil

United States later joined the Allied Powers in the war. The exports to the Central Powers in 1915 and 1916 practically disappeared. The same happened to the imports. The exports to the Near Neutrals and Far Neutrals increased as well, but in comparison with the Allies, the numbers are not that significant. Not only the exports, but also the imports from the Allies, Near Neutrals and Far Neutrals increased, however, the exports were greater than the imports in all cases. (Jefferson, 1917, pp. 477-478) Despite losing business with the Central Powers, the American economy was doing very well. In fact, the United States transformed “from a debtor to a creditor nation” as “by April 1917, American bankers had loaned more than \$2 billion to the Allied governments.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 657)

During the *Progressive Era*, the working class and labour formed numerous associations and unions that called for progress in working conditions, wages, job opportunities and strove for equal rights for black workers and women. Several strikes were organized across the United States, especially in bigger cities such as Chicago and New York City. The outcome was that the labour workers were hugely divided. World War I brought an opportunity to the government to soothe the situation, which led to unprecedented changes in employment. As Helgeson (2016) explained in his article:

In the first place, the wartime economy required labor peace. Therefore, the federal government facilitated the formation and growth of unions. At the same time, the wartime economic boom required many new workers. With the end of European immigration and the draft of white men into the military, women and African Americans found new opportunities. (p. 14)

Being given this opportunity, African Americans from all corners of the South moved to big cities in the North to seek a well-paid job. “Between 1915 and 1918, nearly 500,000 African Americans migrated from the South to northern cities, with another 700,000 following in their wake during the 1920s.” (Helgeson, 2016, p. 15) In the 1920s, “more than 13 million people moved from rural to urban centers.” (Remini, 2008, p. 205) Labour unions finally secured wage increase for their workers, moreover, the membership in unions also increased between 1914 and 1918. The average weekly earnings in manufacturing rose from \$11.01 in 1914 to \$22.08 in 1919, which is an equivalent of a 100.5 percent increase. The average weekly earnings in bituminous-coal mining rose from \$12.22 in 1914 to \$25.65 in 1919, which is an equivalent of a 109.9 percent increase, whereas in anthracite mining the increase was from \$11.40 to \$26.92 between 1914 and 1919, which equals to an impressive

136.1 percent increase. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1945, pp. 13-15) On the other hand, there was a significant change in consumers' prices between 1914 and 1919. Food prices rose 83.1 percent, clothing prices rose 141.7 percent and house furnishing prices rose 121.0 percent. These numbers were collected based on prices in large cities, in addition, the prices varied in different regions across the United States. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1945, p. 7)

Another important fact is that when there is a war of any kind, governments tend to raise taxes as wars cost a significant amount of money. World War I, therefore, brought many changes in the United States' tax system. One of the most important changes was the re-introduction of income tax in 1913. The lowest tax rate was 1 percent on all incomes under \$20,000, whereas the highest tax rate was 7 percent on all incomes over \$500,000. However, there were personal exemptions for single persons—\$3,000—and for married couples—\$4,000. This taxation lasted until 1916 when another increase was introduced, this time slightly higher. The lowest tax rate was 2 percent on all incomes under \$20,000, whereas the highest tax rate was 15 percent on all incomes over \$2,000,000. These changes were introduced in *the Revenue Act of 1916*.

With the United States entering the war in 1917, the next increase in tax rates was astonishing. Personal exemptions were radically reduced—\$1,000 for single persons and \$2,000 for married couples. The lowest tax rate was 2 percent on all incomes under \$2,000, then the tax rate gradually increased up to 67 percent on all incomes over \$2,000,000. Not only the tax rates were high, but with the introduction of *the War Revenue Act of 1917*, tax collection affected more people than before. What seemed already unprecedently high became even higher in 1918 with the introduction of *the Revenue Act of 1918*. The lowest tax rate changed to 6 percent on all incomes under \$4,000, whereas the highest tax rate changed to 77 percent on all incomes over \$1,000,000. And therefore, it is not surprising that the United States' revenue from income tax rose accordingly. In 1914, it amounted to \$71,582, whereas in 1917, it amounted to \$359,648. The most significant increase in tax rates in 1918 registered a massive state revenue of \$2,852,325 from income taxes. (Doris, 1963, p. 282)

The end of the war in 1918 brought an end to economic prosperity and secured job positions in the United States. The U.S. Government quickly cancelled its war contracts, which affected mostly war industry labour such as steel and mining workers, but also other industries that primarily profited from the war. The cost of living was extremely high, the prices of consumers' goods were also high due to high inflation, and because wages did not

grow as much as inflation, it all led to labour unrest. “Many companies wanted to return labor relations to prewar patterns.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 672) Afraid of losing their jobs and living standards during the war, “more than 4 million workers [...] went on strike” in 1919. (Helgeson, 2016, p. 15) The strikes across the United States ended up unsuccessfully for the workers, which led to rise in unemployment numbers, poor living conditions and eventually riots, especially across the biggest American cities.

During the war, the unemployment rate dropped to only 1.2 percent, but during the economic recession between 1920 and 1921, the unemployment rate peaked at 11.3 percent, which was supported by a 22 percent decrease in manufacturing production. (Anderson, 2022, p. 5) “Factory employment dropped 30 percent from March 1920 to July 1921” and “unemployment rose above 4 million.” (Woytinsky, 1945, p. 20) However, many workers who managed to keep their jobs faced significant hour and wage cuts, which even more supported a decrease in consumers’ spending. Although, an important fact is that a big part of the unemployment numbers was caused by returning soldiers and workers who had served in foreign countries during the war and who either returned to their old jobs or could not find a job because of the overproduction and therefore significant shortage of production across industries. The U.S. economy, now in times of deflation, needed another impulse.

1.2 The Roaring Twenties

The primary focus of the American industry during the war was to successfully supply its partners in Europe with war equipment. As the war ended, American factories had no longer those amounts of sales that made them rich during wartime, and in order to survive, they had to adapt and restructure their businesses. It was a perfect time for developing new technology and products, and also new kinds of services. As Woytinsky (1945) stated in his article:

In view of falling prices and relatively stable wages, manufacturers were compelled to improve the technique of production, to introduce labor-saving devices, to streamline organization. The “assembly line”, which before the war had been the trademark of the automobile industry, was introduced in other branches of production. (p. 20)

The production began to rise in 1922, which helped the unemployment rate drop significantly. The biggest boom was in the automobile industry. Henry Ford’s implementation

of the assembly line in production was crucial for his future success. His Model T, introduced in 1908, targeted the middle-class Americans and soon became the most beloved car in America and the symbol of prosperity. The Model T was durable enough to handle American roads, which were mostly in terrible conditions, especially in rural areas, moreover, it was easily maintainable and repairable vehicle. The average price was around \$850, which was still a bit higher for the American middle class, but Ford was able to bring the price down “as low as \$290 by 1927.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 685) The last Model T rolled off the line in 1927 and closed the production numbers with more than 15 million sold models. It is therefore no wonder that “by 1925, Ford Motor Company showed a daily profit of some \$25,000.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 685) Ford was not only generating huge profits, but also paying his employees more than generous. Already in 1914, his employees were earning \$5 a day and at the end of 1929, the minimum wage increased to \$7 a day. On the other hand, Ford was known to apply very strict rules in the workplace. Employees were, for instance, forbidden to talk or sit while working, they could not even whistle. (Carlisle, 2009a, p. 174)

In general, “the number of registered cars rose from 12.2 million to 26.5 million” between 1922 and 1929. (Woytinsky, 1945, p. 22) Moreover, “between 1919 and 1929 sales climbed from 1.5 to 4.8 million.” (Carlisle, 2009a, p. 172) This supported the increase in demand for development of roads, increased consumptions of petrol, and therefore, steady job positions and income. Up until 1930s, “the automobile industry provided employment for nearly 4 million individuals.” (Remini, 2008, p. 206)

The electrification of the nation was another technological boom of the Roaring Twenties. Electricity fuelled factories that used machines for production, but also homes that used modern technological inventions such as electric irons, electric refrigerators, radios, and other electric home appliances. By 1930, “electrical power had reached nearly all urban homes but fewer than 10 percent of farm homes.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 684) Probably the most important invention for homes that was operated through electrification was the first mass medium—the radio. By the end of 1923 “an estimated 400,000 households had a radio, a jump from 60,000 just the year before.” (Lewis, 1992, pp. 26-27) Hundreds of newly formed radio stations joining the broadcasting business began broadcasting almost overnight. People could listen to stations that were operated by newspapers, banks, universities, cities and towns, or even pharmacies, creameries, and hospitals. (Lewis, 1992, p. 27) All kinds of music, games and church services were broadcasted across the United States through radio, and

people were eager to listen to almost anything they heard. Nonetheless, there was one very dangerous industry that was implemented in the broadcast—an advertisement.

An advertisement played a huge role in the sales numbers of companies and paved the way for even more dangerous business that helped to the outburst of the Great Depression—buying goods on credit. The very famous phrase that is still relevant to this day, “Buy now, pay later”, was spreading to all households in the United States and affected the way Americans spent their money mostly on durable goods. “By the end of the 1920s, up to 90 percent of durable goods were purchased with credit.” (Olney, 1991, p. 3) Households shifted their spending towards major durable goods such as automobiles, household appliances and radios. These goods were high-priced and bought on credit. (Olney, 1991, pp. 6-7) In addition, “between 1919 and 1929, consumer expenditures for household appliances grew by more than 120 percent.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 684) For instance, electric refrigerators represented a commodity that created a whole new market. In 1922, 11,000 units were reportedly sold with an estimated value of \$4,000,000, whereas in 1929, 630,000 units were reportedly sold with an estimated value of \$181,175,000. The down payments in 1922 were \$1,000,000, whereas the down payments in 1929 were \$45,294,000. The annual debt, therefore, rose from \$3,000,000 in 1922, to incredible \$135,881,000 in 1929. (Persons, 1930, pp. 111-112) The instalment plan was an opportunity to focus on the present without taking much care about the future. Americans were convinced that the economic prosperity can go on forever and there is no need to worry.

Banks and financial companies played a major role in increased demand for loans. Most banks were located in the centre of cities and their services were limited mostly to businesses and wealthy citizens. It was A. P. Giannini, an Italian-American banker, who changed the banking industry by opening bank branches near people’s workplaces and suburbs. He encouraged people to “open small checking and savings accounts and to borrow for such purposes as car purchases.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 686) He was the founder of Bank of Italy, which was later renamed to Bank of America—one of the biggest American banks to this day. As Rötheli (2013) states in his article, the development of new sales methods, innovation in credit analysis and lending practices led to “overconfidence in banks and an excessive growth orientation” and thus “these forces contributed to a credit boom that ended in collapse.” (p. 326) Consumption in daily life increased during the 1920s because with increased production, various items became more affordable. Still, “personal debts were rising 2.5 times faster than incomes.” (Carlisle, 2009a, p. 29)

Despite growing consumption and (superficial) prosperity in bigger cities and suburbs, people in rural areas did not share the same experience. Agricultural conditions changed drastically after World War I, and farmers experienced a decline in prices and production. The post-war European recovery resumed agricultural production and once agriculturally dependant European countries, they were no longer in need of importing such commodities from the United States. There were, however, more reasons for this severe decline. First of all, “as the United State made the shift from a debtor nation to a creditor nation, the trade balance shifted as well.” (Carlisle, 2009a, p. 77) European countries had to sell to the United States instead of buying from it, and therefore, they supplied farm products from different countries. Despite the falling exports of farm products, for instance, an 85 percent drop in meat exports in the 10 years after World War I, American farmers produced more than the American people could absorb, which led to overproduction and thus falling prices. (Carlisle, 2009a, p. 77; Berkin, 2008, p. 688) “By November 1, 1920, farm prices were 33 per cent lower than the level of the previous year; by the next midsummer, they were down 85 per cent.” (Saloutos, 1951, p. 100) Farmers sought help from the Government, but the Bills passed in Congress were vetoed by President Coolidge. The average farm net income fell sharply during the 1920s and did not reach the 1917-1920 levels until World War II. On the other hand, taxes, mortgages, debts, and prices of farm necessities such as fertilizer or agriculture machinery rose steadily. Many farmers faced bankruptcy because they were not able to pay off their loans, which then enabled the banks to seize their farms. Banks were in a tough position because the value of land “fell by more than half between 1920 and 1928.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 688) Despite the fact that nearly 30 percent of the workforce in 1920 were farmers, throughout the twenties and thirties, thousands gave up and left for urban life.

Many employers began to provide the workers with bonus programmes such as paid vacations, insurance, or plans that offered purchases on the stock market. This approach is called welfare capitalism and its main purpose was to increase economic development and employees’ productivity. One of the most crucial trends during the 1920s was speculating on the stock market. The stock market has always been a very dangerous environment for seasoned traders and businessmen, but during the 1920s, everyone could participate and was given the chance to become rich. After all, “by 1929, 4 million Americans owned stock, equivalent to about 10 percent of American households.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 686) The power of advertisement portrayed the stock market as a place where everyone could make money on rising prices of stocks even with a small investment. It seemed very easy and reachable.

There were basically three choices for making an investment in the stock market. First, people invested their own savings through a brokerage company. Although the income rose throughout the 1920s, and so did savings, the distribution was uneven. The truth is that the rich got richer, while the poor got poorer. As Carlisle (2009a) states, “by 1929 American wealth was concentrated in the hands of the richest 24,000 families, who held 34 percent of all savings. Some 21 million American families had no savings at all.” (p. 185) During the peak year of 1929, the income of 65 percent of Americans was less than \$2,000 a year, while the income over \$10,000 a year was reached by only 1 percent of Americans. (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1975, p. 299) Second, people bought stocks on margin, which is very similar to buying products on credit. Berkin (2008) explains the process as following:

One could purchase stock listed at \$100 a share with as little as \$10 down and the other \$90 “on margin”—that is, owed to the stockbroker. If the price advanced to \$150, the investor could sell, pay off the broker and gain a profit of \$50 on the \$10 investment. Unfortunately, if the stock price fell to \$50, the investor would still owe \$90 to the broker. (p. 687)

In a bull market—when stock prices go constantly up for a certain period of time—buying on margin was the ideal choice for getting rich very quickly. Yet, buying stocks on margin was not the most used option for stock market speculations. The third choice, and probably the riskiest of all, was to borrow money from banks and loan companies.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average (“DJIA”), which is based on 30 largest and most-traded American companies, symbolized the stock market’s health. At the end of 1920, DJIA closed the year with 71.95 points, whereas in 1924, it reached and closed the year with 120.51 points. The New York Stock Exchange experienced a milestone moment on November 11, 1924, when it reported that “a record 2.2 million shares had been bought and sold in a single day.” (Carlisle, 2009a, p. 172) The high was reached on September 3, 1929—less than two months prior to the Wall Street Crash of 1929—with 381.17 points, which represents more than 400 percent increase since 1920. Furthermore, “the number of brokerage offices [...] had jumped from 706 in 1925 to 1,685 by the fall of 1929, with almost all of the increase coming since 1928.” (Morris, 2017, p. 115) The issue with this parabolic increase was, as White (1994) states, that “most historians and some economists treat the bull market of the 1920s as an episode when crowd psychology overwhelmed the fundamentals that should have driven stock prices.” (p. 2)

2 THE GREAT DEPRESSION

This chapter focuses on one of the most severe economic downturns in the American history that started in 1929 and lasted until 1939. After the period of economic prosperity, which started surprisingly during World War I, millions of lives in the United States were affected by destructive power of this depression, which irreversibly changed the socio-economic conditions. This chapter deals with the events that blasted off the economic downturn and life during this unfortunate period. Furthermore, this chapter explores the Dust Bowl period—a period of severe dust storms that occurred during the Great Depression era and made life in the United States even more complicated.

2.1 The Wall Street Crash of 1929

Many historians and economists still debate whether there was a bubble in the stock market or not. And since there is no unambiguous conclusion, it can be only confirmed that the stock market crash uncovered how fragile and superficial the prosperity and the U.S. economy was. Another question is whether the stock market crash could have been expected. Although not absolutely convincingly, Rappoport (1994) concluded that from the option-pricing models “the crash of the bull market in 1929 was apparently anticipated over a year in advance by the rise in implied volatility from diffusion models” and also that “on Wall Street, these fears of a huge decline in stock prices were manifested primarily in the approximate doubling of margin required by lenders and the premium in the interest rates on brokers’ loans.” (p. 280) Some seasoned professional traders and investors, therefore, started to dump their shares early. To name a few, John Raskob, a businessman for DuPont and General Motors, dumped almost all his shares of those two companies in 1928. Bernard Baruch, an important statesman and financier, who made a fortune during the stock market boom in 1920s, started to periodically sell his shares since 1927. (Morris, 2017, p. 119) There were two camps of traders and investors; those who bought the pullbacks and supported the continuation of the bull market, and those who kept closing their positions at high prices because they anticipated a huge drop. At one point, those who were selling engulfed the stock market.

On October 24, 1929, the stock market plunged and DJIA was down 11 percent right after the opening bell. That day, known as ‘Black Thursday’, blasted off the true panic on the stock market. The prices of major stocks dropped significantly, for instance, the Radio Corporation of America (“RCA”) plunged more than 35 percent. On top of that, thousands

of traders and investors could not contact their brokers as communications across the country were disrupted by storms. (Ahamed, 2009, p. 307) DJIA eventually closed the day with 1.78 percent loss and the volume of 12,895,000 traded shares. (James, 2010, p. 133) The next wave roared on October 28, known as ‘Black Monday’, and was even more destructive. More subjects added salt to the wound: panicking individual investors, banks, or traders forced to sell by margin calls. That day, 9 million shares were traded and DJIA was down 40 points—almost 14 percent. (Ahamed, 2009, p. 309) The next day, October 29, known as ‘Black Tuesday’, DJIA dropped another 30 points—almost 12 percent. A record number of shares was traded— more than 16 million—because foreign traders and investors joined the selling. A few big investors tried to save the stock market in order to regain trust in the U.S. economy and were eventually successful for a few trading sessions. DJIA repeatedly regained and lost approximately 30 points and then bottomed at 198.69 on November 13, 1929. “This was followed by a quite spectacular (but incomplete) recovery to 294.07 on April 17, 1930. After this, there was a long slide, with fewer bounces, until the trough of July 1932, with a low of 40.56 on July 8.” (James, 2010, pp. 134-135) The total value of shares on New York Stock Exchange (“NYSE”) was \$82.1 billion in September 1929, but by July 1932, when the stock market reached its bottom, the value was only \$12.7 billion. (Morris, 2017, p. 124)

The consequences of the initial crash were truly devastating. “By mid-November some \$26 billion, roughly a third of the value of stocks recorded in September, had evaporated.” (Kennedy, 1999, p. 38) People wanted to get out of the stock market and withdrew their money, but some banks re-invested it in the stock market and were unable to pay off their clients. Because banks were not properly regulated by the Federal Reserve System (“FED”), hundreds went bankrupt in 1929 and people lost their savings and investments. “Between 1930 and 1933, over 9,000 American banks either went bankrupt or closed their doors to avoid bankruptcy.” (Brinkley, 2010, pp. 605-606) As Berkin (2008) states, the crash was a starting point for the Great Depression, but the causes were overproduction, poor distribution of income, buying on credit, and uneven economic growth. (p. 720) The stock market crash affected the whole world and eventually brought the Depression to other countries, especially European. As a major creditor country, and the world largest economy, the United States loaned billions of dollars to European economies that were hugely weakened by World War I. In order to survive the collapse, American banks were calling in the loans from their European debtors. Germany and Austria, who were paying war reparations to Britain

and France, suddenly faced the economic collapse and were unable to continue paying off their reparations. This fact resulted in Britain and France suddenly unable to continue paying off their loans to the United States. (Brinkley, 2010, pp. 604-605) Moreover, by passing the *Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act* in 1930, which “set the highest tariff rates in U.S. history”, the United States only crippled the world trade and added to the outburst of the global depression as the “increases were so excessive that twenty-six foreign countries retaliated by raising their rates, and American exports took a nosedive.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 723; Remini, 2008, p. 214)

2.2 During the Great Depression

As the United States entered the Depression, the changes in many sectors were alarming. The gross national product “plummeted from over \$104 billion in 1929 to \$76.4 billion in 1932—a 25 percent decline in three years.” (Brinkley, 2010, pp. 606-607) The unemployment rate rose from 3 percent in 1929 to 9 percent in 1930 and skyrocketed to 25 percent in 1933. (Berkin, 2008, p. 723) As Brinkley (2010) states, the unemployment rate in the industrial cities of Northeast and Midwest was much higher, for instance, Cleveland and Ohio were on 50 percent in 1932; Toledo was on 80 percent. People were looking for jobs that did not exist and eventually became homeless. (p. 608) There was a decline in jobs all over the country, especially in bigger cities, for instance, construction employment fell to less than 20 percent of its 1929 level, manufacturing employment fell by more than 40 percent, and work hours were cut by 60 percent. There were virtually no job opportunities for unskilled workers, whereas clerks and managers were not hit hard by unemployment. (Morris, 2017, p. 136)

Rural areas suffered even more. The pre-Depression conditions in agriculture had been already worsening throughout 1920s, but after the stock market crash, farmers and their families faced even worse conditions. Between 1929 and 1932, farm income declined by 60 percent and 400,000 farms were seized by banks as farmers were unable to pay off their loans, moreover, “a third of all American farmers lost their land.” (Brinkley, 2010, p. 608) “Only 16 percent of farm households earned incomes above the national median of \$1,500 per year” and, for instance, “sharecroppers and tenant farm families in the South had annual incomes of \$350 or less.” (Musbach, 2001, p. 34) In general, “by the end of 1933 the income of most Americans had declined by half” and “a million or more individuals had been evicted

from their homes when they could not pay the rent or meet their mortgage payments.” (Remini, 2008, p. 223)

African Americans and minorities were struggling even during the prosperity decade as millions of them still lived in the rural South. The Great Depression, however, made their lives in the South even more precarious for only one reason; the unemployed whites who believed they were the first to claim any available work. “Approximately eleven million African Americans lived in the American South, where they principally labored as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and wage workers.” (Murphy, 2020, p. 1) Therefore, another wave of migration to big northern cities from rural areas began. Conditions there were slightly better, although black unemployment was around 50 percent, moreover, two million African Americans, which equalled to half of the total black population of the country, were on some form of relief by 1932. (Brinkley, 2010, pp. 608-609)

Women and children were in complicated situation during the Depression, as well. People believed that especially married women had no right to work when unemployed men could not find a job. This resulted in many companies refusing to employ married women. Moreover, “from 1932 until 1937, it was illegal for more than one member of a family to hold a federal civil service job.” (Brinkley, 2010, p. 612) White women often took jobs that were traditionally held by minorities, for instance, in domestic service. Therefore, black women suffered huge unemployment. On the other hand, there were businesses that preferred to employ women, for instance, “in Detroit, automakers preferred to hire women at 4 cents an hour rather than pay a man 10 cents an hour.” (Berkin, 2008, p. 740) Federal jobs were also largely occupied by women, but due to falling tax revenues and the national income that had dropped between 1929 and 1932 by more than 50 percent, there were many job positions that had to be reduced. Among other crucial sectors that faced serious cut downs, education was even more destructive as it significantly affected the role of children during the Great Depression. (Marcuss, 2007, p. 34) “According to the U.S. Office of Education, nearly 2,000 rural schools in twenty-four states failed to open in the fall of 1933”, which resulted in “2.3 million children without schools to attend.” (Hendrick, 1972, p. 178; Ruland, 1992, p. 317) In addition, “three million children between the ages of seven and 17 left school for the workplace in 1930 alone.” (Carlisle, 2009b, p. 16) Teenagers were wandering the country looking for work and younger children often helped their parents with household jobs. However, even children faced homelessness as in the early years of the Depression, there were 250,000 homeless children. (Carlisle, 2009b, p. 17)

Herbert Hoover took the presidential office in 1929 and was immediately thrown into the struggle with the Depression. Hoover's presidency was marked by his efforts to address the economic challenges of the Great Depression, but his policies were largely ineffective in stemming the tide of economic decline. Hoover believed in limited government intervention in the economy and preferred to rely on voluntary efforts by businesses and individuals to address the crisis. One of Hoover's early efforts to address the economic crisis was the creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which provided loans to struggling businesses and banks. Despite his efforts, the economy continued to decline, with unemployment rates rising to record levels and widespread poverty and suffering. "Many Americans blamed Hoover for their suffering during the Great Depression and criticized him for his perceived inaction and lack of empathy for the plight of ordinary citizens." (Remini, 2008, p. 342) It is, therefore, no surprise that "Hoover's reputation never recovered from the unpopularity he engendered during his term of office, as the scapegoat for the Great Depression." (Rothbard, 2005, p. 122)

Prior to the election of 1932, Herbert Hoover was renominated for the second term in the presidential office, however, few people believed he could win. His opponent, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democratic Party's candidate for the presidential seat, had been a well-known politician with a recognizable name who was seen as a promising and dynamic figure with a vision of hope for all Americans. The fact that people were blaming President Hoover for doing too little during the Depression resulted in Franklin D. Roosevelt winning the election in 42 of 48 states with nearly 23 million votes. He introduced his programme for social and economic reconstruction of America called the New Deal and started working from his first day in office. During the first "Hundred Days" in office, President Roosevelt "turned the United States into a social welfare state, sponsoring legislation that ranged from the Federal Emergency Relief and National Recovery Acts to the Emergency Conservation Work Act." (Carlisle, 2009b, p. 12) Roosevelt's New Deal acts were divided into three categories—Reform, Recovery, and Relief—and can be also separated into two waves; the First New Deal (1933-1935) and the Second New Deal (1935-1939).

Few days after taking office, Roosevelt introduced the *Emergency Banking Act* to Congress. This Bill was designed to "primarily protect larger banks from being dragged down by the weakness of smaller ones" by giving power to the Treasury Department for "inspection of all banks before they would be allowed to reopen, for federal assistance to some troubled institutions, and for a thorough reorganization of those banks in the greatest

difficulty.” (Brinkley, 2010, p. 628) The bill was passed through Congress within few hours. Through the *Emergency Conservation Work Act*, Congress passed the *Civilian Conservation Corps*, which was a relief programme that provided “work for men between the ages of 18 and 35 [...] if single, healthy, unemployed, an American citizen, and a member of a family on relief.” (Rauchway, 2008, p. 64) Men were paid \$30 a month, but they had to send \$25 home. Within a few months, over 300,000 men had enrolled in the programme and by 1941, enrolment rose to over 2 million men. (Berkin, 2008, p. 731) To further stabilize the economy, Roosevelt focused on agriculture, as well. Through the *Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933*, “producers of seven basic commodities (wheat, cotton, corn, hogs, rice, tobacco, and dairy products) would decide on production limits for their crops.” (Brinkley, 2010, p. 630) The government then paid subsidies to farmers in order to reduce planting. This *Act* was designed to reduce production and raise farm prices. (Berkin, 2008, p. 728) Roosevelt did not forget to include the stock market in his programmes and through the *Securities Exchange Act of 1934*, the Securities and Exchange Commission was established. This commission should regulate the stock market, including the setting of margin rates. (Berkin, 2008, p. 732)

The second wave of New Deal programmes registered establishment of the largest agency under the New Deal. Congress allocated nearly \$5 billion and created the *Works Progress Administration* (“WPA”). Its purpose was to return millions of people back to work, especially in the construction sector. “WPA employed more than three million people in its first year and in the eight years of its life put 8.5 million persons to work at a total cost of some \$11 billion.” (Kennedy, 1999, pp. 252-253) One of the most important *Acts* of the New Deal was the *Social Security Act of 1935*. It created a Social Security system for retired workers over the age of 65 and provided them with an income during their retirement. This *Act* also provided aid for the disabled and families with dependent children. (Berkin, 2008, p. 735) On the other hand, Roosevelt’s New Deal measures included some controversial legislative actions and executive orders, one of which was the abandonment of the gold standard. In 1933, President Roosevelt signed *Executive Order 6102*, which prohibited hoarding of gold coins and bullion. Citizens and corporations had to turn in their gold to the government at a set price of \$20.67 per troy ounce. Those who violated this order faced a huge fine or even up to 10 years of imprisonment. Gold was nationalized as the American dollar’s convertibility into gold was suspended. In addition, banks were forbidden to pay out or export any gold coins or bullion. On the contrary, the inflow of gold from abroad in the

four years after 1933 was over \$5 billion of additional bullion. (Ahamed, 2009, p. 409) “The value of gold held by Fed almost tripled, to \$12 billion”, due to the fact that after Roosevelt confiscated gold, he increased the market price of gold at \$35 per ounce, which also devalued the dollar by over 40 percent. (Ahamed, 2009, pp. 408-409)

Although Roosevelt’s New Deal actions strengthened the U.S. economy and established many important programmes that provided support, protection, or modernization of previous legislations, they did not end the Great Depression. The true recovery began when the United States entered World War II on December 7, 1941, after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.

2.3 The Dust Bowl

Agriculture during the 1920s had already suffered due to falling export numbers, which led to overproduction, and therefore, the decline in incomes. People moved to bigger cities to seek better jobs. Throughout the 1930s, the region of Great Plains that stretched south from North Dakota into Texas was experiencing “a steady decline in rainfall and an accompanying increase in heat.” (Brinkley, 2010, p. 608) The earth then became dry, which led to soil erosion. The topsoil was carried by high winds, which eventually spread into severe dust storms where the biggest storms, called “black blizzards”, reached almost 3 kilometres in height. (Carlisle, 2009b, pp. 4-5)

Although the Dust Bowl was a natural disaster, it was also a man-made disaster. During the 1920s, the vast majority of farmers were farming using horses or mules for ploughing. However, the technological boom provided opportunity to farm machinery makers, who started offering mechanized tractors and other farm machinery. Thus, farming became much faster, which was one of the causes of the overproduction of crops. As prices of crops continuously fell, farmers were exhausting the land and, as Kennedy (1999) describes, “their tractors were clawing the skin off the earth, scratching at its fragile face to plant ever larger crops, more cotton and wheat to carry to market.” (p. 194) There was no grass with roots that would hold the soil in place. Moreover, the storms occurred more frequently as there were 22 storms in 1934, 40 in 1935, 68 in 1936, and 72 in 1937. (Worster, 1977, p. 4) After that, they slightly subsided.

The storms had huge impact on all farms’ lives. People had to cover every little part of their houses to prevent dust from getting inside. When they were not successful, dust

covered furniture and floors, and settled inside dishes and glasses, which had to be washed to be usable again. It was even worse outside, for instance, cars were usually covered with dust, often even buried underneath it. Farmers then had to deal with damaged engines that stopped working, however, they could not afford to repair them. Livestock were hurt by the storms, as well. Ultimately, people suffered from pneumonia and other lung diseases. Despite their efforts to cover their faces by wearing protective masks, dust penetrated their lungs and often led to fatal consequences. These terrible conditions gave the farmers no other option than to abandon their houses and farms and move away. “Black blizzards and other disasters left 500,000 Plains residents homeless in the 1930s, and at least 2.5 million had moved out of the region by 1940.” (Carlisle, 2009b, p. 5) This applied especially to one of the worst places to live during the Dust Bowl period—Oklahoma. The Oklahomans, often called the “Okies”, travelled to California in search of jobs at any wage. Some were successful, but many had to wander from town to town and continue searching for jobs.

3 JOHN STEINBECK: LIFE AND WORK

This chapter focuses on the central literary figure of the Great Depression era—John Steinbeck. Steinbeck’s personal life is presented in detail, tracking his early days at Stanford University over to his adventures during World War II and his post-war life. This chapter further deals with his major works that have been read by millions of readers worldwide and are considered classics, and the most influential works to this day.

3.1 Steinbeck’s Life

John Steinbeck was born on February 27, 1902, in a California’s Salinas, a town with population of 2,500 people. As the only son in a family of four, his parents had high hopes for him, especially his mother, Olive. Olive was the daughter of Irish immigrants, and it was she who stood behind Steinbeck’s later development of love for storytelling, reading, and literature in general. (Reef, 1996, p. 10) She was a teacher and also a very active figure in the town. Still, she managed to raise and educate her children. His father, also named John, was a quiet man who was emotionally detached from his son. He was an accountant, but shortly opened a feed and grain store, which eventually failed. Then he was appointed treasurer of Monterey County, which was a prestigious position. (Reef, 1996, p. 11)

As both parents were educated and considered culture important, they often visited theatres and concerts and read popular literature to their children. When he turned nine, Steinbeck received a copy of *Le Morte d’Arthur* written by Sir Thomas Malory. It was a fifteenth-century prose that influenced his future literary works. (Lynch, 2009, p. 5) In high school, Steinbeck’s grades were above average, but there was one area, in which he truly excelled—writing. He became the associate editor of the school magazine, *El Gabilan*, where he wrote articles and essays. He was also sending his short stories to magazines “with no return address, as if for the time he was afraid to receive rejection slips.” (McCarthy, 1980, p. 8) After graduating from high school, Steinbeck entered Stanford University in 1919. He struggled at university as the subjects that were required to get the degree did not interest him. Instead, he signed up for subjects, such as history, literature, and classical Greek that he regarded beneficial for his dream job. (Reef, 1996, p. 25) Eventually, his attendance and grades went down, and he withdrew from Stanford. He made a few appearances on the campus throughout the following years, but then in 1925, he decided to leave Stanford without a degree, ready to fully focus on writing. During his breaks from Stanford, Steinbeck

worked in several places in California and heard many stories from men who worked mostly on farms and ranches. (McCarthy, 1980, pp. 9-10)

When he left Stanford, Steinbeck worked as a hotel maintenance worker near Lake Tahoe. Once he saved enough money, he moved to New York where he became a hod carrier in the construction of Madison Square Garden. (Lynch, 2009, p. 84) He planned to work at day and write at night, however, his day job was very exhausting, and he soon quit. With help of his uncle Joe Hamilton, Steinbeck then worked as a reporter for the *New York American*, but unfortunately, it was yet another job that was not suited for him. Eventually, he got fired and decided that after a series of job and personal life failures, it was time to return home.

When he returned back to California, he took a job as a caretaker for a summer house near Lake Tahoe. “It was the ideal job for an aspiring writer – peaceful seclusion and isolation.” (Lynch, 2009, p. 85) He could therefore complete his first novel called *Cup of Gold*. When he finished his novel, he quit his caretaker job and took a job at the local fish hatchery where he met his future wife, Carol Henning. (Reef, 1996, p. 39) He got fired after a job incident, but it was an opportunity to move closer to Carol, who worked in San Francisco. Steinbeck found a job at the Bemis Bag Company where he worked as a warehouse labourer. However, this job was very similar to his first New York job. He had no energy for writing, and he had to find a publisher for his novel. He was fortunate enough to receive financial support from his father and moved with Carol to his family’s house in Pacific Grove where he could concentrate on writing. In 1929, his novel *Cup of Gold* was published and in 1930, he married Carol. (Reef, 1996, pp. 40-41) During the early years of the Great Depression, Steinbeck published two books which did not bring “neither the financial assistance nor the critical recognition.” (McCarthy, 1980, p. 14) In addition, the Steinbecks had to move back to Salinas as John’s mother was ill. She died in 1934 and soon after that, John’s father declined in health and died in 1935. In the same year, Steinbeck published a novel called *Tortilla Flat*, which finally made him successful as it became a national best-seller. Steinbeck was financially independent and in the next five years published his most important works—*In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. (Reef, 1996, pp. 53-55)

In 1943, Steinbeck divorced Carol and quickly married Gwyn Conger, who he met in California. He was then hired by a New York newspaper to sail for Europe and report on the war. He visited Britain, Italy, and North Africa, and returned to New York in the same year. (Reef, 1996, p. 100) He had been working on his next novel, which was published after

the war ended in 1945. *Cannery Row* was yet another very successful work. In 1948, Steinbeck had to deal with two major changes in his life. He divorced his second wife, Gwyn, and lost his long-life friend, Ed Ricketts. He returned to Pacific Grove in despair and tried to forget his recent suffering. In early 1949, he met a woman who brought happiness to his life once again. Steinbeck married Elaine Scott in 1950, moved to New York, and was ready to work again. His next book, *East of Eden*, published in 1952, was another best-seller and in Steinbeck's own eyes, his magnum opus. (McCarthy, 1980, pp. 18-19) In the next couple of years, the Steinbecks were travelling Europe. However, in 1960s, Steinbeck's health started to decline. He suffered a stroke in 1961, and another minor stroke in 1965. (McCarthy, 1980, p. 22) However, it did not stop him in seeking new adventures. In 1966, he travelled to Vietnam to report on the war. He returned in 1967 and his health worsened again. John Steinbeck died on December 20, 1968, in his New York apartment. (Reef, 1996, p. 149)

3.2 Steinbeck's Major Works

Steinbeck's writing career started with his novel *Cup of Gold* published in 1929. It is a fictional biography concerning the life of a seventeenth-century English pirate, Sir Henry Morgan. Although his novel was not very successful among readers, "it is an unusually exciting first novel—the presentation of rich, unorganized talent that gave promise of a bright future for its author." (Levant, 1974, p. 22) His second work, *The Pastures of Heaven*, published in 1932, is a collection of 12 short stories that are not mutually connected. Steinbeck started exploring themes that occur in his later works. The reviews were positive among readers, but there were mixed feelings among critics. (Schultz, 2005, pp. 160-161) Steinbeck's next novel, *To a God Unknown*, had been in process for many years and had many draft versions until it was published in 1933. As Schultz (2005) states, "for those reviewers who had an opportunity to read the work before it went out of print, the book was a critical disaster." (p. 217)

Steinbeck's first commercial success came with the publication of *Tortilla Flat* in 1935. It was praised by critics and readers, and it ended Steinbeck's economic struggles. *Tortilla Flat* tells a story of the *paisanos*—people of Spanish, Mexican, and Caucasian blood—living in the Monterey area in poor conditions. Steinbeck's next three novels—*In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)—will be analysed in the following chapter. These three novels deal with the struggles of labourers during the Great Depression and are together often referred to as the Dustbowl Trilogy.

Steinbeck's first post-war work, *Cannery Row*, was published in 1945 and was not received very well at first. As Levant (1974) states, the book "puzzled contemporary reviewers who judged the new work from the perspective of the Depression novels." (p. 164) In addition, as Steinbeck based the book on characters he encountered in Monterey, "the citizens of Monterey [...] felt *Cannery Row* was an insult to their town and began ignoring the Steinbecks." (Newman, 2016, p. 84) The story deals with the people living in the area full of canneries and brothels in Monterey. Steinbeck's twelfth novel, *East of Eden*, tells the story of two families in Salinas. Steinbeck was inspired by his family's stories that had been passed from generation to generation. It became a best-seller very quickly and for Steinbeck, it "was his most meaningful and heartfelt work." (Newman, 2016, p. 96) Steinbeck presented many themes in the book, among which is the most notable inspiration from the biblical stories of Cain and Abel.

Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1940 and in 1962, John Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. His books are the subject of studies at high schools and universities worldwide and are considered literary classics. Steinbeck is considered one of the most influential writers of the 20th century.

4 ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WORKS

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the Dustbowl Trilogy works by John Steinbeck—*In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. These analyses explore the works from the socioeconomic perspective and deals with the depiction of social problems during the Great Depression.

4.1 In Dubious Battle

In Dubious Battle is the first Dust Bowl novel, published in 1936. The lesser-known novel follows two main characters, Jim Nolan and Mac McLeod, who are members of the Party and who plan to organize a strike for apple pickers who face poor working conditions and a recent pay cut. The story is set in fictional Torgas Valley in California. Mac wants to spread the unionization across California in order to humble the field owners and improve working conditions for labour workers across the country. Mac and Jim help in the fields when one day, an old man Dan falls off the ladder and breaks his hip. Mac and Jim use this accident for their advantage and use the men's anger to support their intentions. The men eventually leave the orchard after a conflict with the superintendent and move to the Anderson's place, which was previously arranged by Mac and Jim. The men then face a series of vigilante acts; Joy, one of the workers, is shot dead by unknown men in a public place and Al Anderson's lunch wagon is burned down, whereas Al is beaten up very bad. After another series of fights between the strikers, cops, and members of the Association, the strikers are forced to leave the Anderson's place as he has had enough of them and their constant troubles. As they prepare for a fight, Mac and Jim receive a message that Doc, their partner who disappeared after one of the attacks on the Anderson's place, is nearby and wounded. They get into a trap and Jim is shot dead.

4.1.1 The Poor vs. the Rich

Steinbeck portrays the concept of the rich and the poor through the class distinction in the story. There are the rich on one side: landowners, Torgas Finance Company, the Fruit Growers' Company, and also the local law enforcement; and the poor labour workers and fruit pickers on the other side. Steinbeck portrays the rich as cold-blooded and unsympathetic characters whose major interest is the profit of the company they work for, or their own well-being. On the contrary, they do not care about the well-being of the workers and

only provide them with minimum wages and poor living and working conditions. The rich are also portrayed as exploitative, sneaky, and manipulative figures who control the labourers. The poor are very well aware of that, as can be seen when Mac tries to persuade Mr Anderson to let him, and his men settle on Mr Anderson's farm, Mac only reminds him of the reality of his ownership by saying:

Who holds your paper? Torgas Finance Company. Who owns Torgas Finance Company? Hunter, Gillray, Martin. Have they been squeezing you? You know God damn well they have. How long you going to last? Maybe one year; and then Torgas Finance Company takes your place. Is that straight? (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 113)

The poor are portrayed as vulnerable, oppressed, and with very limited powers as individuals. In addition, they have to make difficult decisions on daily basis in order to survive another day. Throughout the book, the strikers are approached offensively and inferiorly when talking to superintendents. When a superintendent tries to negotiate with London, the leader of the strikers, he immediately sets out poor conditions and totally ignores the reasons for the pickers' unrest:

London said, "S'pose we kick 'em out? Do we get the money we're strikin' for? Do we get what we would of got before the cut?"

"No; but you can go back to work with no more trouble. The owners will overlook everything that's happened." (Steinbeck, 1936, pp. 128-129)

The superintendent eventually threatens London when he sees some sort of resistance:

London went on, "I like to see both sides. S'pose me an' my friends here don't take it, what then?"

"Then we kick you off this place in half an hour. Then we blacklist the whole damn bunch of you. You can't go any place; you can't get a job any place. We'll have five hundred deputy sheriffs if we need 'em. That's the other side. We'll see you can't get a job this side of hell. What's more, we'll jug your pals here, and see they get the limit." (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 129)

Steinbeck shows the reality of socioeconomic inequality and the oppression of the working class, and throughout the novel emphasizes the need for social improvements and changes and also the ways of addressing the injustice.

4.1.2 The Power of Group vs. Individual

During the 1930s, the power of individuals was practically non-existent, especially for the working class. Steinbeck portrays that only collective action can have the impact on dealing with higher powers, such as the Growers' Association in the case of this novel. The main characters are aware of the fact that by mobilizing the pickers together, they can increase their chances of getting better wages and overall working conditions. And they are not hesitant to prove it when they have to. When London negotiates the working conditions with the superintendent, Mac steps in when he feels the superintendent needs to be reminded of their group power, and he does not hold back:

Listen, mister, we're goin' to camp on the Anderson place. Now the first thing you babies are goin' to think of is getting' us off. That's O.K. We'll take our chances. The second thing you weasels are goin' to do is try to get back at Anderson. Now I'm tellin' you this, if any of your boys touch that property or hurt Anderson, if you hurt one single fruit tree, a thousand guys'll start out an' every one of 'em 'll have a box of matches [...] Take is as a threat if you want to.
(Steinbeck, 1936, pp. 130-131)

There are several situations in the novel, where especially Mac uses power of the group in order to fight back against the oppressors. However, to make a group powerful, there have to be strong personalities and leaders, who motivate and push the group forward in their cause. These individuals are represented mainly by Mac, London, and Jim. These characters contribute to the strength of the group and together they shape the group's dynamics in pursuing their cause. Steinbeck, however, portrays internal conflicts within the group, their often-contrasting opinions, and also the struggles in leading and effectively influencing the group. Furthermore, Steinbeck explores his phalanx theory, which is based on the fact that through unity and collective action, a group can achieve its objectives more easily. Steinbeck uses one of his characters to directly explain the idea behind the phalanx theory in the novel, by saying:

I want to see, Mac. I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn't himself at all, he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you. (Steinbeck, 1936, pp. 144-145)

Salazar (1990) further adds that "Steinbeck's main interest in writing the novel, however, was to make some observations about man's behavior both as an individual and as a part of a group" and continues that "the ideal group formation, in the writer's view, is one in which the members act as individuals and at the same time contribute creatively to the formation of a harmoniously integrated whole." (pp. 99-100)

There is one character in the novel that differentiates from the others. It is Doc Burton. He helps the strikers when they get injured but does not participate in the strike. He follows a strict personal philosophy and does not side with either of the sides. He claims that:

I have some skill in helping men, and when I see some who need help, I just do it. I don't think about it much. If a painter saw a piece of canvas, and he had colors, well, he'd want to paint on it. He wouldn't figure why he wanted to. (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 195)

Eventually, when talking to Jim, Doc admits that this philosophy, however reasonable it may seem, causing him with depression as he does not belong anywhere. He does not understand the cause as he has nothing to hate, and therefore, he feels lonely. (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 253-254)

However, *In Dubious Battle* shows that the phalanx theory can fail if unity among workers is fragile and the leaders' intentions to achieve well-being of the workers is not genuine.

4.1.3 Morality

Steinbeck explores the complexity of moral dilemmas and raises questions about the ethical issues throughout the novel. There are more aspects of morality, but the most prominent is the idea of fairness, justice, and respect, given the socioeconomic background of the Great Depression. Steinbeck lets the readers pick a side in the novel, but constantly questions readers' choices by showing ambiguity in deciding what is right and what is wrong. There are two camps within the group of strikers that represent the two poles of morality; on one

side, Mac and Jim, who take violence, manipulation, and deception into consideration, seemingly following the idea that the end justifies the means. In an incident where one of the Party members, Joy, is shot dead, Mac takes advantage of this tragedy and instead of mourning, he displays Joy's dead body to the pickers when they return to the camp in order to start them up. In addition, right after the shooting, Mac says:

He's done the first real, useful thing in his life. Poor Joy. He's done it. He'd be so glad. (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 163)

And then continues:

We've got to take him, I tell you. We've got to use him to step our guys up, to keep 'em together. This'll stick 'em together, this'll make 'em fight. (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 164)

After a short confrontation with Dakin, one of the leaders of the group, who does not support Mac's procedure and is against getting Joy's dead body, Mac answers in response that he does not let him rest:

What do you know about it? Joy didn't want no rest. Joy wanted to work, and he didn't know how. [...] And now he's got a chance to work, and you don't want to let 'im. (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 164)

Seemingly, Mac is able to go above and beyond for the cause, which questions his moral and ethical compass. As the story progresses, Mac and Jim encounter situations in which they act the same way, in the end, Mac uses Jim's dead body at the very end of the story for the same purpose as showing Joy's dead body. Steinbeck leaves it on the reader to decide whether it is good or bad.

The most dramatic progress in terms of morality can be seen with Jim. Steinbeck introduces him as a broken, hopeless man, seeking meaning in his life. Jim explains how he got into this state of hopelessness:

All the time at home we were fighting, fighting something—hunger mostly. My old man was fighting the bosses. I was fighting the school. But always we lost. And after a long time I guess it got to be part of our mind-stuff that we always would lose. My old man was fighting just like a cat in a corner with a pack of dogs around. Sooner or later a dog was sure to kill him; but he fought anyway.

Can you see the hopelessness in that? I grew up in that hopelessness. (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 24)

Jim eventually fully supports Mac's ideas and understands what is behind the constant fighting against the oppressors. As he experiences the incidents throughout the story, he discovers his new purpose—a complete devotion to the cause. Once Mac sees how Jim's personality shapes and transforms, he understands how dangerous this change can be. After beating up a kid who was wandering around their camp with a rifle, Jim says that “he's not a kid, he's an example” and further adds that “it wasn't a scared kid, it was a danger to the cause” and finally that “it had to be done [...] no hate, no feeling, just a job.” (Steinbeck, 1936, pp. 273-274) Mac, who shows emotions and partly regrets his action, is stunned by Jim's approach and replies:

You're getting beyond me, Jim. I'm getting scared of you. I've seen men like you before. I'm scared of 'em. Jesus, Jim, I can see you changing every day. I know you're right. Cold thought to fight madness, I know all that. God Almighty, Jim, it's not human. I'm scared of you. (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 274)

Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* portrays the struggle of the working class in the rural area and their personal sacrifices while searching for better living conditions. Although not the most complex of the Dust Bowl trilogy, Steinbeck puts emphasis on the depiction of working conditions and the labour's influence on their future if together and united. He further tracks the development of the main characters and their moral attitudes, and also explores the political backgrounds including the Communist Party and its influence in the story. His interpretation of life during the Great Depression is based on his own experience while travelling the country and encountering the poor labour. Ultimately, as the title suggests, there is no winning side in the battle.

4.2 Of Mice and Men

The second novel of the trilogy, released a year later in 1937, was a commercial success. It follows a story of two labourers who wander through Salinas Valley in California in order to find a job. They are eventually successful and travel to a ranch where they plan to stay as long as possible until they save enough money for their dream. George Milton, the smaller and way smarter of the two, and Lennie Small, a mentally impaired but strong and hardworking individual, dream of having their own place, their little farm where they would

breed rabbits and other animals, and plant vegetables. However, Lennie often gets into trouble which prevent them from achieving their dream. Not long ago, they had to escape from their previous job in Weed because of Lennie's incident. Unfortunately, soon after their arrival, Lennie gets into a fight with Curley, the owner's son, and crushes Curley's hand. Possessed with petting soft things, Lennie asks Slim, one of the workers on the ranch, whether he can have one of Slim's newborn puppies. Eventually, he kills it by accident in a barn where he plays with it. Wandering around, Curley's wife, the only woman on the ranch, enters the barn and talks to Lennie about her unhappy life as she sees that Lennie is harmless and due to his simple mind, he listens to her. At one point, Lennie is offered to touch her silky hair but because he is too clumsy, she starts to scream as he musses her hair. In panic, Lennie breaks her neck by accident and runs away, knowing he has got himself in trouble again. Once her body is found by the ranch workers, they immediately know who has done it. George, aware of Lennie's whereabouts, navigates other workers to go south and finds Lennie by himself. The story ends with George shooting Lennie to save him from consequences of his wrongdoing.

4.2.1 The Poor vs. the Rich

Steinbeck uses the concept of the poor and the rich in *Of Mice and Men* similarly as in *In Dubious Battle*. The characters such as George, Lennie, Candy, and Crooks represent the lonely labour workers who live in uncertainty with no plans for the future. Although George and Lennie do have a plan, they struggle to keep a steady job because of Lennie's constant troubles. At the beginning of the story, George asks Lennie if he remembers them going into Murray and Ready's, an agency that gave them work cards and bus tickets, which Lennie after reminding recollects. (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 13) As the story progresses, George and Lennie share their plan with Candy who asks them whether they have got any money, for which George replies "We got ten bucks between us." (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 105) Other than that, they have no property, no other place to go, and also no family. This applies for Candy, as well.

Candy is a crippled man who lost his hand in an accident and works as a swamper on the farm. Due to the accident, he was given \$250 and saved additional \$50 in the bank. (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 104) When he hears George and Lennie's plan, he immediately offers his money in exchange for participating in their plan. When George hesitates and tells Candy that he has to think it through, Candy replies:

I'd make a will an' leave my share to you guys in case I kick off, 'cause I ain't got no relatives nor nothing. [...] They'll can me purty soon. Jus' as soon as I can't swamp out no bunk houses they'll put me on the country. [...] When they can me here I wisht somebody'd shoot me. But they won't do nothing like that. I won't have no place to go, an' I can't get no more jobs. (Steinbeck, 1947, pp. 105-107)

Candy is very well aware of his situation and the poverty he lives in, never mind his even worse picture of his future life. Candy understands that what happened to his dog, surely awaits him too, therefore, he does not hesitate to offer his life savings.

In contrast, the rich, represented by Curley and Curley's wife, are powerful as they belong to the group of landowners. They are aware of their power over the migrant workers and treat them with disdain. When Curley enters the story for the first time, Steinbeck portrays his behaviour as cocky and supercilious. He immediately gets into a conflict for no reason just to make sure George and Lennie, the new guys, know their position on the ranch. Curley's wife possesses the same attitude towards the migrant workers. When she enters Crooks' room searching for Curley, she stays longer than the workers anticipated. Crooks eventually sends her away and since she does not like his tone, she immediately reminds him of her position on the ranch by saying:

Listen, Nigger, you know what I can do to you if you open your traps? [...] You know what I could do? [...] I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny. (Steinbeck, 1947, pp. 140-141)

Nevertheless, George and Lennie can be considered the only two characters in the novel, who are truly rich due to their fellowship that lasts until the bitter end of the story.

4.2.2 Friendship and Loneliness

The theme of friendship in contrast with loneliness is the central element of the story. The period of the Great Depression significantly changed human behaviour where the working class suffered the most. Steinbeck displays how isolated most of the characters are, but in contrast, the main protagonists share a mutual bond, which sets them apart. Despite their differences, George and Lennie can rely on each other, which helps them in fighting with the constant struggles in a lonely and cruel world. At the beginning of the novel, readers are

introduced to George's sort of motivational speech that occurs throughout the story. Its main purpose is preventing Lennie from forgetting their mutual dream:

Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. [...] With us it ain't like that. [...] We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. (Steinbeck, 1947, pp. 28-29)

Lennie then adds:

Because...because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why. (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 29)

Their friendship is unusual, which Slim, one of the ranch workers, points out several times when talking to George:

Hardly none of the guys ever travel together. I hardly never seen two guys travel together. You know how the hands are, they just come in and get their bunk and work a month, and then they quit and go out alone. Never seem to give a damn about nobody. (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 71)

On the contrary, loneliness represents the main struggle for several characters in the novel. Crooks, the only black character in the novel, is a crippled man who works as a stable hand on the ranch. He is not very friendly when Lennie enters his room, but eventually invites him for a little chat. Eventually, when Crooks understands that Lennie forgets everything he says, he opens up and speaks up about his struggles with loneliness:

S'pose you didn't have nobody. [...] S'pose you had to sit out here an' read books. [...] Books ain't no good. A guy needs somebody—to be near him. [...] A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. [...] I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick. (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 127)

Crooks is probably the loneliest character in the novel as he even lives in a separate room and keeps his distance from others. Steinbeck also portrays Crooks' room as full of personal possessions, more than "he could carry on his back." (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 117) It represents Crooks' devastating consequences of loneliness as he compensates no relationship for material things.

Although married and belonging to the upper class, Curley's wife struggles with loneliness, as well. As she does not get much attention from Curley, she seeks attention from

the workers but receives only rejection. Similarly to Crooks, she shares her struggles in life with Lennie as she finally finds someone who does not oppose her:

Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely. [...]
You can talk to people, but I can't talk to nobody but Curley. Else he gets mad.
(Steinbeck, 1947, p. 150)

The loneliness eventually confronts George at the very end of the story. Before he decides to shoot Lennie, George is well aware of the fact that he would be alone, alone as all the other guys. Until the bitter end, he assures Lennie of their friendship but already knows that it is about to end. Steinbeck expresses the harsh reality of life during the period, where friendship is a tricky thing. On the other hand, he portrays true friendship values as George has to make sacrifices to protect Lennie from the cruel world in which they exist.

4.2.3 Dreams and Hopes

The central dream in the novel belongs to George and Lennie. Their dream is presented at the beginning of the story before they arrive at the ranch:

Someday—we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs an—[...] we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof. (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 30)

Their dream is a symbol of purpose they strive for. Steinbeck presents the human desire for better life during the Great Depression, and how difficult it is to achieve it. Although they do not like the ranch and the job they have to do, they have to stay and earn some dollars. At the point shortly after their arrival, their dream is still remote and very difficult to achieve. Moreover, Lennie is able to get into trouble very quickly, which makes their dream very fragile.

The situation changes when they meet Candy. Lennie starts to talk about his and George's dream and with more details about their plan, Candy suddenly has the power to make their dream come true. When George realizes that their dream can become reality very soon, he tells Lennie that they need to work on the ranch only for one month. Steinbeck provides hope for the readers that the story aspires for a happy ending.

When Candy and George stand over the dead body of Curley's wife, George already knows that the dream is gone. Candy, on the other hand, asks George out of fear:

You an' me can get that little place, can't we, George? You an' me can go there an' live nice, can't we, George? Can't we? (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 164)

Right after he asks George, he understands that none of it can possibly happen. At that moment, George realizes that only future he has, looks the same as for all the other migrant workers out in the country:

I think I knowed from the very first. [...] I'll work my month an' I'll take my fifty bucks an' I'll stay all night in some lousy cat house. [...] An' then I'll come back an' work another month an' I'll have fifty bucks more. (Steinbeck, 1947, p. 164)

George becomes a broken man, suddenly, with no purpose in life. Steinbeck portrays how easily destroyable dreams and hopes were during the Great Depression. The bitterness of the period only shows that after his experience, Crooks proved to be right. The impossibility of reaching up for the dreams affected most of the characters in the novel, making them join the millions of others throughout the Great Depression in the United States.

4.3 The Grapes of Wrath

The last and the most complex novel of the trilogy was first published in 1939 and was immediately successful. It follows a story of the Joad family who live in Oklahoma and due to the dust storms have to abandon their house and head west to California to seek better job opportunities. On their way to California, they face a series of disasters, such as losing two family members, Granma and Grampa, dealing with a broken car, and foremost, struggling with finding employment.

4.3.1 Treating the Poor

Steinbeck presents the contrast between the poor migrant workers who have to abandon everything they have to survive the devastating living conditions in the Great Plains, and the rich landowners, banks, and businessmen who are willing to lie and deceive to make their profits even greater. At the beginning of the story, Tom Joad, a central character of the novel and a member of the Joad family, returns home after four years in prison to only find

that his family had to abandon their farm as the bank seized it. This was a common situation as farmers who could not pay off their debts had their property taken by the banks. Tenant farmers were in even worse position as they could get evicted straight away by the owners, in most cases, large companies. Steinbeck devoted a whole chapter to explain how it worked during the Great Depression. He stresses that:

A man can hold land if he can just eat and pay taxes; he can do that. [...] But—you see, a bank or a company can't do that, because those creatures don't breathe air, don't eat side-meat. They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don't get it, they die the way you die without air, without sidemeat. It is a sad thing, but it is so. It is just so. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 73)

There was nothing people could do as “the bank—the monster has to have profits all the time. [...] When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can't stay one size.” (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 73) Despite their poor living conditions and the difficulties they had to face, the migrant workers were treated very badly by the people who were above them in terms of class. Even if the migrant workers reached the California borders, they could be sent back very quickly by the border patrol:

Ever hear of the border patrol on the Californian line? Police from Los Angeles—stopped you bastards, turned you back. Says, if you can't buy no real estate we don't want you. Says, got a driver's license? Le's see it. Tore it up. Says you can't come in without no driver's license. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 158)

When the migrant workers prepared for the long journey to the West, they had to sell their possessions as they could not take it with them. They even sold things that had a sentimental value for them and must accept terribly low prices. What they could not sell, had to be burned. The buyers knew that and offered low prices, which the migrant workers accepted as they earned at least some money for their journey. Very similar process occurred when buying of a car. The sellers were offering the most used cars as reliable vehicles that would last for thousands of miles. Instead, they were robbing already poor people by hiding defects:

[...] I heard that Chevvy's rear end. Sounds like bustin' bottles. Squirt in a couple quarts of sawdust. Put some in the gears, too. We got to move that lemon for thirty-five dollars. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 102)

Another awful practice awaits the Joads when they reach one of the camps. A man, pretending to be a contractor, stops in the camp looking for men to work in Tulare County. When one of the men, Floyd, asks whether he could see the contractor's license, the contractor's companion, who appears to be a cop, tries to provoke an incident that would eventually authorize him to use his powers over the migrant workers. Unfortunately, he is successful and some of the characters get into serious trouble. (Steinbeck, 2002, pp. 302-305)

These troubles stick with the Joads until the very end of the story. Steinbeck displays the inhuman oppression of the poor 'Okies' by the powerful who are often represented not only by the rich companies or banks, but also by the local people who hate the migrant workers. Rather than focussing solely on the groups of poor and rich people, Steinbeck exposes the social hierarchies and the devastating consequences for the lowest possible group—the migrant workers.

4.3.2 The Power of Family

Through the Joad family, Steinbeck portrays how important an aspect of life during the Great Depression family represented during the everyday struggles in seeking of better life. The family bond that the Joads hold provide them with strength to overcome anything they deal with on the road to California. However, as the story progresses, they undergo a series of tests that not always end up positively. They suffer their first significant loss early on the journey. Right after Grampa dies of stroke in a tent, Granma, who was besides him, is taken outside, but controls herself in order to keep the family strong:

[...] Granma moved with dignity and held her head high. She walked for the family and held her head straight for the family. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 176)

Steinbeck explores the power of unity through a variety of situations, which do not always comprise solely from the Joads. On the road, they meet the Wilsons, a family from Kansas, with whom the Joads join forces and travel together to reach California. At one point of the story, the Wilsons' car must be stopped as a problem with the engine occurs. Mr Wilson then says that:

Seem like it's my fault. This here goddamn wreck's give me trouble right along. You folks been nice to us. Now you jus' pack up an' get along. Me an' Sally'll stay, an' we'll figger some way. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 206)

Pa Joad immediately dismiss Mr Wilson's suggestion by saying:

We ain't a-gonna do it. We got almost a kin bond. Grampa, he died in your tent.
(Steinbeck, 2002, p. 206)

Steinbeck shows that in unpleasant situations, unity and fellowship is crucial to keep fighting the struggles that could destroy one's goals. The two families eventually part ways due to Sally Wilson's health difficulties, however, their cooperation for the time they had spent together, proved to be beneficial for both families. Steinbeck also portrays how a large group of migrant workers can work together when united. When the Joads reach the Weed-patch camp, they cannot believe how the camp functions when the watchman explains it:

There's five sanitary units. Each one elects a Central Committee man. Now that committee makes the laws. What they say goes. [...] Well, you can vote 'em out jus' as quick as you vote 'em in. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 328)

He also points out that there are no cops in the camp and only the people in the camp watch over it. The atmosphere in the camp is different from what the Joads have experienced, which is also confirmed by Timothy, one of the campers, who says that they all do their best. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 338)

4.3.3 Justice and Morality

The concept of morality in the novel presents the harsh reality of social conditions during the Great Depression. The decisions people had to make were often incredibly difficult but paradoxically, when people did not care whether their behaviour in certain situations is good or bad, selfish or altruistic, it was much easier to decide. Steinbeck contrasts both sides of morality through various characters and various situations and presents the consequences of poor moral standards. The poor moral standards caused injustice for the migrant workers, which they wanted to change mainly by striking.

At the beginning of the story, Steinbeck depicts that a simple decision can get whole families in despair. When the company seized the property of the tenants, Steinbeck shows that there is nothing the tenants can do to prevent it from happening as the owners do not care about anything and anyone. They care about their profits, and that is the way it is. On the other hand, when the tractor comes, the tenant recognizes the tractor driver and confronts him:

Well, what you doing this kind of work for—against your own people? (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 77)

For what the driver replies:

Three dollars a day. I got damn sick of creeping for my dinner—and not getting it. I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day. (Steinbeck. 2002, p. 77)

People like the driver got themselves into something that was way bigger than themselves and only by ignoring the moral values of their acts, they were able to have better living conditions. They could not think that way, because then, they would realize they had been destroying whole families. The same applies for the car salesman and the people who bought migrant workers' belongings. These people did not have no morality and cared only about their profits.

The migrant workers were searching for a good pay and reasonable living conditions in order to take care of their families. After a series of failures, the Joads found a decent camp, but when it came to wages, Tom and other workers were told that thirty cents an hour were cut down to twenty-five cents an hour. The landowners who offered work to the migrant workers hated the government camps as they knew that they have no authority there and that the workers have decent living conditions, given the circumstances. Mr Thomas, who had to lower the hourly wage, eventually helped Tom and other workers by providing them with information about the forthcoming staged fight in the government camp. (Steinbeck, 2002, pp. 335-337) Mr Thomas' morality compass is not rotten, but he is in a tough position. He then explains why this happens:

Those folks in the camp are getting used to being treated like humans. Whey they go back to the squatters' camps they'll be hard to handle. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 337)

However, after all the struggles that the Joads faced throughout the story, Steinbeck uses the last chapter to remind the readers that the journey has not affected and changed their character. After three days of raining, the remaining Joads have to find a shelter as the nearby creek flooded. They find a barn in which they find a starving man and a boy. Rose of Sharon, a member of the Joad family who just gave birth to a dead child, gathers her last bits of

strength, and breast-feed the starving man. In the last lines, Steinbeck portrays that in a situation of total chaos, suffering and despair, the Joads still help those in desperate need. (Steinbeck, 2002, p. 503)

5 USAGE IN ELT/EFL

The previous chapters provide an insight into the period of the Great Depression in the United States from the historical perspective and then deal with the ways of depicting the period in John Steinbeck's novels. Periods of economic recessions have been repeatedly appearing throughout history, and therefore it can be very useful to integrate this topic in English learning classes to remind the students that there are historical events they can still learn from and use the knowledge in today's world. This chapter, therefore, provides methods and strategies for integrating not only Steinbeck's novels in teaching the Great Depression and its main socioeconomic consequences in English learning classes in lower secondary schools.

5.1 Literature in ELT/EFL

Using literary texts can be considered a useful tool for learning English. As an authentic material, it provides multiple possible uses that can be adjusted according to the students' level of English, language skills, or teacher's preferences. Lazar (1993) characterizes literary texts and explores some of the main reasons for integrating literature in language classrooms, by stating that a literary text:

- Is motivational material
- Provides access to cultural background
- Encourages language acquisition
- Expands students' language awareness
- Develops students' interpretative abilities
- Educates the whole person (pp. 15-19)

Motivation is one of the most important aspects in EFL classes. Authentic literary texts provide an interesting alternative as students are exposed to real and meaningful texts, which is something that coursebooks often do not provide. Students are exposed to synthetic texts with a limited purpose. In addition, "if the materials are carefully chosen, students will feel that what they do in the classroom is relevant and meaningful to their lives." (Lazar, 1993, p. 15)

Furthermore, students can have access to cultural and intercultural background through literary texts. There have been certain historical events that can be better understood

through vivid portraits that can be found in the literature. The most important historical events, which are useful to know in today's world, are often explained the best by the authors who lived during that period. Various coursebooks, as stated above, do not often provide meaningful texts and therefore, reading an authentic text can help stimulate language acquisition. It is, however, important to select an adequate text according to the students' level of English. Literary texts are often very complex and contain many different themes and topics, but when used appropriately, a teacher can focus on any aspect of the English language by adjusting classroom activities according to the students' needs.

Authentic literary texts also provide insight into the usage of different forms of the language. Teachers can point out a variety of meanings within the text or point out the wrong usage of the language utterance. Similar to teaching L1, teachers can encourage students to think about the English language as such, which helps them "become more sensitive to some of the overall features of English." (Lazar, 1993, p. 19) Literary texts often contain social themes that can be applied to the students' life and develop their awareness of the issues. Teachers can, therefore, stimulate students' critical thinking.

On the other hand, using literary texts in EFL classes can have some problematic aspects that prevent teachers from integrating them in their lessons. Students can reject this approach for learning as they can find the text too difficult to understand, they can be not interested in the topic, or they simply do not like reading even in their mother tongue. From the teachers' perspective, preparing literary-based lessons can be time-consuming because teachers need to analyse the whole book in order to understand it themselves before they start using it as teaching material.

5.2 Methodological Approaches

The reasons for using literary texts in language classes can be further divided into different approaches according to the learning objectives. Carter (1991) presents three main models, which are:

- **The cultural model**
- **The language model**
- **The personal growth model** (p. 2)

The cultural model is useful as "literature expresses the most significant ideas and sentiments of human beings and teaching literature represents a means by which students

can be put in touch with a range of expressions.” (Carter, 1991, p. 2) The second model, as the name suggests, is used to promote the development of language acquisition. “Detailed analysis of the language of the literary text will help students to make meaningful interpretations or informed evaluations of it. At the same time, students will increase their general awareness and understanding of English.” (Lazar, 1993, p. 23) The personal growth model can help “students to become more actively involved both intellectually and emotionally in learning English, and hence aids acquisition.” (Lazar, 1993, p. 24)

5.2.1 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Content and Language Integrated Learning (“CLIL”) is an approach in which teaching content of subjects, for instance, History and Geography, is taught in the second language of the learners. The learning process, therefore, enables learners to focus on content and language at the same time. Coyle (2010) states that content and language are “interwoven, even if the emphasis is greater on one or the other at a given time.” (p. 16) CLIL, therefore, represents a great alternative in language classrooms that provides a different experience in education. CLIL can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the desired results in the classroom. Scrivener (2011) provides examples of using CLIL as following:

- **Small segments of some lessons** – e.g., the last reading part in a History lesson is written in English; students verbally summarize the text in English.
- **Integrating themes across school subjects** – e.g., in addition to the previous example, in an English lesson, a teacher uses the topic and focuses on some aspects of the language.
- **Separate language support** – the language teacher and the subject teacher plan their lessons together, plan the aims of their lessons and which activities they use, and advise each other on potential problems and how to solve them.
- **Fully integrated classrooms** – teachers can teach in tandem, furthermore, there are no English lessons. The language teacher helps students with language issues and can also teach a part of the lesson when focussing on some language aspects. (p. 329)

5.2.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (“CLT”) or the Communicative Approach can be characterized as a set of principles that aim to use the language primarily for communication purposes and the best way to learn the language is by communicating. There is a variety of interpretations of CLT but there are no prescribed rules for implementing this approach in language teaching, therefore, its flexibility enables teachers to design classroom activities according to their beliefs. Wesche (2002) states that communicative classrooms should feature:

- “Activities that require frequent interaction among learners or with other interlocutors to exchange information and solve problems
- Use of authentic (nonpedagogic) texts and communication activities linked to “real world” contexts, often emphasizing links across written and spoken modes and channels
- Approaches that are learner centered in that they take into account learners’ backgrounds, language needs, and goals and generally allow learners some creativity and role in instructional decisions.” (p. 208)

Çelik (2014) further argues that in an EFL context “CLT constitutes, at most, a sort of dress rehearsal, where learners have the opportunity to try out the language, engaging with and internalizing its semantic forms before putting it to use in real-life interactions.” (p. 192)

5.2.3 The Reader-Response Approach

The main purpose of the Reader-Response Approach is to “provide a genuine engagement between the text and the student, in which the student will achieve satisfaction from his or her reading experience.” (Ali, 1993, p. 289) The focus is on the process of reading and interpretation of the text. The response to the text depends on the interpretation and understanding of the text, which can vary due to the age of the students, their experience, their social background, etc. Beach (1993) provides five primary theoretical perspectives on response:

- **Textual** – learner’s knowledge of conventions of the text or genre
- **Experiential** - learner's experience with the text or the characters of a story
- **Psychological** – learner’s cognitive or subconscious process
- **Social** – influence on the social context

- **Cultural** – learner’s cultural roles and values, historical context (p. 8)

Teachers then design their classroom activities according to what response they want to elicit, and therefore, teachers promote the process of learning in various ways.

II. PRACTICAL PART

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical part provides information about the Great Depression in the United States including the events that preceded this period and the living conditions during this period. It further provides information about John Steinbeck who is known for his depiction of the Great Depression issues in his novels, which are further analysed from the socio-economic perspective. The theoretical part also provides methodological approaches for integrating this topic in ELT and EFL classrooms. In the practical part, a quantitative research method was chosen. This chapter provides the methodological approaches of the research and introduces main hypotheses. It further provides research findings and limitations of the research.

6.1 Research Objectives and Questions

The main aims of the research are to:

- Clarify to what extent are the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools interested in learning about the Great Depression through John Steinbeck's novels.
- Find out whether the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools consider the topic of the Great Depression important.

The minor aims of the research are to:

- Explore how the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools perceive integrating Steinbeck's novels in English lessons.
- Find out to what extent are the students of ninth grade of lower secondary schools interested in learning about the topic through the CLIL method.
- Clarify whether the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools consider reading in English beneficial in improving their language skills.

The following research questions are based on the objectives.

The main research questions are:

- What is the interest in learning about the Great Depression through John Steinbeck's novels among the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools?

- Do the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools consider the topic of the Great Depression important?

The minor research questions are:

- How the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools perceive integrating Steinbeck's novels in English lessons?
- To what extent are the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools interested in learning about the topic through the CLIL method?
- Do the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools consider reading in English beneficial in improving their language skills?

6.2 Research Participants

The research participants are the students of the ninth grades of lower secondary schools in the Olomouc region, specifically in the Šumperk district. The research sample consists of 127 participants, of whom 48 participants are the students of ZŠ Sluneční in Šumperk. The research participants have various levels of language proficiency, which are not further specified nor examined, and the students were not divided in any way according to their English proficiency.

6.3 Research Method

The practical part, as stated above, follows a quantitative research design. The data acquisition method was chosen to be a questionnaire. "Quantitative research [...] is more closely associated with deduction, reasoning from general principles to specific situations." (Wiersma, 2000, p. 12) In quantitative research, there is one or more problems that are being solved. The process of solving these problems is represented by a series of interconnected and interdependent steps. There can be different variations of research steps and activities, but the basic scheme of the procedure is usually following:

- Problem determination
- Hypothesis formulation
- Hypothesis testing (verification)
- Presentation of conclusions (Chráska, 2016, p. 11)

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed electronically to elementary schools in the Šumperk district. The research was conducted in April and May 2023.

6.3.1 Questionnaire

One of the most commonly used data acquisition methods is a questionnaire. Chráska (2016) defines a questionnaire as a set of carefully pre-prepared and formulated questions that are coherently arranged and to which the respondents respond. (p. 158) Krosnick (2010) summarizes the general wisdom when designing of a questionnaire as follows:

- “Use simple, familiar words (avoid technical terms, jargon, and slang);
- Use simple syntax;
- Avoid words with ambiguous meanings;
- Strive for wording that is specific and concrete;
- Make response options exhaustive and mutually exclusive;
- Avoid leading or loaded questions that push respondents towards an answer;
- Ask about one thing at a time; and
- Avoid questions with single or double negations.” (p. 264)

Furthermore, questions should proceed from general to specific, and on the same topic they should be grouped together. (Krosnick, 2010, p. 264)

6.4 Research Hypotheses

Wiersma (2010) defines hypothesis as “a conjecture or proposition about the solution to a problem, the relationship of two or more variables, or the nature of some phenomenon.” (p. 39) Hypotheses cannot be based on a guess, there should be “a definite reason for the hypothesis, either from a theory or from some evidence that this is a useful and valuable hypothesis.” (Wiersma, 2010, p. 38) A hypothesis should be falsifiable and only by the possibility to disprove the hypothesis, it is considered scientific. Chráska (2016) supports this fact by stating that if a hypothesis cannot be falsified during research, it can be accepted but it cannot be proved once and for all. No empirical evidence can unequivocally and definitively prove a hypothesis. (p. 14)

Furthermore, a hypothesis is a claim expressed by a declarative sentence. As already stated, a hypothesis must be either proved or disproved, moreover, there has to be the ability

to re-test a hypothesis. Hypotheses for this research were claimed based on the theory, claiming the following:

1. More students are interested in learning about the Great Depression through the John Steinbeck's novels.
2. More students know the term the Great Depression.
3. More students have heard of the author John Steinbeck.
4. Fewer students perceive the topic of the Great Depression important.
5. Fewer students consider their knowledge of the Great Depression useful in their future life and work.
6. Fewer students are interested in learning about the Great Depression through the CLIL method.
7. Fewer students consider reading in English beneficial for their language skills.
8. More students are interested in reading Steinbeck's novels in English lessons.

6.5 Data Analysis

The questionnaire was designed using one of Google's tools called Forms. When respondents fill in the questionnaire, the data are immediately accessible in real-time and can be further filtered and analysed for the needs of this research. Google Forms also provides automatic creation of graphs, which is presented in the following chapter together with the detail explanation of each hypothesis.

6.6 Data Interpretation

This chapter provides the interpretation of the responses that are used to proving or disproving of the above claimed hypotheses.

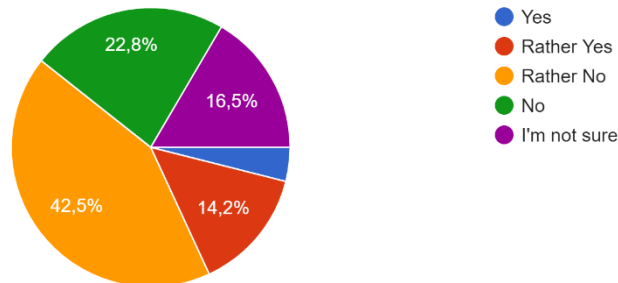
6.6.1 Hypotheses

The first hypothesis claims that *More students are interested in learning about the Great Depression through the John Steinbeck's novels*. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, the question *Would you like to learn about the Great Depression through Steinbeck's novels?* was used. This hypothesis is **disproved** as the final data show in *Graph 1* below.

Image 1 Graph 1 (Own)

John Steinbeck's novels include the Great Depression themes. Would you like to learn about the Great Depression through Steinbeck's novels?

127 odpovědí



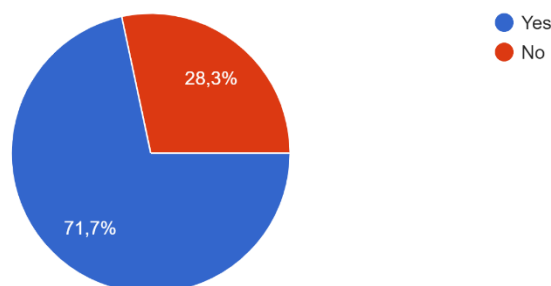
3.9 percent of respondents who answered “Yes” is represented by **5** respondents, 14.2 percent of respondents who answered “Rather Yes” is represented by **18** respondents, 42.5 percent of respondents who answered “Rather No” is represented by **54** respondents, 22.8 percent of respondents who answered “No” is represented by **29** respondents, and 16.5 percent of respondents who answered “I’m not sure” is represented by **21** respondents.

The second hypothesis claims that *More students know the term the Great Depression*. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, the question *Do you know the term the Great Depression?* was used. This hypothesis is **proved** as the final data show in *Graph 2* below.

Image 2 Graph 2 (Own)

Do you know the term the Great Depression (Velká hospodářská krize) ?

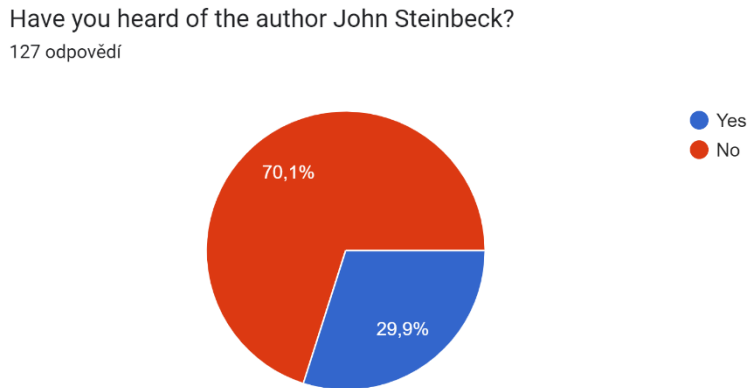
127 odpovědí



71.7 percent of respondents who answered “Yes” is represented by **91** respondents and 28.3 percent of respondents who answered “No” is represented by **36** respondents.

The third hypothesis claims that *More students have heard of the author John Steinbeck*. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, the question *Have you heard of the author John Steinbeck?* was used. This hypothesis is **disproved** as the final data show in *Graph 3* below.

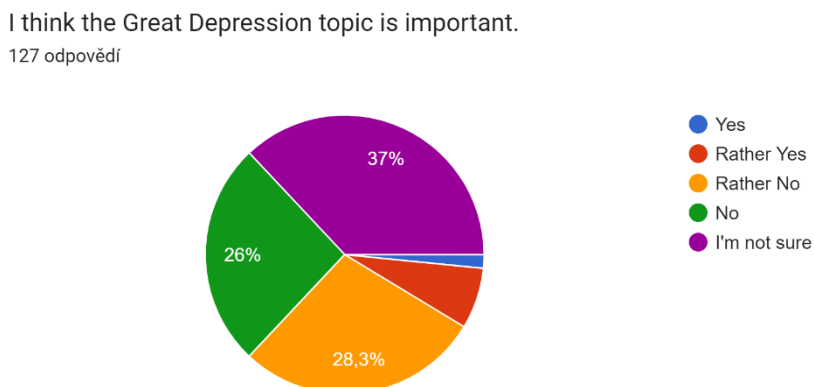
Image 3 Graph 3 (Own)



29.9 percent of respondents who answered “Yes” is represented by **38** respondents and 70.1 percent of respondents who answered “No” is represented by **89** respondents.

The fourth hypothesis claims that *Fewer students perceive the topic of the Great Depression important*. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, the statement *I think the Great Depression topic is important*. was used. This hypothesis is **proved** as the final data show in *Graph 4* below.

Image 4 Graph 4 (Own)

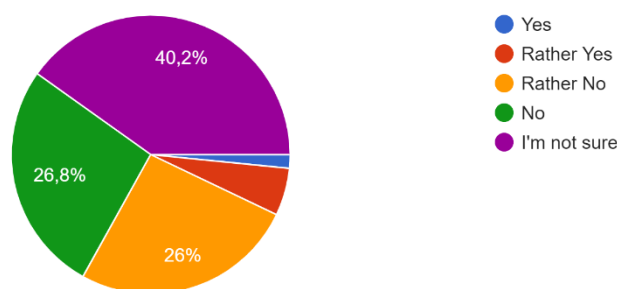


1.6 percent of respondents who answered “Yes” is represented by **2** respondents, 7.1 percent of respondents who answered “Rather Yes” is represented by **9** respondents, 28.3 percent of respondents who answered “Rather No” is represented by **36** respondents, 26 percent of respondents who answered “No” is represented by **33** respondents, and 37 percent of respondents who answered “I’m not sure” is represented by **47** respondents.

The fifth hypothesis claims that *Fewer students consider their knowledge of the Great Depression useful in their future life and work*. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, the statement *I could use the knowledge of the Great Depression in my future life and work* was used. This hypothesis is **proved** as the final data show in *Graph 5* below.

Image 5 Graph 5 (Own)

I could use the knowledge of the Great Depression in my future life and work.
127 odpovědí



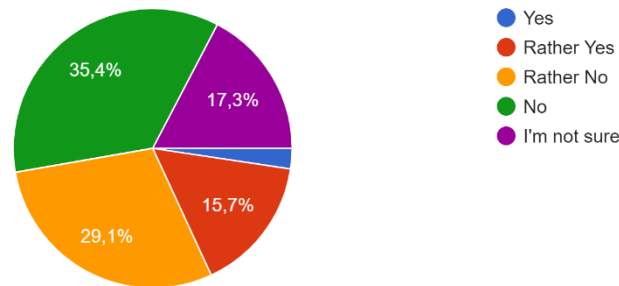
1.6 percent of respondents who answered “Yes” is represented by **2** respondents, 5.5 percent of respondents who answered “Rather Yes” is represented by **7** respondents, 26 percent of respondents who answered “Rather No” is represented by **33** respondents, 26.8 percent of respondents who answered “No” is represented by **34** respondents, and 40.2 percent of respondents who answered “I’m not sure” is represented by **51** respondents.

The sixth hypothesis claims that *Fewer students are interested in learning about the Great Depression through the CLIL method*. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, the question *Would you be interested in learning about this topic in your History lessons but in English language?* was used. This hypothesis is **proved** as the final data show in *Graph 6* below.

Image 6 Graph 6 (Own)

You learn about the Great Depression in your History lessons. Would you be interested in learning about this topic in your History lessons but in English language?

127 odpovědí



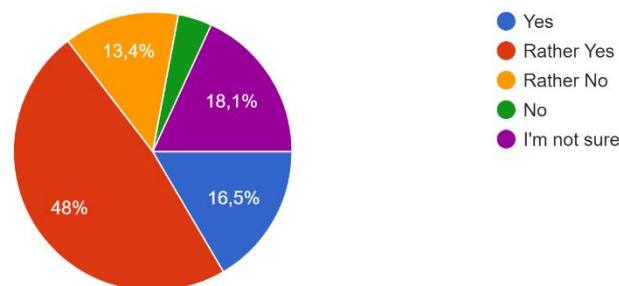
2.4 percent of respondents who answered “Yes” is represented by **3** respondents, 15.7 percent of respondents who answered “Rather Yes” is represented by **20** respondents, 29.1 percent of respondents who answered “Rather No” is represented by **37** respondents, 35.4 percent of respondents who answered “No” is represented by **45** respondents, and 17.3 percent of respondents who answered “I’m not sure” is represented by **22** respondents.

The seventh hypothesis claims that *Fewer students consider reading in English beneficial for their language skills*. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, the statement *I think reading a book in English would improve my English skills*. was used. This hypothesis is **disproved** as the final data show in *Graph 7* below.

Image 7 Graph 7 (Own)

I think reading a book in English would improve my English skills.

127 odpovědí

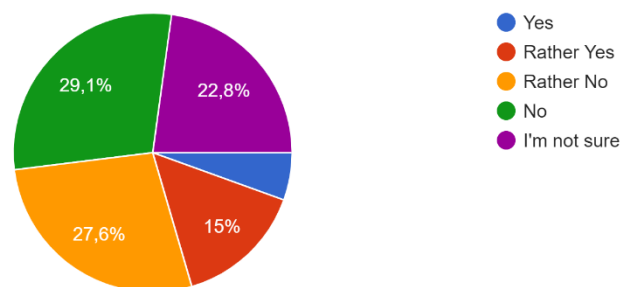


16.5 percent of respondents who answered “Yes” is represented by **21** respondents, 48 percent of respondents who answered “Rather Yes” is represented by **61** respondents, 13.4 percent of respondents who answered “Rather No” is represented by **17** respondents, 3.9 percent of respondents who answered “No” is represented by **5** respondents, and 18.1 percent of respondents who answered “I’m not sure” is represented by **23** respondents.

The eighth hypothesis claims that *More students are interested in reading Steinbeck’s novels in English lessons*. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, the question *If I told you these books are about social injustice, friendship, poor living conditions, and American dreams, would you be interested in reading any of these books in English lessons?* was used. This hypothesis is **disproved** as the final data show in *Graph 8* below.

Image 8 Graph 8 (Own)

If I told you these books are about social injustice (sociální nespravedlnost), friendship, poor living conditions, and American dreams, would you be inte...in reading any of these books in English lessons?
127 odpovědí



5.5 percent of respondents who answered “Yes” is represented by **7** respondents, 15 percent of respondents who answered “Rather Yes” is represented by **19** respondents, 27.6 percent of respondents who answered “Rather No” is represented by **35** respondents, 29.1 percent of respondents who answered “No” is represented by **37** respondents, and 22.8 percent of respondents who answered “I’m not sure” is represented by **29** respondents.

6.7 Research Findings

The research findings show that the first hypothesis is disproved, and it can be said that more students might not be interested in learning about the Great Depression through John Steinbeck’s novels. 29 students responded “No” and 54 students responded “Rather No”. Together, it is 83 students who seem to be not in favour of learning about this topic

through Steinbeck's novels. There are, however, 21 students who are rather undecided and who represent the third largest group of respondents. The questionnaire contains another question that is closely related to this hypothesis, and which presents similar findings as the main question for this hypothesis. The respondents were asked whether they would like to learn more about the Great Depression in English lessons. 3 respondents answered "Yes", 20 respondents answered "Rather Yes", 48 respondents answered "Rather No", 36 respondents answered "No", and 20 respondents were not sure about their opinion. Together, it is 84 students who might not be interested in learning about the Great Depression in English lessons, in general. It can be argued that the students of the ninth grades of lower secondary schools might not be able to imagine learning about this topic in English lessons, at all. Their experience with this topic in their History lessons could lead them to perceive this topic difficult, unsuitable for English lessons, or possibly their lack of experience with literary works in English lessons could be the issue.

This leads to the second hypothesis that has been claimed to support the first hypothesis, and so that more students know the term the Great Depression. It is likely that the students know this term as 91 of them answered "Yes" and 36 answered "No". There is another question in the questionnaire, which further analyses their knowledge of the Great Depression, asking the respondents how they would grade their knowledge of the Great Depression⁵. Although 91 students seem to know the term the Great Depression, 55 students responded they would grade their knowledge with the 5 grade and 33 students would grade their knowledge with the 4 grade. Therefore, it seems that although the students know the term, and possibly some very basic information about the Great Depression, their knowledge is most likely insufficient to decide, whether they are interested in learning about the topic in English. The third hypothesis further supports the first hypothesis. It deals with the students' knowledge of John Steinbeck. 38 students are likely to know the name, whereas 89 students are likely to be unfamiliar with the name. In addition, 91 students responded that they do not know any of Steinbeck's novels listed in the question⁶. 4 students responded that they read *The Grapes of Wrath* and 12 students responded that they read *Of Mice and Men*. It can be possible that lack of knowledge about the author's novels and lack of knowledge about the Great Depression could make the students uninterested in further exploration of what this topic could offer them. The three hypotheses directly answer the first main research

⁵ See the questionnaire in Attachments

⁶ See the questionnaire in Attachments

question, asking what is the interest in learning about the Great Depression through John Steinbeck's novels among the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools?

The fourth hypothesis claims that fewer students perceive the topic of the Great Depression important. Only 11 students, who responded "Yes" and "Rather Yes", would be in favour of finding the topic important, whereas 69 students represent the "No" and "Rather No" group. The largest group of respondents is surprisingly the "I'm not sure" group, which is represented by 47 students. It is likely that the students made their responses based on their possible knowledge, as stated in the previous paragraph.

The fifth hypothesis deals with the students' opinion on the importance of the knowledge of the Great Depression in their future lives and work. This hypothesis is closely related to the fourth hypothesis. The largest group of respondents seems to be not sure about the future usage of their knowledge of this topic as it is represented by 51 students. Only 9 students, out of which 2 responded "Yes" and 7 responded "Rather Yes", seem to be able to consider this knowledge useful in their future lives and work. Again, this is most likely related to their lack of knowledge about the topic in general, which prevents them from considering any usage in their future lives. The fourth and the fifth hypothesis, therefore, answer the second main research question whether the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools consider the topic of the Great Depression important. The data show that they might not consider this topic important at all, although, a large number of respondents seems to be unsure.

The next hypothesis deals with the respondents' opinion on approaching this topic using the CLIL method in their History lessons. The largest group of 45 students responded "No" and 37 students responded "Rather No". Based on the responses, it can be argued that students are probably not in favour of using English language in their History lessons. On the other hand, there is a significant possibility that students are unable to imagine how would such lesson work, and therefore they seem to be uninterested in this method.

The seventh hypothesis deals with students' perception of the importance of reading in English in order to improve their English skills. Students seem to be rather confident about the fact that reading a book in English would improve their English skills as 21 students responded "Yes" and 61 students responded "Rather Yes". Together, it gives more than a half of all respondents who are likely in favour of the statement that reading in English could be beneficial. In addition, similar results can be seen with another statement that says *I think*

reading is important, which is more general. 18 students responded “Yes” and 61 students responded “Rather Yes”. It can be, therefore, argued that the respondents might perceive reading important and also, they seem to agree that reading a book in English language would improve their English skills. In other words, many of those, who are likely to perceive learning about the Great Depression unimportant or uninteresting, might consider reading in English important for their English skills.

The eighth hypothesis deals with the students’ perception of integrating Steinbeck’s novels in English lessons. The respondents were asked whether they would be interested in reading any of the Steinbeck’s novels (*In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*) in English lessons, if they were told the books are about social injustice, friendship, poor living conditions, and American dreams⁷. Those, who are rather against reading any of these books in English lessons, represent 72 students, out of which 35 responded “Rather No” and 37 responded “No”. These data seem to further support the fact that the students are likely to be not interested in this topic to be implemented in English lessons. In addition, another question in the questionnaire explores the students’ choices of activities they would be interested in doing in English lessons. Reading parts of the text was one of the choices and it was selected by 22 respondents.

The research findings show that the students might be rather uninterested in learning about the Great Depression through the Steinbeck’s novels. Although they are likely to know the term the Great Depression, they seem to lack knowledge. Similar findings show that the students seem to be unfamiliar with the author John Steinbeck. Furthermore, students seem to consider the topic of the Great Depression unimportant, and they might not perceive their knowledge about the Great Depression important for their future life and work. This could probably lead to the overall rejection of the topic. It is further supported by the fact that they seem to be uninterested in integrating Steinbeck’s novels in English lessons and they might not be interested in reading any of the novels. Moreover, they seem to be uninterested in learning about the Great Depression in English language in their History lessons. On the other hand, they seem to perceive reading in English beneficial for their language skills and they are also likely in favour of the statement that reading is important.

⁷ See the questionnaire in Attachments

6.8 Research Limits

The biggest challenge, and therefore limitation, of this research is the credibility of the respondents. As they are lower secondary school students, their English proficiency is of a variety of levels, which are not objects of the research. It is possible that some of the students could have had difficulties understanding the questions and answered the questions randomly, either without even reading them or misunderstood some of the questions. However, this was not the case with 48 students of ZŠ Sluneční in Šumperk as I provided sufficient support.

It is also appropriate to mention the difficulty and complexity of the thesis. It can be argued that as the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools have not enough experience with literary works in English lessons and learning about complex topics such as the Great Depression in English language, this fact alone could have led the students to reject this learning method. Qualitative research in combination with action research would probably provide sufficient results that could clarify their perception of this topic with more credibility.

The research sample could represent another limitation as 127 respondents seem not enough to consider the research accurate. A common research sample consists of at least 900 respondents, which professional companies focussing on research and surveys usually include.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the theoretical part is to provide information about the events of the Great Depression, John Steinbeck's life and literary works, and also methods of integrating his novels in English language teaching. The aim of the practical part is to clarify to what extent are the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools interested in learning about this topic through John Steinbeck novels in English lessons, and how they perceive integrating Steinbeck's novels in English lessons.

The first chapter provides information about the events that preceded and contributed to the outburst of the Great Depression. The first event was World War I, which started in 1914 and lasted until 1918. The United States was a major supplier from the very beginning of the war, supplying the Allied Powers with military materials, raw materials, food, and money. The United States eventually entered the war in 1917, which brought an opportunity to secure job positions and increase wages. The export numbers to Europe rose, increasing income and stability to the United States' economy. On the other hand, when the United States entered the war, the government increased tax rates, and prices of food and living suddenly became very high. Although the wages increased, by the end of the war in 1918, the U.S. Government cancelled the war contracts, which led to shortage of production and job position cuts. The combination of high cost of living and high prices of food and consumer goods eventually led to strikes and riots, especially in bigger cities. Businesses had to adapt and develop new technologies and services in order to improve their financial situations. The production began to rise in 1922 as the United States entered the period called the Roaring Twenties. During this period, American businesses flourished, and the economy started to seem healthy again. It was a period of new inventions such as Henry Ford's assembly line, which contributed to the massive production and sales of automobiles. Electrification of the nation enabled American homes to buy new electric home appliances, such as electric refrigerators or radios. Advertisement in radio played a major role in increased consumption, and paved the way for the creation of instalment plans and buying on credit. The increased interest in loans led to increase in debts across the American households. Americans were also interested in investing on the stock market, which further supported the increase in debts. The stock market offered an opportunity of getting rich very fast, as the value and market capitalization of some of the most successful companies skyrocketed. However, the signs of the fall became obvious, and the superficial prosperity began to be unsustainable.

The second chapter starts with the crash on the stock market in 1929, which is often considered the beginning of the Great Depression. The prices of stocks dropped, which further led to huge selling and eventually wiping out billions of dollars off the stock market. Many banks were hugely invested in the stock market and were suddenly unable to pay off their clients. Most of the American citizens who invested in the stock market lost their money and banks faced bankruptcy. The unemployment rate skyrocketed to 25 percent and due to the general overproduction, there were virtually no jobs. The rural areas suffered the most as farm income declined by 60 percent. Many farmers lost their land and had to move to the West in search of jobs and better living conditions. The situation was even worse due to the dust storms that occurred in the area of the Great Plains. President Hoover tried to face the Depression, but his limited interventions did not help fighting the Depression. This led to his loss in the presidential election in 1932 and brought hope to the United States as the new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, introduced his New Deal policies that addressed the Depression issues. His measures strengthened the United States' economy and provided help to many struggling American citizens but did not end the Great Depression. The end of the Depression came with the outburst of World War II, which had similar effects to the economy as World War I.

The third chapter deals with life and work of John Steinbeck. He was born in 1902, in a town called Salinas in California. He had above average grades in high school and excelled in writing. After graduating from high school, he entered Stanford University, but throughout his studies, he struggled to maintain good grades and acceptable attendance. He withdrew from Stanford and worked on farms and ranches. In 1925, after a few appearances at Stanford, he left the university for good in order to fully focus on writing. He worked several job positions and often moved to New York and back to California. His first commercial success was the publishing of a novel called *Tortilla Flat*. Throughout his life, Steinbeck was married three times and wrote many novels and other literary works. He travelled a lot with his third wife and eventually settled in New York where he also died in 1968. Among his most successful works were *The Grapes of Wrath*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and *East of Eden*, which Steinbeck considered his best work. John Steinbeck was also awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, which makes him one of the most influential writers of the 20th century.

The fourth chapter focuses on the analysis of *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck depicted the most notable themes of the Great Depression period in his novels, such as the struggle and oppression of the poor working class, lack of morality of the rich, the power of family and a group, the importance of friendship, the impacts of loneliness, and the striving for justice among the labour. He used these themes in the story of the apple pickers who were organizing a strike in *In Dubious Battle*, furthermore, Steinbeck portrayed how important was true friendship during this period in *Of Mice and Men* and stressed the importance of a family bond and the constant injustice in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The fifth chapter provides possible strategies and methods of implementing authentic literary texts in ELT and EFL classrooms. Literary works in English language teaching represent authentic materials that can promote motivation for learning English, they provide a variety of themes that can educate the whole person, and, in addition, encourage language acquisition of the students. One of the approaches that can be used is the CLIL method. There are several stages of implementation of the CLIL method in English language teaching and it only depends on the desired outcomes of a teacher. Another useful approach can be seen in the Communicative Language Teaching method, which focuses mainly on acquiring the language through communication in order to use the language in real-life situations. The Reader-Response Approach aims at the positive interaction with the reader and the text. By reading a text, readers are exposed to a variety of perspectives that teachers further stress by designing activities based on the desired outcomes.

The practical part deals with quantitative research and its main aim is to clarify to what extent are the students of the ninth grade of lower secondary schools interested in learning about the topic of the Great Depression through John Steinbeck's novels in English lessons, and whether they consider this topic important. A questionnaire was designed to fulfil the aims and was distributed to the students electronically. Furthermore, hypotheses were made, and the results were analysed. Research findings show that the students might be rather uninterested in learning about the Great Depression through the Steinbeck's novels. It seems that students know the term the Great Depression, but they probably lack knowledge. Moreover, students seem to be unfamiliar with the author John Steinbeck and they seem to be uninterested in learning about the Great Depression in English language in their History classes. On the other hand, they are likely to perceive reading in English language beneficial

for their language skills and they seem to be in favour of the statement that reading is important. Furthermore, they seem to consider the topic of the Great Depression unimportant, and they might not perceive their knowledge about the Great Depression important for their future life and work.

This diploma thesis has its limits, which can be summarized as a rather small number of respondents, questionable credibility of the respondents, and the complexity and difficulty of the questions that may pose an issue in understanding and therefore affect the responses. This research could be further explored through qualitative research in combination with action research in lower secondary schools.

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ATTACHMENT 1: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Answer options	Responses	Percentage
Have you heard of the author John Steinbeck?		
Yes	38	29.9
No	89	70.1
Do you know any of these Steinbeck's novels? Choose the ones you know.		
In Dubious Battle (Bitva)	2	1.6
Of Mice and Men (O myších a lidech)	31	24.4
The Grapes of Wrath (Hrozny hněvu)	15	11.8
None of these	91	71.7
Did you read any of these novels? Choose the ones you read. (In English or Czech)		
In Dubious Battle (Bitva)	0	0
Of Mice and Men (O myších a lidech)	12	9.4
The Grapes of Wrath (Hrozny hněvu)	4	3.1
None of these	112	88.2
If I told you these books are about social injustice (sociální nespravedlnost), friendship, poor living conditions, and American dreams, would you be interested in reading any of these books in English lessons?		
Yes	7	5.5
Rather Yes	19	15
Rather No	35	27.6
No	37	29.1

I'm not sure	29	22.8
Do you know the term the Great Depression? (Velká hospodářská krize)		
Yes	91	71.7
No	36	28.3
How would you grade (ohodnotit) your knowledge of the Great Depression?		
1 (I know everything)	0	0
2 (I know a lot)	9	7.1
3 (I know a little)	30	23.6
4 (I don't know much)	33	26
5 (I don't know anything)	55	43.3
Would you like to learn more about the Great Depression in English lessons?		
Yes	3	2.4
Rather Yes	20	15.7
Rather No	48	37.8
No	36	28.3
I'm not sure	20	15.7
John Steinbeck's novels include the Great Depression themes. Would you like to learn about the Great Depression through Steinbeck's novels?		
Yes	5	3.9
Rather Yes	18	14.2
Rather No	54	42.5
No	29	22.8
I'm not sure	21	16.5
Choose the activities you would be interested in doing in English lessons.		
Discussion (talking and sharing your ideas)	30	23.6

Reading and writing (reading parts of the text and then writing your thoughts)	22	17.3
Listening (listening to audiobooks)	38	29.9
Watching (watching a movie, YouTube videos)	88	69.3
Acting (acting out parts of the story)	27	21.3
You learn about the Great Depression in your History lessons. Would you be interested in learning about this topic in your History lessons but in English language?		
Yes	3	2.4
Rather Yes	20	15.7
Rather No	37	29.1
No	45	35.4
I'm not sure	22	17.3
I think reading is important.		
Yes	18	14.2
Rather Yes	61	48
Rather No	20	15.7
No	6	4.7
I'm not sure	22	17.3
I think reading a book in English would improve my English skills.		
Yes	21	16.5
Rather Yes	61	48
Rather No	17	13.4

No	5	3.9
I'm not sure	23	18.1
I would like to read a book in English, and in English lessons.		
Yes	10	7.9
Rather Yes	41	32.3
Rather No	30	23.6
No	21	16.5
I'm not sure	25	19.7
I think the Great Depression topic is important.		
Yes	2	1.6
Rather Yes	9	7.1
Rather No	36	28.3
No	33	26
I'm not sure	47	37
I could use the knowledge of the Great Depression in my future life and work.		
Yes	2	1.6
Rather Yes	7	5.5
Rather No	33	26
No	34	26.8
I'm not sure	51	40.2