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Symbolism in “The Pearl” Example

The Pearl is a novella by John Steinbeck. It is about a pearl diver called Kino who lives a simple and happy life with his wife and son. This happy life did not last because his child, Coyotito, is stung by a scorpion. Since they are a poor family, Kino cannot afford his son's therapy so he goes diving for a pearl. He finds 'the Pearl of the World' because of its size and perfect shape. As the story progresses, the pearl causes many troubles in Kino's life and destroys the peaceful and simple life of his family. There are different symbols used by the author throughout the novella that play an important role in the story, such as the scorpion, the canoe and the pearl.

Steinbeck uses many symbols in his work to deliver different thoughts. One of them is the scorpion which symbolizes danger. It is known that its sting is fatal and might cause death. At the beginning of the story, Kino sees a scorpion near his son and hears 'the Song of Evil' (7). It stings Coyotito's shoulder but his mother puts her lips over the puncture in order to suck the poison as soon as possible. Through this symbol, the author wants the reader to prefigure the evil that is soon will enter Kino's life. The way the scorpion sneaks into his family's hut foreshadows the poisonous evil of many of the town's people. As it tries to steal the boy's life, some men of the community want to steal Kino's precious pearl.

Another symbol is the canoe. Steinbeck expresses that it is 'the only thing of value he [Kino] owned in the world'(20). This indicates that the canoe symbolizes life to Kino because it is what he relies on as a source of living. Kino, in trying to escape after killing a man in self-defense, finds that there is a hole in his boat. This broken canoe signifies the loss of hope and peace especially it is his family's heritage and part of their tradition.

The most important symbol that Steinbeck uses in his novella is the pearl. Throughout the story, it expresses different symbols. In the beginning, the pearl symbolizes hope and future. Kino hopes to make a proper marriage with his wife, to send his son to school and to buy a rifle and new clothes. However, the pearl brings nothing but sadness and danger to his family. It turns all the men around him into enemies except his brother. At the end of the story, it represents evil and greed. Everyone in town feels envy towards Kino. His neighbors try to steal the pearl and many other of the town's people as well. They also destroy his canoe and burn his house. In order to protect the pearl, Kino kills a man and escape with his family. This shows how greedy he and the other men become and how evil the pearl turns to be. It only brings out the worst side of human beings. He is not anymore a simple pearl diver but a murderer. Different people of the town such as the doctor and the pearl dealer see their own dreams in the pearl. It increases their greed and corrupts the tribe life and culture because of its materialistic value. The doctor, in attempts to get the pearl, lies about Coyotito's condition. The dealers, for example, attempt to cheat Kino and buy the pearl at a low price. This selfishness and man's desire for wealth cause the death of the baby at the end. Even a religious figure like the priest wants to benefit from the pearl. This indicates that money can change people and affect their virtue.

In conclusion, Steinbeck uses symbolism in *The Pearl* to deliver a different and deep meaning for the reader to understand the story better. The novella is full of symbols that each one of them presents an idea or a theme. It is a parable story that presents greed as a destructive force. The pearl, which the most important symbol, signifies how greed can destroy peace and happiness. It takes away the simple and warm life of Kino and his family. The only person who senses the danger behind the pearl is his wife. However, he refuses to listen to her because of the dreams he builds and wants to achieve after selling the pearl. Unfortunately, this unexpected wealth attracts the enemies and leads the loss of the most important person in Kino's life; his only son.