

John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*. Synopsis

Kino, a young Mexican Indian pearl diver, lives a simple but honorable life with Juana and their baby son, Coyotito, in a small Indio village on the edge of the inner Sea of Cortez inside Mexico's Baja Peninsula. Time: 1920s. When a scorpion bites Coyotito, they go to the nearby Hispanic town of La Paz to get help from the doctor, who refuses to treat the child because Kino can only pay him with cheap seed pearls. Juana cares for Coyotito as best she can with herbal poultices. Desperate to get money for the doctor, they go out in Kino's canoe and he dives for pearls. As Kino gathers mollusks from the sea, he picks up one that is larger than all the others. When he opens it, he finds a huge pearl—the "Pearl of the World."

Kino believes the pearl is a good thing that will make their lives much better. He says that now Coyotito can go to school to learn to read and write, and then no one will be able to cheat him or his parents, and Kino will buy a rifle, and he and Juana will be married in the Church. Coyotito is slowly recovering from the scorpion sting without the doctor's help. Soon, everyone in the fishing village knows about Kino's good luck, and word also spreads to the town. Everyone in the town wants a piece of their good fortune, while his neighbors simply wish him well. The priest arrives and advises Kino to donate some of his newfound wealth to the Church. The doctor has also heard about the pearl. Claiming to have been "busy" before, he now visits Kino and Juana and secretly gives the baby mild poison so he can then "cure" him. Kino promises to pay the doctor after he has sold the pearl. At night, Kino hides the pearl before going to sleep. He and Juana are awoken by noises and shadows.

The next day, they go to the town to sell the pearl; all their friends come along, happy for them. The pearl buyers, who always conspire to cheat the fishermen, tell Kino that his pearl is not worth much because it is too big and misshapen. Kino angrily rejects the low price they offer him and says he will sell in the Capital. Later he is attacked by a robber, but the pearl remains safe. Juana fears that the pearl will bring only evil and urges Kino to throw it back into the sea. He angrily refuses—the pearl represents his destiny as a man. She tries to do it herself, but he catches her on the beach and strikes her. Late that same night, thieves try to steal the pearl and Kino kills one of them. Kino and Juana discover that his canoe has been smashed and their brush shack set on fire. The villagers think they are dead, but Kino's brother hides them, gets them food and a knife, and they flee the village.

Carrying Coyotito and the pearl, they escape on foot—north through the mountains, during a fierce night windstorm. They know they are being followed by bounty hunters looking to kill Kino, take the pearl, and collect a reward. The next night Juana hides with Coyotito in a little mountain cave above a pool on a high ledge while Kino stalks the trackers below. He kills them, but not before one of them fires his rifle, killing Coyotito. Desolated, Kino and Juana return to the village. Kino can no longer deny that the pearl is a source of evil, not good. He throws the Pearl of the World back into the sea as their neighbors lament.