



## Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

**Report Title:** Traveling a Novel, The Grapes of Wrath      **Name:** Sandy Dossett  
**Other Team Members:**  
**Program:** Oklahoma Program  
**Trip Dates:** 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001      **Location Visited:** Route 66 Oklahoma to California  
**Post Fellowship Reporting Template:** PFR Template 01

**Project Summary:** When I planned my trip to California from Oklahoma following the trail of migrant workers during the Dust Bowl, I set out some goals.

1. Bring the novel to life for my students with pictures of real places and first hand experiences.
2. Show my students through a trip blog that journaling can be a learning experience in itself and that through journaling personal insight can be gained.
3. Become an expert about one novel... one novelist... one social issue.
4. Determine the motivation behind the writer for his subject matter and his viewpoint.
5. Get a sense of the geographic texture of Oklahoma and the effect the trip had on the Joad family.
6. Visualize the time period and challenges the Joads faced as they traveled westward.
7. Help my students understand the power of the pen in affecting social issues.

As it turned out, the opportunity to travel a novel first hand was an unforgettable journey, the visits to museums were invaluable, and the serendipitous encounters with people and places along Route 66 were once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Below are a few excerpts from my on-line journal:

Aug. 2: The farmland around Sallisaw that we encountered didn't really fit the description of the flat, parched earth that Steinbeck described. I realize we aren't in the same drought conditions of the 1930's, but I wonder if Steinbeck didn't superimpose the picture of the panhandle on the Sallisaw area...Oklahoma still has lots and lots of farmland and rolling hills... I didn't realize how much of southern Oklahoma has this type of topography. I think most people think of Oklahoma geography as the plains...flat, not green with trees and rolling hills which makes up most of the southern half and eastern half of the state.

Aug. 3: According to the story, the Joads traveled from Bethany to Amarillo along Route 66. So did we... All day long we took pictures of abandoned gas stations, abandoned roads, abandoned buildings, and abandoned towns. We visited two Route 66 museums, and it dawned on me that we are chasing ghosts... a way of life [along Route 66] that was abandoned quite a long time ago. Just like the Joads we're chasing a ghost to California. They were chasing a dream that didn't really exist.

Aug. 4: ...Our first find was at the Mid-Point Cafe in Adrian, Texas. I was so excited to find a diner/restaurant that has been in business since the 1930's and serves chess pie. The owner of the restaurant said she loved her life in this small town, and coincidentally her father...at age 12 traveled with his family to California where he picked plums to help support his family. He's 83 now and she said she showed her sons the movie, The Grapes of Wrath, because they needed to understand what their grandfather had been through and why he continues to save everything.

Aug. 5: I've also now been to four Route 66 museums, the last one in Kingman, AZ. Discounting the one car museum, the rest all had displays and references to The Grapes of Wrath. I don't think I can ever recall seeing a museum reference a novel in its displays... I think that is amazing and a testament to John Steinbeck's accurate depiction of the plight of the Dust Bowl migrants... Some things I won't forget about this day - The incredible drive between Seligman and Topock... it's a rocky mountain pass on a two-lane highway with roaming wild donkeys, gold mines, cacti and incredible scenery ... At the end of the day, when I thought back to the winding switchback road we'd just traveled, I tried to imagine the Joads traveling that road as many families must have done - in the dark to avoid the heat. They had to be incredibly brave to attempt that trip.

Aug. 6: We spent two hours with Earl Shelton, who is a member of the Dust Bowl Committee who is trying to preserve the history of the camp. He had lived in the camp for 13 years starting in 1941 and traveled from Oklahoma to California when he was seven years. His father lost his Oklahoma farm to the bank .... Earl's trip to California was an amazing story... When they did arrive in California, they were fortunate enough to get into the Sunset camp. The camp that John Steinbeck described and called Weedpatch. Earl had nothing but praise for this government run camp and confirmed many of the details Steinbeck wrote about in his book.

Aug. 7: We got up early in the morning and headed to the Cesar Chavez National Center..... I really didn't know much about Cesar Chavez... Although Cesar Chavez did much to improve working conditions for the workers, there is still much to be done... During several fasts, strikes, and marches Chavez brought to light many of the ongoing issues: the cruel use of a short hoe that caused workers to have to bend over all day long, the use of pesticides on the crops that the workers were often exposed to, and the lack of medical care or retirement for those who worked long hours of physical labor... I was impressed by the center's photographic display of the Delano fast. Chavez's story is moving and inspiring. He was able to accomplish what several others had tried before - to unite

the farm workers in order to improve their working conditions.

Aug. 8: We spent a morning in Monterey- also quite a contrast to the fields. It's a tourist town... a vacation spot... a hot spot at night. It used to be a sea town where the sardine industry was vibrantly alive... fisherman caught sardines and workers canned the fish. Steinbeck wrote two books set in Monterey - Tortilla Flats and Cannery Row... Steinbeck's influence on this region is evident everywhere. The town has changed the name of Oceanview Road to Cannery Row, which is what Steinbeck called the street in his novel. They've turned the area into a tourist attraction and where old canneries once stood they have either been converted to shops or restaurants.

Aug. 9: We spent another day in Salinas, Steinbeck's hometown, which included a walking tour of the downtown area... Our tour guide was a native of Salinas and had lived there a long time... She showed us many of the places that were mentioned in Steinbeck's book, East of Eden... Salinas is in the heart of the agriculture country. When Steinbeck published the Grapes of Wrath, all his books were burned at the public library because the local growers and hometown people were so angry with his depiction of the callous growers and their incredible indifference to the suffering of the migrant workers. The irony of the book burning is that now the library is named after Steinbeck.

**Career Impact:** Personally, I learned a great deal from the trip because I had to take time to reflect each night and put words to what I was experiencing. It helped me see patterns that were repeating in the history I was learning... like how decisions the government makes effects our daily lives... for both good and bad.... It helped me contemplate on how our fast paced life focused only on a destination narrows our vision of the world around us...It helped me discover how profound Steinbeck's drive to help people understand each other really is. Professionally I gained knowledge about Oklahoma, the Dust Bowl, migrant workers, and John Steinbeck. Keeping Dust Bowl families in the forefront as we traveled west was extremely helpful in seeing the novel come to life. The museums were full of details and artifacts about the treacherous trip that thousands made west. Seeing the terrain first hand helped me imagine how incredible the journey across Route 66 must have been in 1920's vehicle loaded down with family, possessions, and unfulfilled dreams.

**Classroom/Community Impact:**The museum trips inspired my first student project of the new school year, a 1960's museum. Since my students were reading The Outsiders set in the 60's, I challenged my students to create a museum for their fellow students in our school library. Armed with lots of museum pictures from my trip, my students were able to envision and create interactive displays to help educate all the freshman in our school about the culture and history of that time period. My students loved the project, their peers loved the museum scavenger hunt we created for them, and I loved all the curriculum objectives we met as we learned together. I've made my trip blog available to several other faculty members in the hopes that I might inspire them to pursue some of their educational dreams. The Oklahoma History teacher and I are working on our interdisciplinary curriculum that our students will be involved in during his Dust Bowl unit.

**Open Response:** I've set a lifetime goal of reading all of Steinbeck's books. I am now one of his number one fans and have completed two more books since I've returned. I'm working on a migrant workers research paper that I will use as a model for my students when they write their research papers over current social issues. I also plan to submit a letter-to-the-editor addressing the plight of the current migrant workers as a model for my students for their social issues project. I'm going to link historical websites and points of interest to my blog before the Dust Bowl unit in December, so students can read my journal and link to additional resources. I'm finishing my pictorial scrapbook from the trip as well as my scrapbook bulletin boards for my classroom that will display maps of different sections of my trip along with artifacts and memorabilia that I collected along my journey. I'm working with our district's Public Relations Director on an article chronicling my trip.

**Quote:** By traveling a novel and creating a trip blog, I hope my students will see that learning is an exciting life-changing journey.

Photos:



Abandoned gas station that represents an abandoned way of life along Route 66.



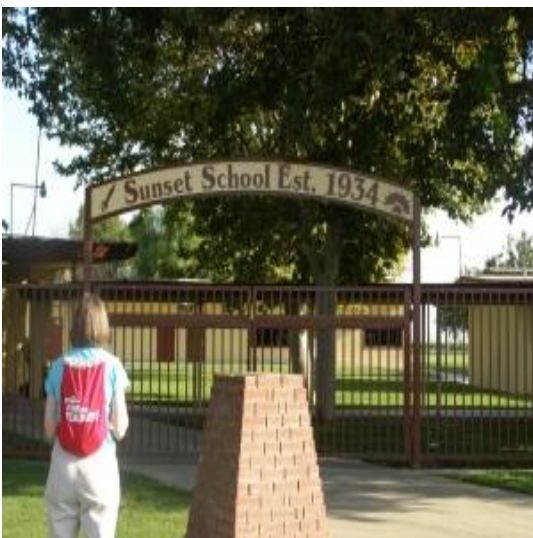
MidPoint Cafe along Route 66 that dates back to 1930's.



Earl Shelton, an Oklahoma Dust Bowl survivor, that lived in a migrant worker's camp in Weedpatch, CA.



Migrant workers in a strawberry field near Salinas, CA.



School for children of migrant workers in Weedpatch, CA.



East of Eden display in the John Steinbeck Center.





Replica of the Joad family vehicle described in *The Grapes of Wrath* in Route 66 Museum in Clinton.



Student space history display for 1960's museum at Bartlesville Mid High library.