

WORKSHEET 2. Excerpts from Working Days, June 1938

Name: _____

Date: _____

Teacher: _____

Grade: _____

First *Working Days* entry, June 23, 1938

The circle of squatting men and the plans, the order of authority and the texture of the family. I only expect to crack the surface of this conference today for it is important and should be dealt with at some length ...

Steinbeck picks up this theme in his journal the next day.

Second *Working Days* entry, June 24, 1938

Well today's work is to indicate the curious democracy of the larger group. I think the whole day's work will deal with this conference and maybe spill over into the next day. I must get this down convincingly. The squatting men, the standing women and children.

Questions:

- Note how the “two squatting men” from Lange’s 1936 photograph have now become a “circle.” Discuss the significance of the circle. How does this symbol transform the context of the image?

Consider each of the four items from the excerpt. Discuss each one individually noting how they are important on their own and collectively noting what connections can be drawn between them:

1. The circle of squatting men
 2. The plans
 3. The order of authority
 4. The texture of the family
- Steinbeck refers to this gathering as a “conference.” What is the significance of Steinbeck’s word choice?
 - Steinbeck proposes to “crack the surface of this conference.” What does he mean by “crack the surface”? He also indicates that this “conference” is important and must be dealt with at some length. What does that lead you to expect the author will do with this image in the novel?
 - Steinbeck uses this image to “indicate the curious democracy of the larger group.” What is the purpose of introducing the concept of “democracy” and why does he refer to it as “curious?”
 - Steinbeck says he will devote a whole day to this “conference” and assigns himself the task to “get this down convincingly.” What does that lead you to conclude about the importance of this image to Steinbeck’s novel?

- What is the significance of stringing the groups together: “the squatting men” with “the standing women and children”? Why might he have the men in a squatting posture and the women and children in a standing posture?
- What other observations or conclusions can you draw from the two excerpts?