



*The Walrus Tusk*

A retelling of

*The Pearl*



by John Steinbeck



# Setting

*The Pearl*  
Baja, California

*The Walrus Tusk*  
Nova Scotia

~BOTH~

- Home to indigenous people
- Near an untrustworthy but rich sea
- Extreme environment, yields a subsistence living
- A time of change, European influences

# The Characters

*The Pearl*

*The Walrus*

Mixtec

**Indigenous People**

*Tusk*  
Sallirmiut

Coyotito

**Innocent**

Kreelut

Juana

**Good/Tradition**

Aulanerk

Kino

**Conflicted Hero**

Anguta

Juan Thomas

**Conscience/Tradition**

The Shaman

Europeans

**Threat to Culture**

Europeans

The Doctor

**Evil**

The Fur Merchant



## The Conflict

*The Pearl*

*The Walrus Tusk*

In both, the protagonist (a flawed hero) sees life changing, and European ways stir new desires in him. In *The Walrus Tusk*, the baby is stricken with smallpox, a white man's disease needing a white man's cure. Anguta asks the fur merchant for medicine, but is refused because he cannot pay.

The background features a stylized illustration of a walrus. On the left, the head of the walrus is shown in profile, facing left, with a large white eye and a dark, pointed tusk. To the right, a large, curved tusk is depicted with a series of circular patterns along its length. The entire scene is set against a dark blue background with some lighter blue, cloud-like shapes.

# The Conflict

## *The Walrus Tusk*

Seeing no other option, Anguta leaves in a skin boat to hunt seals far away, risking his life in the process. Seal hunting is unsuccessful, but upon his return, Anguta finds a rare bull walrus, and kills it. The tusk, which was traditionally used by the shaman, is worth a lot of money to Europeans.

The background features a stylized illustration of a walrus head in profile on the left, looking towards the right. To the right of the head is a large, curved tusk with several circular indentations along its length. The entire scene is set against a dark blue background with faint, lighter blue patterns.

# The Conflict

## *The Walrus Tusk*

Anguta won't deal with the fur merchant, who spies the hidden tusk. After his home is rifled in the night, Anguta leaves the village with his family, determined to sell his tusk for a high price.

On his way, the shaman warns him about turning away from traditional ways. Anguta doesn't listen.



## *The Walrus Tusk*

The remaining story has similar plot elements as *The Pearl*.

Parable: The tusk represents a materialism that causes Anguta to forsake the foundations of his own culture.

Irony: Steinbeck turns the parable “A pearl of great price” on its head to show the folly of man and the destructive influences of “civilized” people.



# *The Walrus Tusk*

## *My Work, My Thinking*

Other unforgiving setting? → Far North

Other culture clashes? → the Russian fur trade in the Far North

Found Inuit tribes map on the Internet →

Sallirmiut tribe near Coral Harbor, Nova Scotia

Found Inuit names → Replace Spanish names





## *The Walrus Tusk*

*My Work, My Thinking, cont.*

Conflict?

Kreelut → Smallpox

Fur Merchant → Doctor role (evil European)

No Money → Seal hunt in dangerous waters

Treasure, hope, new problem → Walrus tusk

The background features a stylized, dark grey walrus head in profile on the left, with a large white eye and a black beak. To the right, a portion of a walrus tusk is visible, showing its characteristic segmented rings. The entire graphic is set against a dark blue background with faint, lighter blue cloud-like shapes.

## *The Walrus Tusk*

*My Work, My Thinking, cont.*

This story is timeless and placeless; it gets at the heart of human nature, flaws and all.

I learned that a good story has a universal theme, flavored by a rich context and savory language.

I look forward to reading other books by John Steinbeck.