\*\*\*This page is only to show you the topic of my sample essay. You do not need a page like this on your essay. The sample essay begins on the next page.\*\*\*

*Topic: What is the importance of music in The Pearl ? Support your answer with evidence from the novel.*

[Name]

Honors Language Arts

[Block Number]

Mr. Williams

[Date]

The Ancient Power of Music in Steinbeck’s *The Pearl*

The most profound effects of music occur not in the moment of hearing it but rather in its lingering in the mind long after the final note has been played. In John Steinbeck’s 1947 novella, *The Pearl*, music of the past lingering in the mind plays a major role. Kino, the novella’s protagonist, lives his entire life to a silent internal soundtrack of ancient song. When Kino finds a pearl of great value that promises to change his life forever, the music in his head influences everything that comes after. His internal songs, based on songs from his village’s past, display the powerful forces of Kino’s culture by shaping his perception of reality, providing warnings of danger and evil, and fueling his obsession with the pearl that ultimately leads to his downfall.

Even in the early pages of the novella, the way Kino’s internal music shapes his perception of reality is clear. In the early hours of the morning, as Kino awakens and hears the sound of the waves, the music begins. “In Kino’s head there was a song now, clear and soft, and if he had been able to speak of it, he would have called it the Song of the Family” (Steinbeck, 2). The music of his culture is so powerful and present in his life that even such a simple thing as the sound of water on a beach makes it play in his mind. Shortly thereafter, the grinding stone Juana uses to make breakfast seems to Kino to be “the rhythm of the family song” (3) and Juana’s singing “rose to an ancient chord that caught the throat, saying this is safety, this is warmth, this is the *Whole*” (3). In Kino’s mind, the music fills everything and makes everything right.

In addition to impacting the way Kino feels about the world around him, music also serves as a warning of imminent danger or evil. As a scorpion descends a rope toward his infant son, Coyotito, Kino hears “the Song of Evil, the music of the enemy, of any foe of the family, a savage, secret, dangerous melody, and underneath, the Song of the Family cried plaintively” (5). There are two layers of music in this moment. The top layer is the Song of Evil. This music signals to Kino that something dangerous or evil, in this case a scorpion, is approaching him and his family. The Song of the Family also plays in his head, but it is being drowned out by the music of the enemy. Music serves as a harbinger of evil in many other moments as well, such as a visit from an untrustworthy priest (27) and a moment of fear when Kino stares into the pearl as he hides from trackers (71).

Though the music of the family gives him comfort and the music of evil warns him of danger, there is another kind of music that enters Kino’s life—the music of the pearl. At first, the music of the pearl gives Kino hope, but it then fuels his obsession with the pearl. A few days after his discovery of the pearl, as Kino holds it, the text states that “the music of the pearl had merged with the music of the family so that one beautified the other” (24). Here, the music of the pearl and the music of the family come together and create in Kino a peaceful feeling of hope for his family’s future wealth and happiness. Shortly thereafter, as Kino stares into the pearl, seeing and then speaking aloud the things his family will do and the things they will buy, the music of the pearl rises “like a chorus of trumpets in his ears” (24). Already, the music of the pearl is becoming more intense and Kino is moving from hope and beginning to creep toward obsession. Later, as Kino hides in the woods, he stares into the pearl but is only able to see awful things he has done. “And Kino thrust the pearl back into his clothing, and the music of the pearl had become sinister in his ears, and it was interwoven with the music of evil.” Whereas before the music of the pearl mixed with the music of the family and produced hope, the mixture of the music of the pearl with the music of evil is now fueling Kino’s obsession and paranoia, putting him on the path that leads to his son’s death.

As this essay has shown, the ancient music of Kino’s people plays an outsized role in his development as a character, as well as in his rise and fall. Kino’s entire worldview is shaped by the songs in his head. They influence not only his thoughts and feelings but also his actions. They give him him peace and hope, and they signal the presence of danger and evil. But they also bring obsession and paranoia, and drive Kino to his tragic downfall. One might well wonder if, without the ancient forces of his culture’s music constantly playing in his head, things might have turned out differently for Kino. Coyotito might have survived, the creaking rope of his box sounding in Kino’s ears.

Works Cited

Steinbeck, John. *The Pearl.* 1947. Penguin, 1992.