Family Over Fortune

Everyone wants fortune. It is a common want of all people—living in a big house, wearing nice, expensive clothes, eating feasts of pricey foods, and having a great job. John Steinbeck portrays this familiar want in Kino in *The Pearl*. Fate brought the pearl of the world to Kino and his family, and greed brought the thought of fame and fortune to Kino’s mind. He, like most others, is too blind to see what is actually most vital in his life—love and family. It is a scale that battles to have the superior position. A major theme revealed by John Steinbeck in this famous story is the concept of family above fortune.

Kino’s life is practically the same day after day. He, his wife, Juana, and his infant son, Coyotito, are a poor family that lives in a brush house by a sea, content with their lives—not desperately yearning for a better one. That is, until the pearl of the world is retrieved by Kino: “And in the incandescence of the pearl the pictures formed of the things Kino’s mind had considered in the past and given up as impossible” (24). After being presented with riches, thoughts of a better life would come flooding into the minds of anyone. Money has the power to tip the scale and put greed as the superior instead of love. Kino is prepared to give up his people that he truly loves and start thinking inwardly.

Selfish fortune was not shown initially. Kino’s first wishes were in the favor of love: “He spoke softly, “We will be married—in the church’ ” (24). Kino maintained the scale at a proper position when he thought of his wife first. But, that started to change after he wished for a rifle: “It was the rifle that broke down the barriers. This was an impossibility, and if he could think of having a rifle horizons were burst and he could rush on. For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you could give them one thing and they want something more” (25). Fortune has won the battle for the moment. Kino begins to think of the many materialistic items that he thinks will make him a happy man, forgetting what is really important. He even becomes so into riches that when he is offered one thousand five hundred pesos, more than what any of his people could even imagine, he turns the offer down and continues his search for a better deal. Some begin to think of him as a fool. Juana wants to throw the pearl away because it is causing Kino to change in a negative way. Family has been forgotten.

Everything begins to go downhill—Kino’s house is burned down, his canoe gets destroyed, and he even killed a man out of greed for the pearl. The reign of fortune in the mind of Kino caused destruction, not happiness. There is then the one key event that changes everything. Coyotito is killed. Thoughts of family spring back up into the mind of Kino. The death of his son causes more sadness than his burned house and broken canoe. He realizes that family tops all: “In Kino’s ears the Song of the Family was as fierce as a cry. He was immune and terrible, and his song had become a battle cry” (89). Family had won the battle in the end. Kino realized his mind had had it wrong the whole time. He and his wife threw the pearl into the sea because they realized riches would not make them happy, but that all they needed was each other.

Overall, though fortune may be human instinct for finding happiness, family and love is what truly matters most. Kino struggled with this battle as his scale shifted in favor of greed. Through *The Pearl,* John Steinbeck brought forth this common struggle and paved a correct pathway to family. Steinbeck wrote it in a way where the readers walked their way through the journey with Kino and discovered the winner of happiness themselves. In conclusion, a major theme of the story was family over fortune, and was shown throughout the book in many forms. What is the scale in favor of in your mind?