Purpose of the Strategy: The purpose of the KWHL strategy is to scaffold the students reading. It allows them to connect their prior knowledge to new knowledge so that they are able to understand the text. This strategy leads them from what they know, to what they want to know, How to find that out, and then what they learned. The strategy can be used as a class or in groups. For the Grapes of Wrath it will work well to connect their prior knowledge of disaster, or poverty to a historical event: the Dust Bowl.

Directions:

Step 1: INTRODUCE THE STRATEGY

The teacher can explain that in order to truly understand and appreciate literature we need to connect it to former ideas. It may be a good idea to ask the class what some of their favorite books are. Ask why they like these books and point out that we like literature when we can connect to it. Ask what books they haven’t liked. Ask why. Usually the students will respond that they couldn’t understand, or that it didn’t have anything to do with their lives. Explain that even though they don’t live in the 1950’s and they don’t live in Oklahoma there are overarching themes in classic literature that help us connect. Once we connect we like the literature. Assure them (with enthusiasm) that they will all like Grapes of Wrath.

Step 2: LIST WHAT IS KNOWN

I would start out having them write down everything they know about dust. Then I would ask them what they know about the Dust Bowl. We could discuss this as a class and pull up pictures off the internet of the Dust Bowl. It might be effective to read just an excerpt together from Chapter 1 of Grapes of Wrath (maybe on the overhead).
"When the night came again it was black night for the stars could not pierce the dust to get
down, and the window lights could not even spread beyond their own yards. Now the dust was evenly
mixed with the air, an emulsion of dust and air. . . In the morning the dust hung like fog, and the sun was
as red as ripe new blood. All day the dust sifted down from the sky, and the next day it sifted down. An
even blanket covered the earth. It settled on the corn, piled up on the tops of the fence posts, piled up
on the wires; it settled on roofs, blanketed the weeds and trees” (pg 3).

The purpose of this part is to just get the students thinking about what they know about the Dust Bowl.

Step 3: LIST WHAT THEY WANT TO KNOW

Ask the students what else they want to know about the dust bowl. Maybe talk a little bit about the
characters so that they will want to know what happens to specific characters. For example: What will
happen to Tom Joad, What will happen to Grandpa and Grandma, what will happen to Muley. Help
them get excited about learning about this time period and especially these people.

Step 4: STUDENTS GENERATE THEIR OWN QUESTIONS

Give students time to think of their own questions. Hopefully with the class discussion they are thinking
enough to come up with their own questions. They will be able to talk to their peers and come up with
questions they really want to find the answers to.

Step 5: DISCUSS HOW TO FIND ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

This is a time to teach students how to find answers to their questions. I would demonstrate a couple
examples—one from the book and one from an outside source. For example I could ask the question :
What emotional impact does that have on people to leave their land? I would then demonstrate finding
the answer in the book with the example of Grandpa, how he died when he left and was buried there.
Another example could be more historical that would use outside sources—example: When did the Dust
Bowl occur and approximately how many people were affected by it. The answer could be found by
looking at an online encyclopedia or by searching the web. The demonstrations will show students how
they want to look for their answers. If a research project is included in the unit, give them time to really
come up with good questions about the text or about the situations. This also might be easier to do
when they have read more of the book.

Step 6: READ TO FIND OUT

Give the students time to read while looking for answers to the questions. Encourage them to write
their answers down on the chart.

Step 7: SHARE ANSWERS

A good idea may be to have a chart on butcher paper and hang it on the wall. As the students are
reading the novel, when the students find answers to the questions, write them down and talk about
them as a class.
Step 8: FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENT

Once the students have learned how to use KWHL it will be much easier to implement in the classroom again. You have taught them the process and now can use it for other novels, for portions of text and for class discussions.

ASSESSMENT: At the end of the unit review the chart with the students. The chart allows not only the teacher to see what the students have learned, but allows the students to see what they have learned. I would probably have the students write an informal paper telling me about a few of the things they didn’t know before and connections they made while reading the novel and using KWHL. If a teacher didn’t want to grade papers, he or she could have the students present in groups something that they learned because of KWHL.