



Of Mice and Men **John Steinbeck**

Discussion & Activities Guide

Parental warning: This story contains profanity and mature themes. Parents and teachers should preview before determining if this is an appropriate book for their students.

Discuss the following elements with your student, as a whole class, or pair students up for discussion and then present ideas back to whole group/class.

John Steinbeck

Research Steinbeck's life and background. In many literary works the setting (where the story takes place) is different from the context (when & where the writer lived), but in Steinbeck's stories the setting is when and where he lived. Steinbeck was born in 1902, in Salinas, California, which is also the setting for *Of Mice and Men*. As a teenager, Steinbeck spent summers working as a hired hand on ranches, and many of his characters are based on people he met.

Discuss how a writer is reflected in his or her writing. Why is it important to understand who a writer is when reading his/her work? Why do you need to be aware of bias and agenda?

Discuss how the story *Of Mice and Men* specifically reflects Steinbeck. Encourage students to be as specific as possible, with passages from the text.

Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962

Watch his full speech at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SKEODtaQUU>

Steinbeck declared, "... . the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit—for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion and love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally flags of hope and of emulation. I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature."

Where do you see evidence of this in *Of Mice and Men*?

Historical Context

Research the history of migrant farmers in California.

Find Salinas, CA on a map. Research the agriculture of the region.

Research the “dust bowl” – what were the causes & effects?

What is Steinbeck’s opinion of migrant farmers?

Where can you see history reflected in the story?

Literary Movement

Of Mice and Men was written during the literary movement referred to as the “Return to Regionalism”. In American Literature, the first “Regionalism” movement occurred directly after the Civil War, with stories such as those written by Mark Twain. Regionalism depicts a very specific geographic area and/or group of people. The Return to Regionalism occurred after World War II. Discuss – Why are these two tragic events followed by a desire to depict small pockets of people? What are these authors attempting to do? How does this attempt to heal us as a nation and/or culture?

Themes

Discuss the following themes found in *Of Mice and Men*

Where do you see these themes in the story? Look for specific passages.

- The predatory nature of humans
- Idealized male friendship
- The impossibility of the American Dream

Symbolism

Steinbeck uses symbolism to help convey his themes.

Discuss the symbolism of

- George & Lennie’s farm
- Lennie’s puppy
- Candy’s dog

Persuasive Paper

Write a persuasive paper regarding George’s final decision and action with Lennie. Did George make the right decision? Why or why not?

Watch a movie version of the story

I recommend the 2003 version, starring John Malkovich & Gary Sinise

After watching the movie, discuss the differences between the movie and the book. Which do you prefer? Why? Are any of the characters different? How? Any plot different? How did that affect the meaning or Steinbeck’s themes? Did the movie use visual or sound effects to help convey any of the themes?