

English Y9 'Of Mice and Men' by John Steinbeck

'Of Mice and Men' by John Steinbeck is a book written and set in 1930s America. The story follows George and Lennie on their quest for the American Dream. The book explores the themes of dreams, loneliness and companionship but also heavily focuses on discrimination.

Key Vocabulary

Circular Narrative	A story begins and ends in a similar way.
Semantic Field	Words that are linked to a key theme or topic.
Zoomorphism	Giving animalistic features to a human.
Colloquial Language	Use of informal language, such as slang.
Juxtaposition	Two contrasting themes, characters or settings.
Oppression	People with power treating groups of people unfairly.
Patriarchal society	A society where men have power and control.
Symbiosis	A relationship that benefits all people involved.
Discrimination	Unfair treatment based on race, gender, religion etc.
Ableism	Discriminating against someone with a physical/mental disability.
Prejudice	Forming stereotypical views of a person/group based on race, religion, gender etc.
Migrant Workers	Workers that travel from one area to another for employment.
Companionship	Friendship.
Tension	A sense of unease or suspecting something will happen.
Morality	Understanding right from wrong.

Characters

George Milton	George is described as physically small with very sharp features, an opposite to Lennie Small. He is short-tempered with Lennie, who he takes care of.
Lennie Small	Lennie Small is huge and lumbering and, in many ways, the opposite of George Milton. He has a mental disability and a child-like mind.
Candy	Candy is "a tall, stoop-shouldered old man". His right hand is simply a stump because he lost his hand in a ranch accident
Curley and Curley's Wife	Curley, the boss' son is a "thin young man with a brown face, with brown eyes and a head of tightly curled hair." Curley is an amateur boxer and is always picking fights, especially with guys who are bigger than he is. Curley's wife is the only woman in the plot. She is defined by her role: Curley's wife or possession. George and Candy call her by other names such as "jailbait" or "tart."
Crooks	Crooks is the stable hand who takes care of the horses and lives by himself because he is the only black man on the ranch
Slim and Carlton	Slim is the top ranch hand and is respected by all the other workers, including Carlson, another ranch hand.

Themes:

Dreams



Loneliness



Companionship



What caused the Great Depression in 1930s America?

In October 1929, the 'Roaring Twenties' came to a dramatic end and the USA economy went into deep depression.

Sixteen million shares were sold at a fraction of their original price due to a slowing of the economy (this was because of overproduction and underconsumption of goods and increased debt). Consequently the economy collapsed.



Big Questions and Key Concepts

Power

Morality

Conflict

Tragedy

- What was life like in 1930s America?**
- Why is it important to address discrimination?**
- How is tension created and what effect does this have?**
- Why are dreams powerful? Why are people cruel?**
- Is violence ever forgivable?**
- How is morality explored?**

Discrimination in 1930s America?

Racial: The Great Depression saw African Americans face unemployment at a rate almost triple that of white Americans. Charities and aid organisations were known to exclude black people from help and support during this difficult time.

Gender: Women's job opportunities rose after the crash as 'women's work', such as cleaning and nursing, were still needed. There were more single and divorced women needing to support themselves. Pay, rights and opportunities for women were limited.

Who was John Steinbeck?

Steinbeck was a famous American writer notable for novels such as 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Grapes of Wrath', which both focused on the plight of poor migrant workers searching for hope and the American Dream.

His books reflected his life experiences. For example, he came from a family of immigrants and worked on farms and ranches with migrant workers.