

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

Summary A story of two itinerant ranch workers who are moving to a new job. George is a clever man, and he takes care of his friend Lennie. The dream of owning their own land and "livin' off the fatta the lan'". Lennie often "does a bad thing" which means they need to leave their work; Lennie does not know his own strength. The dream will never come true.

Character **Other 20th Century American lit texts:**

George - 'small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features'	<i>To Kill A Mockingbird</i>	Harper Lee
Lennie - 'a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, and wide, sloping shoulders'	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	F. Scott Fitzgerald
Candy - ' tall, stoop-shouldered old man..swamper..stick-like wrist, but no hand'	<i>Grapes of Wrath</i>	John Steinbeck
Curley's Wife - 'full, rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made up. Her fingernails were red. Her hair hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages. She wore a cotton house dress and red mules, on the insteps of which were little bouquets of red ostrich feathers'	<i>Huckleberry Finn</i>	Mark Twain

Historical and social context

Banned in the USA even recently due to offensive language and themes of prejudice and violence.
Steinbeck worked with migrants as a journalist and wrote articles on their plight
Wall Street Crash 1929 which led to the Great Depression
Poor farming techniques and sustained drought led to the formation of the Dust Bowl , which meant many poor farming families from the midwest had to move west to California to try to make a living
Racism, segregation and the legacy of slavery all contribute to attitudes towards black Americans in the novels' time; the mention of 'southern negro' by Crooks returns to ideas of slavery and prejudice within black American culture.
Gender expectations - women and men had certain expectations of behaviour and attitudes as well as jobs and roles in family
American Dream - The term " American Dream " was apparently invented in 1931 by historian James Truslow Adams; he was referring to "That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement."
Hollywood and expectations of women; provocative dress and a dream to star in movies
Euthanasia is a controversial topic that arises after the mercy killing of Lennie by George, to save him suffering.

Literary context

"**Great American Novel**" is the concept of a novel of high literary merit which shows the culture of the United States at a specific time in the country's history. Author is knowledgeable about the state, culture, and perspective of the common American citizen. Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Twain, Lee etc.

Nobel Prize 1962 acceptance speech - 'capacity for greatness of heart and spirit' - a novel about humanity;

Published novel 1937 and play adaptation in 1938 - colloquial dialogue and focus on human interactions made it suitable.

The story of Adam and Eve's fall from grace is a tale of how even our "best laid plans" go astray because of the imperfection of our humanity. Curley's Wife as Eve figure.

'Am I my brother's keeper?' - Cain and Abel motif in lots of Steinbeck's work including Grapes of Wrath and East of Eden

Steinbeck influenced by Paradise Lost and the Bible as well as by Arthurian legends, specifically the idea that nothing lasts

Vocabulary	Themes	Literary devices
itinerant	Racism and segregation	Circular narrative
ranch	Violence	Zoomorphism
bunkhouse	Power, status and hierarchy	Symbolism
cathouse	Loneliness	Pathetic fallacy
purty	Friendship	Foreshadowing
negro	Dreams	Colloquial language
nomadic	Treatment of women	Motif
mule	Disability	Repetition
protagonist/ antagonist	Fate	Light V dark imagery
plight	Motifs	Animal imagery
debris	Farm	Simile
emerge	Puppy and Candy's dog	Metaphor
lunber	Hands	Dialogue
quiver	Animals	Descriptive settings
anguish		Magic realism
bait		
pugnacious		

Chapter by chapter summary:

1	G+L and dream introduced
2	Ranch/bunkhouse - intro to Candy, Curley, Boss, Curley's Wife and Slim
3	Bunkhouse - Curley' looks for a fight - Lennie defends himself
4	Crooks' room - segregation explored
5	Barn - CW+puppy are killed; Lennie runs
6	'Hide in the brush' - G kills L and the dream