

Bishop Ullathorne Catholic School. Year 9- Of Mice and Men – John Steinbeck

Plot Overview

1

George Milton and Lennie Small, two itinerant workers who travel from one ranch job to another.

George is a sharp, wiry man with dreams of saving enough money to buy land for a farm and become the master of his own destiny. **Lennie** is a hulking but simple-minded man who has short-term memory problems and a fascination with stroking soft objects.

The boss of the ranch comes to greet the men and agrees to allow them to stay on, though he's disappointed that they're late for their shift and sceptical of two men who travel together.

Candy fills **George** and **Lennie** in on the dynamics of the ranch, warning them that the boss often takes his anger out on the black stable hand, **Crooks**, while the boss's son **Curley**, a short and pathetic man, is always desperate for a fight in which he can prove his strength.

2

Authorial Intent- Why did Steinbeck Write 'Of Mice and Men'?

In it most simplest for authorial intent is what the author meant when they wrote their novel. Writers will often deliver moral messages, or share their perspective on a given topic. Once we have an understanding of context, the writer's background and the plot, we are better prepared to make a valid judgement on the author's intentions and purposes in writing the book in the way they do.

Although Steinbeck was born into a fairly wealthy family, he chose to write about the lives of poor farm labourers after he spent some time working with them. He often deals with the disempowered and poor who work hard in the hopes of attaining a better quality of life. Most of the main characters in *'Of Mice and Men'* represent some of the minority, marginalised groups at that time (Curley's wife = only female on the farm, Crooks= Negro and disabled, Candy= Old and Lennie= slow-witted, harmless giant.)

When considering Crooks we see how, through him, Steinbeck represents the plight of the disempowered black individuals who were caught in the economic poverty and extreme racism of the 1930's. Steinbeck deliberately establishes Crooks as a fully rounded, intelligent, three-dimensional character, not merely a token victim of racism. Steinbeck's sensitivity in writing Crooks' characters allows us to see a snapshot of times gone by. Steinbeck acknowledges that racism was very much an engrained part of society and he intends to shock us by showing us the brutal reality. And yet, through his sensitive narration, it is evident that he never condones the way Crooks is treated by other characters. Through dialogue, Crooks proudly tells how he is 'a southern negro', also through dialogue we hear other characters use the derogatory term 'nigger' in reference to or about Crooks; However, it is important to note that through deliberate choice and conscious crafting, Steinbeck **always** refers to Crooks as a 'negro stable buck'; always choosing the most respectful noun when talking about Crooks.

3

Cyclical Structure.

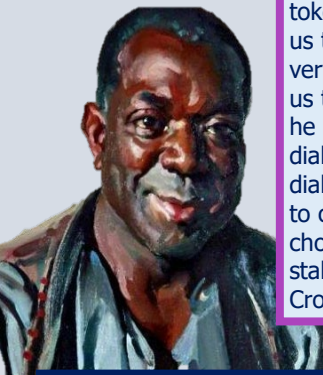
"A water snake slipped along the pool, it's hear up like a little periscope."

"A water snake came to the legs of a motionless heron that stood in the shallows. A silent head and beak lanced down and plucked it out by the head, and the beak swallowed the little snake while its tail waved frantically."



Cyclical – novel begins and ends at the same place. Highlighting the end of their American dream.

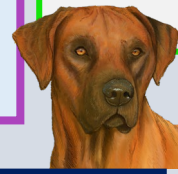
His Art of Writing...



Lennie sits by the pool off the Salinas, worried about getting in trouble with **George** and tortured by visions of his **Aunt Clara**, who turns into a giant rabbit and harasses Lennie for his stupidity and cruelty. George comes crashing through the brush and embraces Lennie. Lennie apologizes for what he's done, but George insists that it doesn't matter and says he isn't mad at Lennie at all



Curley's wife comes into the barn and approaches Lennie. When she sees that the puppy is dead, she tries to soothe **Lennie** by assuring him he'll be able to get another one. She laments her unending loneliness, and states that she should have had a different life—she says she should have been a movie star



Crooks claims that he doesn't want Lennie's company—just as he isn't allowed to go around with with the white ranch hands, he doesn't want any of them coming into his space. But when he sees how innocent and well-meaning Lennie is, he agrees to let the man in. As Crooks tells **Lennie** about his painful past marked by racism, discrimination, and loneliness.



George and **Slim** play cards in the bunk house while some of the other laborers play a game of horseshoes outside. **Lennie** is in the barn, playing with the new puppy **Slim** has given him.

Candy brings his dog inside, and **Carlson** comments on the dog's disgusting odour. He suggests Candy put the dog, who is blind, lame, and mangy, out of its misery. Carlson offers to shoot the dog with his pistol, and **Slim** promises Candy a new puppy from the litter

Lennie asks **George** to tell him about their farm, and **George** gets lost in his own reverie as he talks aloud about their little plot of land. Candy interjects to tell them that he can help make their dream a reality if they'll let him join them on the farm—he'll pitch in the money he has saved up from the accident that cost him his hand.



4

Themes



Disappointed Dreams

Loneliness and Isolation

Friendship

Death and Inevitability

The Plight of minority groups

Injustice

5

Animal Imagery



'He walked heavily, dragging his feet a little , the way a bear **drags his paws.**' Lennie **dabbled his paw** in the water.' ... '[Curley's] first lost in **Lennie's paw.**' 'He **pawed up** the hay until it partly covered her.'



'His huge companion dropped his blankets and flung himself down and drank from the surface of the green pool; drank with long gulps, **snorting into the water like a horse.**'



'**Strong as a bull.**'



"Slowly, **like a terrier** who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again."



"Lennie covered his face with **huge paws and bleated** with terror."

6

Significant context



The Great Depression began with the stock market crash of 1929. On October 29 1929, millions of dollars were wiped out of the stock market in the **Wall Street Crash.**

No Welfare State
Times were desperately hard for some sections of society. With no welfare state to support them, many ended up living in shanty towns called 'Hoovervilles'.

The Dust Bowl was the name given to the drought-stricken Southern Plains region of the United States, which suffered severe dust storms during a dry period in the 1930s. People and livestock were killed..

Significant context

Gender –
During the 1930's women were seen as the property of their husbands and they had to take care of them and do their bidding.

California Civil Code 1905 – laws that outlined the rights and obligations for all people in California. Laws that enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States.

The American Dream – the ideal by which equality of opportunity is available to any American, allowing the highest aspirations and goals to be achieved.

