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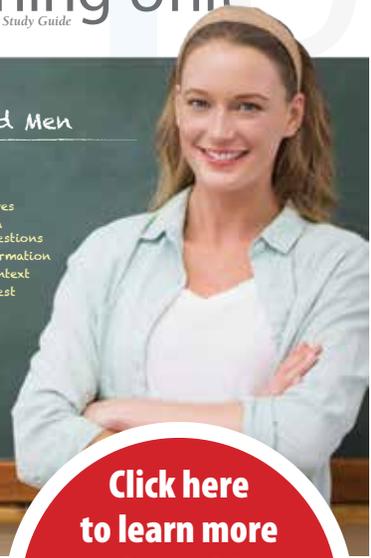
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Of Mice and Men

by John Steinbeck

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Of Mice and Men

Notes

Published in 1937, John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* reflects life during the Great Depression in the rural agricultural region of Salinas Valley, California. Steinbeck was familiar with this area, as it was his birthplace and where his family owned land when he was a small child. Steinbeck patterned his characters after the men and women of all walks of life who were affected by the Great Depression. Citizens across the United States were forced to sell their assets and travel in order to find work. These men and women, as well as the countryside where the story takes place, would have been very familiar to John Steinbeck.

Of Mice and Men follows Lennie and George, two men who represent migrant farm workers who traveled to the West Coast in pursuit of the American Dream. Lennie and George are poor and lonely, as they have only each other for companionship. The nature of life during the 1930s forced George and Lennie into a lifestyle that meant travel, and it prohibited them from settling down to start families. Consequently, rootlessness and loneliness became their way of life. The ideal of settling down and restarting a better life becomes the catalyst of the American Dream that George and Lennie strive for throughout the novel.

John Steinbeck is considered one of America's greatest Naturalist writers. The Naturalist literary movement is characterized by literature that employs the following features:

- Naturalist writing is devoid of many poetic features that other authors might use. Instead of relying on descriptions that provide images for the reader, the prose focuses on explanations and details. While *Of Mice and Men* contains some passages of description (specifically the beginnings of chapters one and five), the majority of the text does not include metaphor. Naturalist writers explore sociological conditions in an almost objective manner, rather than focusing on the beauty of the language and story.
- Naturalist writing examines conflicts between social classes, particularly the exploitation of workers by those in positions of power. For example, in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck presents a microcosm of America through George and Lennie, who are trying to survive on a ranch, but also creates a story that reflects the larger societal issue at hand: a lack of public policy to aid those afflicted by poverty and homelessness. Steinbeck's examination of both the microcosm and macrocosm describe American politics in the 1930s.
- In accordance with the social commentary provided by Naturalist literature, *Of Mice and Men* documents the experiences of migrant workers in the 1930s. Naturalist writers tend to focus on one occupation or trade, gathering specific data about that field before they begin writing. Also, because the literature focuses on one occupation or trade, the setting is usually contained to one less-than-ideal place—in the case of *Of Mice and Men*, a farm. The setting provides a detailed look at the most brutal aspects of life that accompany self-preservation and basic human need. Steinbeck used his ranching experience, as well as his experience in the Salinas Valley, to construct the story.

Of Mice and Men

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. explain the significance of the title and its relationship to one of the major themes in the novel.
2. recognize and explain the allusion in the title, *Of Mice and Men*.
3. explain the use of figurative language and rhetorical techniques within the text and how they function.
4. follow the main and secondary characters within the novel and explain their purpose in the story.
5. offer a close reading of the novel and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text.
6. demonstrate a literal, personal, interpretive, and critical understanding of the text.
7. explain the central conflicts in the play and the nature of the internal and external conflicts with which various characters cope.
8. identify and discuss the following themes in the play:
 - the impossibility of the American Dream
 - loneliness and isolation during the Depression
 - friendship and camaraderie
 - nature
 - violence
 - euthanasia
9. trace and discuss these images: Candy's dog, Lennie's pup, rabbits.
10. define the term *microcosm* and point out how the ranch in this novel is a microcosm of American society.
11. understand how the Depression influenced the lives of American men and women.
12. explain how each of the main characters in the novel deals with the concept of loneliness.
13. understand how the Naturalist literary movement is reflected in the novel.
14. discern George's motives.
15. decide if fate plays a role in the plot.

Of Mice and Men

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. This is a story about people, their friendships, plans, and dreams. Describe George and Lennie's dream. How is their dream representative of the dreams of the migrant worker in the 1930s?
2. Steinbeck uses foreshadowing to build suspense and make later actions more credible. Identify and discuss three incidents of foreshadowing in this novel and explain the effect that the foreshadowing has on the reader's interpretation of events.
3. Identify and explain how characteristics of Naturalism are portrayed in the novel.
4. Examine the relationship between Lennie and George. Be sure to focus on both the negative and positive aspects of the relationship.
5. Choose one of the minor characters in the novel (Crooks, Curley's wife, Curley, etc.) and explain the purpose he or she serves in the story. How would the story change if he or she were not included in the story?
6. Steinbeck's novel explores the morality of a mercy killing. Explain how you feel the novel portrays mercy killings, using specific evidence from the text to support your answer. Then, explain whether you believe that Lennie's death was justified, again using specific evidence from the text to support your answer.
7. Read the poem "To a Mouse" by Robert Burns. Throughout the novel, John Steinbeck argues that "the best-laid plans of mice and men" often go wrong. Explain how he attempts to show this in the novel.
8. Using any pairing of characters in the novel, explain how Steinbeck explores a person's responsibility to another person.
9. Explain the use of animal imagery as it is used to describe the emotional states of the characters within the novel.
10. Using specific examples from the novel, explain whether the reader should feel sympathetic to both George and Lennie.
11. Compare and contrast the instance when Carlson takes Candy's dog away to kill it and when George shoots Lennie. What does each instance add to the novel's themes of personal responsibility to others and the importance of friendship?

4. Steinbeck uses animal imagery to describe Lennie, the larger man. Cite two examples of this type of imagery that is used in the first few pages of the chapter.

5. Why does George tell Lennie not to drink the water? Why might this seem like an unusual instruction to give a man who has spent part of his adult life traveling the country?

6. George gives Lennie instructions about the water, but when he explains about the type of water that is safe to drink, he does so “hopelessly.” What can we deduce about why George might feel hopeless when he is talking to Lennie?

7. When Lennie and George sit by the river to rest, what do they talk about? What can we learn about Lennie from their conversation? What can we learn about George?

8. Read the following line from the novel and explain the allusion, “watchin’ that blackboard.”

“You remember settin’ in that gutter on Howard street and watchin’ that blackboard?”

9. What does Lennie have in his pocket? Why does he want to keep it?

10. Describe George’s plan for getting the job at the ranch. What do we learn about Lennie from this plan?

13. Who comes to visit Lennie, Candy, and Crooks? What is the real reason behind the visit?

14. Characterize Curley's wife as she is presented in the novel. How is the reader supposed to feel about her?

15. How is the idea of power and powerlessness developed at the beginning and in the final section of this chapter?

16. Cite the visual image of Crooks that Steinbeck creates as Crooks is mentally and emotionally defeated by Curley's wife.

17. How does this chapter end? Explain the circular nature of the chapter and what it implies about Crooks.
