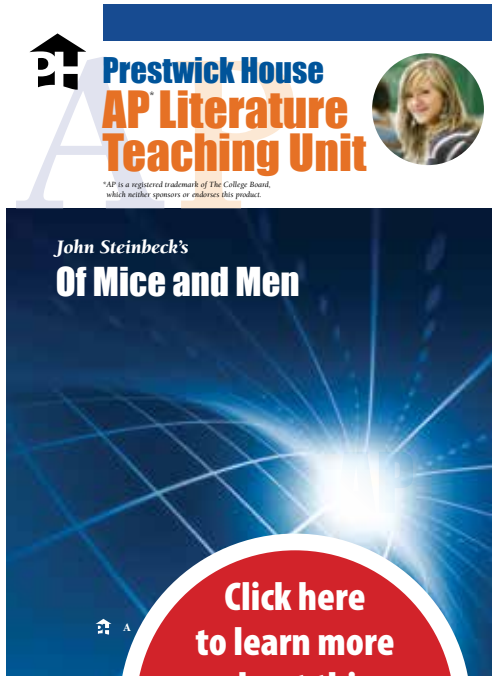




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Teaching Unit

Of Mice and Men

by John Steinbeck

written by Michelle Ryan



Prestwick House

Item No. 302377

Of Mice and Men

Objectives

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

1. discuss the techniques Steinbeck uses to convey character and character relationships to his audience.
2. analyze the importance of literary elements like dramatic irony, foreshadowing, and suspense on the development of the story.
3. analyze character dialogue to guide interpretation of a character's thought process.
4. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
5. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
6. offer a close reading of *Of Mice and Men* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.
7. discuss the dramatic development of the novel in terms of exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution.
8. demonstrate a personal, interpretive, and critical understanding of the text.
9. analyze the main characters in the novel and discuss their relationships to each other.
10. understand how the Depression influenced the lives of American men and women.
11. explain the central conflicts in the novel, and explain the nature of the internal and external conflicts with which various characters cope.
12. explore the importance of the title and its relationship to one of the major themes in the novel.

Lecture Notes

FEATURES OF STEINBECK'S NOVEL

Naturalism:

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 authors might use. The prose uses few descriptions that provide images for the reader, and instead, focuses on the explanations and details. While *Of Mice and Men* contains passages of description (specifically the beginnings of chapters one, five, and six), a majority of the text is free from metaphor. Naturalist writing explores sociological conditions in a mostly objective manner, rather than focusing on the beauty of the language and story.
- Naturalist writing explores conflicts between social classes, particularly the exploitation of workers by those in positions of power. For example, in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck examines a microcosm of America by creating George and Lennie as characters who are trying to survive on a ranch, while at the same time creating a story that reflects the larger societal conflicts at hand—the 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.
- Similar to the social commentary provided by Naturalist literature, *Of Mice and Men* is also a document of migrant workers in the 1930s. Naturalist writers create stories that tend to focus on one specific occupation or trade in order to document society, gathering specific data about actual life before writing. Also, because the literature focuses on one occupation or trade, the setting is usually limited to one less-than-ideal place, in the case of *Of Mice and Men*, a ranch. The setting provides a detailed look at the most brutal aspects of life that accompany self-preservation and basic human needs. Steinbeck used his ranching experience, as well as his experience in the Salinas Valley in order to create a novel that is almost more textbook than literature.
- Naturalist writers create stories in which the narrator or reader is an observer in the story. The characters created in the story, devoid of free will, are inserted into specific plots and observed as they cope with what fate presents. In *Of Mice and Men*, many of the characters strive for the American Dream. Lennie and George want only to make enough money to buy their own land; however, the characters are robbed of their dream by circumstances that seem beyond their control.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Make a list of the incidents that foreshadow the dangers coming to George and Lennie. Explain what you believe is the effect that the foreshadowing has on the reader's interpretation of events.
2. Explain Steinbeck's purpose in including women and African-Americans in the novel. What functions do these characters serve?
3. Analyze the relationship between George and Lennie. Explain how this relationship is a contradiction to the typical relationships that one might find during the Depression. Focus on both the positive and negative aspects of the friendship.
4. Explain how the structure of the novel contributes to the reader's understanding of the events that happen.
5. Discuss how the novel encompasses characteristics of both a narrative and a play.
6. Explain Steinbeck's use of language and what it contributes to the characterization and meaning of the text.
7. Steinbeck's story does not focus solely on the negative emotions that the Depression suggests. At certain points in the story, he writes about events that give the characters hope. Chronicle both the events and the emotions that the characters have in trying to achieve their dreams. What do you think Steinbeck is trying to convey about the nature of a person's dreams.
8. How does Steinbeck demonstrate the cruel side of human nature? Describe the rhetorical and narrative techniques that he uses.
9. The title, *Of Mice and Men*, alludes to one of the novel's themes. Read the poem "To a Mouse" by Robert Burns. Note how the theme of the poem is developed throughout the novel.
10. Animal imagery is used throughout the novel to characterize certain people. Trace the appearance of the imagery and what it comes to symbolize.
11. Trace the pattern of death that is developed in the novel.
12. Steinbeck uses violence throughout the novel to relate to George and Lennie. Discuss the importance of the violence as a necessity in illustrating the theme of the novel.
13. Identify the characteristics of Naturalism that are portrayed in the novel, and explain how these characteristics help define the story.
14. Discuss how the ranch can be seen as a microcosm of the United States. How is George and Lennie's dream representative of the dreams of the migrant worker?

Of Mice and Men

Chapter One

1. Reread the first paragraph of the novel. How does the passage function? What purpose does Steinbeck fulfill by beginning the novel in this way?

2. Explain the rhetorical strategies used in the following line: “There is a path through the willows and among the sycamores, a path beaten hard by boys coming down from the ranches to swim in the deep pool, and beaten hard by tramps who come wearily down from the highway in the evening to jungle-up near water.”

3. Compare and contrast the two men who come into the clearing by the river. What do you think Steinbeck wants the reader to infer about the two men based on their descriptions?

4. Steinbeck uses several animal images to describe Lennie. Cite two examples of images that are used and explain their effect on Lennie’s characterization.

5. When George and Lennie reach a clearing, George gives Lennie instructions about the water. The scene on page three serves two purposes: explain each.

Chapter Three

1. Throughout the novel to this point, Steinbeck has used several occasions to comment on the relationship between George and Lennie. How does Steinbeck comment on the relationship at the beginning of this passage? Why do you think he feels that it is necessary to revisit the nature of relationships between men in the Depression?

2. What does the reader learn about the relationship between George and Lennie as George talks to Slim?

3. Why does George reveal to Slim what happened to them in Weed? What is Slim's response? Explain the irony in George's confession.

4. What do George and Lennie talk about when Lennie comes into the bunk house? How are Lennie's actions similar to the events that happened earlier when Lennie and George were coming to camp?

5. Why does Steinbeck try to create sympathy for Lennie? Is he successful?

6. How does Steinbeck use a discovery in a pulp magazine to reinforce one of the themes of the novel?

Chapter Five

1. Despite the descriptive setting of the barn and the quiet Sunday afternoon, Chapter Five begins with an accident. Explain what happened and why Lennie is so worried. What are the larger implications that Steinbeck wants the reader to consider?

2. Describe the instance where the reader sees Lennie's irrational anger when he does not understand what is going on, or when he is worried about something that is going to happen.

3. How is Curley's wife described when she comes into the barn? Why do you think Steinbeck describes her in this way?

4. When Lennie is explaining to Curley's wife what happened to the puppy, she responds, "Don't you worry none. He was jus' a mutt. You can get another one easy. The whole country is fulla mutts." Explain the symbolism in her statement.

5. Describe the similarities between Lennie and Curley's wife's conversation and the conversation between Lennie and Crooks.

Chapter Six

1. Compare the beginning of Chapter Six with the beginning of the novel. Explain why Steinbeck would begin this chapter in the same way that he began the first?

2. Steinbeck uses an image of nature to comment on the action at the ranch. Describe the image and explain its connection to the themes in the novel.

3. What delusion does Lennie experience as he is waiting for George? Why do you think he remembers this experience?

4. When George finds Lennie, what does Lennie expect him to do? How does George respond?

5. How does the reader know that Lennie does not realize that he has done something wrong?

6. How is the fact that George tells Lennie the story of the farm significant?
