

***Of Mice and Men* Reading Guide**
South Texas ISD Preparatory Academy
Summer, 2021

“...because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that’s why.”

I Introduction and Pre-Reading

Welcome to your summer reading of John Steinbeck’s classic novella, *Of Mice and Men*!

Before we begin, what do you know about the Great Depression, a global event that serves as the backdrop for the events in the novella? Write your answer here--

What I know about the Great Depression:

If you need some additional background information to help you understand the time period surrounding *Of Mice and Men*, I recommend you view the following short video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ9QOcVt1Hc>

Feel free to go back and add some information to your previous answer about the Great Depression based on the video you just watched.

Now, let’s get to know author John Steinbeck better through watching this video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3irviknt-fg>

Based on what you just watched, write down three things you learned about him/his writing of this book that you believe will be important to reading and understanding it better:

1.

2.

3.

The Novella

Of Mice and Men is considered a *novella* – a work of fiction that is shorter than a traditional novel, but longer than a short story. Some novellas (like this one) are easily adaptable to either the stage (drama) and/or the screen (movie). John Steinbeck wrote *Of Mice and Men* to be performed on the stage. As you read this novella, try to pick out some of the techniques the author uses that help the reader “see” the play unfold in the reading.

The characters in *Of Mice and Men*

George

George, a ranch hand, is primarily Lennie's caretaker. He is normally good natured, but angers easily, especially if someone is threatening Lennie. George seeks the American Dream in the

form of a piece of land where he and Lennie can live without having to answer to anyone. Though George's life is unduly complicated by his having to care for Lennie, he accepts his responsibility.

Lennie

Described as a big man with "wide slopping shoulders," the text implies that Lennie is a person with a disability. Lennie relies completely on George for his care. Due to his childlike nature, Lennie, though he has no intention of hurting anyone, at times inadvertently harms animals and people because of his enormous size and strength.

Candy

One of the oldest workers on the ranch, Candy lost one of his hands in a work-related accident. Candy's biggest fear is that when he outlives his usefulness he will be kicked off the ranch and have no place to go. After hearing about the piece of land that George and Lennie plan to buy, Candy offers to give them all of the money in his savings if they will let him live with them.

Curley

Curley is the main antagonist in the novel. As the Boss's son, Curley treats the ranch hands in a very condescending manner. A short man, Curley is angered and provoked by those who happen to be bigger than him, as though he has something to prove. Recently married, he likes to brag about wearing a glove full of Vaseline to keep his hand soft for his wife. He is disliked by nearly all of the workers, who poke fun at him behind his back.

Curley's Wife

The only female character that physically appears in the story, the unnamed wife of Curley is viewed with lightly veiled disgust by the workers. Despite only being married a few weeks, she already has what the workers call "the eye" and they refer to her as a "tart" (26). It is implied that she constantly seeks out male attention to relieve her loneliness. Like the men who are plagued by loneliness in the story, Curley's wife is both lonely and regretful and says that she could have been in movies or magazines if she had not married Curley.

Slim

A quiet, observant man, Slim is portrayed as wise and the true authority figure on the ranch. While the other workers listen to the boss and Curley because they have to, they listen to Slim because they respect him as a worker and as a person. Slim is the only character on the ranch who understands the bond between Lennie and George.

Crooks

The only African-American on the ranch. He, like, Candy, has a physical disability. Due to his race and physical deformity, Crooks lives by himself in the ranch's barn.

Carlson

The ranch hand who suggests the killing of Candy's dog, Carlson comes across as a bitter and self-centered man. He expresses society's view that the old and "crippled" are of no practical use and can easily be eliminated.

Aunt Clara

While Aunt Clara is not a physical character in the story, she serves as a powerful memory for both George and Lennie. She took Lennie in as a child, and on her deathbed asked George to look after Lennie for her.

The Boss

The boss plays a very minor part in the story, only appearing in the first part of the book to interrogate George and Lennie when they arrive for their first day of work. He is curious about George always answering for Lennie and thinks that something suspicious is going on.

Whit

A ranch hand.

<https://sits.sjsu.edu/curriculum-resources/of-mice-and-men/character-census/>

II Annotating the Book – Plot Elements, Themes

You are expected to annotate the novella as you read, using the skills you've previously learned in your study of English. Remember that highlighting/underlining/circling only serves to identify an important thing going on in the text. Annotating requires not only doing this, but jotting down notes about what you highlighted/underlined/circled as well. In English I at Preparatory Academy, we use ICE--

I – *identify by highlighting, underlining, or circling (vocabulary) important parts of the text*
C – *classifying in word or brief phrase the literary element identified (e.g. foreshadowing)*
E – *explaining in a word or phrase the purpose for the technique or literary device*

Watch for and ICE the following literary elements as you read--

Elements of plot

Setting

Exposition

Protagonist

Antagonist

Inciting incident

Conflict

Complication

Climax

Resolution

Figurative Language

Foreshadowing

Symbolism (in dreams, through Steinbeck's use of setting, in the hopes and desires expressed by the characters)

Thematic elements

Loneliness

Survival

Friendship

Sacrifice

III Comprehension Purpose Questions

Type your answers in complete sentences making sure you fully and completely answer each of the questions (specific examples from the novella are expected where appropriate. Make sure identify the page number where your example is from)

1. One aspect of John Steinbeck's style is to create a setting (time, place, objects) so powerful, it can be viewed as a character. How does the setting described at the beginning of the book (and at the beginning of each chapter) contribute to our initial understanding of the story (exposition) and help contribute to other elements of plot (rising action, conflict, resolution)? Cite three specific examples from the text.

Answer:

2. *Of Mice and Men* is about relationships between people. Surface-level character traits can reveal more complex traits. Choose one of the characters in the story and describe how Steinbeck uses one of their surface-level character traits to reveal a more complex/deeper understanding of that character.

Answer:

3. Loneliness is a major theme in this story. Choose one of the minor characters in the novella (not George or Lennie) and describe, using specific examples, how Steinbeck develops the theme of loneliness through this character.

Answer:

4. Friendship is another major theme that Steinbeck treats in this novel. Describe, using examples, the friendship between George and Lennie? Is it a mutual (equal) relationship? Why or why not?

Answer:

5. How does the time period of the Great Depression make the relationship between George and Lennie more meaningful?

Answer:

6. Do you believe that people are sometimes helpless to control their own situation? Explain, using examples.

Answer:

7. Can a person's efforts sometimes be futile? Even if they seem futile, can it still be worthwhile to try? Why or why not?

Answer:

IV Internet/Newspaper/Magazine Article

Like the Great Depression, the COVID-19 pandemic has made a lasting impact on our world. Your final task in completing this reading guide is to locate, read, and print out/copy an article from a reputable news source that describes a situation of poverty, injustice, or other suffering due in part to COVID-19 **within the past six months**. Bring your article on the first day of class in August and be prepared to summarize/discuss it with your classmates/teacher.