

Of Mice and Men

by John Steinbeck, 1937

WORK AND AUTHOR

Of Mice and Men:

1. Published in 1937.
2. A short novel that covers only three days.
3. Became a movie masterpiece starring Lon Chaney and Burgess Meredith.

John Steinbeck:

1. A compassionate American novelist who was concerned about the quality and rights to happiness of every member of the human race.
2. His books portray middle-class America as unrefined, indifferent, even heartless.
3. Although critical of America and a moralist as a writer, he loved America deeply. He never sought critical approval and refused to play a literary celebrity role.

THEME AND CONTENTS

1. Set in the Salinas Valley in California, the book details two men who the American dream has completely passed by.
2. It focuses on:
 - Disadvantaged men.
 - A dream.
 - Abusive owners.
 - Accidental murder.
 - Death before dishonor.

MAIN CHARACTERS

1. Lennie Small, a large, powerful, simple-minded man.

2. George Milton, Lennie's friend and protector.
3. Candy, an older ranch hand who wants to invest in George and Lennie's dream.
4. Slim, a farmhand who is sympathetic to Lennie and George.
5. Crooks, a Negro stable worker who must live separate from the other men.
6. Curley, the abusive and volatile son of the ranch owner.
7. Curley's wife, a nameless, lonesome woman who thinks she should have been a movie star.

STORY

1. Lennie and George sign on at a ranch as hands.
2. George repeatedly tells Lennie the story of their dream to own their own ranch.
3. Curley swings at Lennie, but Lennie catches his fist and crushes it.
4. Curley's wife comes to the barn and is visiting Lennie.
5. As Lennie is caressing her hair, she feels threatened and starts screaming. Lennie, wanting her to stop screaming, shakes her head and accidentally breaks her neck, killing her.
6. Lennie hides near the pond.
7. Curley puts together a posse, hoping to catch and hang Lennie.

8. George borrows a gun and finds Lennie first. He shoots and kills Lennie to save him from the abuse of the mob.
9. George says he and Lennie had struggled for the gun, and Lennie's death had been an accident. Everyone believes him.

LASTING IMPACT

1. In the Depression when this book was written, many Americans were having difficulty believing in The American dream. In *Of Mice and Men*, we meet a cast of characters who have no chance to share in the country's wealth. Lennie lacks the mental capacity. Crooks is a member of the wrong race. George and Candy have never had the opportunity, the education, or the financial resources to pursue the dream. And those who have received the dream, Curley and his wife, are not likeable.
2. In his work, Steinbeck seems to imply that people must possess beastly qualities to achieve the American dream, or, perhaps, the dream itself changes people into beasts.
3. *Of Mice and Men* expresses the American dream in its simplest form — common people never giving up, believing that they too have a right to happiness.
4. The book's message: virtue is more common in the poor and the outcast who are forced by circumstances to develop compassion, strength, and understanding.