



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Of Mice and Men

John Steinbeck



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Of Mice and Men

John Steinbeck

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Analyzing, inference, research,
opinions, prediction

Comprehension

Plot development,
compare/contrast, cause/effect

Literary Elements

Foreshadowing, symbolism,
conflict, foils, static/dynamic
characters, theme

Vocabulary

Definitions, application,
synonyms/antonyms

Writing

Essay, poetry, review, journal,
letter, synopsis, eulogy

Across the Curriculum

Literature—book review, author
interview, John Steinbeck’s short
stories; History—The Great
Depression, migrant workers;
Art—cover art, photography,
painting, collage; Drama—plays,
films

Genre: fiction

Setting: California, near Soledad

Point of View: third-person

Themes: friendship, love, poverty, jealousy, secrecy, loyalty, obedience, mercy, hope, Depression-Era survival, rising above one's circumstances

Conflict: person vs. society, person vs. self, person vs. person

Style: direct narrative in novella form (shorter than a novel, longer than a short story); The descriptive setting details and colloquial dialogue are typical of Steinbeck's style.

Tone: sympathetic, apprehensive, hopeful, forlorn

Date of First Publication: 1937

Summary

George and Lennie are transient workers starting a new job on a ranch near Soledad, California. George is small, wary, and the more intelligent of the two; Lennie is large, strong, and has the mind of a child. They hope the money from this next job will enable them to purchase their own land, start a farm, and raise rabbits for Lennie to tend. Lennie's unwitting desire to touch pretty things has gotten them into trouble before, and George cautions Lennie that if anything bad happens at the new job, he is to hide in the brush beside the river. Once at the ranch, George tries to keep Lennie from talking as much as possible. Curley, the boss's son, is antagonistic and fiercely jealous of any man speaking to his wife, who often hovers around the workers when Curley isn't around. One day, Curley's wife corners Lennie in a barn and convinces the powerful man to touch her hair. When she insists that he let go, Lennie panics and holds on tightly to her hair. Curley's wife screams, and Lennie tries to silence her, accidentally breaking her neck. George, determined to protect Lennie, finds Lennie by the river and begins to repeat the story of their dream farm. As Lennie is daydreaming about tending the rabbits, George shoots him in the back of the head. Distraught, George leaves with the other workers.

About the Author

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902, and many of his novels and short stories take place near this area. He attended Stanford University but never graduated, choosing instead to focus on his writing career. He moved to New York City for a brief period before returning to California. Steinbeck's breakthrough novel, *Tortilla Flat* (1935), takes place in Monterey, a seaside town near Salinas. Thus began Steinbeck's lifelong use of proud yet humble, poverty-stricken characters that make up much of the California working class. Minorities and themes of injustice and class discrimination also play a large role in many of his socially aware works. Notable other novels include *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Pearl* (1947), and *East of Eden* (1952). Although Steinbeck won The National Book Award, The Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and The Nobel Prize for Literature, his books are among the most frequently challenged of the 21st century, mostly due to mature themes and vulgar language. *The Grapes of Wrath* continues to be one of the most challenged books in schools and libraries. Steinbeck is often ranked among the most beloved, controversial, and influential writers of all time, and many of his books are required reading in high schools across the nation. John Steinbeck died in New York City in 1968.

Vocabulary	
derision	<p><i>Slim listens calmly, and when George finishes, Slim observes that Lennie “ain’t mean...I can tell a mean guy a mile off” [p. 42]. Answers will vary. Slim has already been identified as the workers’ confidant and the designated leader of the men. George trusts that Slim will keep his secrets, and he probably needs to unburden himself of his feelings about Lennie. Slim “neither encouraged nor discouraged him” [p. 39], and George is confident to continue when he sees Slim’s “calm, God-like eyes” [p. 40]. George believes he can trust Slim, and it is helpful for George to share his story.)</i></p> <p>2. Analyze Slim’s statement to George: “Guy don’t need no sense to be a nice fella. Seems to me sometimes it jus’ works the other way around. Take a real smart guy and he ain’t hardly ever a nice fella” (p. 40). Explain whether you agree or disagree with Slim. (Answers will vary.)</p> <p>3. How does Carlson feel about Candy’s dog, and how does Candy respond? What do you think this shows about each man? (Carlson suggests that Candy is cruel for letting the dog suffer. Carlson states that the dog is old and smelly. He claims not to understand why Candy would want to keep the animal around. Candy is uncomfortable with the discussion and keeps apologizing for his dog. He explains that he’s had the dog forever and insists it has been a good, faithful dog. Answers will vary. Some students may feel that Carlson is being practical, although he shows very little understanding or empathy for Candy’s feelings or loyalty to the dog. Other students may feel that Carlson is simply taunting Candy, playing on an old man’s uncertainties about aging and death. Candy’s response shows great sentimentality but also fear. The situation mirrors his fear that his own life is now of little worth because of his age and handicap. Although he fears his dog’s death [much like he fears his expulsion from the ranch] and looks to the other workers for affirmation, Candy eventually allows Carlson to shoot the animal.)</p> <p>4. Why do you think the men all wait (mostly) silently while Carlson shoots the dog outside? (Answers will vary, but students should observe that the men agreed with Carlson about what the dog’s fate should be. However, they also feel ashamed about not objecting [for Candy’s sake] or being more comforting to Candy about the situation. It is obviously a task no one feels good about, and even Carlson doesn’t look at Candy when he returns.)</p> <p>5. When Whit hears George talking about the temptation and danger surrounding Curley’s wife, he invites George to join the men at a brothel in town. What does a night out represent for George, and how does he respond? (Answers will vary. A night out could be a chance for George to interact with other men of his demeanor and intelligence outside of a work environment. This is not something he has been able to do since taking on the responsibility of caring for Lennie. It also represents a chance for George to be frivolous and self-satisfying, as he previously claimed: “if I was alone...when the end of the month come I could take my fifty bucks and go into town and get whatever I want. Why, I could stay [out] all night” [p. 11]. This is exactly what Whit is offering, but George declines in order to save money for the dream that he shares with Lennie—owning a farm. The night out is his temptation toward selfish pleasure, but he chooses responsibility and loyalty instead.)</p>
receptive	
nuisance	
irrigation	
cultivator	
deliberate	
sarcastically	
subsided	
reprehensible	
reverently	
bemused	
cowering	

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6. Why does George interrogate Lennie so thoroughly when Lennie returns from playing with the puppies in the barn? Do you think George overreacts when it comes to Lennie? Why or why not? *(George is still trying to foresee and prevent problems for himself and Lennie, so he demands to know everything Lennie saw and did in his absence. George wants to know about Slim—where he was, what he was doing, and if Curley’s wife was with him. George has already exhibited his disdain for Curley’s wife, and he anticipates a fight. George wants Lennie as far away from that as possible so they both stay out of trouble, and he tells Lennie to “keep out of it” [p. 55]. Answers will vary. Students should discuss the responsibilities involved with caring for a person like Lennie—one who is childlike yet an adult, meek yet physically strong, kind yet capable of inflicting harm, and innocent yet an easy scapegoat.)*
7. How does George initially react when he realizes Candy overheard his story about the dream farm? Why do you think he reacts this way? *(After George concludes his story to Lennie, Candy asks him if he knows where such a place is. George immediately becomes defensive, demanding “What’s that to you?” and “You couldn’t find it in a hundred years” [p. 59]. Answers will vary. George is suspicious of Candy’s inquiries and knows the boss will fire them if he finds out about the dream farm because he wants only long-term employees. George also wishes to keep the original plan in which he and Lennie were “gonna do it by [themselves]” [p. 59]. George probably feels like he can better control life with Lennie and prevent trouble if he and Lennie are alone. George may also feel somewhat embarrassed and afraid that Candy will laugh at him and Lennie.)*
8. Why does Candy plead with George to let him join them at their dream farm? What is Candy’s greatest fear? What do you think contributes to this fear? *(Candy is convinced that his employment on the ranch is in jeopardy because of his handicap and his age. He knows it’s just a matter of time before he’s fired, and he desperately wants to feel useful and wanted. Candy’s greatest fear is being alone, which is most likely the reason he kept his dog with him, even though the dog was old and dying. His fear is evidenced in his statement to George: “When they can me here I wisht somebody’d shoot me...I won’t have no place to go...” [p. 60]. Answers will vary, but students should note that Candy is old and his handicap prevents him from doing much work at the ranch. The other workers, while they feel some pity for the man, keep their distance from Candy and don’t involve him in their activities. Candy doesn’t have any relatives, cannot get another job due to his handicap, and will most likely have to live in a county institution once he leaves the ranch. All of these factors make Candy fearful and miserable about his future.)*
9. How do the other workers treat Curley when he enters the bunkhouse? Why are they acting this way? *(It is implied that Curley has accused Slim of indiscretions with his wife. Slim is angry about Curley’s constant accusations and cautions Curley to leave him alone. The other men are also weary of Curley’s wife bothering them and Curley always accusing them of adultery, and so they begin to mock him. Carlson laughs at Curley’s attempt to scare Slim and rebuffs Curley’s return threat, claiming Curley is “yella as a frog belly” [p. 62]. Even Candy joins in, teasing Curley about his infamous gloved hand. Answers will vary, but students can assume that the men feel comfortable taunting Curley with Slim around. Curley appears to be somewhat afraid of Slim, and the men know that he is unlikely to retaliate as long as Slim is present. They take advantage of the opportunity to express themselves without fear of consequences.)*
10. Why do you think Curley attacks Lennie? How do Lennie and George react? What do you think this proves about Lennie? *(Answers will vary. Curley feels trapped in the bunkhouse while all the other men taunt him. He is furious but unable to do much about it. When he sees Lennie smiling, he jumps at the opportunity to start a fight, knowing a fight with Lennie is the only one he can presently win. Curley’s low self-esteem and cowardice cause him to attack Lennie. Students should discuss whether Curley actually believed Lennie was laughing at him or if he just wanted to pick a fight. When Curley attacks Lennie, Lennie tries to get away from him and pleads with George*

to stop Curley. He's too terrified even to defend himself. When George finally shouts, "Get 'im, Lennie... I said get him" [p. 63], Lennie reaches up and grabs Curley's hand, crushing the bones. He doesn't let go until George slaps him in the face and screams at him to stop. Lennie is devastated, saying "You tol' me to, George" and "I didn't wanta hurt him" [p. 64]. Answers will vary, but students should note that Lennie was well-bloodied before he fought back and may have never touched Curley if it weren't for George's urgings. Lennie is a "gentle giant" who is capable of doing much damage but prefers to live peacefully.)

11. What "deal" does Slim make with Curley? How do you suppose Slim so easily convinces Curley to lie about the incident? (To protect Lennie and George, Slim convinces Curley to tell anyone who asks that he hurt his hand in a machine on the ranch. Just as Slim expected, Curley agrees to do so. Answers will vary. Slim knows that Curley fears shame and humiliation, and if anyone knew that Lennie easily crushed his hand, Curley would be devastated. Curley is known around the ranch for being a fighter, and his disdain for larger men is evident. Slim plays off of Curley's insecurities in order to convince him to lie.)
12. **Prediction:** How might Curley get revenge on Lennie?

Supplementary Activities

1. Use magazine clippings to create a collage of one of the following scenes from this section: the men waiting uncomfortably in the bunkhouse with Candy, George telling Lennie and Candy about the dream farm, Lennie tending to the puppies in the barn.
2. Complete the Cause/Effect Chart on page 22 of this guide.
3. Complete the Thought Bubble activity on page 23 of this guide.

Pages 66–107

Lennie visits Crooks, the black stable hand. Crooks initially wants Lennie to leave his room, but he soon realizes that Lennie is simple-minded and trustworthy. Crooks poses the idea that George might not come back from town and that Lennie will be left alone. Lennie becomes both angry and frightened, insisting that George will always come back for him. Lennie tells Crooks about the dream farm, but Crooks isn't convinced it is real until Candy arrives and they discuss it more. Crooks is interested and acts pleasant until Curley's wife comes into the barn. Crooks once again becomes agitated and insists that everyone leave. The next day, Lennie is playing with his puppy in the barn when he accidentally kills it. Angry and frightened, he hastily covers the puppy with hay just as Curley's wife enters the barn. She sits and talks to Lennie, eventually convincing him to stroke her hair. Lennie musses her hair, and she gets angry and demands that he let go. Lennie covers her mouth so no one will hear her yelling at him. As he tries to silence her, he shakes her so hard that he breaks her neck. Terrified, Lennie flees the barn. Candy finds Curley's wife's body first and tells only George. When the other men (including Curley) discover the body, they form a search party to find Lennie. George slips away unnoticed and finds Lennie in their hiding place. As George calms Lennie by talking about the dream farm, he shoots Lennie in the back of the head. The other men arrive, and only Slim knows the truth about what George did and why he did it.

Vocabulary Word Map

Directions: Complete a word map for at least six vocabulary words from the first section of this guide.

Synonyms _____ _____ _____	Antonyms _____ _____ _____
WORD _____	
Definition in your own words _____ _____ _____	Used in a sentence _____ _____ _____

Thought Bubble

Directions: In the graphic below, write what George may have been thinking when Lennie crushed Curley's hand at George's command. Write from George's point of view.

