

Knowledge Organiser - Of Mice and Men

Context

- Set during the Great Depression following the Wall Street Crash.
- Over 1/3 of America's population were unemployed.
- A series of droughts in southern states such as Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas ruined crops and harvests. This left many farmers struggling to pay their debts.

Author

John Steinbeck was born in California in 1902. He is well-known for writing novels such as **The Grapes of Wrath** and **Of Mice and Men**. He was awarded the 1962 Nobel Prize for literature. Steinbeck based the novella on his own experiences working alongside migrant farm workers as a teenager in the 1910s.

Plot Summary

- George and Lennie are two migrant workers who are on their way to a plantation. They have left their last place of work in Weed because Lennie touched a woman's dress and was accused of rape.
- They discuss their 'American Dream', of owning their own land, tending to rabbits and 'livin' off the fatta the lan'.
- George tells Lennie that should he get into trouble like he did in Weed, that he should return to a bush on the outskirts of the ranch and wait for him there.
- They arrive at the farm a little late and meet the boss's son, Curley, who is short, arrogant and has a problem with 'big guys' like Lennie.
- They also meet Candy, an elderly handyman with one hand who spends his time with his old, loyal dog.
- Curley's wife introduces herself – she is flirtatious and provocative, causing George to warn Lennie to stay away from her.
- Slim, a jerkline skinner, gives Lennie and Candy a puppy each when Carlson, another worker, insists that Candy's original dog is shot because he is old and smelly.
- George and Lennie discuss their dreams of their own land with Candy. Their happy discussion is cut short when Curley attacks Lennie, but Lennie, who is much stronger, crushes his hand.
- When George goes into town with some of the other men, Lennie talks to Crooks, the disabled black stable buck, who is frank and bitter after years of racism and discrimination. Candy and Lennie talk about their plans for their own farm and Crooks is cynical that they will achieve their dream. Curley's wife joins them to ask where the others have gone and threatens to have Crooks lynched.
- Lennie accidentally smothers his dog to death, unaware of his own strength while stroking him. He tries to hide the dog in the barn and Curley's wife comforts him by letting him stroke her hair. Lennie is too enthusiastic, hurting her and causing her to panic and scream. Lennie, frightened that he will get into trouble, accidentally breaks her neck in his efforts to make her be quiet. He flees to bushes where George told him to hide should they face trouble.
- A man hunt is called to find Lennie. George manages to catch up with him first and talks to Lennie about their plans for their farm in the future before shooting him before the other men can find him.

Main Characters

- George – migrant worker, frustrated
- Lennie – migrant worker, childlike, strong, compared to an animal
- Candy – old man, one handed, farm worker, lost his hand working for the boss, owns an old dog
- Curley – the boss's son, mean, arrogant, short
- Curley's wife – married to Curley. The only female we meet in the novella. Not named. Flirtatious, vulnerable.
- Crooks – Black, disabled stable buck. Discriminated against. Has his own room. Educated.
- Slim – confident worker, well-liked, fair
- Carlson – worker, insensitive

Themes		Language and Techniques	Key Quotations
prejudice	discrimination	Animal imagery – Lennie is described as ‘snorting into the water like a horse’ and putting ‘his big paw’ into the water.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lennie – ‘the way a bear drags his paws’ • Lennie – ‘I forgot’ • George - ‘Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place.’ • Curley – ‘His glance was at once calculating and pugnacious’. • Candy - ‘Well, I think Curley’s married...a tart. • Curley’s wife – ‘she had full, rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made up. Her fingernails were red.’ • Slim – ‘he moved with a majesty only achieved by royalty and master craftsmen.’ • Crooks – ‘He kept his distance and demanded that other people keep theirs’. • Crooks – ‘A guy needs somebody to be near him [...] a guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody’ • Curley’s wife – ‘Why can’t I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely.’
inequality	role of women	Foreshadowing – Candy’s dog is killed because he is old and has little use. This is a comment upon the elderly, specifically Candy, who would have had no purpose. Also, Lennie’s accidental killing of the puppy foreshadows his killing of Curley’s wife.	
racism	dreams	Colour imagery – the colour red is repeatedly used when describing Curley’s wife to warn of danger.	
authority	loneliness		
friendship	inevitability of fate		
Symbolism/Motifs The Corrupting Power of Women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George and Lennie are on the run from Weed were Lennie has accused of raping a woman – ‘Well, how the hell did she know you jus’ wanted to feel her dress? ...We got to sneak out in the dark and get outta the country’. • The men on the ranch visit a ‘flop house’ (a brothel) – [George] ‘You give me a good whore house every time’. This is their only form of tenderness. • Curley’s wife is immediately identified as a danger by George – ‘I seen ‘em poison before, but I never seen no piece of jail bait worse than her’. Loneliness and Companionship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The men on the ranch travel from job to job and have no family or friends. It is the ‘loneliest job in the world’. • George and Lennie are an exception – ‘With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got a future.’ • The friendship between George and Lennie highlights the loneliness of other characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crooks – ‘I seen it over an’ over – a guy talking to another guy...’ Curley’s Wife – ‘I get lonely. You can talk to people, but I can’t talk to nobody but Curley’. Candy – he asks to put money in for George and Lennie’s dream – “I’d make a will and leave my share to you guys [...] ‘cause I ain’t got no relatives or nothing’. 			