



[Of Mice and Men](#), by John Steinbeck

In A Nutshell

Of Mice and Men, published by John Steinbeck in 1937, is set in the Salinas Valley of California during the Great Depression. In 1936, Steinbeck took a journalistic assignment for the *San Francisco News*, investigating the migrant working situation in California. The stories and circumstances he discovered are reflected in *Of Mice and Men*. The novella's two main characters, George and Lennie, embody the American struggle to survive the Depression, but the novella is timeless because it captures the personal isolation and suffering present in the land of opportunity.

Of Mice and Men is more than a little book about a certain time and place; it covers friendship and sacrifice, not to mention a healthy dose of the bittersweet futility of holding onto dreams. Even as Steinbeck was reworking the text as a play script, he was developing its broader themes and context for his masterwork *The Grapes of Wrath*. *Of Mice and Men* can be thought of as a sketch for that great painting, though it still stands alone. For its stark and unflinching observations, this is one of Steinbeck's best-loved pieces - and a significant contribution to his Nobel Prize in literature.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 *Of Mice and Men* has an allegorical quality, with each character possessing a specific trait that represents something or some group in society. Interpreted closely, the book could read as a heavy-handed treatise about people's chief wrongs against each other, including ageism, racism, sexism, and discrimination against those with disabilities. Are all of these wrongs treated as equally evil? Does the author mean to create a laundry list of mankind's bad habits? Do we then believe in the characters as real, individual people, or are they merely types/symbols?
- 2 The setting here is very specific. Do the events of the story only apply to this particular place and time, or can the novella be thought of as universally applying to humans everywhere?
- 3 Why does George have to give up the idea of the dream farm once Lennie kills Curley's wife? Was the farm ever a real possibility?

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