

## Teacher's notes

## Of Mice and Men

by John Steinbeck



## SUMMARY

**G**eorge Milton and Lennie Small are two ranch workers, who dream of owning a small farm one day. George acts like a father to Lennie, who is physically large but intellectually slow. Lennie loves animals and soft things, such as mice and rabbits. But his physical strength causes problems, so George has to watch out for him. The two men have been traveling together in California and have just gotten a job on a ranch. They start saving money for their future. When they arrive, they meet an old man, Candy, who tells them about the other ranch hands. Curly, the boss's son is small and hates big strong men and he doesn't like Lennie when he sees him. Then they meet Curley's wife, who wants to seduce the ranch hands. George and Candy are not interested in her, but innocently Lennie finds her attractive. Another ranch hand, Slim, enters with news that his dog has had puppies. Lennie wants one and George promises to ask Slim for one. Meanwhile, Candy overhears George and Lennie talking about their dreams and he asks if he can join them. He says he will give them half the money they need to buy their own farm if he can live with them. They are all very happy about this plan. Curley enters and starts giving Lennie a hard time. George tells Lennie to fight back. Finally, Lennie grabs Curley's hand and crushes it by accident. George meets Crooks, the only black man, and soon he wants to join Lennie, George and Candy in their dream to buy a ranch of their own. Curley's wife enters. Crooks and Candy argue with her, but she plays up to Lennie. When George enters, she leaves. George isn't happy when he hears that Crooks has joined in their dream.

The next afternoon, the trouble George predicted starts coming true. Lennie gets his puppy, but accidentally breaks its neck by petting it too hard. Shortly after, Curley's wife enters and invites Lennie to touch her hair. But in a panic, he breaks her neck, too. Lennie runs away, back to the river, where George told him to go if he ever gets in trouble. That way, George would know where to find him. George steals Carlson's gun and goes after Lennie. Curley wants Lennie dead. George finds Lennie by the riverbank and they discuss their dream for the last time. Then George shoots Lennie in the back of the head before the other men arrive to kill him.

## ABOUT JOHN STEINBECK

American novelist, story writer, playwright, and essayist, John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902. His first novel, *Cup of Gold*, was published in 1929. He first received real popular acclaim for his novel *Tortilla Flat* in 1935. *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) concerned the plight of America's dispossessed rural population, during the Great Depression. *The Red Pony* (1937) is another of his finest works. His last major novel *The Winter of Our Discontent* was published in 1961. *Of Mice and Men* was made into a movie in 1939 and 1992. Other Steinbeck novels that have been made into movies include *Tortilla Flat*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Red Pony*, *The Moon is Down*, *Cannery Row* and *East Of Eden*.

Steinbeck was married three times, had two sons by his second wife, and died in New York City in 1968.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The story happens around Salinas, California during the Great Depression, between the years 1929-33. It was a time of economic crisis, when many banks closed and unemployment in the US was 14 million. Men like George and Lennie went out in search of work. When they found work, they found conditions very bad and wages low. These men had dreams of earning enough money to buy their own land and becoming their own bosses. Life was very hard and very lonely. All of the characters in this story suffer from loneliness. They feel there is almost no one they can trust. But Lennie trusts George and George is a good friend to him, which is why it is so important that he kill Lennie in the end so that Lennie does not have to suffer at the hands of those men who want to punish him. The great American Dream to become wealthy and independent is another strong theme in this story. The poor ranch hands, like so many poor Americans, dream of one day having a better life, a better future. These men want to share their dreams with each other. A dream needs to be shared. And so just before George kills his friend, they share their dream together – one last time.

E

1

2

3

4

5

6

ELEMENTARY

OF MICE AND MEN



## Teacher's notes

### Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book see the Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are for use with class Readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access center.

#### ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Write the glossary words for Chapters 1–4 on a set of cards, and write their definitions on another set of cards. Put the students into two groups. Divide the 14 definitions between the two groups, so each group has 7 cards. Give them 5 minutes to read and make sure they understand them. The groups then swap definitions and read them. Take the definitions back. Do the same with the glossary words, but let them use dictionaries to find the meanings. After 5 - 10 minutes, take the cards back. Now give all the glossary words to one group and all the definition cards to the other group. Students with the glossary cards read a word and the other group have to find the definition. If they are correct they keep both cards, if they are wrong, the other group gets the cards. The group with the most sets of cards wins. Play it again later, swapping sets of cards.
- 2 Ask students to work in pairs. Tell them to look at the cover of the book, and to talk about this man. How old is he? What kind of work does he do? Is he happy? Then ask them to read the Introduction. Do they think the man on the book cover is George or Lennie. Why?

#### ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

##### Chapters 1–4

- 1 Write the words *water*, *rabbits*, *work cards*, *mouse*, *Weed* on the board. Put the students into five groups and assign one of these words to each group. They have five minutes to discuss the importance of this word in the story. In what ways does it tell us something about Lennie? About his and George's friendship? Each group reports back to the class.
- 2 Choose 20 direct quotes from these chapters, and write them on cards. Give the cards to one student, who will read them out to the class. Put the rest of the class into two teams. When the reader finishes reading a quote, the first team who can say the name of the speaker from the story keeps the card. The team with the most cards wins. The teacher has the answers and makes the final decision.

##### Chapters 5–8

- 1 Write this sentence on the board: Everybody wants a friend. Ask the class to discuss this in small groups. Is this true for all of the people in the story? Why (not)? Give the groups 15 - 20 minutes to discuss this. Then gather students' answers for each of the characters in the story.
- 2 Tell the class: "You can help one person in this story. You can give this person a farm with animals. Which one person do you want to help? Why?" (Do you want to help a strong man, a weak man, a black man, a white man, the woman?)

##### Chapters 9–11

- 1 Put students into groups of four. One is Crooks, one is Candy, one is Lennie, and one is Curley's wife. Ask them to prepare a role-play of the conversation between the four people in Chapter 9. Students can perform their role-plays for the class.
- 2 Write the names of each of the characters in the story on slips of paper. Each student takes a name, but they should not say who they are. Play Twenty Questions: Students can ask no more than twenty yes/no questions in order to discover each student's identity.

## Glossary

It will be useful if your students know these new words. They are practiced in the 'Before You Read' sections at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.)

#### Chapters 1 - 4

- alone** (adj) without others or separated from others  
**bastard** (n) an unpleasant, disagreeable, or cruel person  
**body** (n) the whole physical structure of a person or animal  
**bunkhouse** (n) a building where workers sleep  
**chase** (v) to follow rapidly in order to catch  
**demand** (v) to ask for firmly and not be willing to accept a refusal  
**feed** (v) to give food to  
**ketchup** (n) a thick red liquid made from tomatoes  
**land** (n) the solid dry part of the Earth's surface  
**mouse** (n) a small furry animal with a long tail that lives in fields  
**pet** (v) to touch kindly with the hands, showing love  
**puppy** (n) a young dog  
**rabbit** (n) a common, small long-eared animal that lives under ground  
**scared** (adj) full of fear, afraid  
**trouble** (n) (something that causes) difficulty, worry, annoyance, or suffering

#### Chapters 5 - 8

- crush** (v) to press with great force so as to break, damage, or destroy the natural shape  
**soft** (adj) not hard  
**touch** (v) to feel with the hands or fingers

#### Chapters 9 - 11

- shake** (v) to (cause to) move from side to side with quick short movements



## Student's activities

Photocopiable

Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group only activities are marked.

### Activities before reading the book

- 1 Read the words in *italics* at the top of the Introduction. What is Weed? What do you know about Weed? What do you know about Lennie?
- 2 Read the Introduction, then circle the best word in each sentence.
  - (a) Lenny loves rabbits/cars.
  - (b) Lenny is a small/big man.
  - (c) Sometimes Lenny is bad/scared.
  - (d) George is kind/unkind to Lennie.
  - (e) Sometimes Lenny makes vegetables/trouble.

### Activities while reading the book

#### Chapters 1-4

- 1 Put the names in the sentences below.  
Carlson Curley George Candy Lennie  
the boss Slim
  - (a) ..... is small with a dark face and quick eyes. His arms and legs are thin.
  - (b) ..... is tall and wide and his walk is slow and heavy.
  - (c) ..... is a short fat man.
  - (d) ..... is a thin angry young man with brown eyes. He has a pretty little wife.
  - (e) ..... is an old man. He doesn't have many friends on the farm.
  - (f) ..... is the best worker on the farm. He speaks slowly and he is very smart.
  - (g) ..... is a strong man with a large stomach.
- 2 Write the correct word in each sentence.  
horse ketchup drink pet dead fat  
trouble bastard farm bunkhouse
  - (a) The bigger man was very thirsty, so he started to ..... from the green pool.

## Of Mice and Men



- (b) "Why do you want a ..... mouse?"
  - (c) "There was ..... in Weed, Lennie."
  - (d) "We're going to work on a .....?" asked Lennie.
  - (e) "I want another mouse...I like to ..... them."
  - (f) "Let's eat now, Lennie." "I want ....., George."
  - (g) "We'll live off the ..... of the land," Lennie shouted happily.
  - (h) There were eight beds in the .....
  - (i) "I'm as strong as a .....", said Lennie.
  - (j) "Curley's a .....", said George. "Lennie wants to work, not fight."
- 3 Answer the questions.
    - (a) Who is wild and strange?
    - (b) Who wants to go to a different farm? Why?
    - (c) Who has a dog?
    - (d) How many puppies does the dog have to feed?
    - (e) How long does she have to feed her puppies?

#### Chapters 5-8

- 1 Put the right answers with the right questions.
  - (a) Why does George say, "Thank you, Slim. Lennie really loves dogs"?
  - (b) Why does George have Lennie with him?
  - (c) Why does Lennie make trouble sometimes?
  - (d) Why did Lennie touch the girl's dress in Weed?
  - (e) Why did the girl shout?
  - (f) Why did George and Lennie have to leave Weed fast?

E

1

2

3

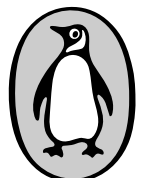
4

5

6

ELEMENTARY

OF MICE AND MEN



## Student's activities

- (g) Because he knew his Aunt Clara and she died.
- (h) Because he likes to touch soft, pretty things.
- (i) Because the men there were very angry.
- (j) Because he gave one to Lennie.
- (k) Because she was scared.
- (l) Because he's not smart.
- 2 Read Chapter 6 again, then close your book. George, Lennie and Candy want to buy a farm. Put the numbers in the sentences. Do not look back in the story.
- \$250 \$350 \$450 \$100 \$50 \$10  
\$600 \$300
- How much money
- (a) does the farm cost? .....
- (b) did Candy get after the accident? .....
- (c) does Candy have in the bank? .....
- (d) will Candy get at the end of the month? .....
- (e) can Candy give George for the farm? .....
- (f) do George and Lennie have now? .....
- (g) will George and Lennie get at the end of the month? .....
- (h) will the three men have for the farm at the end of the month? .....
- 3 Some of these people and animals are weak, some are strong. Write "weak" or "strong" next to them. Talk with another student about why this is important in the story.
- (a) Candy .....
- (b) Curley .....
- (c) Slim .....
- (d) Lennie .....
- (e) a puppy .....
- (f) a mouse .....
- (g) a rabbit .....

## Chapters 9-11

- 1 Why does Curley's wife say
- (a) "So they left the weak men here."
- (b) "I like machines."
- (c) "Sometimes I want to hurt him, too."
- 2 Are these sentences about Lennie right or wrong? Lennie feels
- (a) angry when the puppy is dead.
- (b) happy when Curley's wife comes into the room.
- (c) sad when he tells Curley's wife about the clothes his Aunt Clara gave him.
- (d) angry when he tells Curley's wife, "Please stop! Stop!"
- (e) sad when Curley's wife is dead, too.
- (f) excited when George says, "We're a family, Lennie."
- 3 Why does Lennie say, "We'll live off the fat of the land" before George kills him. What does Steinbeck want us to think? Which man in the story has the same ideas as Steinbeck, do you think? Why?

## Activities after reading the book

- 1 Lennie is dead. You are going to talk to George. Write ten questions for George. Give your questions to another student and take his/her questions. How will George answer these questions? Write George's answers.
- 2 Write the conversation between George and Curley after Lennie and Curley's wife are dead. Will George stay on the farm and work? Will Curley want George to leave?

