

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck:

An **American** writer (1902-1968) who was born in Salinas, where the novella is set. As a teenager, he spent his summers working as a hired hand on neighbouring ranches, where his experiences of rural California and its people impressed him deeply. He often wrote stories that attempted **to criticise or consider the social problems presented by the Great Depression or struggles of particular groups that suffered segregation.**

Plot

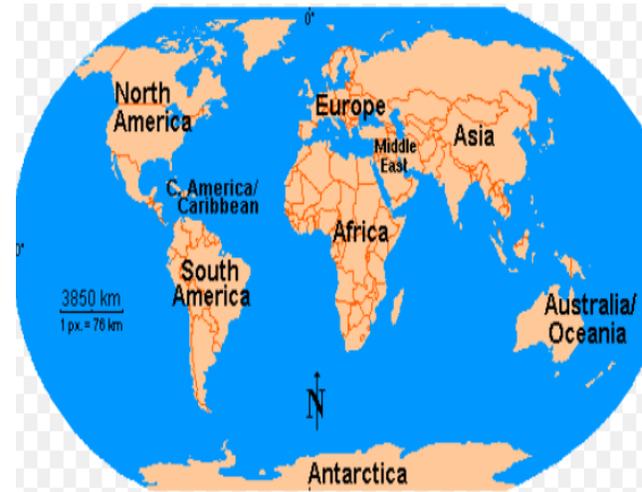
Steinbeck's story of [George](#) and [Lennie](#)'s ambition of owning their own ranch, and the obstacles that stand in the way of that ambition, reveal the nature of dreams, dignity, loneliness, and sacrifice.

Characters:

- **George:** He is the kind-hearted ranch hand who is concerned about his friend Lennie and watches out for him.
- **Lennie:** A physically strong migrant worker who has a mental disability. Lennie cannot remember things other than his and George's dream or control his own strength.
- **Candy:** An old ranch worker who is missing a hand due to an accident. Has an old dog that he loves.
- **Slim:** A popular worker at the ranch that everyone respects. He talks slowly and tries to calm down violent situations.
- **Curley:** A violent, hot-headed bully who loves a fight. He targets people that don't stand up to him.
- **Curley's Wife:** A flirtatious woman who lives on the ranch and appears at places she shouldn't, like the bunkhouse.
- **Crooks:** The only black man on the ranch who cannot live in the bunkhouse due to the segregation laws. He has a crooked back from being kicked by a horse and lives and works on his own.

Key Vocabulary:

The Great Depression
The American Dream
The Dust Bowl
Itinerant Workers
Economic
Racism
Disability
Segregation
Isolation
Derogatory
Misogyny
Poverty
Racism
Inequality
Prejudice
Superior
Inferior



Context:

Steinbeck encourages us to empathise with **the difficulties faced by migrant workers** during the **Great Depression**.
The **prejudices** of 1930s America are exposed, including **racism, sexism and ageism**.
The American Dream is shown to be impossible: **reality** defeats **idealism**. **The American Dream** is written into the *Declaration of Independence*: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Lennie and George's dream of owning a farm and living off the "fatta the lan" symbolises this dream. For **poor migrant workers** during the **Depression**, the **American Dream** became an **illusion** and a **trap**.
The novella explores the human need for **companionship** and the tragedy of **loneliness**.

Themes:

Friendship - the strong bond between George and Lennie is clear throughout.
Dreams - having a dream to own their own ranch keeps George and Lennie working.
Loneliness - working on ranches, even with other men, was a lonely existence. Curley's wife struggles with this too, being the only woman on the ranch.
Racism - Crooks is treated like a second-class citizen because of his colour. Racist terms are also used throughout the book.
Mental disability - George struggles to keep Lennie in a job and out of trouble. Lennie often forgets important things and his inability to control his own strength proves a problem.