

Of Mice and Men

“Of Mice and Men” was written by John Steinbeck and published in 1937.

Characters

George Milton

- Physical traits: He is small, quick and clever with dark features
- Character traits: He is caring and sticks up for Lennie, despite how quick he is to discipline him

Lennie Small:

- Physical traits: Lennie is a huge man, with sloping shoulders and heavy walk
- Character traits: Lennie is a simple-minded man who is usually unaware of his actions and the consequences of them

Candy:

- Physical traits: Candy is an old man who had his hand cut off
- Character traits: Candy is an older man who is a hard worker on the ranch, he lost his arm after many years of working there

Curley:

- Physical traits: Thin young man, with brown features, and tightly curled hair
- Character traits: He is a confrontational, mean-spirited, and aggressive young man who seeks to compensate for his small stature by picking fights with larger men

Curley's Wife:

- Physical traits: She has full rouged lips and wide spaced eyes, heavily made up
- Character traits: She preys on the weaker, he is lonely and she likes to stir up trouble

The Boss:

- Physical traits: Stocky, well-dressed
- Character traits: Only appears once but seems fair-minded

Themes:

- The Predatory Nature of Human Existence
- Idealized Male Friendship
- The Impossible of the American Dream
- Freedom vs. Captivity
- Fear

Plot Overview

One evening two men are on their way to a ranch in California. George leads the way and the person following him is Lennie. George repeatedly asks Lennie to keep his mouth shut on the ranch, suggesting that Lennie has some kind of problem. After supper and before going to sleep, the two of them talk about their dream to own a piece of land.

The next day, George and Lennie travel to the ranch to start work. They are given two beds in the bunkhouse. Then Old Candy introduces them to almost everybody on the ranch. They meet the boss and the boss's son Curley, who is quite rude. They also meet Curley's wife when she comes looking for her husband. George warns Lennie to behave his best around Curley and his wife. He also suggests that they should meet by the lake if anything unfortunate happens to either of them on the ranch.

George and Lennie are assigned to work with Slim. George finds Slim an understanding confidante, and a bond forms between the two of them. When Curley wrongly accuses Slim for talking to his wife, Slim gets very angry. Curley apologizes to him in the bunkhouse in front of everybody, but his apology is rejected. Curley vents his frustration on Lennie, trying to pick a fight. Lennie does not hit back initially, but when George asks him to, Lennie obliges and crushes Curley's hand. Curley agrees that he will not tell anyone about his hand, for it would mean losing his self-respect.

While working on the ranch, George and Lennie continue to dream about owning their own piece of land and make plans accordingly. Old Candy, one of the ranch hands, overhears their planning and asks to join them. He even offers to contribute all of his savings to purchase the land. George and Lennie accept his proposal.

One evening, Lennie, looking for his puppy, enters the room of Crooks; since he is the only black man on the ranch, Crooks lives alone, segregated from the other ranch workers. Candy enters, looking for Lennie; the two of them tell Crooks about their dream of owning their own ranch, but Crooks tells them that it will never happen, foreshadowing the truth. Curley's wife comes in and interrupts them. When Crooks objects to her presence in his room, she threatens him with a false rape charge.

Later on, Lennie is seen alone in the barn, petting his dead pup. He has unintentionally killed it by handling it too hard. Now he is grieving over the loss. Curley's wife walks into the barn and strikes up a conversation with Lennie. As they talk, she asks him to stroke her hair. She panics when she feels Lennie's strong hands. When she raises her voice to him, Lennie covers her mouth. In the process, he accidentally breaks her neck and she dies. Knowing he has done something terrible, he leaves the ranch. When the ranch hands learn that Curley's wife has been killed, they rightly guess the guilty party. Led by an angry Curley, they all go out to search for Lennie. They plan to murder him in retribution.

George guesses where Lennie is and races to the lake. To save him from the brutal assaults of the ranch hands, George mercifully kills his friend himself. Hearing the gunshot, the searchers converge by the lake. They praise George for his act. Only Slim understands the actual purpose of George's deed.