

Context: the novella was written in 1937, during the Great Depression		Themes: bigger ideas explored through the novella
Timescale and Setting	The novella was written and set in California in the 1930s. Steinbeck intended <i>Of Mice and Men</i> as a play as well as a prose narrative. This is reflected in the way the events of the plot take place over the course of a single weekend, opening with sunset on Thursday evening at the pool and closing with the sunset on Sunday evening again at the pool; the dying day providing a suitable backdrop for Lennie's death. The novella has only three settings: the pool by the Salinas River, the bunk house and the barn (which includes Crooks' room). Each chapter represents a separate 'scene'	<p><b>Power and Powerlessness</b> – Steinbeck presents the connection between power and responsibility through the way he portrays the characters and their relationships. The boss is the most powerful man on the ranch because he has the power to sack the hands, although he lacks the power to stop the men moving on if they wish. Slim is held in respect because of his skills and wisdom, and uses his position to make fair judgements. Curley is also a figure of power, but uses it irresponsibly to bully and intimidate others. Curley's wife has some power, both in her role as the Boss's daughter-in-law and in her portrayal as a femme fatale. She tries to use sexual attraction to gain attention from the men. She uses her power as a white woman to silence Crooks and to insult the three men she finds in Crooks' room. She refers to them as the 'weak ones', and this assessment is accurate because Candy, Crooks and Lennie are the weak members of this society. Candy has less power than the other ranch hands because he is old and injured. However, he does have the financial power to help make the dream farm possible. Despite being the most educated man on the ranch, Crooks is an outcast as a result of racist policies that force him to live separately from the other workers. Lennie's physical strength gives him power over other people and over animals, but it is always destructive because his mental weakness makes him unable to use it with restraint. Lennie is picked on by Curley and his wife, and even Crooks bullies him, making him aware of his dependence on George. Although George is both physically and mentally capable, and does have the power of friendship with Lennie, he has little economic power because he has no money to realise his dream. Despite trying to protect Lennie when he gets into trouble, he is powerless to prevent the inevitable tragic ending. Carlson has his strength and his ability with a gun to ensure he is independent of men like Curley. However, Steinbeck also presents him as a man without the ambition or imagination to wish to better his circumstances.</p> <p><b>Loneliness/Friendship</b> – Steinbeck pairs the themes of loneliness and friendship, which are almost opposites. In the novella, no one is really alone: people live and work in close proximity to each other. Yet several characters are lonely. This theme is stated clearly by George early in the novella: 'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world.' He goes on to say that he and Lennie are different from other itinerant workers because they have each other. In this way Steinbeck presents loneliness as a starting point and friendship as an escape from it. The friendship between George and Lennie is the only one presented in the novella. Curley may be too unpleasant to have friends. If Slim and the Boss have friends, we never meet them. Steinbeck provides a picture of most ranch workers as lonely, rootless souls with no friends or family connections, but the three loneliest people in the novella live permanently on the ranch: Candy whose best friend is his dog; Crooks, whose colour isolates him from the others; Curley's wife who has recently married a man she neither loves nor likes. The lack of friendships amongst the characters helps to emphasise their loneliness compared with George and Lennie. Steinbeck explores the tragedy of loneliness and the human need for companionship.</p> <p><b>Dreams</b> – The 'American Dream' is essentially the idea that, through hard work and aspiration, everybody can achieve what they want. For George and Lennie, a particular version of this is the dream of owning their own land. It is a dream of working for themselves, of being independent and so free from bosses, bunk houses and the need to move around from one ranch to another. It is only when Candy overhears the two men discussing their dream that it begins to become a real possibility. However., Crooks puts the dream into the context of harsh reality. He says he has seen hundreds of men with the same dream, and that it never comes true for any of them. Curley's wife has a rather pathetic dream of being a film star. This is her own version of the 'American Dream'. In the 1930s, Hollywood contributed to the American Dream as audiences identified with film characters who went 'from rags to riches', and people like Curley's wife fantasised about becoming film stars themselves. Some of the ranch hands, like Whit, dream of being the cowboy heroes they read about in the pulp magazines. These various dreams provide the characters with a distraction from the unhappiness of life and a hope of some future happiness. Although dreams are initially a source of hope in the novella, Lennie's death makes his and George's dream impossible so as the novel ends, we see that even simple, modest dreams are unattainable in the harsh environment of America during the Great Depression.</p>
The 'American Dream'	The idea that anyone with sufficient motivation and hard work can achieve what they want. Wealth and personal success remain a dream for all the characters as none of them have the economic power or social freedom to realise it. However, characters in the novella have different interpretations of what the 'American Dream' means to them.	
The Great Depression	A period of severe economic hardship for people across the world. It was triggered by the Wall Street crash of 1929, which was caused by the value of shares on the stock market collapsing and banks going out of business. This meant that many people lost their savings and the money they had borrowed suddenly had to be repaid, which most people were unable to do. The situation was made worse for farmers by a succession of droughts. In the Midwest these conditions, combined with extensive farming and little protection from wind erosion, effectively turned the soil to dust. During the 1930s, 15 million people were unemployed in the USA (20% of the population).	
Patriarchy	Steinbeck wrote at a time when women had very few rights. Men were seen a superior in everything, and women were expected to obey them. Women were regarded as the property of men and were expected to be submissive and maintain a domesticated role in life, being excluded from the professions (law, medicine, politics etc.).	
Racism	Racial discrimination was not illegal in 1930s USA; therefore, racism was still widespread at the time. Whites and black people were segregated in the 1930s. Crooks illustrates racial prejudice and his experiences were typical of the time. Racist language which would be seen as very offensive now, was very common then.	
Steinbeck	John Steinbeck was born in 1902 in Salinas, California, a region that became the setting for much of his fiction, including <i>Of Mice and Men</i> . 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, and inspired him to write <i>Of Mice and Men</i> .	
Dustbowl	Resulting from droughts and over-farming (because of food shortages caused by the Wall Street crash) land became barren and huge areas of rural USA became known as the Dustbowl. This meant that agricultural workers in these areas were forced to travel to California in search of work.	

Key Characters	Literary Terms/Key Terminology
<b>George Milton:</b> An itinerant farm worker. He is a small, wiry, quick-witted man who travels with, and cares for, Lennie. Although he frequently speaks of how much better his life would be without his caretaking responsibilities, George is obviously devoted to Lennie. George's behaviour is motivated by the desire to protect Lennie and, eventually, deliver them both to the farm of their dreams. He is small and quite clever.	<b>imagery:</b> visually descriptive language often with reference to the senses.
<b>Lennie Small:</b> A large, lumbering, childlike itinerant farm worker. Owing to his intellectual disability, Lennie completely depends upon George, his friend and traveling companion, for guidance and protection. The two men share a vision of a farm that they will own together, a vision that Lennie believes in wholeheartedly. Gentle and kind, Lennie nevertheless does not understand his own strength. His love of petting soft things, such as small animals, dresses, and people's hair, leads to disaster.	<b>foreshadow:</b> when a writer gives an advance hint of what is to come later in the story to create dramatic tension.
<b>Candy:</b> An aging ranch handyman, Candy lost his hand in an accident and worries about his future on the ranch. Fearing that his age is making him useless, he seizes on George's description of the farm he and Lennie will have, offering his life's savings if he can join George and Lennie in owning the land. The fate of Candy's ancient dog, which Carlson shoots in the back of the head in an alleged act of mercy, foreshadows the manner of Lennie's death.	<b>symbol:</b> a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract, e.g. the pool at the beginning of the novella is a symbol of safety.
<b>The Boss:</b> The stocky, well-dressed man in charge of the ranch, and Curley's father. He seems to be a fair-minded man. Candy happily reports that the boss once delivered a gallon of whiskey to the ranch-hands on Christmas. However, he gets angry at times and is suspicious of George, thinking he might be taking advantage of Lennie.	<b>repetition:</b> when a single word, a group of words or a group of ideas is repeated for effect.
<b>Curley:</b> The Boss's son who wears high-heeled boots to distinguish himself from the ranch hands. Rumoured to be a champion boxer, he is a confrontational, mean-spirited, and aggressive young man who seeks to compensate for his small stature by picking fights with larger men. Recently married, Curley is plagued with jealous suspicions and is extremely possessive of his flirtatious young wife.	<b>tension:</b> involves keeping the reader in suspense while the protagonist's state or fate or outcome is under threat.
<b>Curley's wife:</b> The only female character, Curley's wife is never given a name and is only mentioned in reference to her husband. The men on the farm refer to her as a 'tramp' and a 'tart'. Dressed provocatively, she represents the temptation of female sexuality in a male-dominated world. Steinbeck depicts Curley's wife not as a villain, but rather as a victim. Like the ranch hands, she is desperately lonely and has broken dreams of a better life.	<b>mood:</b> the internal feeling of the reader.
<b>Slim:</b> A highly skilled mule driver and the acknowledged "prince" of the ranch, Slim is the only character who seems to be at peace with himself. The other characters often look to Slim for advice. A quiet, insightful man, Slim alone understands the nature of the bond between George and Lennie, and comforts George at the book's tragic ending.	<b>atmosphere:</b> an external feeling coming from the physical environment.
<b>Crooks:</b> Crooks, the black stable buck, gets his name from his crooked back. Proud and bitter, he is isolated from the other men because of the colour of his skin. Despite himself, Crooks becomes fond of Lennie, and though he derisively claims to have seen countless men following empty dreams of buying their own land, he asks Lennie if he can go with them and hoe in the garden.	<b>allusion:</b> A reference to something else, such as a historical event, a person, a place or another text. Steinbeck makes an allusion to the garden of Eden when describing the setting at the beginning of Chapter 1.
<b>Carlson:</b> A big, powerful and insensitive ranch hand, Carlson complains bitterly about the smell of Candy's old dog. He pressurises Candy to have it shot. He commits the act himself with evident satisfaction, using his own Luger pistol. This is the same pistol that George later uses to shoot Lennie.	<b>protagonist:</b> the leading character or one of the major characters in a novel, novella, play, film, etc.
<b>Whit:</b> A ranch hand who enjoys reading cowboy stories, enthusiastic when telling George about going into town and becomes excited about a possible fight between Slim and Curley.	<b>personification:</b> giving an inanimate object human feelings, attributes or actions.
	<b>anecdote:</b> a short amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person.

### **Of Mice and Men Writing Key Vocabulary List**

<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>In a sentence</b>	<b>Synonyms?</b>
1. sombre	Adjective: having or conveying a feeling of deep seriousness and sadness.	He looked at her with a <b>sombre</b> expression.	solemn grave melancholy dismal mournful
2. dispirited	Adjective: having lost enthusiasm and hope; disheartened.	She was determined to appear unworried in front of her <b>dispirited</b> family.	disheartened discouraged demoralised
3. resolute	Adjective: admirably purposeful, determined, and unwavering.	Phoebe was <b>resolute</b> and unswerving in completing the race.	determined purposeful resolved adamant
4. demise	Noun: a person's death.	The novella's end was the saddened <b>demise</b> of Lennie.	death passing
5. bereaved	Adjective: deprived of a close relation or friend through their death.	Around the grave stood the <b>bereaved</b> families.	grieving sorrowful lamenting
6. desolated (1)	Adjective: make (someone) feel utterly wretched and unhappy.	George was <b>desolated</b> by the death of his beloved friend.	disheartened distressed dispirited
7. irrevocable	Adjective: not able to be changed, reversed, or recovered; final.	She took an <b>irrevocable</b> step into the unknown.	unalterable irreversible
8. sacrifice	Verb: give up (something valued) for the sake of other considerations.	Working hard doesn't mean you have to <b>sacrifice</b> your social life.	give up abandon relinquish
9. rootless	Adjective: having no settled home or social or family ties.	Many agricultural labourers remained rootless during the Great Depression	itinerant unsettled drifting
10. perspective	Noun: a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.	From a farmer's <b>perspective</b> , a lack of rain is disastrous to his crops.	viewpoint outlook attitude
11. ominous	Adjective: giving the worrying impression that something bad is going to happen.	There were <b>ominous</b> dark clouds gathering overhead.	threatening menacing sinister inauspicious portentous

12. illusory	Adjective: based on illusion; not real.	She knew the safety of her room was <b>illusory</b> .	false deceptive misleading
13. cadaverous	Adjective: very pale, thin, or bony.	The figure was gaunt and <b>cadaverous</b> .	ghostly pallid emaciated
14. shrouded	Verb: covered or enveloped so as to conceal from view.	Mountains <b>shrouded</b> by cloud.	veiled cloaked swathed
15. desolated (2)	Adjective: make (a place) appear bleakly empty.	The droughts that <b>desolated</b> the fields of crops.	ruined devastated ravaged