



Of Mice and Men

By John Steinbeck

First published in 1937

Genre and Subject

Mental disabilities—fiction

Friendship—fiction

Classical fiction

Synopsis

George and his large, simple-minded friend Lennie are drifters, following wherever work leads them. Arriving in California's Salinas Valley, they get work on a ranch. If they can just stay out of trouble, George promises Lennie; then one day they might be able to get some land of their own and settle down some place.

Author Biography

John Steinbeck (1902-1968), born in Salinas, California, came from a family of moderate means. He worked his way through college at Stanford University but never graduated. In 1925 he went to New York, where he tried for a few years to establish himself as a free-lance writer, but he failed and returned to California. After publishing some novels and short stories, Steinbeck first became widely known with *Tortilla Flat* (1935), a series of humorous stories about Monterey paisanos.

Steinbeck's novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labour, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach. After the rough and earthy humour of *Tortilla Flat*, he moved on to more serious fiction, often aggressive in its social criticism, to *In Dubious Battle* (1936), which deals with the strikes of the migratory fruit pickers on California plantations. This was followed by *Of Mice and Men* (1937), the story of the imbecile giant Lennie, and a series of admirable short stories collected in the volume *The Long Valley* (1938). In 1939 he published what is considered his best work, *The Grapes of Wrath*, the story of Oklahoma tenant farmers who, unable to earn a living from the land, moved to California where they became migratory workers.

Among his later works should be mentioned *East of Eden* (1952), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), and *Travels with Charley* (1962), a travelogue in which Steinbeck wrote about his impressions during a three-month tour in a truck that led him through forty American states. He died in New York City in 1968.

Discussion Starters

- Why does George "take so much trouble for another guy"?
- Why does George shoot Lennie?
- Why is the dream recited repeatedly?
- Why does the book begin and end at the pond?
- Why does Candy feel he should have shot his dog himself?
- Is Curley's wife to blame for Lennie's death?
- Why doesn't Slim share in the other men's dreams?
- Why does Carlson get the last word?
- What is the meaning of the book's title?
- Did migrant workers have any options for a better life?
- Did George do the right thing by shooting Lennie?

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- *East of Eden by John Steinbeck*
- *The Sound and the Fury by William Faulkner*

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