

# Themes, Ideas + Issues in *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck.

## RANCH LIFE

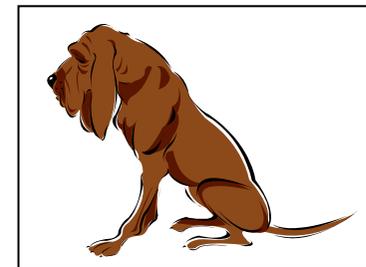
- Hierarchy: all men know their place.  
Boss  
Curley  
Slim  
Whit, Carlson, George  
Candy, Crooks, Lennie
- Whole farm - a machine for work. It is functional, simple with no luxuries.
- Men are not machines - they have strengths and weaknesses. Ranch life is unhealthy and destroys men's dreams.
- Bill Tenner moved on - he serves as a reminder that it is possible.

## NAMES

- Lots of the names describe their characters.
- Some are ironic: Lennie SMALL; Candy.
- Curley's wife has no name: she wants recognition, her own identity, to be more than somebody's wife. Steinbeck emphasises how she has none of these by not naming her.
- Soledad is the local town. It means 'loneliness'.
- A weed is a plant you don't want. Weed is where G and L come from.
- The novel's title comes from a poem. It tells us not to expect anyone to be happy, and that plans always fail - no matter how well they are thought out. The title is a constant reminder that failure is inevitable.

## SHOOTING CANDY'S DOG

- Carlson does the deed for selfish reasons. He convinces Candy it is the right thing to do.
- Slim has the power to save the dog but he chooses not to. This is cruel, but also practical.
- Candy is useless - like the dog.
- There is no mercy on the ranch for animals or humans. This is one of the main messages in the book. It shows the cruelty of life here - not because of the dog but because no-one cares about Candy's feelings.



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## HANDS

- Curley is described as 'handy' and gets his hand crushed by Lennie.
- Candy lost a hand.
- Lennie - famous heavy 'pendula' hands, used for petting and they don't know their own strength.
- George has small, strong hands.
- Slim - hands are large and lean.
- Curley's wife - hands are part of her sexiness. She has polished nails, puts her hands on her hips, uses them for acting.

## WOMEN

- Curley's wife: only weapon is her sexuality.
- Aunt Clara: Authority figure for Lennie.
- Susy: runs a brothel.
- Men and women don't understand one another. Lennie has problems with women.

## LONELINESS

- Everyone on the ranch is lonely: they are single men with apparently no family.
- George plays solitaire - a game for one.
- Curley is lonely even though he's married. The only time we see him with his wife is when she's dead.
- Curley's wife is lonely - she tries for companionship by flirting with the men.
- Crooks lives in a barn on his own because he is black.
- There doesn't seem to be a solution to cure the loneliness: That's why they rely on the dream.
- Lennie has pets: but then he kills them.
- Candy has his dog. But then Carlson shoots it.
- When anyone tries to grab hold of someone, it seems to end in disaster.

## DREAMS

- The novel is about the American Dream - promising equality for all.
- Everyone in the novel has a dream.
- People on the ranch are going nowhere.
- Dreams, unfortunately are not real.
- George's dream dies with Lennie.

## WHY GEORGE KILLS LENNIE

- George only has 3 options: Lennie goes to prison; Lennie gets lynched; find a cave to put Lennie in.
- All options are bad.
- Lennie's death is inevitable.
- George simply has to kill Lennie to avoid all the other things happening.
- Death is Lennie's new dream. He had to die with dignity.

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1. Explain why Crooks is at the bottom of the ranch's hierarchy.
2. Why did Steinbeck choose 'Soledad' to be the nearest town?
3. Why is the colour red important in the book.
4. How does Candy resemble his dog?
5. What is noticeable about the following characters hands: Lennie; Candy; Slim?
6. What does the title tell us about what is inside the book?
7. What (apart from the obvious) is the attraction of the brothel f for the bunkhouse men?
8. What opinion do you think the men have of the women in the book?
9. How does Steinbeck write about nature in the book?
10. Explain why each of the following characters is lonely: Curley; Curley's wife; Crooks; George.
11. Why are dreams important for the characters in the book?
12. Why does George kill Lennie?

