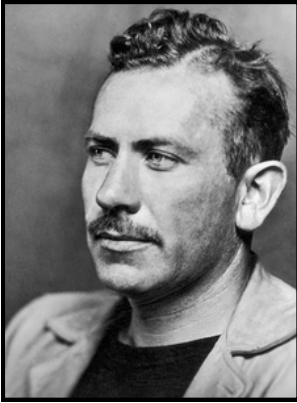


WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT JOHN STEINBECK



John Steinbeck, born in 1902 in Salinas, CA, was an American novelist known for his social novels that depict the realities of life of those in the rural labor economy. Often inspired by his own financial hardships as a young writer in the 1920s and 30s, his work reflects the life of the working class, revealing both its struggles and its beauty. His notable works include *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a novel narrating the lives of Oklahoma farmers who move to California during the Great Depression; *Tortilla Flat* (1935), a book of short, comedic stories set in Monterey, CA; and *East of Eden* (1952), a novel tracing the intertwining histories of two families. During his career, he received the 1940 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Grapes of Wrath*, the 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964.



QUESTIONS: OF MICE AND MEN (1937)

- Throughout the novel, Steinbeck writes about George and Lennie's adventure in the context of a beautifully described landscape. Sometimes, these descriptions are woven together ("the hay came down like a mountain slope"), and sometimes they are distinctly separated. How do Steinbeck's reflections on nature express themes in the novel?
- While Curley's wife is a significant character, we never find out her name, and the way she is described by the characters differs from the impression that readers often have of her. How do you explain this decision, and what does it mean for her character?
- Does George's and Lennie's dream to eventually "live on the fatta the lan" ever feel achievable? Why or why not?
- George's ultimate decision has been the subject of much debate. Does it reflect love and compassion, or is it more an exercise of control?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Consider John Steinbeck's use of biblical allusions throughout this story. In what ways do these references influence or deepen your interpretation of the characters and their actions?
- We encounter characters from a range of social and personal backgrounds in the novel, including Curley, Slim, Candy, and Crooks. Why might this diversity have been particularly significant in 1930s America, and how does that significance continue to resonate?
- The story shares several thematic and character similarities with *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). In what ways do these two works compare and contrast with each other? How do they reflect Steinbeck's development as an author over time, and how does each text approach and explore the concept of the American Dream?
- How does the treatment of minority characters like Curley's wife and Crooks differ from Steinbeck's portrayal of them? Do we see this kind of representation in literature today?

LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- George and Lenny dream of land ownership and economic independence. How are these struggles still relevant today, and who is most likely to experience them? Consider how you can help those in financial precarity in your immediate community.
- How might these fictional representations affect our understanding of minority groups in society today? How can we specifically support disabled people to ensure they are treated humanely?
- Curley's treatment of his wife raises concerns about those who feel trapped in relationships. What resources are available to those who experience domestic violence?
- Candy's character experiences ageism from others due to his physical limitations and not being seen as "useful" anymore. How can we challenge prejudiced perspectives of older individuals?

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [The Arc](#)
- [Emergency Assistance Foundation](#)
- [National Disability Institute](#)
- [Changing the Narrative](#)
- [Women Helping Women](#)

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922)
- Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952)
- Daniel Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon* (1966)
- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)
- J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)