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## *Of Mice and Men* Study Guide

### Searching for Hope in a Cruel World

When migrant field hands Lennie Smalls and George Milton arrive in the Salinas Valley, they are full of hope for their future. When they begin work on a nearby ranch, however, their hope quickly turns into tragedy. When considering the novel's terrible, sad events, do Lennie and George have any hope of obtaining their dreams? What can the relationship of George and Lennie teach us about true friendship?

### Be a Better Reader

As you work through the study guide for *Of Mice and Men*, you will practice these skills, which will help you when you read novels in the future, for school assignments or just for fun.

1. Describe how characters in a novel are developed.
2. Describe the plot development and structure of a novel.
3. Describe and analyze the role of setting in a novel.
4. Identify and analyze the themes in a novel.
5. Identify and analyze an author's purpose and perspective.
6. Explain how historical context affects readers' understanding and appreciation of a novel.

### Behind the Scenes

When California-based author John Steinbeck, published *Of Mice and Men*, America was in the midst of the Great Depression. 12 million Americans were out of work, and laborers, like George and Lennie, were particularly at risk of poverty. Living in California, where the Great Depression unleashed severe economic and social problems, Steinbeck sought to represent the working-class poor in three of his most famous novels: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), for which Steinbeck won the Pulitzer Prize.

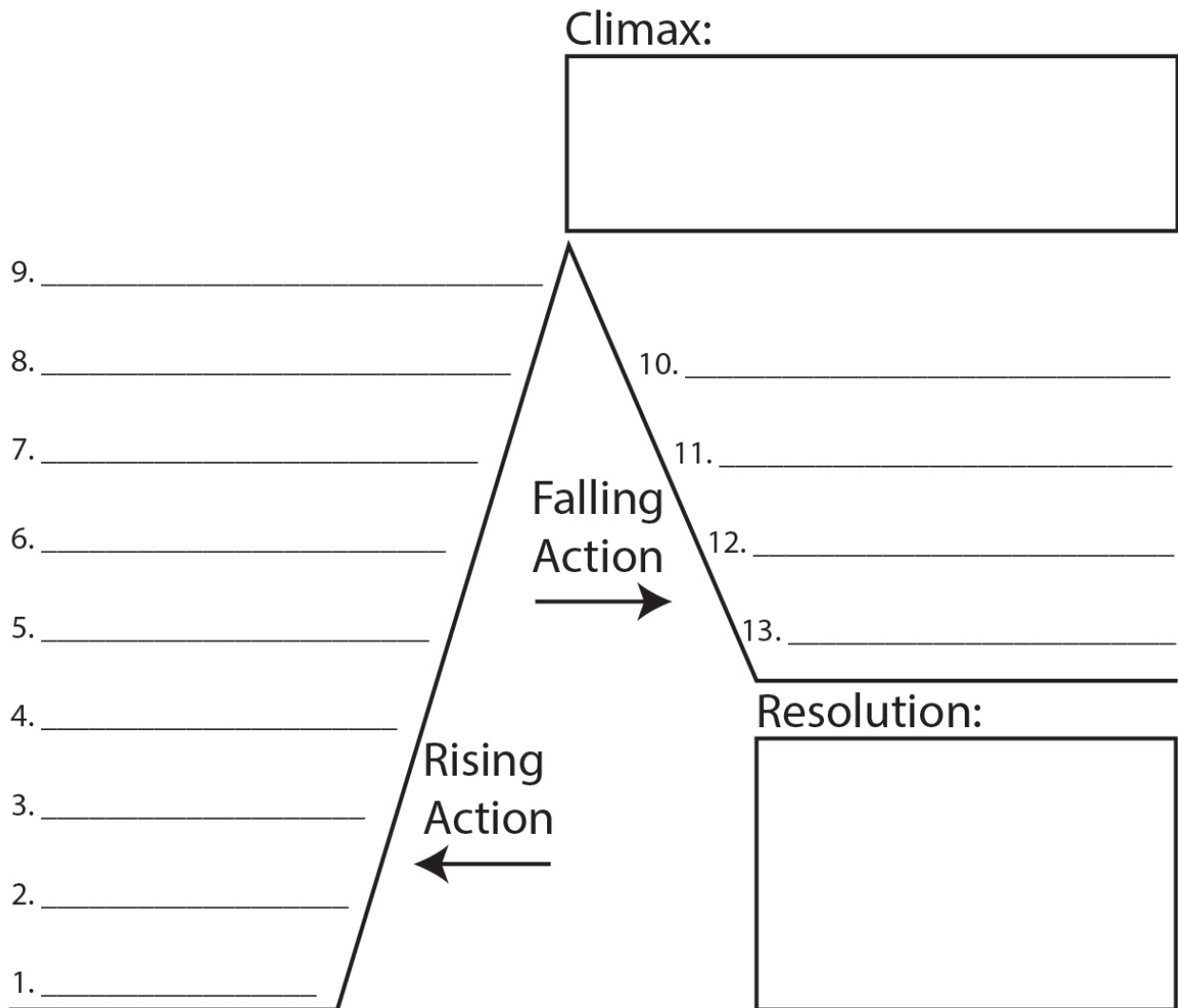
While the characters in Steinbeck's stories are often faced with insurmountable obstacles, they portray the resilience and determination Steinbeck believed was at the heart of all humanity. When accepting his Pulitzer Prize in 1940, Steinbeck said, "[The] writer is delegated to declare and celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit, for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion, and love." George and Lennie embody all of these traits, and through their story, Steinbeck hopes to impart a strong message of friendship and love.

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### The Plot

When Lennie and George arrive in Salinas Valley, they have big dreams of saving enough money to someday buy their own land. As time passes, however, various obstacles get in their way and threaten to thwart their hopes. Will Lennie and George ever achieve their dream? As you read *Of Mice and Men*, fill in the boxes for each element of the novel's plot.



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### The Characters

In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck creates a vivid world of migratory field hands, a world that many of his readers had never experienced. He was particularly interested in the loneliness, isolation, and hopelessness migrant workers felt during the Great Depression. Through Lennie and George's journey, Steinbeck introduces an array of characters that either offer hope to the field hands, or that add to the cruelty of their already depressing existence.

Use the diagram below to note the characteristics and descriptions Steinbeck gives to his main characters, Lennie and George. Be sure to include at least one direct quote from the novel as evidence to support your description of that character.

Primary Characters	Character Traits
Lennie	
George	

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Use the space below to help you organize the novel's secondary characters and their impact on Lennie and George's dream.

<b>Secondary Characters</b>	<b>Character Traits</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Candy		
Curly		
Curly's Wife		
Crooks		
Slim		
Carlson		
The Boss		
Aunt Clara		
Whit		

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### The Setting

Lennie and George's story takes place in four very distinct settings: the clearing by the pond, the bunkhouse, Crook's room, and the barn. Each of these settings plays a vital role in the plot, and helps inform Lennie and George's relationship. Use the spaces below to describe the novel's different settings. Below the description, write or type a short description, in your own words, of how this setting impacts the novel's plot.

The Clearing By the Pond	The Bunkhouse
<p>Impact on Plot:</p>	<p>Impact on Plot:</p>

Crook's Room	The Barn
<p>Impact on Plot:</p>	<p>Impact on Plot:</p>

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### Tracking Themes

What is John Steinbeck trying to say about humanity through the struggles of his main characters, Lennie and George? The main themes in *Of Mice and Men* are related to friendship and the cruelty of the world. See if you can identify and analyze those themes.

**Step 1:** What parts of the plot seem related to a possible theme in the novel? (Think about the main conflict and how it got resolved or worked out.)

**Step 2:** Which characters seem related to a possible theme? Which characters change, and what do those changes suggest about the cruelty of the world, or true friendship?

**Step 3:** How does John Steinbeck use symbols to hint at the novel's themes? What objects, people, or places stand for something "bigger" in the story?

**Step 4:** What does the novel's title suggest about the novel's theme? Why do you think Steinbeck named his novel *Of Mice and Men*?

**Step 5:** Write about one or two of the novel's main themes in your own words.

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### Talk About It

What do you think about Steinbeck's tragic novel *Of Mice and Men*? Does the ending leave you feeling depressed or hopeful? In the space below each question, write an answer based on your own experiences and your own understanding of the plot. Include some textual evidence or examples that helped you arrive at your answer.

1. When accepting his Nobel Prize in 1940, Steinbeck said, "[The] writer is delegated to declare and celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit, for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion, and love." How do Lennie and George embody Steinbeck's mission as a writer? Did he accomplish this goal in *Of Mice and Men*?

Textual Evidence:

2. Some critics have slammed Steinbeck's novels, including *Of Mice and Men*, as being overly sentimental and too moralistic. Is Steinbeck's portrayal of the world's cruelty accurate? In what way does Lennie and George's friendship trump, or overpower, that cruelty?

Textual Evidence:

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### **Represent!**

Show what you know about *Of Mice and Men* and its message about friendship in the face of cruelty. Choose one of these projects to complete and share with your teacher, classmates, and others.

### **Choice 1: Compiling Memories**

When traveling to a new place, one of the best ways to preserve your thoughts and memories is in a scrapbook. Travel scrapbooks might contain photographs, brochures, leaves, receipts, menus, and many other objects that capture the mood and experience of a journey. The Selinas Valley Library is looking for a scrapbook of Lennie and George's experience on the ranch. Because you have just finished reading *Of Mice and Men*, the library has commissioned you to compile the scrapbook!

For this project, you may create either a physical or digital scrapbook of Lennie and George's experiences on the ranch. Collect or create images, background material (such as newspaper clippings), video, and objects you think best represent the setting, themes, characters. Compile them all into a scrapbook that presents a cohesive representation of George and Lennie's journey in the Salinas Valley. You may want to refer back to your notes on setting to ensure that all the four important settings are represented in the scrapbook.

If you choose to create a physical scrapbook, take photos of each scrapbook page for upload. If you choose to create a digital scrapbook, use PowerPoint to make the scrapbook interactive. Remember, your "scraps" must be justified, so include a short (one-sentence) explanation for each inclusion. If you use any outside sources, be sure to include a Works Cited page at the end!

### **Choice 2: Spreading the Good Word**

Often, when people are faced with great tragedy, they use their experiences to motivate others and bring positive change in society. Imagine that after Lennie's death, George goes on a speaking tour to commemorate Lennie's life and spread a positive message of hope. Because you have just finished reading *Of Mice and Men*, and have a deep understand of the characters' tragic experiences, George has hired you to work as his speechwriter!

For this project, write a five-minute speech for George to deliver at a town hall. The speech should summarize George and Lennie's friendship, their experiences, and what you imagine George has learned about life through Lennie's death. Ensure that the speech embraces the novel's themes and how others could learn from George's experiences.

You may upload your speech as a Word document, or upload a video of yourself reading the speech aloud.