



OF MICE AND MEN

2011 STUDY GUIDE



American Players Theatre
PO Box 819
Spring Green, WI
www.americanplayers.org

OF MICE AND MEN BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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Cover Photo: Brian Mani and Jim DeVita

All photos by Carissa Dixon

MANY THANKS!

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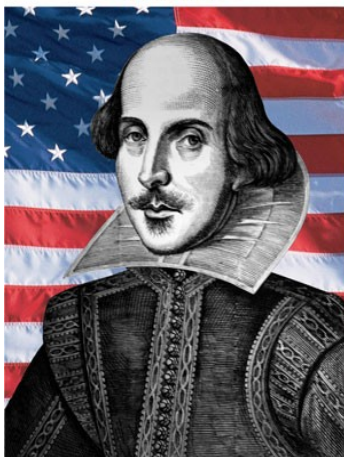


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If you have any questions or comments regarding the exercises or the information within this study guide, please contact Emily Beck, Education Coordinator, at 608-588-9207, or ebeck@americanplayers.org.

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Who's Who in *Of Mice and Men*



Lennie (Brian Mani)



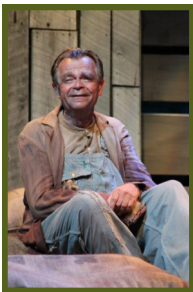
A large, lumbering, childlike migrant worker. Due to his mild mental disability, Lennie completely depends upon George, his friend and traveling companion. His love of petting soft things leads to disaster.

George (Jim DeVita)



A 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.

Candy (Paul Bentzen)



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 and offers his help in making it a reality.

Curley (Matt Schwader)



The boss's son, 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 young wife.

Curley's Wife (Colleen Madden)



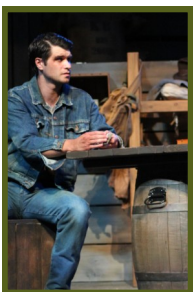
Curley's wife is never given a name and is only mentioned in reference to her husband. Steinbeck depicts Curley's wife not as a villain, but rather as a victim; she is desperately lonely and has broken dreams of a better life.

Crooks (La Shawn Banks)



Crooks, the black stable-hand, gets his name from his crooked back. Proud, bitter and caustically funny, he is isolated from the other men because of the color of his skin.

Slim (Marcus Truschinski)



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 Boss (John Lister)



The well-dressed man in charge of the ranch, and Curley's father. He is never named and appears only twice.



About the Play



George and Lennie, Depression-era migrant workers, have just lost another job. George, an intelligent man, and Lennie, a giant with limited mental abilities, have relocated hoping for work on a ranch. They stop for the night, and talk about their future. It seems they've had some problems with work and life in general due to Lennie's size and love of soft things. Illustrating the point, George finds Lennie petting a dead **MOUSE** he's been keeping in his pocket. George gets frustrated with his friend, and citing diseases, throws the mouse away.

MOUSE: The title *Of Mice and Men* comes from a poem by Robert Burns called "To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough." The famous line is: "The best laid schemes o' mice and men oft go awry."

George often complains that his life would be easier if he didn't have to take care of his companion but, it's clear they are devoted to each other. He and Lennie share a dream of buying their own piece of land, farming it, and, much to Lennie's delight, keeping rabbits. George sends Lennie to sleep by telling the often-told story of what life will be like on their farm, and especially about the rabbits.

WIFE: Curley's Wife is not given a name within the confines of the play (or the book), which only adds to the loneliness of her character. As the sole woman among men, her attempts to friend the ranch hands are misinterpreted by everyone, especially her husband.

When they reach the ranch the next day. George tells Lennie to stay quiet and let him to do all the talking because he's worried they won't hire them if they realize he's slow. George tells the foreman that they're cousins traveling together, and that Lennie was kicked in the head by a horse as a child, but is a hard worker and no threat to anyone. After they're hired, they meet Candy, an old "swamper," or handyman, with a missing hand and an ancient dog, and Curley, the boss's mean-spirited son. Curley is newly married and extremely possessive of his **WIFE**.

As fate would have it, once George and Lennie are alone in the bunkhouse, Curley's wife appears and talks with them. George senses the trouble that could come from tangling with this woman and her husband, and warns Lennie to stay away from her. Soon, the ranch-hands return from the fields for **LUNCH**, and George and Lennie meet Slim, a respected mule skinner on the ranch. Carlson, another ranch hand, tries to convince Candy to shoot his old dog, offering him a puppy to replace it. Candy refuses.

LUNCH: While the ranch hands probably ate pretty well, people without steady jobs ate delicacies such as lard sandwiches, as well as anything they could hunt or fish. Food theft was rampant.

The next day, George confides in Slim that he and Lennie are not cousins, but have been **FRIENDS** since childhood. He tells how Lennie has often gotten them into trouble, and it turns out they were forced to flee their last job because Lennie tried to touch a woman's dress and was accused of rape.

FRIENDS: George tells Slim a story about a time when he told Lennie to jump in the river, and he nearly drown. Look for a scene later in the play where Lennie briefly describes the same incident.

Slim offers Lennie one of his puppies, while Carlson continues to badger Candy to kill his old dog. When Slim agrees with Carlson, saying that death would be a relief to the suffering animal, Candy gives in. Slim goes to the barn to do some work, and Curley, who is once again searching for his wife, heads to the barn to accuse Slim of messing around with her.



About the Play



LAND was at the core of many people's hopes during the Dust Bowl - a massive drought during the Great Depression. Displaced farmer workers left the Midwest scabbling for land to grow food for their families (as portrayed in another Steinbeck novel *The Grapes of Wrath*..)

In the meantime, Candy overhears George and Lennie discussing their plans to buy **LAND**, and offers his life's savings if they will let him live there too. The three make a pact to let no one else know of their plan. Slim returns to the bunkhouse, berating Curley for his suspicions. Curley, searching for an easy target for his anger, finds Lennie and picks a fight with him. Lennie crushes Curley's hand in the altercation. Slim warns Curley that if he tries to get George and Lennie fired, he will be the laughingstock of the farm.

The next night, most of the men go to the local brothel. Lennie is left with Crooks and Candy. Curley's wife stops by to talk with them, refusing to leave until the other men come home. She notices the cuts on Lennie's face and suspects that he, and not a piece of machinery as Curley claimed, is responsible for hurting her husband.

The next day, Lennie accidentally kills his puppy in the barn. Curley's wife enters the barn, planning to escape the ranch after Curley and his father beat her. Noticing that Lennie is upset, she tries to console him. She admits that life with Curley is a disappointment, and wishes that she had followed her **DREAMS** of becoming a movie star. Lennie tells her that he loves petting soft things, and she offers to let him feel her hair. When he grabs too tightly, she cries out. In his attempt to silence her, he accidentally breaks her neck.

The characters in this story are looking for their own version of **The American DREAM**—the idea that everyone should have the chance to succeed regardless of the circumstances of their life. Part of the tragedy of *Of Mice and Men* is the collapse of this dream.

Lennie flees back to a pool of the Salinas River that George had designated as a meeting place should either of them get into trouble. As the men back at the ranch discover what has happened and gather together a lynch mob, George runs off to find Lennie. Lennie is surprised that George is not mad at him, and George once again tells the story of the farm they'll someday own. While he's talking, George puts a gun to the back of Lennie's head as he describes the rabbits. Resigned, George ends his friend's life.





APT's *Of Mice and Men*



Brian Mani and Jim DeVita

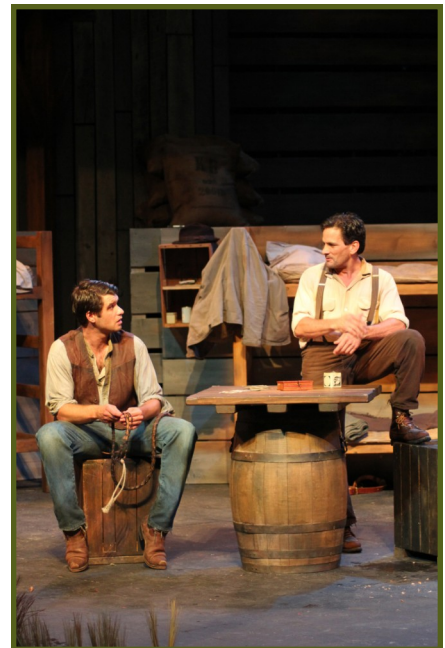
Every production of a play is different, and being on an outdoor stage is different than most. So plays at APT come with their own unique challenges (rain, heat, bugs) and amazing benefits (moonlight, birdsong, summer breeze). And the outdoors is at the forefront of everyone's minds, from designers to actors to patrons.

“Many of the scenes from the play take place between two or three characters, and require a certain degree of intimacy,” says *Of Mice and Men* director, Kate Buckley. “Outdoors, the actors need to keep those scenes close

physically and vocally, and yet they must project their emotions to the back row of our theatre. This takes great skill.”

Acting outdoors isn't the only aspect of this play that takes special skill. Most of the difficulty George, Lennie and all the other characters face are caused by The Great Depression, a difficult era brought to life by APT's talented design staff. Holly Payne, the costume designer for this production, had the opportunity (and the challenge) of keeping the costumes authentic and also comfortable for the actors.

To help protect actors from the sometimes extreme weather conditions, APT's costume designers go so far as to create wardrobe that functions as air conditioning, with pockets for ice packs built in to keep the company cool. Long-time costume designer Robert Morgan (who designed both costumes and set for *The Cure at Troy* in APT's Touchstone Theatre this season) says:



Marcus Truschinski and Jim DeVita



Costume rendering by Holly Payne

“Costumes must be built like armor but look and function like clothing. Heat, wet, athletic activity, emotional distress—all these take their toll on silk dresses and white trousers. Costume design involves intellectual acuity, dramatic insight and intense personal interaction with the actors. Satisfaction comes from the complex process of design, the eventual success onstage of the storytelling before a live audience, and, selfishly, simply creating beauty.”



APT's *Of Mice and Men*



Scenic design is another component of the plays that's near and dear to APT. With five productions on the APT stage each season, sets are put up and torn down sometimes multiple times each day. That makes for hard work for the production assistants, but also requires special attention from our designers.

Nathan Stuber (once a PA at APT himself) did a remarkable job creating a beautiful and emotionally evocative set, that serves as the backdrop of a story that, though beautiful, plays out in one of the most difficult eras in American history.



Model by Nathan Stuber.

Nate's inspiration for the set came from "a combination of the script, the aesthetic of our stage and driving through Montana, a land trapped in the past." You can see these influences in the way that the set works with APT's barn board, which is what the permanent stage is made from, and which is particularly well-suited to the scenes on the ranch.

Barns are something Nate knows pretty well, as he has been exploring them all his life. But the set is



Nate's set in action.

not primarily about duplicating a barn from the 1930s. Rather, it is trying to bring a sense of the desperation of those hard times, as well as the characters' struggles.

"The architecture in this show is not about authenticity," says Nate. "Rather, it's emotive sculpture that speaks to decay and longing."

Regardless of costuming and staging; or whether it's *Inside* or out, *Of Mice and Men* is a tragic story, but it's also a story about love, hope and friendship that holds moments of beauty. According to Kate, her favorite thing about the play is "The world the characters inhabit, the humanity found within its despair. And I love that each one of them have dreams they are trying to fulfill, even if they don't reach them."

The central characters in *Of Mice and Men*, George and Lennie, have a very simple dream: to live on their own farm. Slim comments that it's odd for the two of them to travel together, but Jim DeVita

(George in APT's production) thinks differently.

"I think George gets just as much (if not more) out of the relationship as Lennie does. Lennie has an innocence and appreciation of life that has been dulled in George after a hard life of living from hand to mouth, and trying to survive in a rough and sometimes dangerous world. George's dreams of a



APT's *Of Mice and Men*



simpler life, on his own place, working, enjoying the land, come alive when he speaks them to Lennie.”

Jim and Brian Mani (who plays Lennie) went to college together, and are very good friends themselves. “The level of trust we had to start with is wonderful,” said Jim. We didn’t have to spend weeks getting to know each other, or trusting each other—that was just there. And then we built on that.”

Jim’s favorite parts of playing opposite his real-life best friend are “the playful and fun moments with Lennie, getting to dream about a better life with him.”

But on the flip side, he says that it’s difficult when he has to be mean and yell at Lennie. “But it’s like a father screaming at a child who is about to walk across the street into traffic. The child often cries, or his feelings are hurt, because Dad scared him, or yelled at him after for what they were going to do, but it’s out of love and concern. But in the moment, it doesn’t sound like that.”



One of George’s fatherly chats.



Brian Mani and Colleen Madden

While George and Lennie’s story may not ultimately be a happy one, it is tempered with love. As Kate says in her director’s notes “understand that the end of the play expresses a profound act of love in a very harsh world.”

The tragedy in this story doesn’t just belong to George and Lennie. It belongs to all of the characters who lose their dreams, and sometimes their lives, throughout the course. Candy and Crooks’ dreams of better lives for themselves are lost with Curley’s Wife—a lonely and often misunderstood character who isn’t even given the benefit of a name. Kate says “Curley’s wife is desperately lonely. All she wants to do is talk to someone. She tries every way she can. The men misinterpret her intention.” And when she in turn misinterprets Lennie’s actions, it turns into the end for all of them.

There are important lessons to take away from the tragedy—and the hope—that runs through this story. Kate says “I think George says it himself: *‘Guys like us that work on ranches is the loneliest guys in the world. They ain’t got no family. They don’t belong no place. They ain’t got nothin’ to look ahead to. With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn*

about us.’ We all need to remember the importance of having friends and family who care about us. “

Jim adds “Ignorance is often what cause most tragedies of the world. It’s hard to hate someone if you really get to know them, no matter how different from you they are.”



Of Mice and Men Photo Summary



George and Lennie—two down-on-their-luck migrant workers during the Depression, are hoping to find work in a new town.



Lennie is slow, and George does his best to keep him out of trouble. Though George often gets impatient with his friend, he obviously cares about him very much. They dream of owning their own farm, and Lennie never gets tired of hearing about the rabbits he'll tend, and how they'll "live off the fat of the land."



George tells Lennie not to talk when they get to their new job site. Lennie ignores the advice, and George gets mad at him, but in spite of that they get jobs bucking barley.



The guys meet their new co-workers, including Curley, the boss's nasty son. Curley likes picking fights with bigger men to make himself look tough.



APT's *Of Mice and Men*



Curley's wife makes an appearance, saying she's looking for Curley, but obviously just looking for company. After she leaves, Lennie says she's pretty and George tells him to stay away from her.



George confides to Slim that he and Lennie were run out of the last town they were in when a misunderstanding caused Lennie to be accused of rape.



Candy, an old ranch worker who lost his hand on the job, offers his life savings to help buy the farm after Carlson shoots his dog. With Candy's help, George and Lennie are a month away from buying their land.



After Curley loses track of his wife again, he picks a fight with Lennie, punching him repeatedly. George tells Lennie to fight back, and he crushes Curley's hand.



APT's *Of Mice and Men*



The guys all go in to town, leaving Lennie with Candy and Crooks, the stable hand. Crooks is bitter about his lot on the ranch, and teases Lennie for a while, but eventually offers to also throw in money for the farm. Curley's wife shows up and realizes that Lennie was the one who beat up her husband. She says she's glad, and flees as the rest of the men return.



Lennie accidentally kills his puppy, and Curley's Wife tries to console him. She offers to let him touch her hair, but when he frightens her, Lennie breaks her neck while trying to keep her from yelling.



Candy finds the body and tells George, who says nothing works out and he's done with the idea of the farm. The rest of the men come in, and immediately know that it was Lennie who killed Curley's Wife. Curley organizes a lynch mob to go find Lennie and kill him.



George finds Lennie at their meeting spot. Slim has given him a gun, and as he tells the story of their farm he holds it to Lennie's head. The gunshot rings out, and the lights go down.



Classroom Activities



1. Read the first two paragraphs of Chapter One. Break up into 5 small groups. Each group will be assigned a different sense: touch, taste, sight, hearing or smell. Reread the paragraphs as a group and find as many sensory details for your sense as you can. Discuss as a class how your group's sense affected your mood and comprehension.
2. Create a detailed map of where the story takes place. Include names of towns and cities, and how they are related to the play.
3. Create a newspaper of the day after George shot Lennie. Include as many details of the event as possible in the main article. Also include advertisements, horoscopes, photos, gossip and advice columns, letters to the editor or other newsworthy events of the day.
4. Design and draw appropriate costumes for each of the main characters in the play. Include drawings for Lennie, George, Curley, Curley's wife, Candy and Slim. Attach fabric swatches and include a short description of the costume, including which scenes the costume appears.
5. Cast your own film version of *Of Mice and Men* using celebrities. Then create a movie poster including the casting, opening night, a brief summary and an eye-catching image. Defend your casting to the class.
6. Create a cause and effect diagram, explaining how each event of the book caused other events to occur. What might have happened had had one of the events not occurred? Choose an event to change, and rewrite the story based on that change.
7. Find 5—10 photographs taken during the Depression. Choose the photo that affected you the most, and write a paragraph, story or poem about why you chose it, who you think the people are, where they're from and what the photograph is depicting.
8. Research the economic and political concerns of the Great Depression. Choose from President Hoover, President Roosevelt, Wall Street, "The New Deal", Social Security, etc. Compile the information into a brochure, poster or news story including photos.
9. Break into groups. For each of characters in the story, complete the chart with direct quotes of both direct and indirect characterizations. Then characterize them as protagonist, antagonist, other, AND round, flat, dynamic or static. Did the seeing the play affect your selections? Why?
 - **Round Characters:** complicated and interesting to the reader
 - **Flat Characters:** simple and under-developed
 - **Dynamic:** grow or change emotionally or learn a lesson.
 - **Static:** change or grow very little (or not at all)
 - **Direct Characterization:** when the author or narrator tells the reader what a character is like. Ex: "Jennifer is a good student."
 - **Indirect Characterization:** when the author gives information about a character and allows the readers to draw their own conclusions by looking at the character's own thoughts, feelings and actions, as well as what other characters say or feel about them.



Exercises



1. Write a journal from George's point of view about George and Lennie's adventures. A minimum of ten entries should be included, and should focus on major events in the character's life, and how he would respond to that event. Remember, you are George—you should write the way George talks, as well as from his point of view.
2. Write a different ending for the story. What if George hadn't killed Lennie? What if Curley had reached Lennie first? What if Lennie had been arrested and put on trial? You choose from where the story changes.
3. The killing of Candy's dog was significant on several levels. Discuss the significance of the death, including the concept of old age and worth, and the foreshadowing of Lennie's death. Include any similarities or differences between the death of Candy's dog and Lennie's death.
4. The concept of "having someone" weaves through the play. Discuss the significance of this idea, along with the theme of loneliness. Be sure to include observations about the "outcasts" on the ranch, including Lennie, Crooks, Candy and Curley's wife.
5. Analyze George's role in the play. Consider his role as a worker, caretaker and friend. How does this change throughout the play?
6. Conduct an interview with George, Lennie, Curley, Curley's Wife or Slim. Write at least 10 questions that will give the character a chance to tell his story from his point of view. You may ask questions, challenge a situation, express a complaint or make a suggestion. Then answer the questions in the persona of the character you choose.
7. Write about what you would have done in the same situation, had you been one of the characters in *Of Mice and Men*. Describe your character. What would he or she contribute to the plot?

Classroom Activities and Exercises Used with permission.

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