

1: Context-The Great Depression

- John Steinbeck was born in 1902 in Salinas, California, a region that became the setting for much of his fiction, including 'Of Mice and Men' which was written in 1937. The novella is set in the 1930s against the backdrop of the United States' economic catastrophe, the Great Depression.

The Great Depression

- In 1929, the US stock market Wall Street Crash plunged the USA into economic depression. 16 million shares were sold on the stock market which caused the US economy to completely collapse. The Great Depression was a worldwide period of economic uncertainty and decline. The situation was made worse by the 1930s Dust Bowl, where dust storms swept across America destroying crops.

Migrant/ Itinerant Workers

- Unemployment during the Great Depression rose to 25%. As a result, many farmers migrated to California to look for work, as this state was perceived to have spare land and a lot of work. However, because so many people moved to California (an estimated 1.3 million), work was not so easy to find. Ranch workers often moved from one place to another looking for work, as jobs on ranches would be temporary and seasonal. Wages for men like these were low and jobs were scarce, so the lifestyle that they lived was very insecure.

2: Context– Oppression in Society 1900s

Oppression - prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority

Race and Segregation

- Racism:** prejudice or discrimination directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.
- Racial discrimination was not illegal in 1930s America. White and black people were segregated and black people were considered as second class citizens. Black people were paid less than white people and they had to work harder than everyone else, often given the more 'dirty work'.
- Jim Crow Laws, were laws in America enforced between 1876 and 1965 that provided a legal basis for segregating and discriminating against African-Americans.

Disability : People with disabilities were treated very unsympathetically by the majority of society. Abnormal behaviour and low levels of economic productivity were thought of as a burden to society. Anything 'abnormal' or different such as disability was ridiculed or feared.

Age: The Depression hit the elderly particularly hard. Those who were retired or close to retirement watched a lifetime of savings disappear, and they weren't well enough to work or couldn't find the jobs that would allow them to rebuild their lost investments.

Gender : Women were not treated equally compared to men. Instead of working, most of society believed that a woman's place was in the home. This was largely because of the patriarchal society (male dominated) in which women at the time lived, where women were considered inferior to men.

3: Terminology

- foreshadowing:** clues or hints of a future event - *Steinbeck utilises foreshadowing in the novella, to hint at future events.*
- cyclical Structure:** structure is cyclical when the conditions at the end are in some way the same as the start - '*Of Mice and Men*' has a cyclical structure as the setting at the start and end of the novella is similar.
- novella:** a work of fiction that is longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. *Of Mice and Men* is a novella.
- Americanisms:** a word or phrase, feature of grammar, spelling or pronunciation that originated in the US e.g *God sakes, gonna, Jes',*
- colloquialisms:** words or phrases that are informal - '*He's just a bindle-stiff..*'
- derogatory language:** a word or phrase that has negative connotations, shows a lack of respect and is usually a form of criticism e.g *tart*

4: Vocabulary

- Promiscuous:** (of a person) having lots of different sexual partners or sexual relationships –*Steinbeck presents Curley's wife as a promiscuous character through the words of the other ranchmen such as Candy.*
- Vulnerable:** exposed to the possibility of being attacked– physically or emotionally; in need of special care or protection. *Lennie and Curley's wife are vulnerable characters.*
- Segregation:** the action or state of setting someone or something apart from others, being separated. *Crooks is segregated from the other ranchmen because of his race.*
- Oppression:** prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority. *Curley's wife faces oppression due to her gender.*
- Discrimination:** unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people on the grounds of race, age or sex. *Black people faced discrimination in 1930s America.*

5: Grammar– Use of Speech marks/Rules

- Punctuation is used in direct speech to separate spoken words, or dialogue, from the rest of a story. The words spoken by a character sit inside speech marks:
"Did you hear that noise?" whispered George.
- Every time there is a new speaker in the conversation, a new line is used. Each new section of dialogue is like beginning a new paragraph, so in a printed novel you will see that each new line is also indented - this is when a line starts further in from the margin. Each new line of direct speech should also start with a capital letter:
"I think there is something moving in the bushes," George said.
"I can't see anything," said Lennie.
- Each section of direct speech should end with a punctuation mark. If there is no reporting clause then this is likely to be a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark:
"Listen! I definitely heard something that time!"

6: Themes

- Friendship:** friendships are symbiotic relationships, where people share their talents and qualities to help one another. In 'Of Mice and Men', there are many of these friendships: George and Lennie, Crooks and Lennie, and George and Slim. These friendships show how each pair benefit from companionship.
- The American Dream:** a happy way of living that is thought of by many Americans as something that can be achieved by anyone in the U.S. especially by working hard and becoming successful
- Loneliness** - Loneliness is an inevitable part of life, which many individuals struggle with. It is an emotional response to a lack of companionship and communication with others, which has a huge impact in one's overall behaviour. Some impacted individuals may try to end their loneliness; others become hopeless and bitter. Steinbeck uses characters to reflect on the discriminative time period that ultimately lead to the characters' loneliness.