OF MICE AND MEN
By John Steinbeck
But little Mouse, you are not alone,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes of mice and men
Go often awry,
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,
For promised joy!

Still you are blest, compared with me!
The present only touches you:
But oh! I backward cast my eye,
On prospects dreary!
And forward, though I cannot see,
I guess and fear!

From the poem “To A Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough” by Robert Burns, 1785.
TheatreWorks thanks our generous donors to the Education Department, whose financial support enables us to provide in-depth arts education throughout Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area. During the 2010/11 season alone, we served over 23,000 students, patients, and community members, making almost 90,000 educational interactions.

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FOR TEACHERS

Students matinee performances of Of Mice and Men will be held on April 24 and 26, 2012, beginning at 11:00am at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts. The play is approximately 2 hours and 25 minutes long, including a 15-minute intermission. The play will be followed by a discussion with actors from the show.

Student audiences are often the most rewarding and demanding audiences that an acting ensemble can face. Since we hope every show at TheatreWorks will be a positive experience for both audience and cast, we ask you to familiarize your students with the theatre etiquette described on the “For Students” pages.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This guide is arranged in worksheets. Each worksheet or reading may be used independently or in conjunction with others to serve your educational goals. Together, the worksheets prepare students for the workshops, as well as seeing the student matinee of Of Mice and Men produced by TheatreWorks, and for discussing the performance afterwards.

Throughout the guide you will see several symbols:

_means “Photocopy Me!”_ Pages with this symbol are meant to be photocopied and handed directly to students.

_means “English Language Arts.”_ Pages with this symbol feature lessons that are catered to California State English Language Arts standards.

_means “Theatre Arts.”_ Pages with this symbol feature lessons that are catered to California State Theatre Arts standards.

_means “Social Studies.”_ Pages with this symbol feature lessons that are catered to California State Social Studies standards.
FOR STUDENTS

THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

All the work that goes into a production would mean nothing if there wasn’t an audience for whom to perform. As the audience, you are also a part of the production, helping the actors onstage tell the story. When the performance is about to begin, the lights will dim. This is a signal for the actors and the audience to put aside concerns and conversation and settle into the world of the play.

The performers expect the audience’s full attention and focus. Performance is a time to think inwardly, not a time to share your thoughts aloud. Talking to neighbors (even in whispers) carries easily to others in the audience and to the actors on stage. It is disruptive and distracting.

There is no food allowed in the theatre: soda, candy, and other snacks are noisy and, therefore, distracting. Please keep these items on the bus or throw them away before you enter the audience area. There are no backpacks allowed in the theatre.

Walking through the aisles during the performance is extremely disruptive. Actors occasionally use aisles and stairways as exits and entrances. The actors will notice any movement in the performance space. Please use the restroom and take care of all other concerns outside before the show.

Cell phones and other electronic devices should be turned off before the performance begins. When watch alarms, cell phones, and pagers go off it is very distracting for the actors and the audience. Please do not text during the performance, as it is distracting to the audience members around you.

What to bring with you:

- Introspection
- Curiosity
- Questions
- Respect
- An open mind

What to leave behind:

- Judgements
- Cell phones, etc.
- Backpacks
- Food
- Attitude

Renderings by Costume Designer Allison Connor
75 years after the publication of *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck’s remarkable power to move and shake us remains astonishing. His profound understanding of the human spirit—its admirable strengths and its inevitable weaknesses—is both inspiring and distressing. Despite the disillusionment of the Depression, he pairs the very human dream of family and fulfillment with the very American dream of success and security. Yet he acknowledges that for many these are dreams deferred. Steinbeck sees life as a dubious battle between humanity’s potential for collaboration and its tendency toward self-interest and intolerance.

*Of Mice and Men* endures because it is many things: a hymn to friendship and brotherhood, an indictment of prejudice, an ode to the dispossessed, a protest against poverty, a cry for help for the developmentally disabled, and a defense of dreams. It is a vision of life at the bottom of a society preoccupied with rising to the top. It is a tragedy whose fatal flaw is not found in an individual but in a culture too unforgiving to care for its own. Steinbeck offers a window on the world of the common man of the 1930s, a view of the grueling transient life at the bottom rung of America’s social ladder.

Three quarters of a century later, we have to wonder how much our world has changed. As we slowly emerge from the worst recession since the ’30s, the Georges and Lennies of our times struggle to survive at the edges of society much as they did when Steinbeck captured them in words years ago. They work the fields, wander the streets, sleep in the battered cars and concrete overpasses of a California in which the haves and have-nots grow further apart every day.

For Steinbeck’s migrant workers George and Lennie, a powerful friendship and a shared dream of the future make their difficult journey worth the taking. If that dream proved elusive in their America, perhaps it is more attainable in our own. We have taken many steps forward since the days of the Depression. We stood up to prejudice, and embraced diversity as never before; we wove a safety net for the least fortunate in society—it isn’t perfect but it’s there all the same. The soaring works of John Steinbeck remind us of how far we’ve come and what a distance we have to go.

Robert Kelley, *Of Mice and Men* director and TheatreWorks Artistic Director

connections:

In the director’s statement above there are a two bolded quotes. Discuss these quotes as a class or have your students pair share.

PROMPTS: What are your dreams for their future? Is the “American Dream” still obtainable to everyone today? Do more people today have the possibility of reaching the American Dream?

Do you think that “we still live a culture that is too unforgiving to care for it’s own?” Apply this idea to current events in the news, on things you’ve read on the internet, and happenings in your community. Who are the people today that might have to face a “dream deferred?” Why? What is society’s responsibility today to help others reach their dreams?
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOHN STEINBECK

John Steinbeck grew up in California’s Salinas Valley and attended Stanford University, leaving without a degree. He won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction 1940 for The Grapes of Wrath, was a war correspondent in both World War II and the Vietnam War, has had fourteen of his works turned into films and/or plays and is one of nine Americans to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. These are some of the highlights of a long literary career, but they only scratch the surface of the man that Steinbeck was.

Before he made his living as an author, Steinbeck earned his keep doing manual labor. Not only did he spend time helping to build Madison Square Garden in New York City, he worked as a supervisor for Sprekels Sugar Company on one of the company’s ranches in Salinas where he met men who would appear as characters in Of Mice and Men.

Although he is best known for his works about central California, Steinbeck’s writing covers a breadth of topics. His first novel, Cup of Gold—A Life of Henry Morgan, Buccaneer, with Occasional Reference to History, was about a real life pirate. The Log from the Sea of Cortez is about his work assisting his friend Ed Ricketts with oceanographic research, The Wayward Bus is from a trip to Russia with photographer Robert Capa, and Travels with Charley is an account of a cross-country trip he took with his poodle, Charley.

Steinbeck also wrote several movies unrelated to his literature including Viva Zapata! (directed by Elia Kazan), Forgotten Village (a documentary about modern medicine coming to a traditional Mexican village), and Alfred Hitchcock’s Lifeboat, although he objected to racist changes made to his script and unsuccessfully tried to have his name removed from it. He was friends with both Elia Kazan and Arthur Miller, and saw each called before the House Un-American Activities Committee, Kazan naming names and Miller refusing to do so, which meant a contempt of Congress citation and a trial. Steinbeck was the only person to publically support the playwright. He wrote in an article in Esquire,

If I were in Arthur Miller’s shoes, I do not know what I would do, but I could wish, for myself and for my children, that I would be brave enough to fortify and defend my private morality as he has. I feel profoundly that our country is better served by individual courage and morals than by the safe and public patriotism which Dr. Johnson called “the last refuge of scoundrels.”

It is this strength of character that is recognized in the John Steinbeck Award, ‘In The Souls of the People.’ It is presented to artists who capture “the spirit of Steinbeck’s empathy, commitment to democratic values, and belief in the dignity of the common man.” Past recipients include Arthur Miller, Bruce Springsteen, Joan Baez, Sean Penn, Garrison Keilior, and Studs Terkel. His full impact will never be known, but it is thoroughly recognized. The area around his hometown of Salinas is now known as “Steinbeck Country” and his boyhood home is The Steinbeck House, a restaurant/museum on the National Register of Historic Places. Salinas also hosts an annual Steinbeck Festival and is the home to The National Steinbeck Center.
PLOT SUMMARY

George and Lennie are itinerant laborers in the depths of the Depression. They move all over California to find work. George looks after Lennie who is developmentally disabled but stronger than most men. They fled Weed, California after an unfortunate incident and now find themselves on a ranch outside Soledad with a handful of other men who regularly work the ranch. The boss’ son, Curley, is newly married and his pretty wife causes a lot of trouble among the men. George and Lennie, however, are determined to stay out of trouble and save up enough money to buy a piece of land for themselves. As tensions mount and allegiances change that dream is in put jeopardy.

THE PLAY-NOVELETTE:
STEINBECK’S LITERARY EXPERIMENT

Unlike the adaption of many novels to the stage, John Steinbeck wrote the theatrical version of Of Mice and Men himself. He hoped to create a new literary form, one that has since come to be called the “play-novelette.” Steinbeck came to this idea through his view of the modern novel, saying,

Now if it is true, and I believe it is, that the preoccupation of the modern novelist lies in these themes which are most poignantly understood by a group, that novelist limits the possibility of being understood by making it impossible for groups to be exposed to his work. In the reading of a novel there are involved only the author, the novel, and the reader; but in the seeing of a play there are the author, the play, the players, and the whole audience, and each one of these contributes a vital part to the whole effect.

His idea was to combine these forms and create a new one that would serve both original formats while bringing something to each. In his mind, “To read an objective novel is to see a little play in your head. All right, why not make it so you can see it on a stage?” It was not his idea that all novels should be written in this way. This new format was a literary experiment intended to allow people to “see the novel” when they might not be able to afford a book or have the skills to read it. Steinbeck thought this would enhance both book and the play because,

the novel form would integrate tone and play in one entity, would allow the reader, whether actor, director or lay reader, a sense of the whole much more complete than he can get from the present play form...But the novel itself would be interfered with by such a method in only one way, and that is that it would be short. Actually the discipline, the necessity of sticking to the theme… the brevity and necessity of holding an audience could influence the novel only for the better.

He also believed,

A play written in the physical technique of the novel would have a number of advantages. Being more persuasive than the play form, it would go a great way toward making the play easy to read for people who cannot and will not learn to absorb the play symbols...In the second place the novel’s ability to describe scene and people in detail would not only make for a better visual picture to the reader, but would be of value to director, stage designer, and actor, for these latter would know more about the set and characters.

Interestingly, Steinbeck considered his “experiment” (though not the novel) a failure. The play was produced in 1937 in San Francisco directly from the book but he said, “it wouldn’t play; and it wouldn’t play because I had not sufficient experience and knowledge in stagecraft.” That problem was solved by director/writer George S. Kaufman who directed the play’s Broadway debut later that year and who Steinbeck allowed to alter the format to make it stageworthy. The Broadway version played 207 performances and won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award.

By Vickie Rozell, TheatreWorks Dramaturg
Of Mice and Men is a story with a lot of layers. Many events happen in a short time. Identify the 6 most important events in the play. Then number them 1–6 and assign them to a box. Draw a small picture of the event in the box and write a brief description of the event on the lines below the boxes or divide the class into six groups and have each group form one tableau. Using their bodies and imaginations, to tell the story in six frozen pictures.
THE SETTING & GEOGRAPHY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Having been raised in Salinas, California, the northern part of the Golden State is one of the primary influential locations throughout Steinbeck's many novels and works of non-fiction. Nonetheless, Steinbeck says he found it “difficult to write about [his] native place, northern California,” though he felt that it should “be the easiest” to write about.

Steinbeck uses Northern California to not only address the theme of environmentalism, but also to expound on the idea of nostalgia and how and why people often find it necessary to cling to the past instead of seeing the present or the future. After meeting with some of his old friends and his family, Steinbeck contemplated how much they had changed. But after reviewing it further, he came to the conclusion that “[s]ometimes the view of change is distorted by a change in oneself. The room which seemed so large is shrunk, the mountain has become a hill.” Steinbeck realized that maybe it was not his friends or family who had changed, but he himself. The concept of not accepting change by clinging to an often distorted perception of the past fits into the larger theme of the American people refusing to see that they are not living in a golden age anymore, but are instead perpetuating new and dangerous habits that threaten their well-being and the stability of the natural environment.

Salinas Riverbank: Of Mice and Men begins and ends at the Salinas riverbank a few miles outside of the ranch where George and Lennie start working. George and Lennie camp there for the night prior to moving on to the ranch in the morning. Readers are introduced to the men’s dream of owning a plot of land there for the first time. George also forebodingly instructs Lennie to return to the riverbank in case he gets into any trouble. While at the beginning of the story the space represents hope in the American Dream, it comes to represent the shattering of that hope as George must shoot Lennie there in order to protect him from Curley’s wrath at the end of the story.

The Bunkhouse: Lennie, George, and the rest of the ranch workers, except for Crooks, live in the bunkhouse. There the men make an attempt at creating some sort of home life and bonding with one another. The bunkhouse also serves as a symbol of elite masculinity in the text as outsiders such as the feminine Curley’s wife and the African-American Crooks are usually barred entry. The men are quite antsy and desire Curley’s wife to leave immediately when she makes an appearance. Steinbeck also reveals that Crooks has only been admitted into the bunk house for a holiday celebration.

Crooks’ Room/The Barn: Living in seclusion in a small, isolated room, Crooks lives a bitter and lonely life in the barn, which is a dark and foreboding place in the story. A critical conversation takes place there between Crooks and Lennie that reveals to readers how heavily solitude and loneliness can weigh on a person. That Crooks is forced to live in the barn with the animals also demonstrates his society’s view of African-Americans as subhuman, more fit to dwell with the animals in the barn than in the bunkhouse with men during the time period. Finally, Lennie accidentally kills Curley’s wife in the barn at the end of the story.

From The MHCC for Steinbeck Studies, http://as.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/teaching_steinbeck/index.jsp?val=teaching_of_mice_and_men_setting
Of Mice and Men is set in the 1930s, right in the middle of the Great Depression. In California, where much of Steinbeck’s work takes place, there were strikes and bloody riots. There was grinding poverty and fear.

Two men were lynched in San Jose. 150 striking farmworkers were rounded up like cattle in rural Contra Costa County. There was a "red scare" in Salinas, and what looked like revolution in San Francisco. Millions of people were out of work, and some were near starvation.

The ‘30s really began in 1929 with a stock market crash and ended in 1941 with a war. San Francisco began the decade deep in gloom and ended by throwing a huge party on Treasure Island—an artificial creation built in the bay for the Golden Gate International Exposition.

Los Angeles staged a glorious Olympics in 1932. That same year, San Diego, the city where the sun always shines, was the suicide capital of the country. Oct. 29, 1929, was the day the stock market crashed—but it was more than just a Wall Street problem.

The bottom dropped out of the economy almost at once. The unemployment rate, only 3 percent in 1925, was 25 percent in 1933. Some 9,000 banks failed across the United States, farm prices dropped by half, the stock market lost 80 percent of its value between 1930 and 1933.

Thousands of farmers, driven off the land by technological change and the Dust Bowl, settled in towns made of old crates and cardboard, named Hoovervilles for Herbert Hoover, the President of the United States, who kept saying prosperity was “just around the corner.” In Oklahoma City, there was a Hooverville 10 miles long and 10 miles wide.
As the naturally occurring grasslands of the southern Great Plains were replaced with cultivated fields, the rich soil lost its ability to retain moisture and nutrients and began to erode. Soil conservation practices were not widely employed by farmers during this era, so when a seven-year drought began in 1931, followed by the coming of dust storms in 1932, many of the farms literally dried up and blew away creating what became known as the "Dust Bowl."

Driven by the Great Depression, drought, and dust storms, thousands of farmers packed up their families and made the difficult journey to California where they looked to find work, hoping the state's mild climate allowed for a long growing season and a diversity of crops with staggered planting and harvesting cycles. For people whose lives had revolved around farming, this seemed like an ideal place to look for work.

Although the Dust Bowl included many Great Plains states, the migrants were generically known as "Okies," referring to the approximately 20 percent who were from Oklahoma. Most were of Anglo-American descent with family and cultural roots in the poor rural South.

In the homes they left, few had been accustomed to living with modern conveniences such as electricity and indoor plumbing. Many Americans held conservative religious and political beliefs and were ethnocentric in their attitude toward other ethnic/cultural groups, with whom they had had little contact prior to their arrival in California.

Such attitudes sometimes led to the use of derogatory language and negative stereotyping of cultural outsiders, especially towards Mexican and "Okie" workers, as well as toward the families of migrant workers in general.
Comparisons between this economic recession and the Great Depression are common, but the granddaddy of all downturns was far worse. Look at the facts below, comparing what Americans went through in the 1930s and what Americans are struggling with today.

### The Economy: Then & Now

**Great Depression vs. ‘Great Recession’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th><strong>Great Depression</strong></th>
<th><strong>‘Great Recession’</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank failures</td>
<td>9,096 — 50% of banks (Jan. 1930 – March 1933)</td>
<td>57 – 0.6% of banks (Dec. 2007 – May 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic decline</td>
<td>-26.5% (1929 - 1933)</td>
<td>-3.3% (SSecond quarter 2008 - first quarter 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biggest decline in Dow Jones industrial average</td>
<td>-89.2% (Sept. 3, 1929 – July 8, 1932)</td>
<td>-63.8% (Oct. 9, 2007 - March 9, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in prices</td>
<td>-25% (1929 – 1933)</td>
<td>+0.5% (Dec. 2007-March 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency spending programs</td>
<td>1.5% of GDP for 1 year (Increase in 1934 budget deficit)</td>
<td>2.6% of GDP for 2 years (2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States’ response</td>
<td>Raise taxes, cut spending</td>
<td>Federal stimulus plan gives fiscal relief to states to lessen impact of tax increases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in money supply by Federal Reserve</td>
<td>17% (1933)</td>
<td>1.26% (September 2008 – May 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: FDIC, Federal Reserve; Commerce Department; Dow Jones; Christina Romer, Obama economic adviser, "Lessons from the Great Depression for Economic Recovery in 2009" (March 9) and JEC testimony*

### Connections:

Break off into pair or small groups and review the facts above. Discuss the similarities and the differences of the economic downturns. Do you think things are better or worse today? Do you think that characters like George and Lennie still exist in the modern recession? Who do you think suffers the most when the economy is not doing well?
SELECTED TIMELINE FOR 1930s TRANSIENT WORKERS

Transient workers might walk for days at a time without eating, carrying everything they owned with them. Some rode inside or on top of freight train cars. Some formed or joined hobo camps. They all had difficulty finding food, drinking water, a place to bathe, a chance to care for their clothing, healthcare, and a place to sleep. Sometimes they slept in a tent city or found a work camp that had room for them. They might find occasional short-term work, and few might gain a career. Too often, they were treated as varmints to eliminate and unjustly tagged “dirty, dishonest, and lazy.” Training programs that finally became effective at the middle of the Great Depression provided many of the survivors with necessities and skills for future work.

1931
• March 31: Davis-Bacon Act states that prevailing wages (union scale) are to be paid on Federal construction contracts from this date forward.

1932
• June: Revenue Act of 1932, the largest peacetime tax increase in US history.
• July 21st: Emergency Relief and Construction Act and Norris-La Guardia Act protected labor unions from anti-trust suits, private damage suits, and court injunctions.

1933
• May 12: Agricultural Adjustment Act passed and the United States pays farmers not to grow crops.
• May 12: Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA).
• November 8: Civil Works Administration (CWA) created by the President.

1934
• February: Civil Works Emergency Relief Act.
• August 13: “Li’l Abner” comic strip begun by cartoonist Al Capp, satirizing the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression, and America Federal Surplus Relief Corporation.

1935
• April: Works Progress Administration (WPA).
• July: National Labor Relations Act (the Wagner Act).
• August: Social Security Act.

1937
• May: US Economy enters a second depression.
• July: Farm Security Agency (FSA) set up labor camps for migrant farm workers, provided medical care, and helped with job placement.

1938
• Supreme Court decides National Labor Relations Board v. Mackay Radio & Telegraph. Companies may hire permanent replacements for striking workers in an economic strike. Economic recovery would not begin until the USA declares war on Japan after Pearl Harbor in 1941.

From Hub Pages: http://pattyinglishms.hubpages.com/hub/Fighting-the-Great-
THE AMERICAN DREAM
IS IT STILL POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE?

In Of Mice and Men, Lennie and George are victims of the American Dream. According to this idea, if you work hard, make enough money, and put all your energy into climbing the socio-economic ladder, you can achieve anything and have what you most desire. For Lennie and George, their dream as hardworking Americans is to buy a piece of land that they can farm raise animals on, including rabbits. They soon discover that others, such as Candy, are also hoping to own property and make their living off the land.

Today, many people still try to achieve the American Dream by doing well in school, working hard at their jobs, and providing for their families. For a lot of Americans, the idea of home ownership is key, but as the last few years have proven, it is more and more difficult for people to buy a house, pay it off, and keep it for themselves.

Imagine what would happen if today’s recession turned into a full blown Great Depression, and you become a victim of the downfall. Think about what the characters in Of Mice and Men had to face, what struggles they encountered, and the hard choices they had to make. In this scenario, the bank is threatening to take away your home. Creditors are calling your house, demanding payment for overdue bills. Family members are losing their jobs and cannot find work anywhere.

Write the opening monologue to a play that is about you and your family struggling to make ends meet and whether or not you still believe the American Dream is something that can be attained. What tough decisions will be made? Where will you go if you cannot stay in your home? How will you eat? Where will you sleep? How will you survive? Use the backside of this page if you need more space to complete the monologue.

YOU:
(talking directly to the audience)
The power struggle in *Of Mice and Men* can be seen through the way none of the characters ever seem to win. The characters in both the book and the play are surrounded by an atmosphere of strength, but some of the characters are not. Sometimes the characters rebel and fight for domination over each other. On the other hand, some characters struggle to be friendly and respectful to everyone else at all times. The question that Steinbeck raises in this story, then, is who has power (whether rightfully earned or not) and who is left without power?

**George** has an almost natural power that he dictates to Lennie and the residents at the ranch respect him for this. Lennie on the other hand, has a strange type of power that is different from George.

**Lennie** is a tall character who is very powerful. However, Lennie is seemingly lost without George and lacks power when George is not around. When George is not there, Lennie can accomplish nothing on his own.

**Slim** is one of the most influential of all the characters at the ranch. He is very strong and influential, but he is also humble which makes him sincere. In the novel *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck writes "Slim doesn't have to wear high heeled boots to say he wasn't a working man."

**Curley** is in the center of an ongoing power struggle on the ranch. Conflicts arise anytime he feels he is not being given the respect the authority that he feels he deserved. Additionally, Curley has no control over his wife, something that is deemed unmanly and makes him seem weak in the eyes of the other men.

**connections:**

Break off into pairs or small groups and review the characters in *Of Mice and Men*.

Discuss why the idea of power is important in the story. Some of these people and animals are weak, some are strong. Together as a group, write "weak" or "strong" next to each character below:

(a) Candy ...................................................
(b) Curley ...................................................
(c) Slim ....................................................
(d) Lennie ..................................................
(e) a puppy ...............................................
(f) a mouse .............................................
(g) a rabbit .............................................

After you have assigned "weak" or "strong" to the characters, rank them in order of who you think is the strongest, with the person who holds the most power on the left the least amount of power on the right. Use seven students and create a hierarchy for the characters in *Of Mice and Men* using the opinions of the entire class.
A WAY WITH WORDS
THE LANGUAGE IN OF MICE AND MEN

Steinbeck’s writing style mirrors his characters. Steinbeck himself was very well spoken and eloquent, but as an author, he writes as the men of his books would literally speak. The language of both the play and the book is simple but compelling—just like the characters. Because the language is easy to understand, it’s even more extraordinary that it can carry such lofty themes, feelings, and ideas.

Though the characters never gush about each other, it’s clear that they feel deeply. Steinbeck achieves this by using simple language to build characters who are more than what they say. For example, while George says he and Lennie just got used to each other, what he’s really feeling is that their friendship is the only thing he’s ever really had to hold on to. The language, like the men on the ranch, seems simple enough, but it’s more “still waters run deep” than “OMG you’re my BFF4L.”

Steinbeck uses his writing style as another means to suggest that every story is important, no matter whose story it is. Though these characters are working class people who don’t have access to big vocabularies or grand philosophies, they can still communicate about the things that really matter.

This all comes through in the dialogue that dominates the book, and is only occasionally augmented by the narration. The narrative style can differ slightly from the simplicity of the dialogue (like when the narrator is so effusive in describing Slim), but usually even the narration tells the most gripping stuff in a straightforward manner. When George kills Lennie, Steinbeck lets the language be as stark and straightforward as the act, making it all the more shocking. Part of Steinbeck’s brilliance is this subtle usage of language: when he needs to make words sing, he can, but the action doesn’t seem like it’s clouded over with poetry. Instead, it just reads like real life.

Take a look at the vocabulary words below. These examples illustrate the kind of terms used by the men on the farm:

- bindle: a bed roll and/or pack of personal belongings.
- jack: money
- graybacks: lice
- tick: mattress
- buck: a man
- bucker: those who move or load heavy objects (sacks of grain, for example)
- skinner: a driver of a draft (team of animals)
- tart: prostitute
- found: free food and lodging in addition to wages
- hoosegow: jail
- hame: part of the collar for a draft animal
- booby hatch: insane asylum
- floozy: cheap, immoral woman
- snooker: a variation of pool played with 15 red balls and 6 balls of assorted colors

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| GEORGE doesn’t answer.) Well, I think Curley’s married himself a tart. |continued... |
| GEORGE. (Casually.) He ain’t the first. Black queen on a red king. Yes, sir. . . . there’s plenty done that! | |
| CANDY. (Moves toward door, leading dog out with him.) I got to be settin’ out the wash basins for the guys. The teams’ll be in before long. You guys gonna buck barley? | |
| GEORGE. Yeah. | |
| CANDY. You won’t tell Curley nothing I said? | |
Using Steinbeck’s writing style and the language of the time, write a scene between two characters that could take place in the same world as Of Mice and Men. Create your own original characters, define who they are to each other, and some of the problems they are facing in their lives. Turn your characters’ conversation into a small scene. Try to use at least five of the words from the vocabulary list on the previous page.

**TIME:** Summer Afternoon, 1937

**SETTING:** A farm in Northern California

**CHARACTER 1:** (name, age, a unique trait): ___________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** (name, age, a unique trait): ___________________________________________

**CHARACTER 1:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 1:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 1:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 1:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 1:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 1:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 1:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 1:** ________________________________________________________________

**CHARACTER 2:** ________________________________________________________________
AN ARTFUL CONTROVERSY:  
AN AMERICAN CLASSIC, OR BAN IT?

Of Mice And Men is considered by many to be a timeless piece of American literature and one of John Steinbeck’s greatest works. For years, readers of the book and audience members for the play have come away from the work with a genuinely moving depiction of the struggle between the dream of the self-made man and the reality of those trying to live it. Its tragic climax has become a classic moment. Yet many are shocked to see that Of Mice and Men is ranked highly in the American Library Association’s list of banned and challenged books. Over the last ten years, Of Mice and Men provoked the following controversies:

2001
• Banned for using offensive language, racism, violence, and being unsuited to age group.

2003
• Challenged as required reading at Grandville (MI) high school for “racism, profanity and foul language.”
• Banned in George County (MS) schools for profanity.

2004
• Challenged in the Normal (IL) Community High Schools because the book contains “racial slurs, profanity, violence and does not represent traditional values.”

2005
• Challenged in the Normal (IL) Community High Schools because the book contains “racial slurs, profanity, violence and does not represent traditional values.” An alternative book, Steinbeck’s The Pearl was offered but rejected by the family challenging the novel. The committee then recommended The House on Mango Street and The Way to Rainy Mountain as alternatives.

2007
• Retained in the Greencastle-Antrim (PA) tenth-grade English classes. A complaint was filed because of “racial slurs” and profanity used throughout the novel. The book had been used in the high school for more than thirty years, and those who object to its content have the option of reading an alternative book.

2008
• Challenged at the Newton (IA) High School because of concerns about profanity and the portrayal of Jesus Christ. Newton High School has required students to read the book since at least the early 1980’s.
• Retained in the Olathe (KS) 9th-grade curriculum despite a parent calling the novel a “worthless, profanity-riddled book” which is “derogatory towards African Americans, women, and the developmentally disabled.”

connections:

Those who have advocated that Steinbeck’s book be banned most often cite the sheer volume of swearing, as well as the carefree (yet period accurate) racial slurs and descriptions of segregation. Some have concerns about the violent ending. One complainant referenced the book’s “treatment of the retarded” as a problem.

PROMPTS: Do you think Of Mice and Men (the book or the play) should be banned? Why or why not? Pair share about why you think we still make Of Mice and Men required reading. Explain why you think it is important to read even today or if you think there is offensive material in it that might merit it being banned.
PUBLIC REACTION TO THE NOVEL

John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men is a fascinating book. It was chosen as a Book of the Month Club selection before it was published and sold 117,000 copies in the first few weeks. The New York Times said, “it is a long time since [the reviewer] laid eyes on anything as completely disarming ….under Mr. Steinbeck’s touch it is also strong, moving, and very funny.”

The book did have its detractors. Some readers criticized it because it took an unflinching look at working men. Steinbeck was accused of being a communist (which he wasn’t) because he illuminated the lives of migrant workers and other societal outcasts including immigrants and African Americans. As much as the right wanted him to stop telling the stories of the workers, which led to accusations of him being anti-business, the left wanted him to use his novels to demand social change. Also, people objected to the earthy language, to which Steinbeck responded, “For too long the language of books was different from the language of men. To the men I write about profanity is adornment and ornament and is never vulgar and I try to write it so.”

Of Mice and Men’s stage adaptation played 207 performances and received 1937’s Best Play Award from the New York Drama Critics’ Circle. The New York Times said, “Steinbeck has told [the story] with reticence and integrity, and the theatre has had the genius to look at it from his point of view.”

However, in 1939 censors in Providence, Rhode Island banned the road company of the play as “cheap, bawdy and lusty.” One board member said, “We do not think the people of Providence need this kind of lowdown stuff. The plays may represent certain phases of life, but we feel that these phases are not what the people of Providence want to see.”

Today Of Mice and Men is a staple of school reading lists. A study by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature in the United States found that it was one of the ten most frequently read books in public high schools. However, the book is also on the American Library Association’s list of Most Challenged Books of the 21st Century. That includes it being challenged or banned in the US at least 28 times in the 1990s and at least 6 times since 2000.

Current complaints revolve around Steinbeck’s use of language (including swearing and the N-word) and his portrayal of African Americans and the disabled. Ironically, what was seen as overly positive portrayals of those groups in the past has evolved into being seen by some as negative portrayals now. Others also disagree with the characterization of the only woman in the play, Curley’s wife, who is viewed as a one-dimensional sexual being belonging to Curley without any individuality.

Interestingly, the book’s popularity and the controversy surrounding its content have made it a touchstone in popular culture. Saturday Night Live, Lost, Cold Case, Casino Royale (the novel), The Monkees TV series and several Stephen King novels are just a few examples of the places where references to the novel occur. Clearly the story is a part of the national consciousness in a deep and complicated way—and likely will continue to be for many years to come.
ADAPTING A STORY FROM PAGE TO STAGE

Many of the movies and plays you see today are actually adaptations, meaning they are based on a story already written. An adaptation may simply present the characters and plot points of a novel as they were originally written, or it may change the setting and situation of the story.

Identify what grabbed you emotionally about the story.
Before you start to form the plot and characters, decide the feeling you want to invoke in the audience.

Pare down the story to only the most important plot points.
A novel may tell a story in hundreds of pages that a film or stage adaptation would have to tell in roughly two hours. Which parts of the plot are the most important? What is extra, and might be cut out? When you’re outlining the plot, ask yourself if each scene helps to invoke the emotion you identified in the first step. Every scene doesn’t have to convey that feeling, but they should all should help carry the story to that place.

Decide which characters and locations are needed to tell the story.
The number of characters in a stage or film production should be kept small. Hiring more actors is not only costly, but too many characters can be confusing to the audience in a story only two hours long. If a character has a minor part and doesn’t affect the story much, leave that character out. When writing for the stage, do the same thing for locations: only use the most essential settings. A play can be very successful in only one place—no need for set changes! Films have a little more freedom because scenes can be shot in many different locations.

Consider the conventions of your medium.
A novel is not likely to include songs, but a musical adaptation certainly would. If you’re writing a screenplay, you might show the passage of time through a montage. Keep in mind the different ways that you can convey emotion or plot points that are different from the way they’re presented in a book.

Begin writing the adaptation.
Once you’ve outlined your scenes, you’re ready to start writing dialogue. Use your source material as a guide, but you won’t want to copy it verbatim. If writing for the stage, include any essential stage directions. If writing for film, make sure your writing is very visual.

continued...
ADAPTING A STORY FROM PAGE TO STAGE WORKSHEET

Can you think of other examples of classic stories adapted for productions or movies? What stories might you like to see adapted for modern audiences? Why?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

What might a sequel to *Of Mice and Men* be like? Make a list of ideas. Consider:
- What characters would be included?
- When would it take place?
- Where will it take place?
- What is happening given the changes in time and place?

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

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Now, write a plot summary or scene in a story you would like to see adapted into a play based on your ideas:

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RESOURCES


Student Matinees/STUDENT Feedback

Name____________________________________Grade_____________School_________________________________________

Performance Tasks based CA State theatre arts standards

Select and complete one of the following activities:

1. Rewrite the ending of the play. How would you like to see it end? Why?

2. Pick a moment in the play that affected you. Describe the stage elements that created that moment for you (the script, acting, lighting, music, costumes, set design, sound design, and/or direction).

3. Write a review of the play or an actor.

4. Describe something you would change in the production. Describe what benefit that change create in the production and why.

5. Identify and describe how this production might affect the values and behavior of the audience members who have seen it.

6. Write about any careers you learned about in attending this production. (example: stage hands, set designers, actors, etc.)

Assessment Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Really Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learned a lot from this experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to do this sort of project again</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will remember what I learned</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

pg. 1, STUDENT Matinee Evaluation/Student
Finish the following statements:

The most important thing I learned from this play was:
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Besides getting out of school, the best thing about attending this student matinee is:
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
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_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Learning through the theatre is different from my regular class because:
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
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If I could change something about attending a student matinee, I would:
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
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I'm going to use what I learned, saw, or experienced by:
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

# Student Matinee/TEACHER Evaluation

Name_____________________________________________________________________School___________________________

Please rate your Student Matinee experience below:

## Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I received sufficient and timely information from TheatreWorks before the matinee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TheatreWorks maintained communication with me and/or involved administrators at my school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was clear to me that the production and study guide incorporated curriculum standards</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Matinee Workshops…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matinee Workshops...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported other curriculum areas/subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted students' educational needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided a grade-appropriate experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged students' interest and attention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to learn how to lead more of these kinds of activities on my own in the classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Post-Matinee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-Matinee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students were engaged in this experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience was valuable to my students' education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The &quot;Performance Tasks&quot; were useful in helping my students understand their experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be interested in bringing more drama related activities into my classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TEACHER Evaluation (cont.)

For your classrooms please list the strengths of watching a student matinee:

_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________

In terms of your teaching, did this particular Student Matinee give you any arts integration ideas for your curriculum:

_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
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We are very interested in your feedback. What worked for you about this experience?

_________________________________________________________________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________________________

What did not work for you?

_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________

Additional Comments:

_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________

TheatreWorks student matinees tend to fill up quickly, so we encourage you to book your tickets as soon as possible! Information about next season is currently available online. Keep us updated with your current contact information, and let us know if you have friends who would like to be added to our mailing lists.