



**Getting the most out of the Study Guide for**

## ***Of Mice and Men***

**Compiled and Edited by Michael R. Kelly, Education Associate**

Our study guides are designed with you and your classroom in mind, with information and activities that can be implemented in your curriculum. The National Players has a strong belief in the relationship between the actor and the audience. Without either one, there is no theatre. We hope this study guide will help bring a better understanding of the plot, themes and characters in the play so that you can more fully enjoy the theatrical experience.

Feel free to copy the study guide for other teachers and for students. Some content would be applicable before your workshops and seeing the performance; some content is more appropriate for discussion afterwards. Of course, some activities and questions will be more useful for your class, and some less. Feel free to use any article, activity, or post-show discussion question as you see fit.

### **Your feedback is important to us!**

These study guides are developed by the Education department of Olney Theatre Center. In order to improve our programming, we appreciate any feedback you and your students can provide. Please use the evaluations found at the end of this study guide.

Call 301.924.4485 x116 if you have any questions.

NATIONAL  
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AMERICA'S LONGEST RUNNING TOURING COMPANY



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### **America's Longest Running Touring Company**

The National Players has earned a distinctive place in American theatre by bringing innovative and accessible productions to audiences across the country. Performed with high-voltage energy, clarity, and wit, the National Players introduces audiences to great works of dramatic literature that are rich in exciting stories and characters, and profound in language and themes. Our productions touch hearts and minds, inspire imagination and wonder, spark curiosity about the self, the world, and the creative process, and celebrate what it means to be human.

The National Players was founded in 1949 by Father Gilbert V. Hartke, a prominent arts educator and head of the drama department at Catholic University of America. His mission – to stimulate young people's higher thinking skills and imaginations by presenting classical plays in surprisingly accessible ways – is as urgent and vital today as it was 63 years ago.

National Players offers an exemplary lesson in collaboration and teamwork-in-action: the actors not only play multiple roles onstage, but also serve as managers, teaching artists, and technicians. A self-contained company, National Players carries its own sets, lights, costumes, and sound.

### **Before the Performance**

Using the articles found in this study guide, students will be more engaged in the performance. The guide will help you spot useful information in the show. In addition, the guide also contains articles on the various theatrical adaptations and movies inspired by Shakespeare's work. This, combined with our in-classroom workshops, will keep the students attentive and make the performance an active learning experience.

### **After the Performance**

With the play as a reference point, our questions and activities can be incorporated into your classroom discussions and can enable students to develop their higher level thinking skills. Our materials address Maryland Core Learning Goals, which are listed on the next page.

### **The study guide addresses specific Maryland Core Learning Goals in English and Essential Learning Outcomes in Theatre.**

#### **Goal 1 Reading, Reviewing and Responding to Texts**

1.1.4 The student will apply reading strategies when comparing, making connections, and drawing conclusions about non-print text.

1.2.1 The student will consider the contributions of plot, character, setting, conflict, and point of view when constructing the meaning of a text.

1.2.2 The student will determine how the speaker, organization, sentence structure, word choice, tone, rhythm, and imagery reveal an author's purpose.

1.2.3 The student will explain the effectiveness of stylistic elements in a text that communicate an author's purpose.

1.2.5 The student will extend or further develop meaning by explaining the implications of the text for the reader or contemporary society.

1.3.4 The student will explain how devices such as staging, lighting, blocking, special effects, graphics, language, and other techniques unique to a non-print medium are used to create meaning and evoke response.

1.3.5 The student will explain how common and universal experiences serve as the source of literary themes that cross time and cultures.

## **Goal 2 Composing in a Variety of Modes**

2.1.2 The student will compose to describe, using prose and/or poetic forms.

2.1.3 The student will compose to express personal ideas, using prose and/or poetic forms.

## **Goal 4 Evaluating the Content, Organization, and Language Use of Texts**

4.1.1 The student will state and explain a personal response to a given text.

4.2.2 The student will explain how the specific language and expression used by the writer or speaker affects reader or listener response.

4.3.1 The student will alter the tone of a text by revising its diction.

4.3.3 The student will alter a text to present the same content to a different audience via the same or different media.

### **Outcome 1: Perceiving, Performing and Responding—Aesthetic Education**

- Identify a wide variety of characters presented in dramatic literature and describe ways they reflect a range of human feelings and experiences.

### **Outcome II: Historical, Cultural, and Social Context**

- Demonstrate knowledge of appropriate audience behavior in relationship to cultural traditions.

- Select and discuss the work of a variety of playwrights, critics, theatre commentators, and theorists that represent various cultures and historical periods.

- Demonstrate familiarity with a variety of dramatic texts and genres.

- Compare the treatment of similar themes in drama from various cultures and historical periods.

### **Outcome III: Creative Expression and Production**

- Construct imaginative scripts and collaborate with actors to refine scripts so the stories and their meaning are conveyed to an audience.

- Develop multiple interpretations for scripts and visual and oral production ideas for presentations.

- Create and project subtleties of character motivation and behavior using speech, sound, and movement.

Study dramatic texts and, using improvisational skills, create extensions appropriate for identified characters and situations.

### **Outcome IV: Aesthetic Criticism**

- Use prescribed and self-constructed criteria to evaluate and describe verbally the characteristics of successful ensemble performances and productions.

- Analyze dramatic texts and other literature of theatre to identify and describe the presence of theatrical conventions that influence performance.

- Identify and describe verbally the primary scenic, auditory, and other physical characteristics of selected theatrical performances.

- Write critical reviews of selected theatre performances using established criteria and appropriate language for the art form.

## **The Role of the Audience**

The audience plays an integral role in every live performance, and especially in National Players shows. The audience is, in fact, a key element in making live theatre such a special medium and so different from television and film. During a live performance, please keep in mind that the actors onstage can both see and hear the audience, and while actors enjoy listening to the audience react, talking and making loud comments only serves to distract actors and fellow audience members.

So please watch the show, let the story move you in whatever way is true to you. Laugh if you want to laugh; be afraid, intrigued, shocked, confused or horrified. The actors want you to be involved in the story they are telling. But please be respectful of the actors working hard to bring you a live performance and to the audience around you trying to enjoy the play.

## The Characters of *Of Mice and Men*

**George Milton:** a small, sharp-witted migrant worker/ranch hand that travels with Lennie. George is a typical, realistic hand who uses his mind to anticipate the future and keep Lennie in line.

**Lennie Small:** a physically large and strong man whose mind is slow. He has a short attention span and acts similar to a child; because of his mental limitations, Lennie never really understands or anticipates the consequences of his actions. He travels with and is looked after by his friend George.

**The Boss:** he is the superintendent of the ranch and oversees its day-to-day operations, but a big land corporation owns the ranch itself. He is a generally nice person that treats his workers nicely if they work hard, but he is a no-nonsense businessman when it comes to getting the grain out.

**Slim:** he is a tall, well-respected mule driver (jerk-line skinner) that is looked up to as a leader among the other ranch hands. He treats his work and everyone on the ranch with equal respect, a hard and honest worker, and he knows how to do his work without being told.

**Carlson:** he is ranch hand who is the opposite of Slim: coarse and insensitive to the other ranch hands, he only cares about what is best for him. He is the true stereotype of how migrant workers act and behave.

**Candy:** the ranch worker that lost his hand on the job a few years back, he wants to join the George and Lennie in their dream of owning their own land by providing them with a down payment. Candy's one faithful companion is his old dog, who is about as useless as Candy is at the ranch.

**Whit:** a young ranch hand that is like the younger brother of the bunkhouse. He relates easily to Candy and his dog, and is quick to making new friends out of the men that arrive at the ranch.

**Curley's Wife:** she is the only woman on the ranch and also in the play. She is continually around the ranch hands claiming that she "is looking for Curley," but she is also remarkably lonely in her new life on the ranch and just wants to talk with someone. She is pretty, if not excessively so, in order to get attention.

(Left) Crooks; costume design by Ivania Stack



Curley's Wife; costume design by Ivania Stack

**Crooks:** he was given the nickname for his crooked back where a horse kicked him. He is a proud and independent African American who also is an outcast on the ranch. He is bitter against the racial discrimination against him on the ranch, but Lennie and Crooks come to be friends later on. He also wants to join Lennie and George's dream of having his own land.

**Curley:** he is the short-tempered son of the Boss and a former boxer. He is small in stature but he picks fights with those weaker than he is and attempts to intimidate those larger than him. He is also recently married, so he is constantly thinking about his wife on the ranch as well.





## Plot Synopsis

The play begins with two traveling farm laborers, named George Milton and Lennie Small, on their way to a job loading (bucking) barley at a California ranch. It is a Thursday evening, and they spend the night along the banks of Salinas River before arriving at the ranch the next morning. In this scene the audience discovers the main personality differences between George and Lennie. Lennie is slow mentally, and George acts as Lennie's guardian, watching out for his friend. They've been traveling and working together for a long time, since Lennie's Aunt Clara passed away. George also continually mentions that Lennie's habit of petting soft things, such as a dead mouse or the dress of a woman, often gets them into trouble - forcing the two men to continuously look for new jobs. They can never really settle down in one area due to this, and also that Lennie doesn't understand the danger of his own great strength. They dream about owning their own place and being their own bosses in the near future as they fall asleep.

Upon arriving at the ranch Friday morning, they meet an old man named Candy, who lost his hand at the ranch a few years back. Candy explains to them the ways of the ranch and the manners of the other ranch hands. The Boss enters the bunkhouse to visit with his new workers and is quite angry that they arrived late for the morning shift. He questions both George and Lennie about their previous work experience, but eventually takes them on and writes them into his work notebook. Curley, the Boss' son, enters soon after looking for his father. He is a former boxer of short stature and has a quick temper. He confronts George and Lennie about arriving late, and even goes to threaten them with physical violence, but leaves the bunkhouse.

(L-R) Michael Pettey  
(George) and Mat Leonard (Lennie). Photo by Madeleine Russell



Curley's Wife enters the bunkhouse right before the ranch hands arrive for lunch. She claims she is "looking for her husband" and is a very attractive woman, but all the men avoid her since she just married Curley two weeks prior to the start of the play and they are wary of Curley's temper. George warns Lennie to stay away from her, and Lennie tells George that he wants to leave this scary working environment. Slim, a mule driver (jerk-line skinner), enters and introduces himself to George and Lennie. Another mule driver by the name of Carlson enters soon after and finds out from Slim that his dog has had puppies. Carlson discusses with Slim the idea of killing Candy's old dog and replacing it with one of his puppies because its smell makes it impossible to sleep in the bunkhouse. As the ranch hands leave to have their lunch, George agrees to ask Slim if Lennie can have a puppy.

Later that evening, George confides in Slim his relationship with Lennie and thanks him for giving Lennie a puppy. He admits that Lennie isn't bright, but obviously a nice person and a hard worker. Carlson enters from playing horseshoes and pressures Candy to allow him to kill his dog in order to put it out of its misery. Candy gives in when Slim joins in the argument. Later in the scene, he overhears George and Lennie talking about their dream and asks to be part of it, offering to advance half of the money they need. Finally, their dream appears within reach.

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Slim left the bunkhouse to fix one of his mules' hooves in the barn, and Curley enters looking for his wife, and then leaves suspecting she is in the barn with Slim. Some of the other ranch hands follow thinking they are going to see a fight between the two men. They all return to the bunkhouse with Curley and Slim in a verbal argument. Curley is taunted by the other men and is pushed to a boiling point, and he takes out his aggression on Lennie by first taunting him and then beating him up like a punching bag. Lennie takes this abuse until George tells him to "get him," where he grabs Curley's hand and breaks all the bones in it. Curley is taken to the doctor and George and Lennie are left wondering whether they will be fired or not.

The next night, Saturday evening, George and most of the other ranch hands are off in town, while



Lennie explores the barn after playing with his puppy and comes across Crook's room. At first, Crooks objects to this invasion of privacy, but eventually Lennie wins him over. Crooks describes the difficulties of his life at the ranch, while Lennie speaks of the dream that he, George, and Candy share. Candy enters and tells Lennie that he has been figuring out how to make the dream a reality on their ranch. Crooks asks if he can join them, and George enters the room to find that they have been spreading their secret dream around. Curley's wife, looking for company, enters the room. All the men except Lennie argue with her, but she plays up to Lennie. The scene ends with the Boss entering in on Curley's Wife being in a room alone with the four men.

(L-R) Mat Leonard (Lennie) and Alex Highsmith (Curley's Wife). Photo by Madeleine Russell

The next afternoon, Sunday, Lennie is alone in the barn while the men play horseshoes outside. By handling his puppy too much he has broken its neck and as he tries to hide the animal, Curley's wife enters. She talks to Lennie about her life, seemingly opening up her troubled past to him. When she learns of Lennie's love for soft things, she invites him to touch her hair. He does so, but he holds on too tight, frightening Curley's Wife and causing her to struggle about. Lennie panics and accidentally breaks her neck, and flees to the riverbank of the first scene where George told him to go in case of trouble. Candy enters to find the woman's body. He gets George and asks for reassurance that their dream will still be fulfilled, even

without Lennie. But George has already forsaken the vision with this crushing discovery. He asks Candy to give him a few minutes head start before telling the others so they won't think he was involved in the incident. George reenters the barn with the others to discover the body and he attempts to convince the men that Lennie should only be put away because he meant no harm. However, Curley insists on lynching him and they all go out to look for Lennie.

That evening, Sunday night, Lennie makes his way back to the riverbank where the play began. George enters to hide him in the brush as the men trail closely behind him. Slim persuades the group to spread out away from the area in order to give George and Lennie some time. They exit, and Lennie asks George if he will "give him hell," but George does so halfheartedly. They discuss their dream one last time as George has Lennie look across the river to imagine the land they will eventually have. As Lennie finally pictures the land, George shoots him in the back of the head with the gun he stole from Carlson.

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(L-R) Michael Pettey (George) and Mat Leonard (Lennie). Photo by Madeleine Russell

### Director's Notes – *Of Mice and Men*

“It is one of the paradoxes of Truth that we gain by giving up; we lose by greedily grasping. Every gain in virtue necessitates some loss in vice; every accession of holiness means some selfish pleasure yielded up; and every forward step on the path to Truth demands the forfeit of some self-assertive error. He who would be clothed in new garments must first cast away the old, and he who would find the True must sacrifice the false. The gardener digs in the weeds in order that they may feed, with their decay, the plants which are good for food; and the Tree of Wisdom can only flourish on the compost of uprooted follies. Growth/gain necessitates sacrifice/loss.”

- James Allen

“It is this Compassion alone which is the real basis of all voluntary justice and all genuine loving-kindness. Only so far as an action springs therefrom, has it moral value; and all conduct that proceeds from any other motive whatever has none. When once compassion is stirred within me, by another's pain, then his weal and woe go straight to my heart, exactly in the same way, if not always to the same degree, as otherwise I feel only my own. Consequently the difference between myself and him is no longer an absolute one. No doubt this operation is astonishing, indeed hardly comprehensible. It is, in fact, the great mystery of Ethics.”

- Arthur Schopenhauer

“It has always seemed strange to me... the things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling, are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest, are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second.”

- John Steinbeck

**Jason King Jones, director**

## Playwright's Biography– John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902, and attended Stanford University, where he studied marine biology intermittently between 1920 and 1926. Steinbeck did not graduate from Stanford but instead chose to support himself through manual labor while continuing his writing career. Steinbeck's first novel, "Cup of Gold" was published in 1929, and was followed in 1932 by "The Pastures of Heaven" and, in 1933, by "To a God Unknown." However, these first three novels were unsuccessful both critically and commercially.

Steinbeck had his first success with "Tortilla Flat" in 1935, an affectionately told story of Mexican-Americans imbued with gentle humor. His subsequent novel, "In Dubious Battle" (1936), is a classic account of a strike by agricultural laborers and a pair of Marxist labor organizers who engineer it, and is the first Steinbeck novel to encompass the striking social commentary of his most notable work. Steinbeck received even greater acclaim for the novella "Of Mice and Men" (1937), a tragic story about the strange, complex bond between two migrant laborers, which he later adapted to the stage. His crowning achievement, "The Grapes of Wrath," won Steinbeck a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award. After the best-selling success of "The Grapes of Wrath," Steinbeck went to Mexico to collect marine life with the freelance biologist Edward F. Ricketts, and the two men collaborated in writing "Sea of Cortez" (1941), a study of the fauna of the Gulf of California.

During the World War II, Steinbeck wrote some effective pieces of government propaganda, among them "The Moon Is Down" (1942), a novel of Norwegians under the Nazis. He also served as a war correspondent. With the end of World War II and the move from the Great Depression to economic prosperity Steinbeck's work did soften somewhat. While containing the elements of social criticism that marked his earlier work, the three novels Steinbeck published immediately following the war, "Cannery Row" (1945), "The Pearl," and "The Bus" (both 1947), were more sentimental and relaxed in approach. Steinbeck also contributed to several screenplays. He wrote the original stories for several films, including "Lifeboat" (1944), directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and "A Medal for Benny," and wrote the screenplay for Elia Kazan's "Viva Zapata!," a biographical film about Emiliano Zapata, the revolutionary Mexican peasant who rose to the presidency. Among Steinbeck's later works are: "Burning Bright" (1950), "East of Eden" (1952), "The Winter of Our Discontent" (1961), and "Travels With Charley" (1962). Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962 and died in New York City in 1968.

(Below) Scenic design concept, Tour 63





## The Play itself- Author's Interpretation to the Stage

*Of Mice and Men* was Steinbeck's first attempt at writing in the form of novel-play termed a "play-novelette". Structured in three acts of two chapters each, it is intended to be both a novella and a script for a play. He wanted to write a novel that could be played from its lines, or a play that could be read like a novel. This later made his adaptation from the novella to a play possible, given the shared structure across the mediums. The main action of the story is also driven by dialogue, which helps maintain its message and artistic integrity in its translation to the stage by the author.

Steinbeck originally titled his novella *Something That Happened* (referring to the action of the book as "something that happened," because no single character can be truly blamed for the tragedy that unfolds in the story). However, he changed the title after reading Robert Burns' poem, "To a Mouse". Burns' poem tells of the regret the narrator feels for having destroyed the home of a mouse while plowing his field. This poem is contained in a later section of this study guide.

Below are some of Steinbeck's personal thoughts on the story and characters in *Of Mice and Men*:



"I was a bindlestiff (a tramp/hobo that carries their possessions in a bindle or bedroll) myself for quite a spell. I worked in the same country that the story is laid in. The characters are composites to a certain extent. Lennie was a real person. He's in an insane asylum in California right now. I worked alongside him for many weeks. He didn't kill a girl. He killed a ranch foreman. Got sore because the boss had fired his pal and stuck a pitchfork right through his stomach. I hate to tell you how many times I saw him do it. We couldn't stop him until it was too late." (Taken from an interview with the New York Times in 1937)

Based on Steinbeck's own experiences as a migrant worker in the 1920s, the title of the novella/play is taken from Robert Burns' poem "To a Mouse", which read: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft agley." (The best laid schemes of mice and men / Go oft awry.)

"In every bit of honest writing in the world there is a base theme. Try to understand men, if you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and nearly always leads to love. There are shorter means, many of them. There is writing promoting social change, writing punishing injustice, writing in celebration of heroism, but always that base theme. Try to understand each other." (Steinbeck's journal entry, 1938)

(Top to bottom) George and Lennie; costume design by Ivania Stack

# History and Major Events of the Period

**Time period:** 1937

Place: along the Salinas River, south of Soledad, California

**Land:** relatively arid, given that it lies in a valley of the Gabilan mountain range, but is fed by the Salinas River. It would not be as bountiful as the California Central Valley to the east or Napa region to the north. Land plots were generally owned by large agricultural companies or held in a few private hands in this region.

**National:**

- President- Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democrat)
- US is still in the grip of the Great Depression, as caused by the Wall Street Market crash of 1929 and furthered by an economic recession in 1937. Roosevelt's New Deal and Second New Deal programming brings about great change to how the US government runs the country and aids its citizens.

## Agricultural Adjustment Act

This act would have had the most effect on the lives of the characters we see in *Of Mice and Men*. The celebrated First Hundred Days of the Roosevelt administration produced a federal program to protect American farmers from the uncertainties of the market through subsidies and production controls, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), which Congress passed in May 1933. The AAA reflected the desires of leaders of various farm organizations and Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace.

Relative farm incomes had been falling for decades. The AAA included reworkings of many long-touted programs for agrarian relief, which were demanded for decades. The most important provision of the AAA was the provision for crop reductions—the "domestic allotment" system, which was intended to raise prices for farm commodities. In order to keep prices at a stable level, farmers were paid to not produce crops. The most controversial component of the anti-deflationary domestic allotment system was the large-scale destruction of existing crops and livestock to reduce surpluses. At a time in which many families were suffering from malnutrition and starvation, it was a difficult measure. However, gross farm incomes increased by half in the first three years of the New Deal and the relative position of farmers improved significantly for the first time in twenty years. Many families at the time felt that the benefit, increased income for farmers (and the lobbying farm organizations), outweighed the cost of malnourishment and death. Roosevelt felt that without the allotment system, the decreasing commodity prices would have

worsened the Great Depression significantly. This was later proven decades later when prices for farm commodities, falling sharply due to the Green Revolution, led to disastrous results.

## The Dust Bowl

Adding to the misery of the Great Depression and the thousands of Americans left unemployed, The Dust Bowl, or the Dirty Thirties, was a period of severe dust storms causing major ecological and agricultural damage to both American and Canadian prairie lands from 1930 to 1936 (in some areas until 1940). The phenomenon was caused by severe drought coupled with decades of extensive farming without crop rotation, fallow fields, cover crops or other techniques to prevent wind erosion. Midwestern farmers, given how land was granted from the US government in square acreage, often plowed their fields from in straight north-to-south lines, which removed a great deal of the terrain diversity (trees, forests, etc) and furthered soil erosion. Deep plowing of the virgin topsoil of the Great Plains had displaced the natural deep-rooted grasses and brush that normally kept the soil in place and trapped moisture even during periods of drought and high winds.

During the drought of the 1930s, without natural anchors to keep the soil in place, it dried, turned to dust, and blew away eastward and southward in large dark clouds. At times the clouds blackened the sky reaching all the way to cities such as New York and Washington, D.C. Much of the soil ended up deposited in the Atlantic Ocean, carried by prevailing winds, which were in part created by the dry and bare soil conditions. These immense dust storms—given names such as "Black Blizzards" and "Black Rollers"—often reduced visibility to a few feet (around a meter). The Dust Bowl affected 100,000,000 acres (400,000 km<sup>2</sup>), centered on the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, and adjacent areas of New Mexico, Colorado, and Kansas.

Millions of acres of farmland became useless, and hundreds of thousands of people were forced to leave their homes; many of these families (often known as "Okies", since so many came from Oklahoma) migrated to California and other states, where they found economic conditions little better during the Great Depression than those they had left. Owing no land, many became migrant workers who traveled from farm to farm to pick fruit and other crops at starvation wages.

## Themes and Motifs

**Loneliness:** Throughout the play, a main characteristic most of the characters was being lonely. Candy has only his dog as his one companion. Upon the killing of the dog, he has no one and therefore, attaches himself to the dream George and Lennie share. Thus, he will not end up an outcast and therefore, completely alone. Even after Lennie kills Curley's Wife and cannot return to his life the way it was before, Candy still wants to carry out the dream because he had once again attached himself to something tangible.

Crooks remarks, "...A guys goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he with you..." He would work for nothing, as long as he could communicate with others. Curley's wife is so overwhelmed by her loneliness, she seeks the friendship of other men besides her husband. She seeks out the friendship of Lennie for all of the others fear Curley and will have nothing to do with her. "Think I don't like to talk to somebody ever' once in a while?"

**The American Dream:** Everyone has a dream that they strive for. The poor ranch hands George and Lennie wish to be their own bosses, and actually have the stability of owning their own land. They have a dream, even before they arrive at their new job on the ranch, to make enough money to live "off the fat of the land" and be their own bosses. There, Lennie will be permitted to tend the rabbits, which is what he sincerely wants to do. Candy, upon hearing about the dream, wants to join them so that he would not be left alone, because he is almost obsolete at the ranch since he lost his hand. Slim remarks later in the play that he would like to have his own team of mules to drive and work instead of using the animals that belong to the ranch.

**Friendship:** George and Lennie share such a strong bond that when one is lost, the other inevitably is as well. Steinbeck often stresses how ranch hands are loners by nature, and that George and Lennie are the only ones who travel as a pair. They seem and act like two halves of the same person, and they know that the other will always have their back. George says in the opening scene, "Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world...They got no family. They don't belong no place...With us, it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us..."

Candy's need for the companionship of his dog also stresses the importance of true friendship. For, after Carlson put his old dog out of his misery, Candy attaches himself to the dream Lennie and George share.

(Below) Scenic design concepts, Tour 63





## Play's inspiration- "To A Mouse" (1785)

Translated into Standard English from poet Robert Burns' colloquial Scottish writing style

Small, crafty, cowering, timorous little beast,  
O, what a panic is in your little breast!  
You need not start away so hasty  
With argumentative chatter!  
I would be loath to run and chase you,  
With murdering plough-staff.

I'm truly sorry man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
And justifies that ill opinion  
Which makes thee startle  
At me, thy poor, earth born companion  
And fellow mortal!

I doubt not, sometimes, but you may steal;  
What then? Poor little beast, you must live!  
An odd ear in twenty-four sheaves  
Is a small request;  
I will get a blessing with what is left,  
And never miss it.

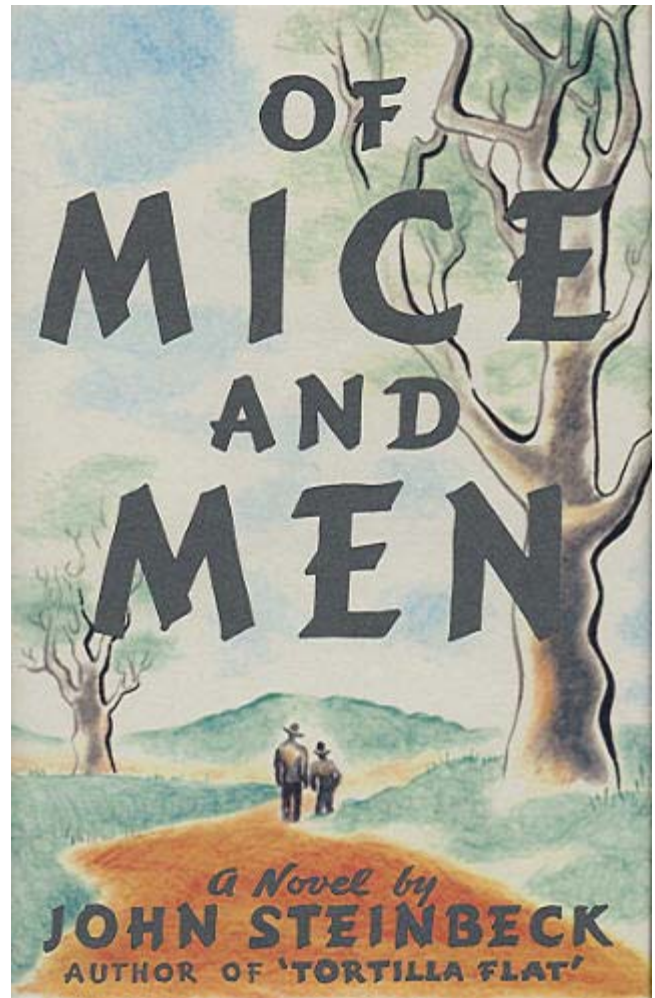
Your small house, too, in ruin!  
Its feeble walls the winds are scattering!  
And nothing now, to build a new one,  
Of coarse grass green!  
And bleak December's winds coming,  
Both bitter and keen!

You saw the fields laid bare and wasted,  
And weary winter coming fast,  
And cozy here, beneath the blast,  
You thought to dwell,  
Till crash! the cruel plough passed  
Out through your cell.

That small bit heap of leaves and stubble,  
Has cost you many a weary nibble!  
Now you are turned out, for all your trouble,  
Without house or holding,  
To endure the winter's sleety dribble,  
And hoar-frost cold.

But little Mouse, you are not alone,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best laid schemes of mice and men  
Go often askew,  
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!



(Above) Original cover of Steinbeck's novella

## Study of Character Archetype

The concept of psychological archetypes was advanced by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, c. 1919. In Jung's psychological framework archetypes are innate, universal prototypes for ideas and may be used to interpret observations. A group of memories and interpretations associated with an archetype is a complex, e.g. a mother complex associated with the mother archetype. Jung treated the archetypes as psychological organs, analogous to physical ones in that both are morphological constructs that arose through evolution.

Jung outlined five main archetypes:

- The Self, the regulating center of the psyche and facilitator of individuation
- The Shadow, the opposite of the ego image, often containing qualities with which the ego does not identify, but which it possesses nonetheless
- The Anima, the feminine image in a man's psyche; **or**:
- The Animus, the masculine image in a woman's psyche

The Persona, how we present ourselves to the world, is another of 'the subpersonalities, the complexes' and usually protects the Ego from negative images (acts like a mask)

Although archetypes can take on innumerable forms, there are a few particularly notable, recurring archetypal images. These general forms can be applied to almost any work of literature, theatre, or art:

- The Hero
- The Child
- The Trickster or Fox
- The Devil/Satan
- The Old Mother
- The Scarecrow
- The Mentor
- The Wise Old Man/ Sage
- The Wise Old Woman/Man (the collective unconsciousness)
- Rebirth

Joseph Campbell, an American mythologist, writer, and lecturer became fascinated with the ideas that Jung set forth, along with work of psychologist Sigmund Freud. At the beginning of the Great Depression (1932-1932), Campbell travelled to California to continue his independent studies and became friends with John Steinbeck, and their friendship would later affect Steinbeck's structure and writing style, most notably in *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Campbell came to diagram out Jung's theory of archetypes in what is considered his greatest work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, through the exploration of the archetypal hero found in numerous world mythologies.

## Vocabulary List

**acres** (n.): An acre is an area of land equal to 4,840 square yards or 43,560 square feet.  
For comparison, a football field is 45,000 square feet, so one acre is a little smaller than a football field.

**bundle** (n.): a small bundle of items rolled up inside a blanket and carried over the shoulder; a bedroll.

**bucking** (v.): To buck in this instance is to throw large bags of grain on a truck.  
Barley is poured into large burlap bags (75 or more pounds) and passed brigade-style (in a line) to the truck.

**cat house** (n.): whore house; house of prostitution

**debris** (n.): remains

**flats** (n.): level, flat ground

**rabbit hutch** (n.): A type of cage for keeping rabbits.

**reeds** (n.): tall grass with hollow stems, often found in or near water.

**stake** (n.): an amount of money

**thrashin' machines** (n): Thrashing machines, sometimes called threshers or threshing machines, are used on farms to separate the grain or seed from the straw of such plants as barley or wheat.

**tramps** (n.): In this case, a tramp is a person who travels about on foot, usually doing odd jobs for a living

**axles** (n.): bars connecting two opposite wheels

**bale** (n.): a large bundle of something that has been compressed and tied together. Grains such as hay, wheat, and barley are often made into bales after they're harvested.

**barley** (n.): a type of cereal grass. The grain from the barley plant is often used for making animal feed.

**blacksmith** (n.): a person who works with iron, especially in the making of horseshoes.

**bunk house** (n): a building that provides sleeping quarters (bunk beds) for workers on a ranch or farm.

**burlap** (n.): a coarse, inexpensive, woven fabric; often used for making grain sacks

**cesspool** (n.): a deep hole in the ground into which sewage from sinks, toilets, etc. is drained.

**grain teams** (n): A team is two or more horses harnessed to a wagon or other drawn vehicle.  
Grain teams would be the teams (horses and wagons) used to haul grain in from the fields.

**graybacks** (n.): lice; parasites. Lice are small, wingless insects that live off the blood of other animals.

**jerline skinner** (n.): person who drives mules

**slough** (v): get rid of

**swamper** (n.): a handyman; someone who performs odd jobs often involving cleaning

**tart** (n.) a woman of loose morals; one who is prone to be sexually unfaithful

**alfalfa** (n.) : a plant widely grown for animal feed

**euchre** (n.): a card game

**rheumatism** (n.): a painful condition involving the joints and muscles

## Further Reading/ Research

### On John Steinbeck and his work:

- ["John Steinbeck, American Writer"](#) by Dr. Susan Shillinglaw. The Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies.
- *John Steinbeck: The Contemporary Reviews* by Joseph R. McElrath et al, 1996.
- Stephen Maunder (March 25, 2011). ["Who, what, why: Why do children study Of Mice and Men?"](#). BBC News.
- ["National Steinbeck Center: About John Steinbeck : Facts, Awards, & Honors"](#). National Steinbeck Center.

### Film and stage productions:

- Of Mice and Men– Internet Movie Database: <http://www.imdb.com/find?s=all&q=Of+Mice+and+Men>
- Of Mice and Men– Internet Broadway Database: <http://www.ibdb.com/show.php?ID=6661>



## Discussion Questions

### Before the Show

- 1.) Titles are often very important to the artistic/literary success of a play/book, especially in how it is received by the artistic community. In reading the Robert Burns poem "To A Mouse," what do you think inspired John Steinbeck to use one of the lines as the title of his work? Write down your answers and save for class discussion until after the show.
- 2.) Steinbeck was quoted earlier in this study guide saying, "Try to understand each other," in reference to writing his characters. Do you think the characters in *Of Mice and Men* try to do this? Make a list/diagram of all the relationships between the characters in the play, and compare with your classmates to answer this question: Do they try to understand each other, or are they selfish in their own worlds?
- 3.) The Dust Bowl and the Stock Market crash of 1929 combined had a large effect on the lives of the characters in this play. Thousands of people from the crippled American Midwest travelled west to California to find work and land to farm on. Why do you think these people chose to go west during this national crisis? What do you think would/could have happened if they instead all moved to the east coast?
- 4.) Having read the book/play, take a look at the Character Archetype section of this study guide and compare it to the characters of the show. Do you think all of the characters can fit into specific categories, or do they overlap into numerous categories? Discuss with your classmates and then write your answers down to discuss more after seeing the show.
- 5.) Who do you think is the protagonist, or central character, of this play? George or Lennie? A protagonist is defined in the theatre as the character that undergoes a change, and usually learns something or takes something away from the change. Create a list of pros and cons for why each character could be the protagonist and then discuss with your classmates.

### After the Show

- 1.) After seeing the show, do you think the set helped to tell the story, or did it hinder it? Do you think transitions helped to tell the story through movement, music, and lighting? Directors often aim to keep the audience constantly engaged in the story, so do you think the choices did?
- 2.) If you've read the Robert Burns poem "To A Mouse," why do you think this poem inspired Steinbeck in the writing of his play/book? Using your answers from question #1 of the previous section, compare your thoughts with your classmates after seeing the show. Are there verses of the poem that resonate with the action of the play? Think of possible connections between specific scenes and verses from the poem.
- 3.) There are multiple historical events that influence the action of this play. Having seen the show, do any of these specific events (like the Stock Market crash or Dust Bowl) come to directly effect the action/plot of the play, or do they hold a more subtle influence over the characters and their lives?
- 4.) Using your answers from question #4 from the previous section, take a look at what you said after having seen the show. Have your perceptions changed about the Character Archetypes you assigned? Have they stayed the same? Discuss your thoughts with your classmates.
- 5.) Steinbeck based a great deal of *Of Mice and Men* on his experience as a migrant worker in California during the late 1930's. Why do you think he chose to turn his experiences into a book and later a play? Would you consider storytelling to be a crucial part of human existence, or something that we just enjoy listening to and engaging in?

# TEACHER EVALUATION (1 of 2)

Name of show: \_\_\_\_\_ Show location: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

School Address: \_\_\_\_\_

School Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade (s): \_\_\_\_\_ Type of class: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of students: \_\_\_\_\_

**Have you ever been to a National Players student matinee before?** Yes No

**If yes, which shows did you attend?** \_\_\_\_\_

## THE PERFORMANCE

**The artistic merit of the production was:** Excellent Good Fair Disappointing

**The performance was suited to the students' age and grade.** Yes No

**This performance was chosen because:**

*It enhanced curricular topics.* Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

*The description of the show sounded interesting and enjoyable.*

Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

**Other:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did the majority of the students respond to the performance?** \_\_\_\_\_

## ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMING:

**Did you participate in any additional programming?** (please check all that apply)

\_\_\_ Workshop (Title of Workshop: \_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_ Back-stage Tour \_\_\_ Q & A with the cast

**The workshop enhanced the performance and learning experience for my students.**  
Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

**The workshop provided depth to classroom preparation and/or follow-up.**  
Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

**The workshop would be more useful if:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**How did the majority of your students respond to the workshop?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have any suggestions for additional programming around our student matinees?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# TEACHER EVALUATION (2 of 2)

## CURRICULUM

Did this experience apply to your curriculum?

Yes

No

If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_

Was classroom time spent discussing the performance after your students attended the play? Yes No

The program was a valuable addition to classroom teaching. Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

The program enhanced aesthetic appreciation. Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

The program enhanced higher thinking skills. Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

## STUDY GUIDE

The study guide was useful in general. Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

It provided what was necessary to prepare the students. Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

How appropriate was the volume of information provided in the Study Guide? Very Somewhat A little Not at all

Which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful? \_\_\_\_\_

In which sections did the students show the greatest interest? \_\_\_\_\_

The study guide could be improved by: \_\_\_\_\_

## SERVICE

The registration forms and brochures were clear and easy to use.

Very much Somewhat A little Not at all

The scheduling and confirmation of reservations was: Excellent Good Adequate Poor

The seating arrangements were: Excellent Good Adequate Poor

Parking and bus unloading and reloading were: Excellent Good Adequate Poor

*We welcome your comments! Please return this form, along with student evaluations, to: Madeleine Russell, General Manager, National Players, 2001 Olney-Sandy Spring Road, Olney, MD 20832 or email [nationalplayers@olneytheatre.org](mailto:nationalplayers@olneytheatre.org)*



