

# ***Of Mice and Men***

Lesson #7

# Review - Steinbeck

- Winner of the Pulitzer Prize Fiction Award for *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) & the Nobel Prize for Literature (1962) among many other awards
- Gave voice to working-class America by writing about **unfamiliar but relatable characters**, stressing the universal conditions that we all share



# The Title's Origin

- Originally called *Something That Happened*
- Title comes from a poem called *To a Mouse* by Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759-1796):

*The best laid schemes **o' mice and men**  
Gang aft agley [often go wrong]  
And leave us nought but grief and pain  
For promised joy!*

- The best laid schemes of mice and men often go wrong - referring to a little mouse who had so carefully built her burrow in a field to protect herself and her babies, and the burrow is turned over and destroyed by the man plowing

# George Milton

- Small, wiry, quick-witted
- Travels with and cares for Lennie
- Behavior is motivated by the desire to protect Lennie and to fulfill their dream
- Cautious (e.g.: Candy)



Played by **Gary Sinise**  
(Lieutenant Dan Taylor - *Forrest Gump*)  
(Detective Mac Taylor - *CSI*)

# Lennie Small

- Large, strong, child-like migrant worker
- Completely dependent on George because of his mental disability
- Does not understand his own strength
- Love of petting soft things leads to disaster



Played by **John Malkovich**  
(Lucien Laurin - *Secretariat*)  
(John Malkovich - *Being John Malkovich*)

**What is “The  
American Dream”?**

# The American Dream

- A set of ideals that includes **freedom**, the opportunity for **prosperity** and **success**, and the **possibility for upward social mobility** achieved through **hard work** and **determination**
- Largely broken in 1929, the beginning of the Great Depression, but even in the midst of such hardship, the dreams of some survived

# George and Lennie's Dream

- George's description of their dream farm has many "Eden-like" qualities - all of the food they want and need will be right there (i.e.: living off the fat of the land)
- George twice describes the farm in terms of things he loved in childhood
- Lennie is mostly concerned with being able to tend the rabbits, but is also invested in this dream because he will be with George



# Candy

- Aging ranch handyman
- Lost his hand in an accident while working
- Worries about his future on the ranch, fearing that his age is making him useless
- Offers his life's savings if he can join in on George and Lennie's dream



Played by **Ray Walston**  
(Mr. Hand - *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*)  
(Armitan - *My Favorite Martian*)

# Candy's Dream

- Candy's hope is largely shattered by the killing of his dog. It is quickly rekindled when he overhears Lennie and George discussing their dream, and shattered again with Lennie's death
- Worried about his future (old, has lost his hand)
- Candy's dog's death foreshadows Lennie's death, but also Candy's fate

# Curley

- The boss's son, putting him in a "superior" position to the other workers
- Confrontational, aggressive younger man who seeks to compensate for his smaller stature by picking fights with larger men
- Rumored to be a champion prizefighter
- Recently married and plagued with jealous suspicions regarding his wife



Played by **Casey Siemaszko**  
(3-D - *Back to the Future*)  
(Billy Tessio - *Stand by Me*)

# Curley's Wife

- Only female character
- Never given a name - reflects her complete lack of an individual identity (the ranch is only livable if you are an able, white male) and says a lot about the attitude toward women in a society like the one in the novella
- Referred to as a “tramp” and a “tart”
- Is a victim in her own way - has her own broken dreams, is desperately lonely and needs companionship much in the same way all of the other characters do

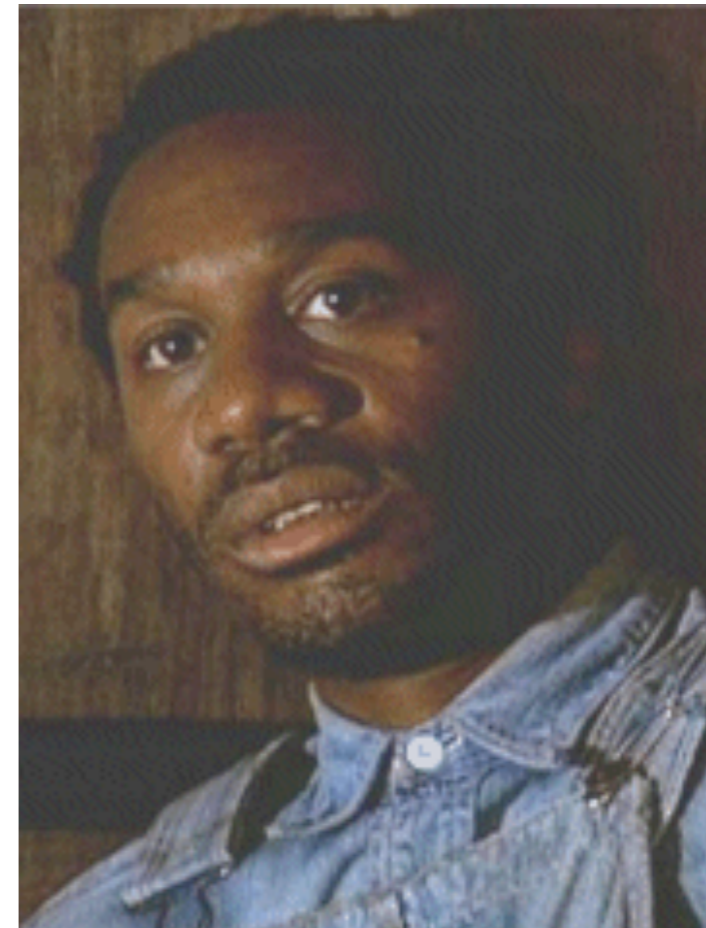


Played by **Sherilyn Fenn**  
(Anna Nardini - *Gilmore Girls*)



# Crooks

- Black stable-hand
- Name given to him because of his crooked back
- Proud, bitter, and isolated from other men because of his skin color
- Points out the failure of many others' dreams, but still has some hope (asks Lennie if he can join them and hoe in the garden - reminded of his reality by Curley's Wife)



Played by **Joe Morton**  
(Charlie Williams - *American Gangster*)

# Slim

- Highly skilled mule driver
- Referred to as “the prince of the ranch” - only character who seems to be at peace with himself
- Other characters look to him for advice (i.e.: the situation with Candy and his dog)
- Understands the nature of the bond between George and Lennie at the novella’s tragic ending



Played by **John Terry**  
(Charles Thieriot - *Zodiac*)

# 2 Elements of Theme

- Literary language is important
- The easiest way to verify your theme as legitimate is to make sure that both elements are present:

**THEME = Universality + An aspect of the human condition**

# Themes

## ★ **The Nature and Meaningfulness of Dreams:**

- *Of Mice and Men* is a story about the nature of human dreams and aspirations as well as the forces that work against them
- Humans can give meaning to their lives and to their futures by creating dreams and having aspirations. Without dreams and goals, life can in many ways be seen as just “going through the motions”
- George and Lennie’s dream is a crucial component to the novella



# Themes

## ★ **The Desolation of Loneliness and Isolation:**

- In addition to dreams, humans crave contact with others to give their life meaning
- While George and Lennie are repeatedly described as being different and lucky for having one another, other characters like Crooks, Curley's Wife and Candy are all isolated from others and suffer from their lack of human connections and interactions
- Lennie is also isolated from others because of his mental disability
- Characters are often isolated because of their differences and "deficiencies"

# Themes

## ★ **The Predatory Nature of Human Existence:**

- The novella teaches a grim lesson about the nature of human existence - the characters rendered helpless by their loneliness and isolation often seek to destroy those who are even weaker than themselves
- During this time period, a man's value or worthiness was based entirely on his being able-bodied. Characters who do not fit this mould suffer in the novella

# Motifs

## ★ **The Significance of the Idealized Male Friendship:**

- Friendships like the one that George and Lennie share are described as being considerably uncommon. However, we see that friendship, in many ways, also enhances the human experience and brings meaning to one's life
- Even George and Lennie, who come closest to achieving this ideal of brotherhood, are forced to tragically separate
- The rest of the world (represented by Curley and Carlson) fails to acknowledge, appreciate, or understand the nature of such a friendship

# The Film

- Released in 1992
- Directed by Gary Sinise (also plays George)
- Older version (1939) was nominated for five Academy Awards
- Described as having a poor box office performance, but received positive critical acclaim

