

Unit Plan: <i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck	
Grade	9
Duration	Approximately 8 weeks
Edition (ISBN)	978-0-14-017739-8

Unit Overview

High level overview of the text at the core

Set in the town of Soledad, California, this novella explores the experiences of Lennie Small and George Milton, two migrant workers who have entered the town to find work. Set during the Great Depression, the experiences of the text's characters reflect the challenges and prejudices experienced by those in the United States at this time. Lennie and George have a unique and moving relationship that tests the limits of what friends can and should do for each other. Steinbeck's novella illustrates the power relationships amongst characters with different racial, class, and gender identities, as well as dis/abilities. Traditionally taught in the high school curriculum, this unit asks students to examine the text from a critical perspective in order to unpack these power relationships in historical context.

Big Ideas

Conceptual understandings from the unit

- The Great Depression devastated the lives of those living and working in the United States.
- The traditional stories told about the Great Depression have been whitewashed.
- Laborers are exploited in times of economic crisis.
- The American Dream is a symbol ingrained in the American psyche.
- The American Dream is not attainable for all Americans.
- Friendships are complicated and dynamic.

Essential Questions

Questions driving the Big Ideas

- How can critically examining traditional stories of the Great Depression lift up the voices of the silenced?
- How can criticality support new readings of canonical texts?
- What impact did the Great Depression have on *all* of those living in the United States?
- What is the American Dream and who is it available to?
- How is true friendship defined?
- How do authors use symbolism and motifs to capture the complex fears and yearnings of their characters?

Culminating Task

Assessment that demonstrates mastery of unit content

Great historical events often have deep effects upon the people who live through them. Depending on the person and the situation, those effects can be very different.

You are going to read a short article about the Dust Bowl days in American history titled “Black Blizzard.” You will also look at some photographs taken during that time period. As you read and study the photographs, think about how this experience may have affected the individual people who lived through it.

Finally, you will write a narrative, showing how a particular small moment during this experience affected one person.

Remember, a good narrative:

- *Establishes a clear point of view*
- *Focuses closely on one character or characters*
- *Uses strong sensory details to make the character(s) and event come alive*
- *Uses precise language*
- *May use dialogue and description to capture the character(s) and event*
- *Concludes effectively*

Here are your choices for your narrative:

- A young child watching the “black blizzard” rolling in over the plains
- A young child, watching a tractor knock down his family home in Oklahoma, several years into the Dust Bowl drought
- The owner of a small business struggling to pay bills, pay employees and keep your doors open during the Dust Bowl.
- An unemployed father, arriving at a squatter camp in California from Oklahoma

Key Background Knowledge

Core knowledge that students will build throughout this unit

Contextual Knowledge

- The emotional, economic, physical and psychological impact of The Great Depression.
- The idea of white washing history: excluding or minimizing the histories of Black Americans, Indigenous people on whose land America was violently formed, and immigrants of color from the stories we tell about important historical events.
- Streams of migration and flight in United States history, including those across the Mexico/US border.
- The racial and gender hierarchies structuring society in the US West during the early 20th century.

Literary Knowledge

- The vocabulary of fiction (e.g. plot, setting, protagonist, antagonist).
- Literary devices (e.g., symbolism, motif, foreshadowing, characterization, tragedy).
- Third-person omniscient narration.
- The principles of narrative writing.

Historically Responsive Literacy Framework

Dr. Ghodiy Muhammad’s Five Learning Pursuits

Identity → How will your teaching help students learn something about themselves and/or others?

- *Students will...*
 1. Consider how our identities impact the way we are treated by others.
 2. Consider how identities influence our experiences during times of economic crisis.
 3. Consider how our intersecting identities shape our perspectives and the way we experience the world. How do differences in power and privilege influence the relationships we have with each other? How do these differences affect our sense of community and its development?
 4. Deepen their identities by exploring their stance to critical issues in today's society.

Skills → What skills and content learning standards will you be teaching?

- *Students will...*
 1. Comprehend and analyze a grade-appropriate piece of text.
 2. Use direct and indirect characterization to analyze the evolution of characters in *Of Mice and Men*.
 3. Identify and analyze important themes, symbols, and motifs represented in *Of Mice and Men*.
 4. Make a text-to-self connection in order to reflect on their own identity.
 5. Refine and produce a piece of narrative writing, reflecting on their own personal identities.

Intellect → What will your students become smarter about? (Big picture)

- *Students will...*
 1. Strengthen narrative and formal writing skills
 2. Understanding important issues that affect their lives.
 3. Strengthen narrative comprehension skills.
 4. Understand that literature is representative of societal anxieties and requires readers to grapple with cultural norms.

Criticality → How will you engage your thinking about power, equity, and anti-oppression in the text, in society, and in the world?

- *Students will...*
 1. Examine power structures during the Great Depression that impacted labor, gender/sexuality, and friendship.
 2. Unpack the white-washing of history in order to create updated, factual narratives about the reality of the Great Depression.
 3. Ask questions of texts and the world in order to imagine justice and freedom for Black Americans and disabled people.
 4. Learn about the historical and contemporary role that white women play in anti-Black racism and violence, applying an intersectional analysis.
 5. Analyze the impact of racist, dehumanizing language on their own lives in order to evaluate its use within the core text.

Joy → What is there to love and be joyful about in this lesson?

Students will...

1. Use their imaginations to creatively extrapolate from the core text and from history, using empathy to imagine the experiences of others' across time.
2. Work collaboratively with their peers to read and analyze texts and the world around them.
3. Learn that everyday people make history and that our individual stories can be used to promote justice, tell important stories of everyday life, and enact change.

Connections to Core Instructional Resources

Click [HERE](#)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Alignment between unit content and SEL goals

Skill Objectives: Students will learn to...

- analyze similarities and differences between one's own and others' perspectives
- use conversation skills to understand others' feelings and perspectives
- analyze the origins and negative effects of stereotyping and prejudice
- respect individuals from different social and cultural groups

Career Education and Work (CEW) Connection

Entrepreneurship 13.4.11

A. Compare and contrast entrepreneurship to traditional employment.

Naviance Task

Interviewing Entrepreneurs: *Students will explore entrepreneurship and consider the rewards and challenges of owning a business. Interview one or more small business owners of local businesses. Create a pros and cons chart that compares wages, benefits, job security, and costs.*

Unit Development

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Unit Supports

English Language Development (ELD)	Multi Level Student Supports (MTSS)	Special Education	Career Work and Education/Naviance	Social Emotional Learning	ELA Supports
Paul Zwolak and Donna Sharer	LaTasha Stewart	Nolita Pettus and Jenn White	Cathey White	Jaimie Piotrowicz	Alison McMonagle