

**Communication in Literature: *Of Mice and Men***

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**Process Paper: 269 words**

## **Introduction**

During times of grief and desperation, many authors got inspiration. This inspiration led to powerful connections with readers, connections that fuse the historical moments of agony from the authors to the readers. With books like *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, readers get a sense of what the Great Depression was like for some. Fictional books can only go so in depth of what a historical tragedy felt like. As we analyze through pages of books, they serve as a sense of communication to dissect.

## **Farmer's Life**

*Of Mice and Men* was written by John Steinbeck, published in 1937. It is about George and Lennie being given a new job opportunity during the Great Depression of the United States. The Great Depression took place in the 1930s, from 1929 to 1933, it was a worldwide economic depression caused by a stock market crash. This tragedy caused many to suffer and left people fired from their job, needing to put food on the table, people went looking for new jobs. Many of these people were farmers. In the novella *Of Mice and Men*, we see the two characters being ranch workers for money. George feels this pressure of having to do well in the new job and wants to stay out of trouble to be a hard worker. Throughout the book the pair talks about a dream they both share of owning their own homestead. Their passion and determination is what is driving them towards their possible future. As for real farmers during the Great Depression, they were struggling. According to, North Carolina Encyclopedia, "Farmers who had borrowed

money to expand during the boom couldn't pay their debts. As farms became less valuable, land prices fell, too, and farms were often worth less than their owners owed to the bank. Farmers across the country lost their farms as banks foreclosed on mortgages.” Farmers did not have much of a choice, with their crops going in price and people not buying they would lose their land. Like dominoes, once one domino falls the rest do too. This also affected cities and towns, meaning everyone was on board for grabbing the first job that comes their way. Although these people were going through hard times, the best they could do was hope and dream, which is what George and Lennie did.

### **Racial Discrimination**

In the book, John Steinbeck incorporates how racial discrimination during the 1930s in America. Crooks, a character in the book, is an African American man who is forced to live by himself away from the workers at the ranch. Crooks got his name from his crooked back, we never learn his real name he is only called by his color and job. Multiple times throughout the book he is called a racial slur, in fact they introduce him as that which goes to show the normality of racism during the 1930s. Crooks shares his room and medicine with the animals. He is described as a distant person, him being pushed away by others only gives him more of a reason to distance himself from them. He is very protective of his own little space he has, for example, when Lennie wanders off to his room, Crooks tells him to leave saying, “Yo go on get outta my room. I ain't wanted in the bunk house, you ain't wanted in my room.” Crooks gets defensive of his only rights he has. Although slavery was abolished in 1865, he still gets mistreated by the farm and is treated the same as an animal. For African Americans during the Great Depression, it only worsened their economic situation. For instance, Britannica states, “They were the first to be laid off from their jobs, and they suffered from an unemployment rate

two to three times that of whites. In early public assistance programs African Americans often received substantially less aid than whites, and some charitable organizations even excluded Blacks from their soup kitchens.” It’s unimaginable to exclude one to get food just from the color of their skin, especially since people were going through the same thing, you would think some would have pity. Since communities were concerned with their own struggles, it was a complicated process to coordinate civil rights movements, many turned their eye, or even ignored, this atmosphere of racism and abuse.

### **Physical Disability Abuse**

The book also touches on the mistreatment of disabled people during the Great Depression. Candy, another worker in the farm, only has one hand from a ranch accident. He himself is aware that he is going to be fired from the job due to his disability. He also gets paid less because he only has one hand and cannot do the same work as everyone else. Candy says, "You seen what they done to my dog tonight? They says he wasn't no good to himself nor nobody else. When they can me here I wish somebody'd shoot me. But they won't do nothing like that. I won't have no place to go, an' I can't get no more jobs." Candy begged to be a part of the dream both George and Lennie shared about owning their own land, Candy wanted to work there since nobody else would have hired him. Candy had no hope in himself; he saw his disability as a burden. For disabled people during the Great Depression already had a disadvantage, for example, Internationalist Socialist Review says, “It goes without saying that the Great Depression that began in 1929 had a devastating impact on the lives of all American workers, with official unemployment rates skyrocketing to 25 percent. But for disabled people the economic crisis hit even harder. One study found that 44 percent of deaf workers who had been employed prior to the crash had lost their jobs by 1935.” There were very little health and

safety regulations in California during the 1930s. Only 35 years later in 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Act was implemented in America, an act that keeps people safe during work.

### **Mental Disability Abuse**

Of mice and men talks about mental illness as well. Lennie has a mental disability, throughout the story he does not remember things that are told to him and he is very passionate about small things like rabbits. One of the main reasons George tries to hide this fact about Lennie is to avoid having to look for another job. George knows that if the boss figures out that Lennie is mentally disabled, he would fire him. George has this parental feeling for Lennie, he feels the need to protect him, ensure him and cover for him. In the end George shoots Lennie in the head, killing him, because he didn't want him to suffer, let alone suffer in someone else's hands. George made a very rigorous decision to kill him, George from the time they entered the ranch he wanted Lennie to have a chance in life. While in the 1930s, society wasn't nice to the mentally disabled. Many of them being taken away from their houses and being put in psychiatric institutions. Paul Lombardo states, "In 1914, Harry Laughlin published a Model Eugenical Sterilization Law that proposed to authorize sterilization of the 'socially inadequate' – people supported in institutions or 'maintained wholly or in part by public expense.' The law encompassed the 'feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf; deformed; and dependent' – including 'orphans, ne'er-do-wells, tramps, the homeless and paupers.' By the time the Model Law was published in 1914, twelve states had enacted sterilization laws." These facilities only tried to ease the person, not provide what they needed. Although this law was published before 1930, the psychiatric hospitals did not improve. George knew that whatever Curley was to do with him when he found him, it would be harsh. Curley

could have sent him to a psychiatric hospital, George wanted to give him a chance when coming to the ranch but it was too much of a struggle for him.

## **Conclusion**

John Steinbeck created these characters out of real people, people that were suffering during the economic depression. He was able to make readers sympathize and feel pity for them just from their back story. Farmers, Black people, and the disabled, all struggled through this time and did not receive much help. In *Of Mice and Men* we get an understanding of what these people encounter with. Through literature we are able to communicate real stories with each other and make people understand what happened during historic events.

## Process Paper

### **1. How did you choose your topic and how does it relate to the annual theme?**

I recently just finished rereading of mice and men and thought I could somewhat incorporate it into the project with the Great Depression. I researched with more depth about how people were actually struggling at the time to get a job. I thought that what the book incorporates can be translated to what actually happened historically.

### **2. How did you conduct your research?**

First I did my research on John Steinbeck as an author and how was living during the Great Depression. I myself wondered what inspired him to write such a novella and be able to write moments in paper. I then did further research on how western people were affected by the stock market crash, mainly the farmers.

### **3. How did you create your project?**

I chose to make an essay because I feel that it is the way I would best elaborate myself and explain. Writing an essay and splitting up the body paragraphs comparing the book and real historic events was convenient for me.

### **4. What is your historical argument?**

My historical argument is how unfairly people were treated during the Great Depression. Farmers, Black people, disabled people had a very hard time economically and the stock market crash only worsened it.

### **5. In what ways is your topic significant in history?**

My topic is significant in history because I compare similarities of what really happened to people in the Great Depression to what a story goes off of. I think it's important for people to understand history with books written at that time.

## Annotated Bibliography

“African American Life during the Great Depression and the New Deal.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.,  
[www.britannica.com/topic/African-American/African-American-life-during-the-Great-Depression-and-the-New-Deal](http://www.britannica.com/topic/African-American/African-American-life-during-the-Great-Depression-and-the-New-Deal).

This source is an article, it showed how equally treated African Americans were compared to White people. It talks about the racial discrimination against African Americans throughout history. I learned that people boycotted chain stores for having Black customers but only hiring white people.

“Disabilities in 1930s America: Of Mice and Men Context.” *OxNotes GCSE Revision*,  
[www.oxnotes.com/of-mice-and-men-context-disabled-in-1930s-america-gcse.html](http://www.oxnotes.com/of-mice-and-men-context-disabled-in-1930s-america-gcse.html).

This source is an article, it compared how both physical and mental abuse was treated in *Of Mice and Men* and during the 1930s in America. From this I have learned that people with disabilities back then were very low on the social class, and were looked down upon.

“Of Mice and Men and The Great Depression.” *SparkNotes*, SparkNotes,  
[www.sparknotes.com/lit/micemen/context/historical/of-mice-and-men-and-the-great-depression/](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/micemen/context/historical/of-mice-and-men-and-the-great-depression/).

This source is a book blurb, talks about how the Great Depression inspired John Steinbeck to write a book. Beforehand he worked on articles about inequality for farmers during the Great Depression. I learned that John Steinbeck himself was surprised from this economic depression.

“Of Mice and Men, and Racism: Analyzing the Character of Crooks.” *Literature Essay Samples*, 21 Apr. 2019,  
[literatureessaysamples.com/of-mice-and-men-and-racism-analyzing-the-character/](http://literatureessaysamples.com/of-mice-and-men-and-racism-analyzing-the-character/).

This source is a character analysis, gave a deep look on Crooks. It thoroughly explains why Crooks is the way he is and how he was treated differently than everyone else. From this I learned that Crooks had a rough exterior to himself and that deep down he was just affected by discrimination.



Rosenthal, Keith. "Pioneers in the Fight for Disability Rights." *Pioneers in the Fight for Disability Rights* | *International Socialist Review*, 1 Mar. 2018, [isreview.org/issue/90/pioneers-fight-disability-rights](http://isreview.org/issue/90/pioneers-fight-disability-rights).

This article talks about the disability rights movement and how the disabled were unfairly treated. From this I learned that the years that led up to the Great Depression were very harsh on them because they were forced into sterilization.

Shmoop Editorial Team. "Lennie Small in *Of Mice and Men*." *Shmoop*, Shmoop University, 11 Nov. 2008, [www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/of-mice-and-men/lennie-small](http://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/of-mice-and-men/lennie-small).

This source is a small character analysis on Lennie. It explains how Lennie was looked upon at the ranch and how close his friendship was with George, it also says how death was the only nice option for Lennie.

Walbert, David. "NCpedia: NCpedia." *Link to NCpedia Main Page*, [www.ncpedia.org/anchor/depression-farmers](http://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/depression-farmers).

This article explains how the Great Depression affected farmers. The farmers had sold their products for very low prices during the time. I learned that there was a law that benefited the farmer that would boost the price of their food, however it didn't work because of a new drought.