



# Of mice and men

By John Steinbeck

First published in 1937

## Genre & subject

Mental disabilities - fiction

Friendship - fiction

Classical fiction

## Synopsis

George and his large, simple-minded friend Lennie are drifters, following wherever work leads them. Arriving in California's Salinas Valley, they get work on a ranch. If they can just stay out of trouble, George promises Lennie; then one day they might be able to get some land of their own and settle down some place.

## Author biography

John Ernst Steinbeck, Jr. was born on February 27 1902, in Salinas, California. He was of German, English, and Irish descent. Johann Adolf Großsteinbeck, Steinbeck's paternal grandfather, had shortened the family name to Steinbeck when he immigrated to the United States.

His father, John Ernst Steinbeck, served as Monterey County treasurer. John's mother, Olive Hamilton, a former school teacher, shared Steinbeck's passion of reading and writing. The Steinbecks were members of the Episcopal Church, although Steinbeck would later become an agnostic.

Steinbeck lived in a small rural town, no more than a frontier settlement, set in some of the world's most fertile land. He spent his summers working on nearby ranches and later with migrant workers on Spreckels ranch. There he became aware of the harsher aspects of migrant life and the darker side of human nature, which supplied him with material expressed in such works as *Of Mice and Men*.

His 1935 novel *Tortilla Flat*, set in post-war Monterey, California, became his first commercially successful work. With some of the proceeds he built a summer ranch-home in Los Gatos. His next works were the California farm-worker depression-era novels *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. The allusive titles were suggested by his wife after reading the manuscripts.

John Steinbeck died in New York City on December 20, 1968, of heart disease and congestive heart failure. He was 66, and had been a lifelong smoker. An autopsy showed nearly complete occlusion of the main coronary arteries.

In accordance with his wishes, his body was cremated, and interred (March 4, 1969)[12] at the Hamilton family gravesite at in Salinas, with those of his parents and maternal grandparents. His third wife, Elaine, was buried in the plot in 2004. He had earlier written to his doctor that he felt deeply "in his flesh" that he would not survive his physical death, and that the biological end of his life was the final end to it.

## Discussion starters

- Why does George "take so much trouble for another guy"?
- Why does George shoot Lennie?
- Why is the dream recited repeatedly?
- Why does the book begin and end at the pond?
- Why does Candy feel he should have shot his dog himself?
- Is Curley's wife to blame for Lennie's death?
- Why doesn't Slim share in the other men's dreams?
- Why does Carlson get the last word?
- What is the meaning of the book's title?
- Did migrant workers have any options for a better life?
- Did George do the right thing by shooting Lennie?

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