



## Of Mice and Men

*John Steinbeck*

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# Of Mice and Men

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## Of Mice and Men John Steinbeck

They are an unlikely pair: George is “small and quick and dark of face”; Lennie, a man of tremendous size, has the mind of a young child. Yet they have formed a “family,” clinging together in the face of loneliness and alienation.

Laborers in California’s dusty vegetable fields, they hustle work when they can, living a hand-to-mouth existence. For George and Lennie have a plan: to own an acre of land and a shack they can call their own. When they land jobs on a ranch in the Salinas Valley, the fulfillment of their dream seems to be within their grasp. But even George cannot guard Lennie from the provocations of a flirtatious woman, nor predict the consequences of Lennie’s unswerving obedience to the things George taught him.

--back cover

## Of Mice and Men Details

Date : Published September 1993 by Penguin Books (first published 1937)

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Author : John Steinbeck

Format : Mass Market Paperback 107 pages

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## From Reader Review Of Mice and Men for online ebook

### Paul Bryant says

The title of this novel is only 50% accurate, a very poor effort. Yes, it's about men, but there's little or nothing about mice in these pages. Mice enthusiasts will come away disappointed. This got me thinking about other novel titles. You would have to say that such books as *The Slap*, *The Help*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Gangsta Granny*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Hamlet* have very good titles because they are all about a slap, some help, a Gatsby who was really great, a no good granny, a woman who was married to a guy called Dalloway and a Hamlet. I have no problem with those titles. But you may be poring over the pages of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for a long fruitless evening to find any mockingbirds coming to any harm at all. Indeed, to coin a phrase, no mockingbirds were harmed during the making of that book. So I rate that title only 5% accurate. And some titles seem to have a word missing, such as Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*. Four what? It doesn't say. Perhaps he completed the book and left the title to the very last minute and died as he was writing it down. Same thing with *The Crimson Petal and the White*. White what? Wallpaper? Hat? Cat? Mouse? Mockingbird? Could be *The Crimson Petal and the White Gangsta Granny* for all we know. A poor title. And what about *The Dharma Bums*? I think a *Cigarette* or *You Out* is clearly missing from that title. Another grossly misleading title is *Women in Love*. I can't be the only reader who was expecting some strong girl on girl action from DH Lawrence but I would have been better off fast-forwarding to the middle part of *Mulholland Drive*. Now that's what I call *Women in Love*. DH, take note. Another badly chosen title is *Hitler's Niece* - yes, it is 100% accurate, but at first glance it can look like *Hitler's Nice*, and surely that is going to put off a lot of potential readers (except for the readers you really don't want).

And what about *Call it Sleep*? – call what sleep?

*The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Flaubert's Parrot*, *The Camomile Lawn* – sometimes obscure titles can be solved if you understand that the author is referring to Death, so, the Catcher is Death, the Postman is Death, the lawn is Death and the Parrot is Death. Of course, I may have got that wrong. It's something I read somewhere and it just stuck in my mind.

Some other titles I would give low ratings to :

*The Turn of the Screw* completely baffled me – I know that “screw” is what inmates call prison officers, so I was expecting a story about a concert put on by the staff of a large correctional institution. It was nothing like that.

*The Little Prince* according to my system does rate 100% but I still think *The Little Faux-naif Idiot* would have been better.

*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* – actually, I rate this as 90% accurate – there are two guys who are named Kavalier and Clay, and they do have adventures, but they aren't amazing.

*A Clockwork Orange* – this must be a metaphor for “I have given up thinking of a title for my novel”

*No Name* – like *A Clockwork Orange* this must be where the author couldn't think of any title so in this case he left it without one, like the Byrds' album *Untitled*, or () by Sigur Ros, or several paintings by De Kooning and those other abstract expressionist types; but to call a novel *No Name* is self-defeating, because *No Name*

then becomes its name – epic fail, Mr Collins.

*The Violent Bear it Away* - this is another example of a word missing - possibly "took" or "dragged", I expect that's the sort of thing a violent bear would do I'm surprised the publisher did not catch this error.

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### Nataliya says

Well, somehow I've managed to read close to 800 books by now, and none of those had been *Of Mice and Men*. That has been remedied now, and I'm feeling **emotionally drained by it**. So yeah.

**I suppose pretty much everyone knows the heartbreak story of Lennie and George.** I was relatively 'unspoiled' and still knew what happened in the end. I just did not know how or why, but figured out those pretty quickly into the book. **And still that did not help the sense of impending doom that was like one protracted gut punch.** I think that says something about the masterful writing - where the story takes over so much that you keep reading despite the clear sense of where it is going, without having to rely on suspense or twists - instead, going forward just on the impact of the story itself

*"I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog."*

I used to work with Special Education kids some time ago. And I have seen first-hand what Steinbeck describes in *Of Mice and Men* - **the childlike vulnerability and innocence often combined with physical strength, just waiting for something bad to happen.** The children we took care of - some of which topped my 5'3" frame by a foot or so and outweighed me by a good hundred pounds (but despite that a few times I had to physically put myself on between them and a smaller child) - had, unlike Lennie, the society that is determined to protect them. They were luckier than poor George's charge. But I could not help but picture some of them, who have forever secured spots in my heart, in place of Lennie Small, feeling nothing but dread and sadness. **Lennie, who is as innocent as one gets, and yet as much of a unwilling menace as one can be.** And it was soul-crushing.

I think the impact of this story was that it did not have me taking sides. I felt bad for Lennie. I felt awful for Curley's wife who does not even have a NAME in this story. I felt sad for George and what he had to do. And I felt bad for the whole bunch of men who had names and stories, and a woman who got one but not the other.

*"You God damn tramp," he said viciously. "You done it, di'n't you? I s'pose you're glad. Ever'body knowed you'd mess things up. You wasn't no good. You ain't no good now, you lousy tart."*

And that's where this book lost stars for me. **Curley's wife**, the unwilling almost-antagonist/victim of this story. **The woman who had no name except for the possessive one of her husband whose property - and therefore trouble for everyone else - she was viewed as.** It seemed that she was the one getting the blame, not as much the crazy volatile husband of hers. After all, she **\*asked\*** for trouble, didn't she? At least that's the nagging feeling I got from this story, from the way her character was handled, from the way it was

repeatedly stated that a '*tart*' like her meant trouble for a man. Blame-the-victim mentality does not sit well with me, and I can't help but think that Steinbeck did that. (view spoiler).

This book is definitely a classic with a profound impact on the reader, **a short read that is in no way easy**. It deserves the fame and recognition that it has enjoyed for quite a few years. **3.5 stars from me** (it would have been 4.5 stars, but for the literary treatment of Curley's wife).

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### **Andy says**

It's the way Steinbeck describes things that gets me.

"Crooks, the negro stable buck, had his bunk in the harness room; a little shed that leaned off the wall of the barn. On one side of the little room there was a square four-paned window, and on the other, a narrow plank door leading into the barn. Crooks' bunk was a long box filled with straw, on which his blankets were flung. On the wall by the window there were pegs on which hung broken harness in process of being mended; strips of new leather; and under the window itself a little bench for leather-working tools, curved knives and needles and balls of linen thread, and a small hand riveter. On pegs were also pieces of harness, a split collar with the horsehair stuffing sticking out, a broken hame, and a trace chain with its leather covering split. Crooks had his apple box over his bunk, and in it a range of medicine bottles, both for himself and for the horses. There were cans of saddle soap and a drippy can of tar with its paint brush sticking over the edge. And scattered about the floor were a number of personal possessions; for, being alone, Crooks could leave his things about, ad being a stable buck and a cripple, he was more permanent than the other men, and he had accumulated more possessions than he could carry on his back."

None of this is relevant to the story, and yet a middle chapter opens up with this vivid scene. Steinbeck succeeds because the characters he paints in your head are exact. The first time I saw the movie that was made out of this story, it was just as I had envisioned it. Though the story great itself, the reason I will come back to this book is for the little things, the very things that have made me love Steinbeck so much.

I first read *Of Mice And Men* my sophomore year of high school, when it was a required reading in Mrs. Beeler's class. I recall disliking almost all required school readings up to this point (though admittedly I had skipped out on the summer reading project of "*The Grapes Of Wrath*"). When this book was assigned, I knew it was different. I blew through it, reading it in a day or two, even though I wasn't supposed to. For once there was a school book that I enjoyed. And all the credit in the world to my teacher, who chose other good books the rest of the year. So it's been 6-7 years since I've read this, and now, reading it for the second time, it's just as memorable as I remember. The story sticks with you, the imagery sticks. The characters are among Steinbeck's best, painted in such a crystal clear vision of the time.

It's a near perfect short story, and one that I will surely revisit throughout my life.

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### **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

I think I've been avoiding John Steinbeck, consciously or subconsciously, ever since I was a horse-loving teenager and thought that *The Red Pony* would be a nice, pleasant book to read.

I didn't read any Steinbeck books for years.

But I was in the local library, putting around in the general fiction shelves, and happened to pull this one out and noticed how short it was--only 107 pages. I had just finished reading *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, which was a 127-page overdose of cheesy 70's inspiration, and it occurred to me that by reading this book to offset *JLS* I could restore the cosmic balance in my life, or something like that.

Lennie and George are a unique pair of friends: George is restless, intelligent and often short-tempered; Lennie is huge and incredibly strong, although mentally damaged. He has a childlike sweetness but is easily confused and frightened, and that combined with his strength makes him threatening to others. Somehow, despite their differences, the two have formed a friendship. George tries to protect Lennie from the world . . . and the world from Lennie. It's a difficult task. But they have their dreams and plans of a place of their own, where they can tend a garden and raise animals. And Lennie can take care of the rabbits. It's the most heavenly thing he can imagine.

George and Lennie are hired as field hands at a ranch in California, and the foreshadowings of disaster start to come thick and fast. An old sheepdog whose usefulness has passed is unceremoniously shot. The owner's son Curley comes around to their bunkhouse, spoiling for a fight. Curley's young, bored wife comes around even more often, looking for a different kind of trouble. The hands are sure that they only need a month or two of wages to achieve their plans of a place of their own, but the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang oft agley.

I was expecting to read about shattered dreams, but I was surprised and touched by the strength of the theme of true friendship--not just the friendship between George and Lennie, but also the friendship and understanding offered by Slim, the ranch foreman. With all of the loneliness and cruelty and loss and disappointment that life can bring, it's this one message of hope that I choose to take away from this short but powerful book.

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## Dolors says

Only a writer capable of assembling the symbolic with the folkloric can pen a novella that straddles genres, writing techniques and figurative voices and tug at the heartstrings of both commonplace audiences and the most exigent of readers.

Such indisputable universality is what Steinbeck accomplished with "*Of Mice and Men*", a fabled novella with a linear plot delivered in a succession of theatrical scenes, compact on the surface and with simply drawn characters that might be accused of being excessively melodramatic and verging on the caricaturesque.

Yet when reflected upon, this deceptively modest tale appears designed in concentric layers of deep meaning that orchestrate a rich parable on thematic complexities like the natural goodness of man, the alienation triggered by a socio-economic system that endorses exploitative working conditions and the need to cling to illusions to face a mirthless existence.

Set in a few miles south of *Soledad*, Spanish for "*solitude*", Steinbeck introduces two antithetic characters combining coarse and fast paced dialogue with lush descriptions of the Salinas river.

Lennie Small is ironically heavily built and as strong as he is good-natured. Of a gullible disposition and feeble minded he depends solely on his workmate George to be hired as a temporary hand harvesting seasonal crops in the farms of California. George, a sharp and resourceful rogue, tries to protect Lennie

mostly from himself but also from the maliciousness inherent in most of their fellow labourers. They both dream of owning a rabbit farm and “living off the fatta the lan’ ”, an ideal that Lennie begs George to repeat over and over again with the exact same words creating the mesmerizing effect of an invocation or a soothing lullaby that equals a spell capable of transforming the inconceivable into a tangible possibility.

Alternating the romantic with the myopic vision of hope and gloom, the story is shaped by the intense friendship between these disparate characters and their legitimate aspirations to achieve a respectable livelihood, creating an expansive allegory for the dehumanization the itinerant labourers were victims of during the years ensuing the Great Depression.

George’s attempts to shelter Lennie from the viciousness of foremen and masters also exposes the juxtaposition between the innate solidarity of man and its posterior corruption when trapped in the dynamics of an abusive social hierarchy.

The lonely(\*), the dispossessed and the crippled become the easy target of such system with only love, friendship and compassion as shielding forces.

“Of Mice and Men” is a heart-warming story with a chilling conclusion. A story of marginalized men and women who live on the fringes of an impulsive society and navigate the stirred waters of human dignity and animalization, reason and instinct, courage and weariness, narcotic dreams and hopeful illusions.

In the same way an innocent dummy might crush a tiny mouse unwillingly and with only good intentions human beings crush each other not truly grasping the full consequences of their atrocious acts. There is irony in that equation, but a gentle one.

This is a dark tale, a bitter pill to swallow. It hurts. But it also illuminates with its moving tenderness, allegorical scope and unflinching naturalism. Dreams mightn’t come true this time, but maybe that’s a weighty reason to start loving the things we’ve got.

(\*) A quick note to mention Steinbeck’s shocking depiction of women as an object of desire who use erotic mysticism to lure men into the social stability offered by marriage. This notion highly contrasts with his previous approach to the essential role of females in the family unit as seen in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Perfect soundtrack for this book:

Things that stop you dreaming

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### **Shayantani Das says**

**“Trouble with mice is you always kill ‘em.”**

Breathtaking prose, touching characters and a heart breaking ending. Who said only lengthy novel can make an impact?

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### **Kemper says**

I needed a quick read because I stupidly forgot that the library would be closed yesterday for Veteran’s Day. I’d exhausted my current supply, and I needed a short term fix to hold me until I could get some new product

today. So I grabbed Of Mice and Men off the bookshelf last night.

And I'm glad I did because I'd somehow remembered that this was a depressing book. How wrong I was! Oh, sure there were some tense moments like when you think Lennie will accidentally hurt Curley's wife in the barn. What a relief when George and Candy come in at the last minute and stop anything bad from happening! And isn't it nice that the scare changes both Curley and his wife so that they have a much better marriage and new appreciation for each other.

Plus, it leads to the great moment when Curley is so grateful that he fronts George, Lennie and Candy the money to finally buy the ranch of their dreams. Oh, and that last scene with George and Candy on the porch of their new home while Lennie tends the rabbits brought a tear to my eye.

What's that you say? I got the ending wrong? No, I'm quite certain this is what happened. No! Be quiet! I can't hear you! LA LA LA LA LA LA LA LA LA

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### Ahmad Sharabiani says

#### 608. Of Mice And Men, John Steinbeck

Of Mice and Men is a novella written by author John Steinbeck. Published in 1937, it tells the story of George Milton and Lennie Small, two displaced migrant ranch workers, who move from place to place in California in search of new job opportunities during the Great Depression in the United States.

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## **Brina says**

Over the past year, I have rediscovered John Steinbeck as a master American story teller. Having read Cannery Row and its follow up Sweet Thursday, I realized what a prolific author Steinbeck was and hope to continue my reading with a number of his novels this year. One novella I did read while in school but have a fuzzy memory of is Of Mice and Men. With a square on this year's classic bingo board being read a group read that you haven't read yet, I decided that it was as good a time as any to revisit this work of Steinbeck's through adult eyes.

Near the Salinas River and Soledad, California, two nomadic farm hands named George and Lennie stake out their existence in life. George dreams of having his own farm house and acreage but it is during the depression and he has little money saved. He also promised Aunt Clara, really a family friend, that he would take care of her nephew Lennie, a dimwitted yet strong man. Steinbeck portrays George as an average man during his era who attempts to find work in order to make ends meet, yet he has the added burden of caring for and providing for Lennie's well being. Had this been written in contemporary times, Lennie would have been characterized as developmentally disabled or autistic, yet in the 1930s society could not pinpoint what ailed people like Lennie. They were dismissed as dimwitted with little future, preventing those caring for them in having many prospects for bettering themselves either.

The reader finds out that Lennie loves animals although with his limited mental capacity he does not have success in caring for them, killing one mouse, rabbit, or puppy after another. Steinbeck alludes to the fact that the reason that George and Lennie are in between jobs is because Lennie had felt a woman's dress meaning no harm, yet the act alarmed other members of their work team, forcing the duo to flee the premises. As the pair approaches yet another farm, George makes Lennie promise to keep his mouth shut, to do whatever George asks him to, and to please stay out of trouble. Despite the best of intentions, with Lennie's condition being what it is, he does not always remember to do what George asks of him, putting both of their futures in jeopardy.

As in past jobs, George quickly becomes friendly with the rest of the work crew, attempting to distance himself from Lennie. Lennie ends up attempting a friendship with the rest of the outcasts on the farm, including a Negro horseshoe hand, yet even this relationship ends in tragedy. When Lennie's actions result in tragic proportions, George must choose between protecting Lennie and thinking of himself and his own future, with the denouement coming to a upsetting climax. I could not help but thinking that if George and Lennie lived today with society's awareness of degrees of developmental delays, that both George and Lennie would have enjoyed a happier existence. The burden of caring for Lennie would not have been placed on George, and Lennie himself would have been taught the rudimentary aspects of self care and perhaps even been placed in a basic job. Yet, placing George and Lennie in modern times is hearsay and their relationship ended in tragedy with Steinbeck placing George in a precarious situation which he would have to dwell upon for the rest of his life.

In reading Steinbeck I have seen how he has done a masterful job in painting his characters as archetypes of the era in which they lived, usually depression era California. George and Lennie are two men looking to

better themselves in a decade when one had little to be happy about. While rereading this tragic novella, I could not help but think if like other books I read for school if this is above most teenagers heads. Perhaps, teachers could discuss George and Lennie's relationship and where Lennie would be if he lived today, much as I did while reading. Yet, like other books I read at the time, *Of Mice and Men* gains a deeper appreciation while reading it through adult eyes. Another bingo square checked off, yet definitely not the last Steinbeck novel I will devour this year.

4.5 stars

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### **Lisa says**

"Yet each man kills the thing he loves..."

Oscar Wilde's prison poem came to mind not only for its literal truth in the context of Lenny and George, but also because it evokes the brutal isolation of the whole cast of characters, each one of them stuck in their separate reality and unable to connect with each other. The young lonely wife has nobody to confide in, and keeps looking for trouble out of sheer isolation. The black man is so utterly alone that he is almost insane, and the barrier of his skin colour is even more impenetrable than the woman's gender. George's loneliness is connected to his responsibility for Lenny, and Lenny himself is in the brutal prison of his intellectual inferiority and herculean strength. Even the boss' son is in a no man's land between privilege and torture.

The dream of sharing a future together keeps the men's spirits alive for a while, and it is contagious. Breaking out of the isolation, enjoying freedom and partnership - those are powerful ideas.

"Yet each man kills the thing he loves..."

The domino effect of Lenny's inability to control his strength or his craving for softness and love makes all dreamers wake up to a nightmare without end. The only solace is finding another human being who understands enough of the pain of killing what one loves to offer a sign of support or friendship in the misery of reality.

Lenny broke my heart, and yet I had to smile at his limited vision over and over again. When I first read this novel, I was a busy teenager, bored and frustrated that school picked my reading materials for me, not willing to enter into the confused minds of men with whom I had seemingly nothing in common. With hindsight, I see myself in a cloud of ignorance, not fully grasping what happened around me, missing a masterpiece in the process - I was very much like Lenny myself, unaware of the bigger picture of what was going on around me. Reading *Of Mice and Men* now, to prepare a teaching unit for a new generation of fifteen-year-olds, I find myself more in the role of George, gently coaxing, carefully repeating the information I consider crucial, avoiding too much detail out of fear to completely lose the attention of my students. Lenny and George live a life of their own in my head now, and they have transcended their bitter story and become part of mine.

Just what one expects of a great classic!

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## **Sean Barrs the Bookdragon says**

I remember reading this at school at being completely uninterested in the story. I remember the teacher droning on about basic plot allegories before we read each section; she would tell us what certain things “meant” before we had even seen them. She would explain how this portrays a vital part of American culture and a vital element of human nature. All in all we were told what to see in the book before we even began reading.

Perhaps she should have just let us read it first, and see what we took from it before being told how to read it. I hated it at the time. I hated being told that passages meant certain things when clearly criticism is just speculation. This wasn’t effective teaching: it was being told how to think. She should have prized open our minds and made us engage with it more. When I approached it again years later I did so with more of an open mind, I was determined to find more in the book than I’d been taught to see.

And I did. Lenny and George naively dream of the farm; they dream of a retreat where they can reside in friendship without having to answer to any master. They wouldn’t have to go to work; they can simply work for themselves. Running their own farm would mean that they are self-sustainable. They could grow crops for themselves and choose when they laboured: they would be free. Well George wants this. Lenny just wants a few rabbits to pet. The attractiveness of the dream draws in Candy, who is very old and very lonely. He doesn’t want to end up like his dog: put down because of his years. He wants someone to protect him and care for him in his advanced years. The three become united by this shared dream but it is nothing but fancy.

*“Just like heaven. Ever’body wants a little piece of lan’. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land. It’s just in their head. They’re all the time talkin’ about it, but it’s jus’ in their head.”*

Indeed, the American dream doesn’t exist in this book. Only harsh cold reality awaits the protagonists. Crooks, for all his cruel and understandable bitterness, was right in the end. The farm is just a dream. It is evocative of the loneliness within the human soul, and how we will always long for the impossible. It’s impossible because there is no sunset over the rainbow. Life doesn’t quite work like that. People don’t always get what they want. The world is a cruel unforgiving place here. This is embodied by Lenny; he is vulnerable and emotionally weak. He is completely unaware of the vicious strength he possesses. He never truly understands the situation. He almost walks through the world blind. The world he sees is different to that of everyone else’s.

So this is a story about the outsiders, about the unloved and misunderstood. This a story about those that long for an alternative to the drudgery of standard human existence, but have their expectations cut short. This is a story about how we judge people based upon their appearance and how we label them unjustly. This is a story that Mary Shelley would have loved, a story where a character with an innocent heart is destroyed by the world he should have been accepted by.

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## **Mariah Roze says**

This is a story about George Milton and Lennie Small, two migrant ranch workers, who move from place to place in California in search of new job opportunities during the Great Depression in the United States. George Milton is intelligent but uneducated and Lennie Small is extremely physically strong but mentally disabled.

After being hired at a farm, the pair are confronted by the Boss's son who dislikes Lennie. Another worker on the farm offers to help pay to buy a farm with George and Lennie. However, the next day Lennie accidentally kills his puppy while stroking it. After finding out about Lennie's habit, the farmer's wife offers to let him stroke her hair. When she starts to panic and scream Lennie becomes nervous and breaks her neck... This leads to a very tragic ending...

Of course, when reading a classic novel I have to research the author and find out "more." This book was based on Steinbeck's own experiences as a bindlestiff in the 1920s. He got the title from Robert Burns' poem "To a Mouse," which read: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men." (The best laid schemes of mice and men)

I suggest this book to anyone that enjoys short classics that don't have happy endings.

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#### **????? says**

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#### **Whitney Atkinson says**

I think it's tradition for me to finish a classic and think, "That was good, but I wonder what insights and symbolism I missed out on since I didn't read this for class and have a professor telling me about it." It's also just really hard to review classics in general, because whereas "normal" books I can pick apart the plot, characters, pace, etc., there's something different about these. I feel like I always expect classics to be deep and mindblowing with huge world-shifting themes, but in reality, it's totally normal to be disappointed by them. In this case, I spent most of this book wondering what the point was. I wondered if I was just not connecting to this because it was too short, or because of the very slang dialogue, but by the end of this everything just clicked into place and I actually went into my mom's room to discuss. Touching, tragic, and just..... wow.

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#### **Joe Valdez says**

What more can I possibly add to a discussion of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* without drawing a high school English teacher's salary? Considering I'm not drawing bored glances from teenagers, I doubt that a check from LAUSD will appear in my mailbox anytime soon.

-- Published in 1937, this is the work that the Goodreads algorithms seem to have agreed is the author's most renowned. For Stephen King, it's *The Shining*, for Elmore Leonard it's *Get Shorty* and for John Steinbeck it's

*Of Mice and Men.*

-- This is a novella, approximate length 34,720 words. I read it in under forty-eight hours.

-- The story revolves around two ranch hands traveling the highways and ranches of California, looking out for each other and trying to build enough of a stake to put down on their own piece of land.

*Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders. The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely.*

-- George Milton is the small man, the thinker. Lennie Small is the child in a hulk's body. Walking ten miles to a barley ranch south of Soledad after a bus driver with a grudge drops them off on the highway far short of their destination, Lennie is fascinated by petting mice or rabbits or anything with a nice texture. Lennie has never laid a hand on George, enamored by the tales his traveling partner tells of the land they'll settle someday. When the men finally arrive for work, George does the talking.

*"He ain't no cuckoo," said George. "He's dumb as hell, but he ain't crazy. An' I ain't so bright neither, or I wouldn't be buckin' barley for my fifty and found. If I was bright, if I was even a little bit smart, I'd have my own little place, an' I'd be bringin' in my own crops, 'stead of doin' all the work and not getting what comes up outta the ground." George fell silent. He wanted to talk. Slim neither encouraged nor discouraged him. He just sat back quiet and receptive.*

-- One of the reasons John Steinbeck is my favorite author is that when he pens description, I don't want it to end, and when he switches to dialogue, I don't want his characters to stop talking either. Stephen King's dialogue can be tin, while Elmore Leonard's attentiveness when it comes to prose is short spanned to say the least, but Steinbeck's descriptions and dialogue achieve a purity that captivates me. It's like the difference between drinking water from a garden hose that's been drying in the sun with who knows what crawling inside it and one day, someone hands you a bottle of Perrier.

-- While most authors have been around people, with Steinbeck, I'm always left with the undeniable impression he watched and achieved a wisdom about people. Then he works that knowledge into his books and passes it along to the reader. I find myself able to relate to Steinbeck more than I can the majority of contemporary authors, who often seem to have never been around humans who dreamed, drank, lusted, got into fights or trouble with the law, fell out with family members or worried about where their next meal might come from.

*Crooks said gently, "Maybe you can see now. You got George. You know he's goin' to come back. S'pose you didn't have nobody. S'pose you couldn't go into the bunkhouse and play rummy 'cause you was black. How'd you like that? S'pose you had to sit out here an' read books. Sure you could play horseshoes till it got dark, but then you got to read books. Books ain't no good. A guy needs somebody--to be near him." He whined, "A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long as he's with you. I tell*

ya," he cried, "I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick."

-- For those joining late, I'm no English teacher, but if I encountered someone who was adamant that they didn't read fiction (I'm thinking men here) and I wanted to try to get them to change their attitude, *Of Mice and Men* would be the novel I'd hand them. It's short, it's about men and work and figuring out a better future and loyalty and how things don't always work out the way you dream they will. Yet the writing takes me away to another place. I couldn't last a day bucking barley or bucking a sack of anything, but as Steinbeck knows well, we all yearn to be on the open road, traveling, camping out on a river and maybe eating beans just because we felt like it.

-- Lastly, *Of Mice and Men* has been adapted to film twice: a 1939 production starring Burgess Meredith as George and Lon Chaney Jr. as Lennie and a 1992 film with Gary Sinise as George and John Malkovich as Lennie. Reading the novel, I heard Sinise's voice as George. As Lennie, I heard the Abominable Snowman from the 1949 Looney Toons short directed by Chuck Jones, *The Abominable Snow Rabbit*. References to Steinbeck's novel have been dropped by a ton of cartoon series, perhaps as much a tribute to Jones as to Steinbeck, but the homage that stands out for me are the characters of Pinky and the Brain on *Animaniacs*.

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