Of Mice and Men
National Players
For over 125 years Regions has been proud to be a part of the Middle Tennessee community, growing and thriving as our area has. From the opening of our doors on September 1, 1883, we have committed to this community and our customers.

One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC’s Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is – reaching over 25,000 students and teachers – some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have close to 200 associates teaching financial literacy in classrooms this year.

**Thank you, teachers,** for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.

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Dear Teachers,

TPAC Education is excited to present John Steinbeck’s classic *Of Mice and Men* as part of our HOT Season for Young People. We know many of you teach the novella each year and have great lesson plans for this story; therefore, we have created this guidebook to prepare you and your students specifically for the play you will see at TPAC this spring.

Much of the information comes directly from a guidebook prepared by the touring company, National Players. We’ve included additional classroom activities, a web search handout, and information about Steinbeck and the time period.

Please note the following comments from the director regarding the violence and language in the play. The play will remain true to the action and language of Steinbeck’s novel.

TPAC Education

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Handouts included –
- Web Search Activity
- “To a Mouse” Poem/Activity
- Scenes with Lennie

Guidebook written and compiled by Kristin Dare-Horsley. Excerpts from National Players guidebook. Edited by Cassie LaFevor
The play begins with two traveling farm laborers, George Milton and Lennie Small, on their way to a job loading (bucking) barley at a California ranch. It is a Thursday evening, and they spend the night along the banks of Salinas River before arriving at the ranch the next morning. In this scene the audience discovers the main personality differences between George and Lennie. Lennie is slow mentally, and George acts as Lennie’s guardian, watching out for his friend. They’ve been traveling and working together for a long time, since Lennie’s Aunt Clara passed away. George also continually mentions that Lennie’s habit of petting soft things, such as a dead mouse or the dress of a woman, often gets them into trouble - forcing the two men to continuously look for new jobs. They can never really settle down in one area due to this. And Lennie doesn’t understand the danger of his own great strength. They dream about owning their own place and being their own bosses in the near future as they fall asleep.

Upon arriving at the ranch Friday morning, they meet an old man named Candy who lost his hand at the ranch a few years back. Candy explains to them the ways of the ranch and the manners of the other ranch hands. The Boss enters the bunkhouse to visit with his new workers and is quite angry that they arrived late for the morning shift. He questions both George and Lennie about their previous work experience, but eventually takes them on and writes them into his work notebook. Curley, the Boss’ son, enters soon after, looking for his father. He is a former boxer of short stature and has a quick temper. He confronts George and Lennie about arriving late, and even goes to threaten them with physical violence, but then leaves the bunkhouse.

Curley’s Wife enters the bunkhouse right before the ranch hands arrive for lunch. She claims she is “looking for her husband” and is a very attractive woman, but all the men avoid her since she just married Curley two weeks prior and they are wary of Curley’s temper. George warns Lennie to stay away from her, and Lennie tells George that he wants to leave this scary working environment. Slim, a mule driver (jerk-line skinner), enters and introduces himself to George and Lennie. Another mule driver by the name of Carlson enters soon after and finds out from Slim that his dog has had puppies. Carlson discusses with Slim the idea of killing Candy’s old dog and replacing it with one of his puppies because the smell of Candy’s old dog makes it impossible to sleep in the bunkhouse. As the ranch hands leave to have their lunch, George agrees to ask Slim if Lennie can have a puppy.

Later that evening, George confides in Slim about his relationship with Lennie and thanks him for giving Lennie a puppy. He admits that Lennie isn’t bright, but obviously a nice person and a hard worker. Carlson enters from playing horseshoes and pressures Candy to allow him to kill his dog in order to put it out of its misery. Candy gives in when Slim joins in the argument. Later in the scene, he overhears George and Lennie talking about their dream and asks to be part of it, offering to advance half of the money they need. Finally, their dream appears within reach.
Slim leaves the bunkhouse to fix one of his mules’ hooves in the barn. Curley enters the bunkhouse looking for his wife, and then leaves suspecting she is in the barn with Slim. Some of the other ranch hands follow thinking they are going to see a fight between the two men. They all return to the bunkhouse with Curley and Slim in a verbal argument. Curley is taunted by the other men and is pushed to a boiling point, and he takes out his aggression on Lennie by first taunting him and then beating him up like a punching bag. Lennie takes this abuse until George tells him to “get hi.” He then grabs Curley’s hand and breaks all the bones in it. Curley is taken to the doctor and George and Lennie are left wondering whether or not they will be fired.

The next night, Saturday evening, George and most of the other ranch hands are in town while Lennie explores the barn after playing with his puppy. He comes across Crook’s room. At first, Crooks objects to this invasion of privacy, but eventually Lennie wins him over. Crooks describes the difficulties of his life at the ranch, while Lennie speaks of the dream that he, George, and Candy share. Candy enters and tells Lennie that he has been figuring out how to make the dream a reality on their ranch. Crooks asks if he can join them, and George enters the room to find that they have been spreading their secret dream around. Curley’s wife, looking for company, enters the room. All the men except Lennie argue with her, but she plays up to Lennie. The scene ends with the Boss entering in on Curley’s Wife being in a room alone with the four men.

The next afternoon, Sunday, Lennie is alone in the barn while the men play horseshoes outside. By handling his puppy too much he has broken its neck. As he tries to hide the animal, Curley’s wife enters. She talks to Lennie about her life, seemingly opening up her troubled past to him. When she learns of Lennie’s love for soft things, she invites him to touch her hair. He does so, but he holds on too tight, frightening Curley’s Wife and causing her to struggle. Lennie panics and accidentally breaks her neck. He flees to the riverbank where George told him to go in case of trouble. Candy enters to find the woman’s body. He gets George and asks for reassurance that their dream will still be fulfilled, even without Lennie. But George has already forsaken the vision with this crushing discovery. He asks Candy to give him a few minutes head start before telling the others so they won’t think he was involved in the incident.

George reenters the barn with the others to discover the body and he attempts to convince the men that Lennie should only be put away because he meant no harm. However, Curley insists on lynching him and they all go out to look for Lennie.

That evening, Sunday night, Lennie makes his way back to the riverbank where the play began. George enters to hide him in the brush, and the other men trail closely behind. In order to give George some time, Slim persuades the group to spread out. They exit, and Lennie asks George if he will “give him hell,” but George does so halfheartedly. They discuss their dream one last time as George has Lennie look across the river to imagine the land they will eventually have. As Lennie pictures the land, George shoots him in the back of the head.
John Steinbeck was born in 1902 in Salinas, California, a region that became the setting for much of his fiction, including *Of Mice and Men*. As a teenager, he spent his summers working as a hired hand on neighboring ranches, where his experiences of rural California and its people impressed him deeply. In 1919, he enrolled at Stanford University, where he studied intermittently for the next six years before finally leaving without having earned a degree. For the next five years, he worked as a reporter and then as caretaker for a Lake Tahoe estate while he completed his first novel, an adventure story called *Cup of Gold*, which was published in 1929. Critical and commercial success did not come for another six years, when *Tortilla Flat* was published in 1935, at which point Steinbeck was finally able to support himself entirely with his writing.

Steinbeck’s best-known works deal intimately with the plight of desperately poor California wanderers, who, despite the cruelty of their circumstances, often triumph spiritually. Always politically involved, Steinbeck followed *Tortilla Flat* with three novels about the plight of the California laboring class, beginning with *In Dubious Battle* in 1936. *Of Mice and Men* followed in 1937, and *The Grapes of Wrath* won the 1940 Pulitzer Prize and became Steinbeck’s most famous novel. Steinbeck sets *Of Mice and Men* against the backdrop of Depression-era America. The economic conditions of the time victimized workers like George and Lennie, whose quest for land was thwarted by cruel and powerful forces beyond their control, but whose tragedy was marked, ultimately, by steadfast compassion and love.

Critical opinions of Steinbeck’s work have always been mixed. Both stylistically and in his emphasis on manhood and male relationships, which figure heavily in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck was strongly influenced by his contemporary, Ernest Hemingway. Even though Steinbeck was hailed as a great author in the 1930s and 1940s, and won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962, many critics have faulted his works for being superficial, sentimental, and overly moralistic. Though *Of Mice and Men* is regarded by some as his greatest achievement, many critics argue that it suffers from one-dimensional characters and an excessively deterministic plot, which renders the lesson of the novella more important than the people in it.

Steinbeck continued writing throughout the 1940s and 1950s. He went to Europe during World War II, then worked in Hollywood both as a filmmaker and a scriptwriter for such movies as *Viva Zapata!* (1950). His important later works include *East of Eden* (1952), a sprawling family saga set in California, and *Travels with Charley* (1962), a journalistic account of his tour of America. He died in New York City in 1968.

In his own words:

“I was a bindlestiff myself for quite a spell. I worked in the same country that the story is laid in. The characters are composites to a certain extent. Lennie was a real person. He’s in an insane asylum in California right now. I worked alongside him for many weeks. He didn’t kill a girl. He killed a ranch foreman. Got sore because the boss had fired his pal and stuck a pitchfork right through his stomach. I hate to tell you how many times I saw him do it. We couldn’t stop him until it was too late.” (Taken from an interview with the New York Times in 1937.)

“In every bit of honest writing in the world there is a base theme. Try to understand men, if you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and nearly always leads to love . . . Try to understand each other.” (Steinbeck’s journal entry, 1938.)
Internet Search Activity – John Steinbeck

Answer the following questions, using the internet to search for the information.

Name:

1. What award did Steinbeck win specifically for Of Mice and Men in 1938?
2. What Steinbeck book won the Pulitzer Prize? What year?
3. What central themes are woven through Steinbeck’s best known stories?
4. Why have some schools banned Of Mice and Men from the classroom?
5. Where did Steinbeck go to college? Did he obtain a degree?
6. List three awards/honors Steinbeck received:
7. Where did Steinbeck get the title Of Mice and Men?
8. Finish the Steinbeck quote: “This I believe: That the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: The freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes undirected. ________________________________
                           ____________________________________________
                           ________________________________________________.”
9. What nickname was given to Salinas, California? Why?
10. List five books written by John Steinbeck: ________________________________,
                           ________________________________, ________________________________,
                           ________________________________, ________________________________.
11. What year did the play Of Mice and Men open on Broadway?
12. In what theater on Broadway was Of Mice and Men performed?
13. How many performances of the story Of Mice and Men played on Broadway?
Of Mice and Men – The Play

Steinbeck’s writing style for *Of Mice and Men* was experimental. He wanted to write a novel that could be performed, just as it was written, as a play. After seeing a theater company perform the novella, however, he concluded that his experiment didn’t work as well as he’d imagined. Noted playwright (*You Can’t Take it With You*) and director (*Guys and Dolls*) George F. Kaufman convinced Steinbeck to adapt *Of Mice and Men* for the stage. Kaufman directed the stage adaptation which opened at The Music Box Theater on Broadway in 1937 and ran for 207 performances.

National Players

The National Players have earned a distinctive place in American theatre by bringing innovative and accessible productions to audiences across the country. Performed with high-voltage energy, clarity, and wit, the National Players introduce audiences to great works of dramatic literature that are rich in exciting stories and characters, and profound in language and themes. Our productions touch hearts and minds, inspire imagination and wonder, spark curiosity about the self, the world, and the creative process, and celebrate what it means to be human.

The National Players was founded in 1949 by Father Gilbert V. Hartke, a prominent arts educator and head of the drama department at Catholic University of America. His mission – to stimulate young people’s higher thinking skills and imaginations by presenting classical plays in surprisingly accessible ways – is as urgent and vital today as it was 63 years ago.

National Players offers an exemplary lesson in collaboration and teamwork-in-action: the actors not only play multiple roles onstage, but also serve as managers, teaching artists, and technicians. A self-contained company, National Players carries its own sets, lights, costumes, and sound.

The Role of the Audience

The audience plays an integral role in every live performance, and especially in National Players shows. The audience is, in fact, a key element in making live theatre such a special medium and so different from television and film. During a live performance, please keep in mind that the actors onstage can both see and hear the audience, and while actors enjoy listening to the audience react, talking and making loud comments only serves to distract actors and fellow audience members.

So please watch the show, let the story move you in whatever way is true to you. Laugh if you want to laugh; be afraid, intrigued, shocked, confused or horrified. The actors want you to be involved in the story they are telling. But please be respectful of the actors working hard to bring you a live performance and to the audience around you trying to enjoy the play.
The Characters

George Milton: A small, sharp-witted migrant worker/ranch hand that travels with Lennie. George is a typical, realistic hand who uses his mind to anticipate the future and keep Lennie in line.

Lennie Small: A physically large and strong man whose mind is slow. He has a short attention span and acts similar to a child; because of his mental limitations, Lennie never really understands or anticipates the consequences of his actions. He travels with and is looked after by his friend George.

The Boss: He is superintendent of the ranch and oversees its day-to-day operations, but a big land corporation owns the ranch itself. He is a generally nice person that treats his workers nicely if they work hard, but he is a no-nonsense businessman when it comes to getting the grain out.

Slim: He is a tall, well-respected mule driver (jerk-line skinner) that is looked up to as a leader among the other ranch hands. He treats his work and everyone on the ranch with equal respect, is a hard and honest worker, and he knows how to do his work without being told.

Carlson: He is a ranch hand who is the opposite of Slim: coarse and insensitive to the other ranch hands, he only cares about what is best for him.

Candy: The ranch worker that lost his hand on the job a few years back. He wants to join George and Lennie in their dream of owning their own land by providing them with a down payment. Candy’s one faithful companion is his old dog, who is about as useless as Candy is at the ranch.

Whit: A young ranch hand that is like the younger brother of the bunkhouse. He relates easily to Candy and his dog, and is quick to make new friends out of the men that arrive at the ranch.

Curley’s Wife: She is the only woman on the ranch and also in the play. She is continually around the ranch hands claiming that she “is looking for Curley,” but she is also remarkably lonely in her new life on the ranch and just wants to talk with someone. She is pretty, if not excessively so, in order to get attention.

Crooks: He was given the nickname for his crooked back where a horse kicked him. He is a proud and independent African American who also is an outcast on the ranch. He is bitter against the racial discrimination against him on the ranch, but Lennie and Crooks become friends later on. He also wants to join Lennie and George’s dream of having his own land.

Curley: He is the short-tempered son of the Boss and a former boxer. He is small in stature but he picks fights with those weaker than he is and attempts to intimidate those larger than him. He is also recently married, so he is constantly thinking about his wife on the ranch as well.
From the Director: Jason Jones

What inspired/excited you about directing Of Mice and Men?
I first got excited about Of Mice and Men because I am drawn to stories of our American past and the struggles earlier generations have endured in order to make for a better life. Of course, I recognize that the concept of Hope in our contemporary time has been put under considerable strain, and in that I found a strong connection between Steinbeck's story and our own time. This also drew me closer to the play. How would the text help me gain perspective on our current struggles? How would our current struggles illuminate the text? These questions drew me deeply into the story.

What challenges did you face?
I see any challenge as an opportunity waiting to be revealed. This year's tour provided us numerous opportunities to work on this play in exciting and unconventional ways. For example, in the company we have two outstanding female actors but only one role to fill. We decided to cast both women as Curly's Wife and have them perform on an alternating schedule. Because we had the opportunity to rehearse the Curly's Wife scenes with very talented but very different actors, we learned significantly more about the breadth of character and choices available to the actors playing the role at any given time. For her scene partners and the company as a whole, the casting alternation requires of them a deeper listening and responsiveness within the scenes.

How did you motivate the actors to connect with their characters?
The actors came to rehearsals on Day One with strong ideas about their characters, so little initial motivation was required. We deepened the exploration through three major factors: (1) understanding the archetypal connections of the characters in relation to George, (2) investigating specifically how the characters relate differently to George and Lennie, and (3) building an unbreakable bond between George and Lennie. These ways of looking at the action of the play provided a wealth of possibilities and allowed the story to resonate far beyond the play's time and place.

How did you approach the time period/setting of the novella?
We investigated the world of the play through group effort of image and textual research in conjunction with information collected by our dramaturge. We explored the physical labor of the farm, and the hierarchy of their microcosm.

Also, since I see the play as a metaphor for a deeper human struggle that transcends the novella/play's time and place, we also referenced Jungian archetype. Steinbeck was exploring the choices that individuals make to define themselves, and he was tapping into some surprisingly primal stuff in the process. Asking deeper human questions about the text and about ourselves kept our creative juices flowing throughout the rehearsal process and into the tour.

What do you hope the students will think about as they watch the play? After they see the play?
For students who have studied the novella or the play, I would encourage them to be aware of the interpretive choice we made and how those choices impact their previous understanding of the text. For students who have no previous contact with the text, I hope this event would encourage them to pick up a copy of it and investigate the story for themselves.

I hope that all people who watch the play will allow themselves to give over to the events as they unfold. If audience members are open, they may discover that the play has an effect on them deeper than the level of conscious thought.
History and Major Events of the Period

After World War I, economic and ecological forces brought many rural poor and migrant agricultural workers from the Great Plains states, such as Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas, to California. Following World War I, a recession led to a drop in the market price of farm crops, which meant that farmers were forced to produce more goods in order to earn the same amount of money. To meet this demand for increased productivity, many farmers bought more land and invested in expensive agricultural equipment, which plunged them into debt. The stock market crash of 1929 only made matters worse. Banks were forced to foreclose on mortgages and collect debts. Unable to pay their creditors, many farmers lost their property and were forced to find other work. But doing so proved very difficult, since the nation’s unemployment rate had skyrocketed, peaking at nearly twenty-five percent in 1933.

The increase in farming activity across the Great Plains states caused the precious soil to erode. This erosion, coupled with a seven-year drought that began in 1931, turned once fertile grasslands into a desert-like region known as the Dust Bowl. Hundreds of thousands of farmers packed up their families and few belongings, and headed for California, which, for numerous reasons, seemed like a promised land. Migrant workers came to be known as Okies, for although they came from many states across the Great Plains, twenty percent of the farmers were originally from Oklahoma. Okies were often met with scorn by California farmers and natives, which only made their dislocation and poverty even more unpleasant.

John Steinbeck immortalized the plight of one such family, the Joads, in his most famous novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*. In several of his fiction works, including *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck illustrates how grueling, challenging, and often unrewarding the life of migrant farmers could be. Just as George and Lennie dream of a better life on their own farm, the Great Plains farmers dreamed of finding a better life in California. The state’s mild climate promised a longer growing season and, with soil favorable to a wider range of crops, it offered more opportunities to harvest. Despite these promises, though, very few found it to be the land of opportunity and plenty of which they dreamed.

Early in the novella, George tells Lennie, like he did many times before, “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place … They got nothing to look ahead to … With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to …”

In this quote we are introduced to many of the themes in the book and play: loneliness, friendship, having a dream. Below are a few other examples within the play.

**Loneliness:** Throughout the play, loneliness is a main characteristic of most of the characters. Candy has only his dog as his companion. Upon the killing of the dog, he has no one and, therefore, attaches himself to the dream George and Lennie share. On their farm, he would not be an outcast or alone. Even after Lennie kills Curley’s Wife, Candy still wants to carry out the dream because he had once again attached himself to something tangible.

Crooks remarks, “…A guys goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody. Don’t make no difference who the guy is, long’s he with you…” He would work for nothing, as long as he could communicate with others.

Curley’s wife is so overwhelmed by her loneliness that she seeks the friendship of other men besides her husband. “Think I don’t like to talk to somebody ever’ once in a while?”

**The American Dream:** Everyone has a dream that they strive for. George and Lennie wish to be their own bosses and actually have the stability of owning their own land. They have a dream, even before they arrive at their new job on the ranch, to make enough money to live “off the fat of the land.” There, Lennie will be permitted to tend the rabbits, which is what he sincerely wants to do. Candy, upon hearing about the dream, wants to join them so that he would not be left alone, because he is almost obsolete at the ranch since he lost his hand.

Slim remarks later in the play that he would like to have his own team of mules to drive and work instead of using the animals that belong to the ranch.

**Friendship:** George and Lennie share such a strong bond that when one is lost, the other inevitably is as well. Steinbeck often stresses how ranch hands are loners by nature, and that George and Lennie are the only ones who travel as a pair. They seem and act like two halves of the same person, and they know that the other will always have their back.

Candy’s need for the companionship of his dog also stresses the importance of true friendship.

**Strength/Weakness:** The ideas of strength and weakness are both literal and turned around in this story. There are obvious examples of Lennie’s physical strength. “There ain’t nobody can keep up with him.” But there are also instances, such as in the fight with Curley, where Lennie, enduring a pummeling, must first get permission from George before he defends himself. Lennie proves to be both weak and strong in that he cannot control himself, yet he has the ability to cause great harm.

Curley, thinking and trying to be strong, picks a fight with the biggest man in the crew, only to learn he is himself the weakest man, both in losing the fight, and in picking a fight in the first place with someone of a lesser mind than he who didn’t want trouble.

George is also strong because he has taken on the responsibility of looking after Lennie, which ultimately leads to his decision to kill Lennie rather than let strangers lynch him.
Steinbeck’s original title for the novel was “Something that Happened.” He changed the title after reading the poem “To A Mouse” by Robert Burns. Burns’ poem is an apology to a mouse he accidently caused to become homeless by overturning her nest with a plough. The following activity will familiarize your students with the Modern English translation of the poem as well as give them an opportunity to be creative and to compare the famous stanza to their own lives.

Objectives: The student will paraphrase part of the Robert Burns poem “To a Mouse”.
  The student will construct their own version of Stanza 7, relating it to their own lives.
  The student will assess Steinbeck’s use of this poem, and evaluate the best laid plans within the play.

Standards: English/Language Arts – Language, Communication, Writing, Logic, Literature
  Social Studies (United States History) – Culture, Economics, Individuals, Groups and Interactions

Materials: Copies of the poem and activity (handout provided), pen or pencil.

Step 1. Make copies of the poem (handout). Read the poem aloud once and describe what is taking place so the students will get a vision for the action and an ear for the language.

Step 2. Assign each student a stanza of the poem. Each student should read her part aloud either in her seat or in front of the class. There are eight stanzas, so the class may read the poem several times in order for each student to have a turn reading aloud.

Step 3. Focus on stanza 7 and explain to the students this specifically is where Steinbeck was inspired for the title of his novella. Read stanza 7 aloud again and then ask the students to write the stanza in their own words. There is room for the students to write at the bottom of the page or beside stanza 7. Ask one or two students to read their summary of stanza 7.

Step 4. Ask students to write a verse that is their own version of stanza 7. (Space is provided for this on the back of the handout.) Burns’ poem is a retelling of something that actually happened with further reflection of how the incident related to his life and life as a whole. The students’ version may be funny or serious, but it must relate to something in their lives. They may write it to themselves, family members, friends, animals, etc. Their poems do not have to rhyme. Give the students 5 minutes to write their stanzas.

Examples:

| But, brother, you are not alone,  
in feeling strange in your own skin;  
The best-laid plans of every teenager  
Go often astray,  
And will take them places they know not  
until future days. |
|-----------------------------|
| But, Hobbes, you are not alone,  
in wanting me to come home;  
The best-laid plans of cats and humans  
Go often astray,  
And they long for times to be together  
to frolic and to play. |

Step 5. Ask students to take turns reading their verses aloud.

Step 6. Reflection: Ask students to reflect upon their poems, the Burns poem, and Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men title. Ask students, “Why do you think Steinbeck chose the title ‘Of Mice and Men’?”

Step 7. Extension: After the show, discuss the “best laid plans” of these characters in the play: Curley’s wife, Crooks, George, Lennie. What were their dreams? Ask students, “What caused their plans to go astray?”

But, brother, you are not alone,  
in feeling strange in your own skin;  
The best-laid plans of every teenager  
Go often astray,  
And will take them places they know not  
until future days.

But, Hobbes, you are not alone,  
in wanting me to come home;  
The best-laid plans of cats and humans  
Go often astray,  
And they long for times to be together  
to frolic and to play.
To A Mouse

Poem in Modern English

Stanza 1
Tiny, sleek, cowering, fearful mouse,
O, what a panic is in your breast!
You need not start away so hasty,
With pattering noises!
I would be loath to run and chase you,
With my murdering spade!

Stanza 2
I'm truly sorry that my world,
Has broken into your world,
And justifies your ill opinion of men,
Which makes you startle
At me, you poor, earth-born companion,
And fellow mortal!

Stanza 3
I doubt not that at times you may steal;
What then? poor little animal, you must live!
An occasional ear of corn out of twenty-four sheaves
Is a small request;
I'll be blest with the rest of the corn,
And never miss the ear you took!

Stanza 4
Your tiny house, too, in ruin!
Its fragile walls the winds are strewing!
And nothing, now, to build a new one,
Out of densely growing grass!
And bleak December's winds are following,
Both harsh and keen!

Stanza 5
You saw the fields were bare and desolate,
And weary winter coming fast,
And cozy here, beneath the wind,
You thought to dwell—
Till crash! the cruel plowshare passed
Right through your cell.

Stanza 6
That little heap of leaves and stubble,
Has cost you many a weary nibble!
Now you are turned out, for all your trouble,
Of house and home,
To endure the winter's sleety dribble,
And hoarfrost cold!

Stanza 7
But, Mousie, you are not alone,
In proving foresight may be vain;
The best-laid schemes of mice and men
Go often astray,
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,
For promised joy!

Stanza 8
Still you are blest, compared with me
The present only touches you:
But, Oh! I backward cast my eye.
On prospects dreary!
And forward, though I cannot see,
I guess and fear!
Write your own version of Stanza 7.

But,______________, you are not alone,

________________________________________________________;

The best-laid plans of ________________________________

Go often astray,

And______________________________________________________

For reference:

Stanza 7

But, Mousie, you are not alone,

In proving foresight may be vain;

The best-laid schemes of mice and men

Go often astray,

And leave us nothing but grief and pain,

For promised joy!
This activity will familiarize your students with portions of important scenes in the play as well as give them an opportunity to study the characters of Lennie, George, Crooks, and Curley’s Wife. The text used is from the original novel adapted into a reader’s theater format.

**Objectives:**
- The student will interpret and portray characters from scenes in *Of Mice and Men.*
- The student will create a “voice” for a character in each scene.
- The student will perform scenes for the class.

**Standards:**
- English/Language Arts – Language, Communication, and Literature
  - Theatre – Character Acting, Research, and Context
- Social Studies – Economics, Governance and Civics, Individuals, Groups and Interactions

**Materials:** Copies of the handout Scenes with Lennie (provided), character descriptions (on pg. 7)

**Teacher Note:** The lesson assumes the students have read or are reading *Of Mice and Men.*

Step 1. Make copies of the three scenes with Lennie for each student. Ask students to read each scene silently to themselves.

Step 2. Read aloud the character descriptions (on page 7 of the guidebook) for George, Lennie, Crooks, and Curley’s Wife. Discuss each character, and ask these questions:
- How would this character move and carry himself/herself?
- How would this character speak?

Step 3. Ask your students to practice embodying the characters as they read lines aloud. With everyone reading at once, the students will feel less intimidated as they get used to hearing the sound of their own voice as they practice the different characters. Ask them to read each scene aloud twice to familiarize themselves with the language and text. This will also give them a chance to portray each character.

Step 4. Ask your students to get into groups of two, facing one another. Ask them to “perform” each scene with their partner. One student will portray Lennie, one student will portray the other character in the scene. Let the students decide who will play which role.

Step 5. Ask each student pair to “perform” their favorite of the three scenes in front of the class.

Step 6. After each pair has had a chance to perform, discuss the similarities and differences in the character and performance choices they made. Read the questions after each scene, and discuss the answers as a class.

Step 7. Extension: After the show, ask students these questions: How did the actors who portrayed George and Lennie carry out the scene? Is it what you imagined? Is it similar to how you portrayed your scene? What were some of the nuances the actors portrayed as Crooks and Curley’s Wife? Who is the most sympathetic character?
Scenes with Lennie — Scene Excerpts

Scene 1 Lennie and George

Lennie (pleading): Come on, George. Tell me. Please George. Like you done before.

George (In a deep voice. He repeats his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before.): Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place. They come to a ranch an’ work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they’re poundin’ their tail on some other ranch. They ain’t got nothing to look ahead to."

Lennie (delighted): That’s it — that’s it. Now tell how it is with us.

George: With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don’t have to sit in no bar room blowin’ our jack jus’ because we got no place else to go. If them other guys gets in jail they can rot for all anybody gives a damn. But not us.

Lennie (breaking in): But not us! An’ why? Because . . . because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that’s why. (laughing delightedly) Go on now, George!

George: You got it by heart. You can do it yourself.

Lennie: No, you. I forget some a’ the things. Tell how it’s gonna be.

George: O.K. Someday — we’re gonna get the jack together and we’re gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an’ a cow and some pigs and —

Lennie: An’ live off the fatta the lan’, and have rabbits. Go on, George! Tell about what we’re gonna have in the garden and about the rabbits in the cages and about the rain in the winter and the stove, and how thick the cream is on the milk like you can hardly cut it. Tell about that, George.

Discussion Questions for Scene 1:
- What does this scene tell us about Lennie and George’s relationship?
- Do you think George enjoys telling Lennie the same ol’ story?

Scene 2 Lennie and Crooks

Crooks: 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. A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody. Don’t make no difference who the guy is, long’s he’s with you. I tell ya, I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an’ he gets sick.

Lennie: George gonna come back. Maybe George come back already. Maybe I better go see.
Crooks: I didn’t mean to scare you. He’ll come back. I was talkin’ about myself. A guy sets alone out here at night, maybe readin’ books or thinkin’ or stuff like that. Maybe if he sees somethin’, he don’t know whether it’s right or not. He can’t turn to some other guy and ast him if he sees it too. He can’t tell. He got nothing to measure by. I seen things out here. I wasn’t drunk. I don’t know if I was asleep. If some guy was with me, he could tell me I was asleep, an’ then it would be alright. But I jus’ don’t know.

Lennie: George wun’t go away and leave me. I know George wun’t do that.

Discussion Questions for Scene 2:
- Why do you think Crooks explains all of this to Lennie, even though he knows Lennie doesn’t understand?
- What does this scene tell us about the way Crooks is treated by others on the ranch?

Scene 3 Lennie and Curley’s Wife

Curley’s Wife (angrily): Wha’s the matter with me? Ain’t I got a right to talk to nobody? Whatta they think I am, anyways? You’re a nice guy. I don’t know why I can’t talk to you. I ain’t doin’ no harm to you.

Lennie: Well, George says you’ll get us in a mess.

Curley’s Wife: Aw, nuts! What kinda harm am I doin’ to you? Seems like they ain’t none of them cares how I gotta live. I tell you I ain’t used to livin’ like this. I coulda made somethin’ of myself. Maybe I will yet. I lived right in Salinas. Come there when I was a kid. Well, a show come through, an’ I met one of the actors. He says I could go with that show. But my ol’ lady wouldn’t let me. She says because I was on’y fifteen. But the guy says I coulda. If I’d went, I wouldn’t be livin’ like this, you bet.

Lennie: We gonna have a little place – an’ rabbits.

Curley’s Wife: ‘Nother time I met a guy, an’ he was in pitchers. We went out to the Riverside Dance Palace with him. He says he was gonna put me in the movies. Says I was a natural. Soon’s he got back to Hollywood he was gonna write to me about it. I never got that letter . . . You listenin’?

Lennie: Me? Sure.

Discussion Questions for Scene 3:
- Why do you think Curley’s Wife is always hanging around the guys?
- What does this scene tell you about Curley’s Wife? Lennie?
**Discussion Questions**

**Before the Show**

1.) What’s in a Name? Titles are often very important to the artistic/literary success of a play/book, especially in how it is received by the artistic community. Steinbeck’s first title for the novel was “Something that Happened.” He changed the title after reading the Burns poem “To a Mouse.” Compare the original title “Something That Happened” to “Of Mice and Men.” Which title is better and why?

2.) Steinbeck was quoted saying, “In every bit of honest writing in the world there is a base theme. Try to understand men, if you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and nearly always leads to love …Try to understand each other.” (Steinbeck’s journal entry, 1938.) Do you think the characters in *Of Mice and Men* try to do this? Make a list/diagram of all the relationships between the characters in the play and work with your classmates to answer this question: Do they try to understand each other, or are they selfish in their own worlds?

3.) The Dust Bowl and the Stock Market crash of 1929 combined had a large effect on the lives of the characters in this play. Thousands of people from the crippled American Midwest travelled west to California to find work and land to farm. Why do you think these people chose to go west during this national crisis? What do you think would/could have happened if they instead all moved to the east coast?

4.) Who do you think is the protagonist or central character of this play? A protagonist is defined in the theatre as the character that undergoes a change and usually learns something or takes something away from the change. Create a list of pros and cons for why each character could be the protagonist and then discuss with your classmates.

**After the Show**

1.) After seeing the show, do you think the set helped to tell the story, or did it hinder it? Do you think transitions through movement, music, and lighting helped to tell the story? Directors often aim to keep the audience constantly engaged in the story. Do you think his choices kept the audience engaged?

2.) Why do you think the poem “To a Mouse” inspired Steinbeck to change the title of his book? Think of possible connections between specific scenes and verses from the poem.

3.) There are multiple historical events that influence the action of this play. Having seen the show, do any of these specific events (like the Stock Market crash or Dust Bowl) come to directly affect the action/plot of the play, or do they hold a more subtle influence over the characters and their lives?

4.) Steinbeck based a great deal of *Of Mice and Men* on his experience as a migrant worker in California during the late 1930s. Why do you think he chose to turn his experiences into a book and later a play? Would you consider storytelling to be a crucial part of human existence, or something that we just enjoy listening to and engaging in?
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