

Analysis of Major Characters

Lennie - Although **Lennie** is among the principal characters in *Of Mice and Men*, he is perhaps the least dynamic. He undergoes no significant changes, development, or growth throughout the novel and remains exactly as the reader encounters him in the opening pages. Simply put, he loves to pet soft things, is blindly devoted to **George** and their vision of the farm, and possesses incredible physical strength. Nearly every scene in which Lennie appears confirms these and only these characteristics.

Although Steinbeck's insistent repetition of these characteristics makes Lennie a rather flat character, Lennie's simplicity is central to Steinbeck's conception of the novel. *Of Mice and Men* is a very short work that manages to build up an extremely powerful impact. Since the tragedy depends upon the outcome seeming to be inevitable, the reader must know from the start that Lennie is doomed, and must be sympathetic to him. Steinbeck achieves these two feats by creating a protagonist who earns the reader's sympathy because of his utter helplessness in the face of the events that unfold. Lennie is totally defenseless. He cannot avoid the dangers presented by Curley, **Curley's** wife, or the world at large. His innocence raises him to a standard of pure goodness that is more poetic and literary than realistic. His enthusiasm for the vision of their future farm proves contagious as he convinces **George**, **Candy**, **Crooks**, and the reader that such a paradise might be possible. But he is a character whom Steinbeck sets up for disaster, a character whose innocence only seems to ensure his inevitable destruction.

George - Like Lennie, George can be defined by a few distinct characteristics. He is short-tempered but a loving and devoted friend, whose frequent protests against life with Lennie never weaken his commitment to protecting his friend. George's first words, a stern warning to Lennie not to drink so much lest he get sick, set the tone of their relationship. George may be terse and impatient at times, but he never strays from his primary purpose of protecting Lennie.

Unlike Lennie, however, George does change as the story progresses. The reader learns that he is capable of change and growth during his conversation with **Slim**, during which he admits that he once abused Lennie for his own amusement. From this incident George learned the moral lesson that it is wrong to take advantage of the weak. *Of Mice and Men* follows him toward a difficult realization that the world is designed to prey on the weak. At the start of the novel, George is something of an idealist.

Despite his hardened, sometimes gruff exterior, he believes in the story of their future farm that he tells and retells to Lennie. He longs for the day when he can enjoy the freedom to leave work and see a baseball game. More important than a ball game, however, is the thought of living in safety and comfort with Lennie, free from the people like Curley and **Curley's wife**, who seem to exist only to cause trouble for them. Lennie is largely responsible for George's belief in this safe haven, but eventually the predatory nature of the world asserts itself and George can no longer maintain that belief. By shooting Lennie, George spares his friend the merciless death that would be delivered by Curley's lynch mob, but he also puts to rest his own dream of a perfect, fraternal world.

Candy - One of the book's major themes and several of its dominant symbols revolve around Candy. The old handyman, aging and left with only one hand as the result of an accident, worries that [the boss](#) will soon declare him useless and demand that he leave the ranch. Of course, life on the ranch—especially Candy's dog, once an impressive sheep herder but now toothless, foul-smelling, and brittle with age—supports Candy's fears. Past accomplishments and current emotional ties matter little, as Carson makes clear when he insists that Candy let him put the dog out of its misery. In such a world, Candy's dog serves as a harsh reminder of the fate that awaits anyone who outlives his usefulness.

For a brief time, however, the dream of living out his days with George and Lennie on their dream farm distracts Candy from this harsh reality. He deems the few acres of land they describe worthy of his hard-earned life's savings, which testifies to his desperate need to believe in a world kinder than the one in which he lives. Like George, Candy clings to the idea of having the freedom to take up or set aside work as he chooses. So strong is his devotion to this idea that, even after he discovers that Lennie has killed Curley's wife, he pleads for himself and George to go ahead and buy the farm as planned.

Curley's wife - *Of Mice and Men* is not kind in its portrayal of women. In fact, women are treated with contempt throughout the course of the novel. Steinbeck generally depicts women as troublemakers who bring ruin on men and drive them mad. Curley's wife, who walks the ranch as a temptress, seems to be a prime example of this destructive tendency—Curley's already bad temper has only worsened since their wedding. Aside from wearisome wives, *Of Mice and Men* offers limited, rather misogynistic, descriptions of women who are either dead maternal figures or prostitutes.

Despite Steinbeck's rendering, Curley's wife emerges as a relatively complex and interesting character. Although her purpose is rather simple in the novel's opening pages—she is the "tramp," "tart," and "bitch" that threatens to destroy male happiness and longevity—her appearances later in the novel become more complex. When she confronts Lennie, Candy, and Crooks in the stable, she admits to feeling a kind of shameless dissatisfaction with her life. Her vulnerability at this moment and later—when she admits to Lennie her dream of becoming a movie star—makes her utterly human and much more interesting than the stereotypical vixen in fancy red shoes. However, it also reinforces the novel's grim worldview. In her moment of greatest vulnerability, Curley's wife seeks out even greater weaknesses in others, preying upon Lennie's mental handicap, Candy's debilitating age, and the color of Crooks's skin in order to steel herself against harm.

Crooks - Crooks is a lively, sharp-witted, black stablehand, who takes his name from his crooked back. Like most of the characters in the novel, he admits that he is extremely lonely. When Lennie visits him in his room, his reaction reveals this fact. At first, he turns Lennie away, hoping to prove a point that if he, as a black man, is not allowed in white men's houses, then whites are not allowed in his, but his desire for company ultimately wins out and he invites Lennie to sit with him. Like Curley's wife, Crooks is a disempowered character who turns his vulnerability into a weapon to attack those who are even weaker. He plays a cruel game with Lennie, suggesting to him that George is gone for good. Only when Lennie threatens him with physical violence does he relent. Crooks exhibits the corrosive effects that loneliness can have

Despite Steinbeck's rendering, Curley's wife emerges as a relatively complex and interesting character. Although her purpose is rather simple in the novel's opening pages—she is the "tramp," "tart," and "bitch" that threatens to destroy male happiness and longevity—her appearances later in the novel become more complex. When she confronts Lennie, Candy, and Crooks in the stable, she admits to feeling a kind of shameless dissatisfaction with her life. Her vulnerability at this moment and later—when she admits to Lennie her dream of becoming a movie star—makes her utterly human and much more interesting than the stereotypical vixen in fancy red shoes. However, it also reinforces the novel's grim worldview. In her moment of greatest vulnerability, Curley's wife seeks out even greater weaknesses in others, preying upon Lennie's mental handicap, Candy's debilitating age, and the color of Crooks's skin in order to steel herself against harm.

Crooks - Crooks is a lively, sharp-witted, black stablehand, who takes his name from his crooked back. Like most of the characters in the novel, he admits that he is extremely lonely. When Lennie visits him in his room, his reaction reveals this fact. At first, he turns Lennie away, hoping to prove a point that if he, as a black man, is not allowed in white men's houses, then whites are not allowed in his, but his desire for company ultimately wins out and he invites Lennie to sit with him. Like Curley's wife, Crooks is a disempowered character who turns his vulnerability into a weapon to attack those who are even weaker. He plays a cruel game with Lennie, suggesting to him that George is gone for good. Only when Lennie threatens him with physical violence does he relent. Crooks exhibits the corrosive effects that loneliness can have on a person; his character evokes sympathy as the origins of his cruel behavior are made evident. Perhaps what Crooks wants more than anything else is a sense of belonging—to enjoy simple pleasures such as the right to enter the bunkhouse or to play cards with the other men. This desire would explain why, even though he has reason to doubt George and Lennie's talk about the farm that they want to own, Crooks cannot help but ask if there might be room for him to come along and hoe in the garden.