Of Mice and Men — EMC Study Guides

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The film of Of Mice And Men (d. Gary Sinise, 1992) from which the stills on pages 46 - 47 are taken is available on DVD (£12.99) and VHS video (£5.99)
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Page references: Note that the page references refer to the Penguin paperback edition. Page numbers for the New Longman Literature and Mandarin Classic paperback editions are listed at the back of the publication.
Introduction

The English and Media Centre’s original *Of Mice and Men* booklet put the emphasis firmly on understanding the context in which the novel was written. This study guide includes much of that original contextual material, as well as new visual images and other references from the times. Classroom approaches are updated and extended in the light of current examination demands.

The activities form a logical sequence (before, during and after reading) and can either be used in this way, or adapted according to the needs of the class. The material focuses on key episodes and characters. Some episodes are not dwelt on in the ‘During Reading’ activities, but are picked up later on in the ‘After Reading’ section (for instance the introduction of Slim). Teachers will need to read these sections with their classes before moving on to the next major focus in the material provided. This is intended to ensure that pupils enjoy a reasonably pacy, lively first read rather than stopping at every point.

There is a balance between close-reading activities, active classroom approaches that will engage students’ interest, such as role play and drama.
Before reading

First ideas

Predicting the story

This is the way the story starts.

Two men have been in trouble – they’ve just run away from a town.

They’re going to try to make a better life for themselves.

One tells the other what to do, if anything goes wrong – ‘Hide in the brush and wait for me’.

What can you predict about the story from this beginning?

Of Mice and Men – the context

1 John Steinbeck was an American writer. He wrote Of Mice and Men in 1936.

2 In America in the 1930s there was mass unemployment. In 1932, one out of four Americans wanting work couldn’t find any.

3 Many single men travelled the country in search of work, hitching lifts on trucks or travelling on the railroads and sleeping rough if they had to.

4 Many farm owners in the Midwest lost their land and travelled, with their families, to California to find casual agricultural work. They often ended up in camps for migrant workers.

5 There was a huge amount of poverty and family life was threatened. There was no unemployment benefit or support for families on the verge of starvation.

6 In America people had always believed that if they worked hard they could be successful – anybody could ‘make’ it, if they tried hard enough. This idea was known as the ‘American Dream’. In the 1930s, the myth of the American Dream was put to the test. Many individuals lost everything they owned. They felt that they had no hope of making a decent life for themselves and lost all self-respect and faith in their society. Some still clung desperately to the dream of success and opportunity, despite all the evidence that it was unattainable.
Look at these photographs taken at the time. Talk about which of the statements on page 4 each photograph seems to show.

Choose a person in one of the photographs and use what you know to create a thought bubble for that person. Share your thought bubbles with other people in the class.