

Of MICE and MEN

Written by John Steinbeck
Directed by Mark Clements
January 19 – February 21, 2016
The Quadracci Powerhouse

TEACHER'S GUIDE

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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SUGGESTED TEACHING AND LEARNING TOPICS

- The Great Depression
- The American Dream
- Banned & Challenged Books

This Teacher Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with Milwaukee Rep's Play Guide for *Of Mice and Men*. These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The Play Guide is available online at <http://www.milwaukeeep.com/On-Stage/2015-16-Season/Of-Mice-and-Men-PlayGuide/>

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- *Of Mice and Men* follows the lives of George and Lennie, two migrant workers living in California during the 1930s, at the height of The Great Depression. What is a migrant worker? Who may be described as the equivalent to a migrant worker in society today?
- The Great Depression impacted lives of all Americans, either directly or indirectly, and influenced the environment of the country. What caused The Great Depression? How did The Great Depression affect the lives of Americans? How might this affect the world of the play?
- What predictions can you make about George and Lennie's lives as migrant workers during The Great Depression?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- How did the set (the stage and scenic design) communicate the environment of The Great Depression?
- If the story of George and Lennie took place today, would the ending change? How and why? What types of jobs do you think George and Lennie might have in 2016?



THE AMERICAN DREAM

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- Where have you heard the phrase, "The American Dream"? What does it mean to you? What did it mean in the 1930s? Now? Why has it changed over time? Do you think "The American Dream" has had a positive or negative influence on culture? If you could rewrite the concept of "The American Dream," what would you include?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- What were George and Lennie's dreams? Candy's? Curley's? Curley's Wife's? What stood in their way? How did their dreams influence their behavior? How do your dreams compare/contrast to the characters' dreams? How do your dreams influence your behavior?

ACT IT OUT:

Character Walks and Alternate Endings

Warm up students by instructing them to walk through the space without speaking or physical contact. Instruct students to think about one of the characters in *Of Mice and Men*. How did you see them **WALK** on stage? What did you learn about their *personality* and *environment* that affected their *physicality*? Guide students to begin walking as the character. How fast are they moving? Which part of their body leads their movement?

Break the students into groups of 4-5. Ask students to discuss what they predict may happen if George did not shoot Lennie, or what would happen to George if John Steinbeck wrote a sequel. Choosing one of these alternatives, give students about 20 minutes to **WRITE** a short scene that portrays their prediction. Remind students to think of what they **KNOW** about the characters. Students will **PERFORM** their scenes for the class.

Reminders: Encourage students to write their scene in the format of a script:

CHARACTER NAME: (*Stage directions*) Dialogue

Students may use as many characters as they would like in their scene in order to clearly tell their story. Guide students in developing thoughtful, meaningful, and realistic predictions that portray their understanding of the story and characters. (i.e. Would George really say something like that? Why or why not?)

Debrief: Ask students what challenges they faced when writing an alternate ending that fit what they know about the story, including the characters' personalities. How did character walks affect their understanding of the characters? Did you believe the alternate endings your classmates performed? Why or why not? What similarities or differences did you see in the alternate endings?

DESIGN: A Poster for the Play

Guide students to **DRAW** responses and symbols of the American Dream and other themes or motifs in the story including, but not limited to: broken dreams, friendship, isolation, strength, loss, disappointment and companionship. What is the first thing they think of when they hear those words? Draw what comes to mind. If they do not feel comfortable drawing, encourage students to sketch stick figures or basic shapes and write what they imagine.

Break students into groups of 4-5 to **DISCUSS** the symbolism and themes in *Of Mice and Men*. Explain to students that they will be **DESIGNING** a poster for *Of Mice and Men*. Remind students that it is important not to reveal any spoilers on the poster, but accurately depict the mood, theme, and environment of the show. Encourage students to discuss the symbols they sketched previously in relation to the characters and story.

Debrief: What challenges did you have incorporating symbolism, mood, theme, and setting into the poster without spoiling the plot? How can pictures communicate stories without words? How can a poster impact who sees a show?

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BANNED & CHALLENGED BOOKS

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- From 1990 to 2009 John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* was among the top 10 most frequently banned or challenged books. Discuss the issue of censorship. Where do you see censorship in our society? Why do people support censorship? What does it mean to censor a book? Why would a book or story be censored? Since *Of Mice and Men* has been a frequently banned or challenged book, what topics do you think may be in this story? When dealing with sensitive topics, what must audience members and creative teams keep in mind?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- The racist and profane language in *Of Mice and Men* is a major reason it has earned its status as a banned book. Why do you think the book remains in classrooms? What might audience members gain from experiencing this story? How would this story be different if the language were censored?
- In addition to the language in *Of Mice and Men*, the characters face many other difficult issues. What choices were George and Candy forced to make? How did you feel as George and Candy made these choices? Why might it be important to think about or discuss these issues? What can we gain from discussing issues that may be uncomfortable?

DEBATE: Censorship

Begin by breaking students into two groups. One group will **SUPPORT** censorship and one group will **OPPOSE** censorship. Explain that while they may not be on the side they support personally, their objective is to create the most persuasive argument possible. Provide students with a few prompts for the issue of censorship in our **SOCIETY TODAY** ("racy" shows on TV later in the evening, language censored on radios and TV, content censorship in newspapers, media censorship, etc.). Encourage students to engage in an open discussion within their team exploring both sides of the argument before writing their debate points.

Instruct students: *In order to maintain an order to the debate, it is most effective to follow the debate structure of competitive debate:*

- 1) First Speaker, Proposition Team (5 minutes)
- 2) First Speaker, Opposition Team (5 minutes)
- 3) Second Speaker, Proposition Team (5 minutes)
- 4) Second Speaker, Opposition Team (5 minutes)
- 5) Rebuttal Speaker, Opposition Team (3 minutes)
- 6) Rebuttal Speaker, Proposition Team (3 minutes)

Students should choose their speakers and prepare points and rebuttals. Encourage mature, respectful conversation rooted in factual information and personal experience.

Debrief: What did you learn from preparing your arguments in your groups? What challenges did you face when creating your arguments? How did listening to the opposing speaker affect your speech? What can we gain from seeing a different point of view?

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards:

English Language Arts

RL.6-10.1 LITERACY COMPREHENSION

RL.6-12.3 ANALYZE DIALOGUE

SL.8-12.1 COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSIONS

WL.6-12.3 WRITING A NARRATIVE

SL.6-12.4 PRESENTATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS



"John Steinbeck, sitting on a chair"

Image courtesy New York Public Library, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature.

MILWAUKEE REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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