

Of Mice and Men in the Great Depression

Background & Setting

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Grade Level	9th – 10th Grade	**Time Frame**	2-3 class period(s)
Subject	English/Language Arts, Social Studies	**Duration**	105 minutes
Course	American Literature, Oklahoma History		

Essential Question

What was society like during the 1930s? How does understanding the 1930s prepare us for reading "Of Mice and Men"?

Summary

This lesson analyzes the context and setting of the novel "Of Mice and Men." This cross-curricular lesson previews societal issues that were prevalent in John Steinbeck's text. Steinbeck was a young man during the Great Depression, and he wove the background and context of the Great Depression into several of his fictional novels. Students in this lesson will identify specific Depression-era struggles to gain insight into the setting, perspective, and background of the novel "Of Mice and Men." This lesson can serve as a preview prior to reading the novel.

Snapshot

Engage

Students individually view four photographs of the Great Depression era and make general observations.

Explore

Students form teams to share their observations about the Great Depression photographs.

Explain

Students read different informational texts about Great Depression issues and create short summaries of what they read.

Extend

In groups, students create concept maps about the Great Depression and draw conclusions about American life during the Depression.

Evaluate

Students make predictions about *Of Mice and Men* based on the lesson.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

SYN301: Make straightforward comparisons between two passages

Oklahoma Academic Standards SOCIAL STUDIES (Oklahoma History and Government)

OKH.C.7.1: Identify economic conditions occurring nationally and within the state which contributed to the Great Depression and were characterized by mass unemployment and human suffering.

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.2.R.1: Summarize the main ideas and paraphrase significant parts of increasingly complex texts.
9.3.R.3: Evaluate how literary elements impact theme, mood, and/or tone, using textual evidence:

- setting
- plot structure (e.g., foreshadowing, flashback, *in media res*)
- conflict (i.e., internal, external)
- characters (e.g., protagonist, antagonist)
- characterization (i.e., direct, indirect)
- point of view (e.g., narrator reliability)
- archetypes

Attachments

- Americans in the Great Depression Readings—Of Mice and Men in the Great Depression.docx
- Americans in the Great Depression Readings—Of Mice and Men in the Great Depression.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Of Mice and Men in the Great Depression.pptx

Materials

- Lesson slides (attached)
- Americans and the Great Depression Readings (attached; print one-sided; print enough for each student to receive one of the three readings)
- Notebook paper
- Pen/pencil
- Chart paper
- Markers

20 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Lesson Preparation

Prior to beginning this lesson, print pages 1–3 of the attached **Americans in the Great Depression Readings**. Print one-sided. There are three readings in this packet, and students should receive one reading apiece. Not all students will read the same text. For example, for a class of thirty, you would need ten copies of each text, and would therefore print ten copies of the full packet.

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to guide the instruction. Begin by explaining to students that, in this lesson, they will learn about the background and setting of the novel, *Of Mice and Men.* Author John Steinbeck wrote about the struggles of men and women during the Great Depression. Steinbeck was a young man during the Great Depression, and this experience greatly influenced his writing. Explain that to understand Steinbeck's novels, first the society about which he wrote needs to be understood.

Display and discuss the essential questions and learning objectives on **slides 3–4** as the focus of today's lesson.

Move to **slide 5** and have students fold a piece of notebook paper in half lengthwise (commonly called hot dog style). Introduce the I Think/We Think strategy to students. Have students create two columns on the notebook paper with the respective headers “I Think” and “We Think.”

Invite students to look at photographs from the era of the Great Depression (1929 through 1939) and to write down observations in each photograph. Move through **slides 6–9.** Point out that the title of each photograph should serve as a clue to inform their observations.

20 minutes

Explore

Ask students to form groups of four. Display **slide 10.** Have each group discuss the question on the slide: *What do these pictures tell you about the Great Depression?* Provide time for small group discussion about their observations of the photographs.

After they discuss, have each group write down a collaborative response to the question in the “We Think” column. Ask for a representative from each group to read the response they wrote down.

25 minutes

Explain

Tell students that they will learn a little more about the Great Depression to prepare for reading *Of Mice and Men.* Number students one through three. Pass out the attached informational text that corresponds to the student's assigned number:

1. **Family Life During the Great Depression**
2. **Finding Work During the Great Depression**
3. **Art and the Great Depression**

Display **slide 11.** Ask students to read their assigned informational text and annotate using the CUS and Discuss strategy.

Once students have read their assigned texts, have the class participate in an Inverted Pyramid activity.

Display **slide 12.** Have students find a partner who read the same text to discuss what they read and share their summaries. Allow only 5–7 minutes for this discussion.

Display **slide 13.** Have partners meet with another pair who read the same text. Have the group discuss the informational text and share what they learned or have summarized. Allow 7–10 additional minutes for this discussion.

Display **slide 14.** Have students create new groups of three who each read a different text so that the group has a representative for all the texts. These groups should work together to complete the activity described in the Extend portion of the lesson.

Teacher's Note: Group Size

If students cannot be evenly distributed into groups of three, consider adding one more group member for some groups to have four members. The goal is to have all the texts represented by students who read and previously discussed them.

Teacher's Note: Maximizing The Inverted Pyramid Strategy

The goal of the Inverted Pyramid strategy is for struggling or marginal readers to gain textual knowledge through repeated discussions of the text with a variety of people. This strategy works best if you monitor discussions throughout the room and keep the time period for each phase brief.

30 minutes

Extend

Once students are in their groups of three, give the groups time to share what they learned from their texts. Allow about 5–10 minutes for this sharing of information.

After their discussion, groups should create a concept map using chart paper and markers. Have chart paper and markers available to students. Display **slide 15**, which gives students an example of how to start their concept maps.

Ask students to add two or three details for each aspect of society that was affected by the Great Depression.

Allow 20–25 minutes for students to complete the concept map, then have each group present their concept map to the class.

Display **slide 16.** Connect what students have learned about the Great Depression by sharing some details about the background and setting of the novel *Of Mice and Men.*

10 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 17.** Ask groups to have a discussion about what might happen in the book *Of Mice and Men*. After providing time for this discussion, have each group share a prediction. You can record these predictions in a Google document or on an Anchor Chart, or you can have students submit their predictions in writing. Save these predictions to refer back to them periodically during or after students read the novel.

Teacher's Note: Making Inferences About The Novel

Emphasize that Steinbeck was a young man during the Great Depression and that the setting of his most famous novels was this real-life era. You might need to reinforce the facts that students previously learned about the Great Depression to help them predict or make inferences about what will happen in the novel. Use probing questions to help them reflect on what they know. For example: *What was the life of a migrant worker? How might people have behaved given the extreme poverty and hardships of the Great Depression? How might an intellectually disabled migrant worker manage in this setting?*

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Anchor charts. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/58
- K20 Center. (n.d.). CUS and discuss. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/162
- K20 Center. (n.d.). I think / we think. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/141
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Inverted pyramid. Strategy. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/173