

John Steinbeck



OF MICE AND MEN

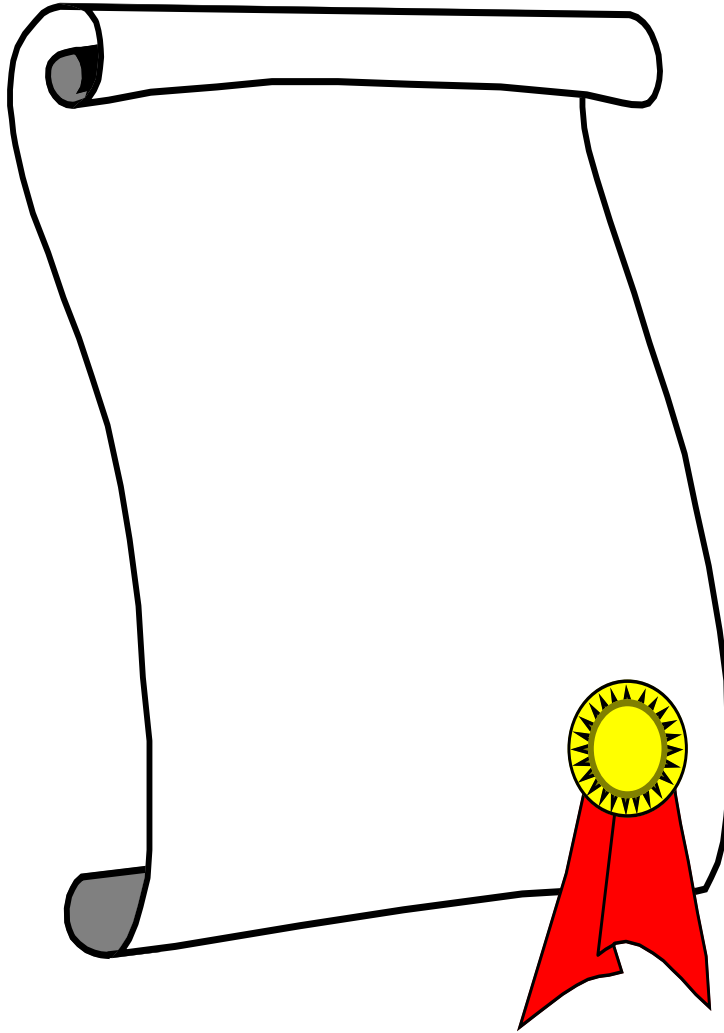
Background Information



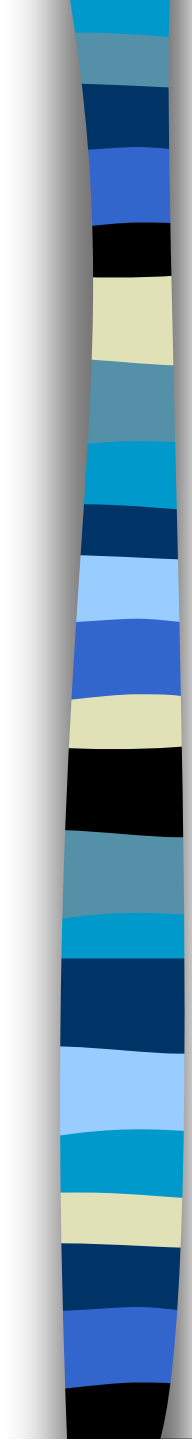
- Born-February 27, 1902
- Salinas, CA
- Father-town treasurer
- Mother-school teacher

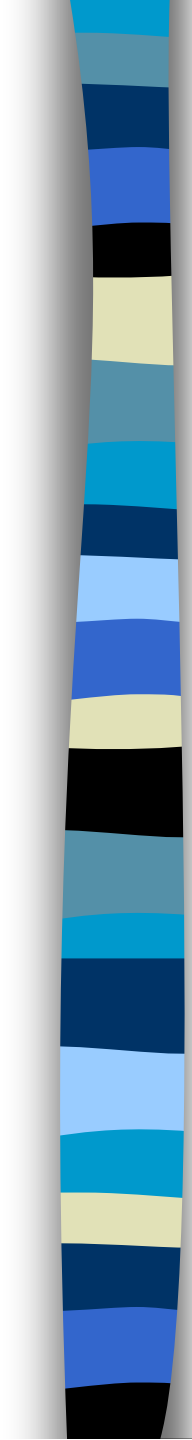


- The agricultural valley of Salinas, situated 25 minutes from the coast, is a common setting for a variety of Steinbeck's novels.



- Steinbeck went to Stanford and took literature and writing courses. However, he left in 1925 without a degree.

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- After moving to NY to pursue a writing career, he faced failure.
 - His first 3 books were financial failures.
 - After being hired by the government, he worked various jobs including fruit picking

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- His novel is somewhat autobiographical in that he experienced first-hand the dismal life of the book's main characters, George Milton and Lennie Small.



- Steinbeck won the Nobel prize in 1962 for Of Mice and Men
- He was the sixth American novelist to be honored

(read speech)

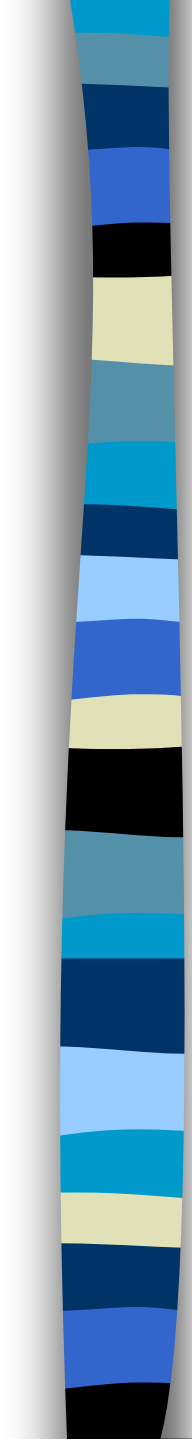


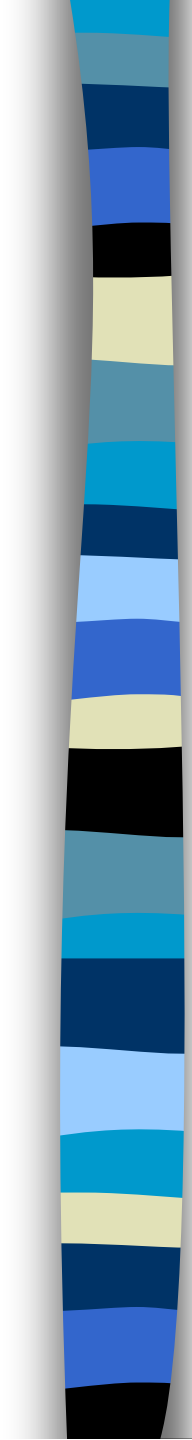
- In 1968, Steinbeck died at his home in New York City at the age of 66.

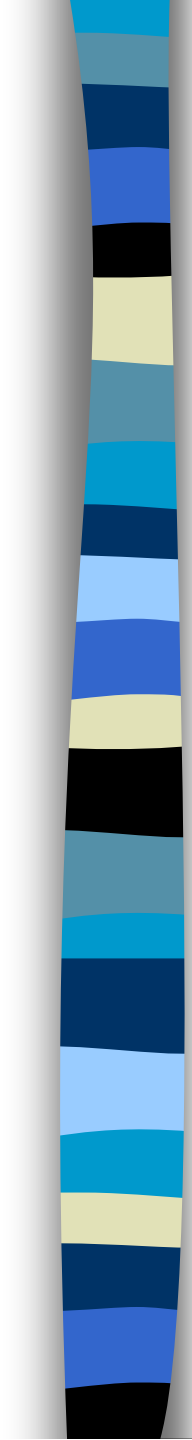


Writing Style

- Steinbeck is often described as an experimentalist with his writing
- Steinbeck deliberately set out to create a new literary form: play-novelette

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- Indirect Characterization -
He develops his characters through speech and action rather than letting the reader in on their thoughts

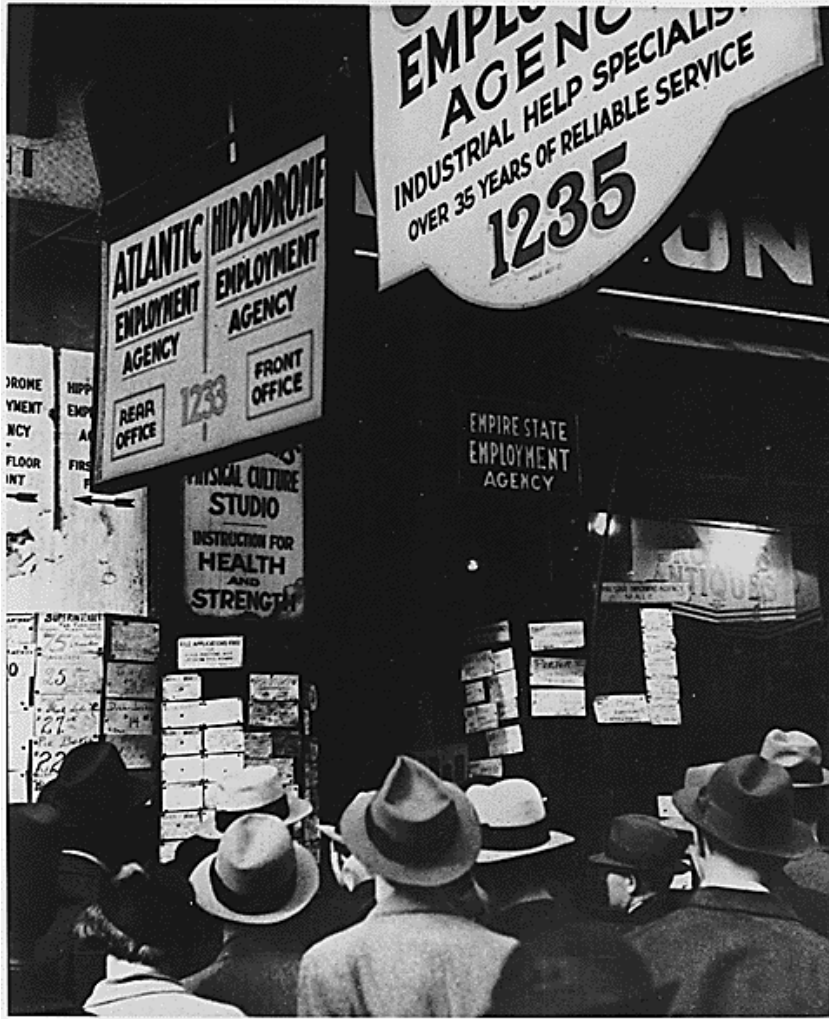
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- Steinbeck originally intended the story to be a play.
 - He starts each chapter with description of the setting similar to drama.

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- Dialogue - He uses dialogue to reveal characterization. Slang, profanity, and uneducated pronunciations are naturally used to represent the laboring class.

Historical Background of Novel

- When the book was published in 1937, America was beginning to pull out of the Depression due to the threat of war in both Europe and Japan.



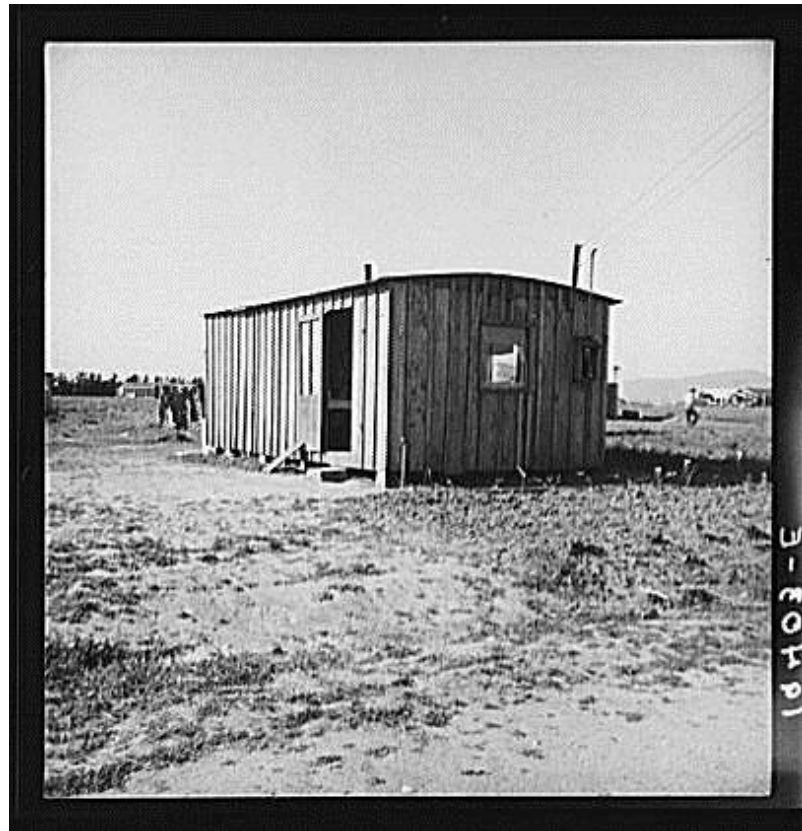


- The Great Depression began tragically in October of 1929 in New York City. The collapse of the Stock Market left 1.5 million American workers unemployed and without money.

- By 1930, over 3 million Americans were without work. As a result, many families were confined to live in crowded, unsafe conditions in an effort to save any money they had.



- Children were forced to work instead of attending school and homes usually consisted of tents or boarding houses.

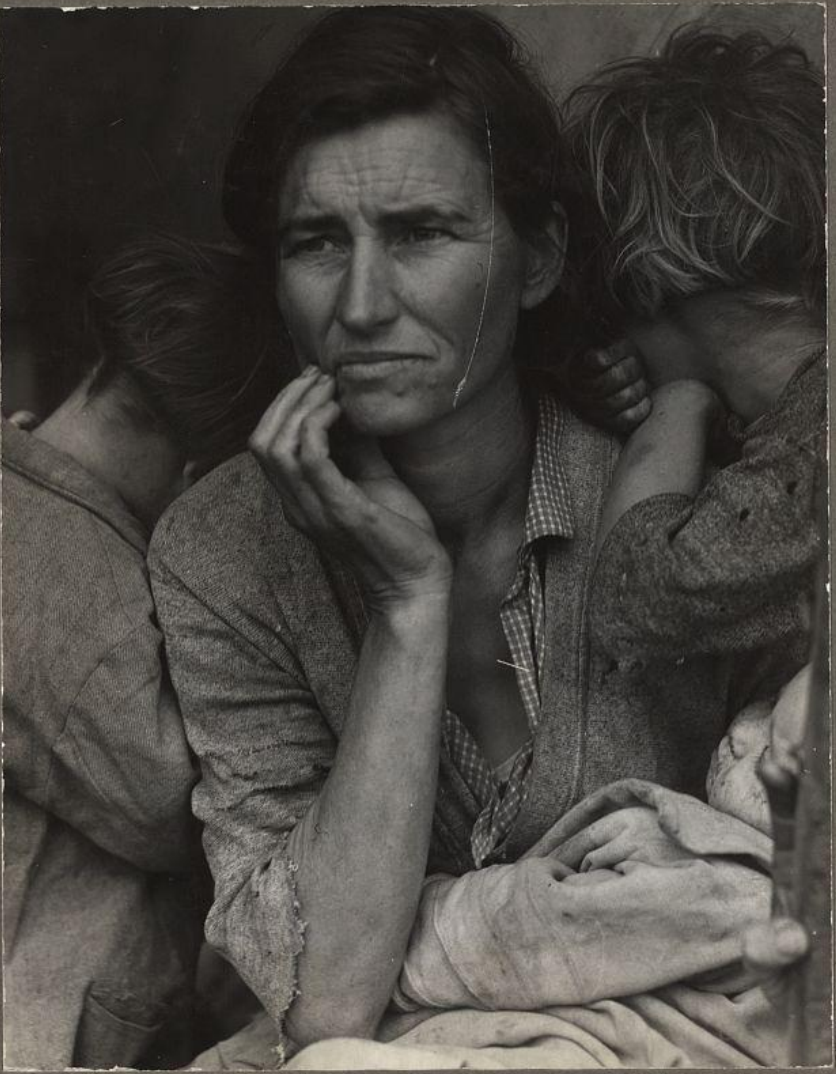




“Migrant Mother”

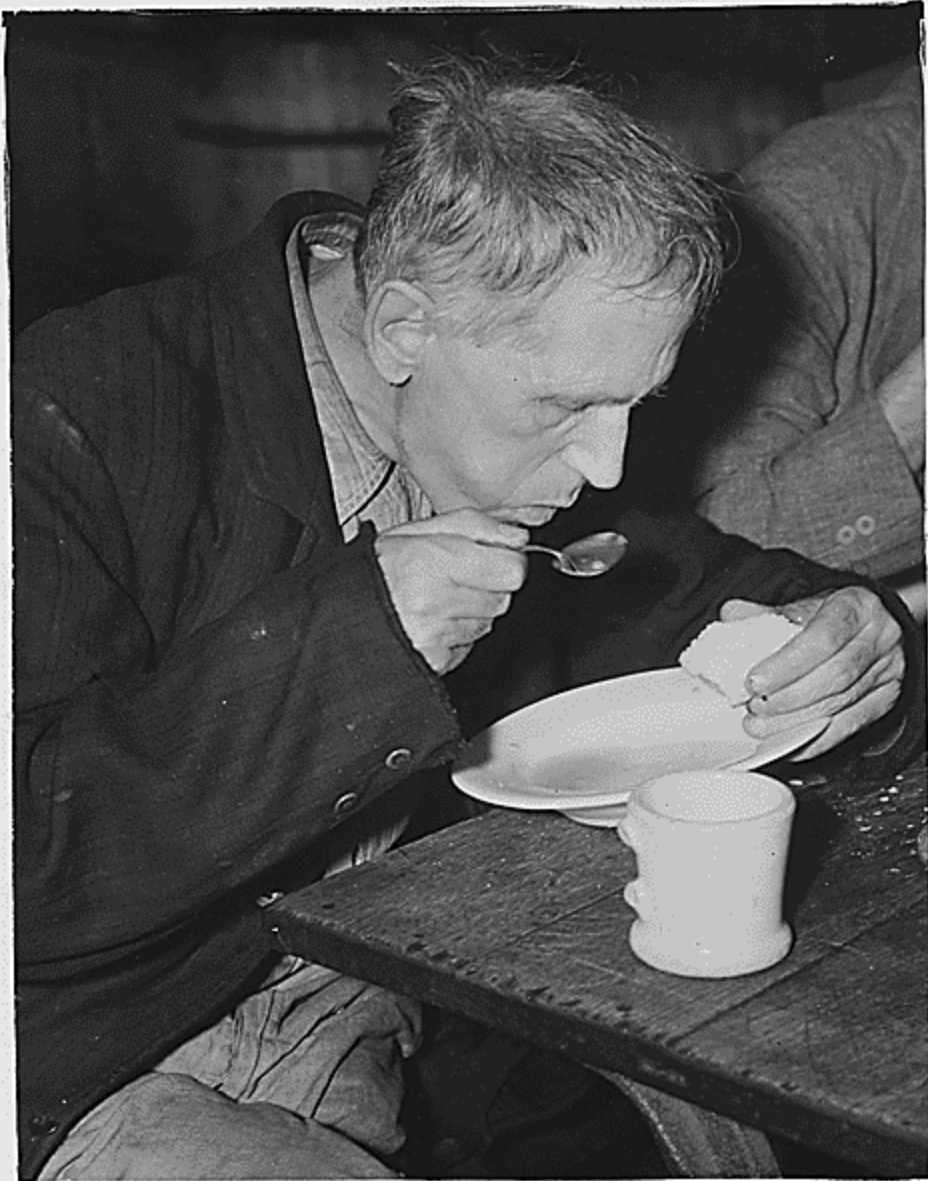
Dorothea Lange

- She would walk into camps, where homeless pea-pickers and refugees of the Oklahoma dust bowl were scraping by, sometimes starving to death, and talk to them until they felt comfortable enough to have their pictures taken.



Destitute peepickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February, 1936.
US DEPT. AGRIC. FARM SECURITY ADMIN. *Not for commercial use*
LC-USF 34- *LC-USF34-9058-C*
Negative No. RA 9058-C PHOTO BY Dorothea Lange
LC 4422-15253
LC Div. Prints - 1985 (card)

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- As conditions worsened for the American people, the Red Cross began to give 75 cents per week to starving families.



- Many American workers would travel from place to place in order to locate work. Sometimes, their pay was either food and clothing or a mere \$2.00 per week.



- Ranch hands would drift from one ranch to another rarely making friends or much money.

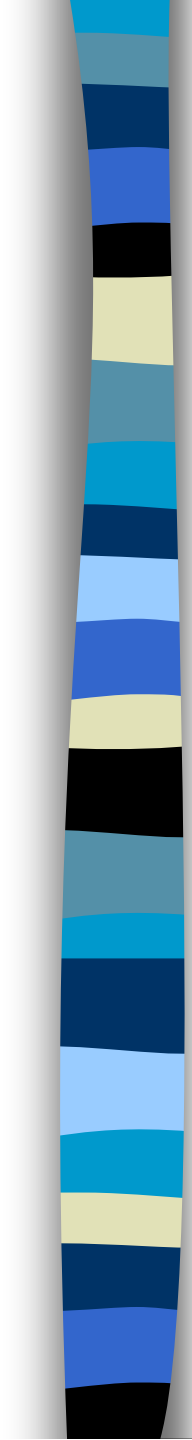
- They would leave a place and roam on with no plans beyond next Saturday. No one cared for them.



Criticism



- As Steinbeck's **Of Mice and Men** was read by the American people, he was criticized for his sympathetic presentation of the poor and disadvantaged.

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- The main enemies of the book were wealthy employers and landowners whom he held responsible for continuing this cycle of poverty and deprivation.
 - Even though the novel won much critical acclaim, it wasn't until 30 years were to pass until he would be awarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature.

“Pastures of Plenty”

- Read the lyrics by 30's folk singer Woody Guthrie. Highlight some events/phrases/lines of interest to the time period.

