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**MISSION STATEMENT**

Bag&Baggage is committed to unique interpretations and novel stagings of plays by the world's best-known authors. We seek to rethink and reinvigorate the most celebrated titles, to challenge the public to experience them in new ways, and to connect our work to the lives and experiences of our audiences. Founded by a Hillsboro native, Bag&Baggage believes that cultural experiences like live theatre play an absolutely critical role in the health of our community.

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**BAG&BAGGAGE STAFF**

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**PLAY SYNOPSIS**

courtesy of Dramatists Play Service

Two drifters, George and his friend Lennie, with delusions of living off the “fat of the land,” have just arrived at a ranch to work for enough money to buy their own place. Lennie is a man-child, a little boy in the body of a dangerously powerful man. It’s Lennie’s obsessions with things soft and cuddly that have made George cautious about who this gentle giant, with his brute strength, associates with. His promise to allow Lennie to “tend to the rabbits” on their future land keeps Lennie calm, amidst distractions, as the overgrown child needs constant reassurance. But when a ranch boss’ promiscuous wife is found dead in the barn with a broken neck, it’s obvious that Lennie, albeit accidentally, killed her. George, now worried about his own safety, knows exactly where Lennie has gone to hide, and he meets him there. Realizing they can’t run away any more, George is faced with a moral question: How should he deal with Lennie before the ranchers find him and take matters into their own hands?

**CAST**

- George ................. Peter Schuyler
- Lennie .................... Colin Wood
- Candy ..................... Edward Williams
- Slim ...................... Nathan Dunkin
- Curley .................. Adam Syron
- Curley’s Wife ........ Cassie Greer
- The Boss ............... David Heath
- Whit ...................... Luke Armstrong
- Carlson .............. Ian Armstrong
- Crooks ................ Emery John Frazier

**SETTING**

An agricultural valley on the banks of the Salinas River in Northern California, 1937
John Steinbeck (1902-1968) was born in the little town of Salinas, California, a few miles from the Pacific coast near the fertile Salinas Valley. This locality forms the background for many of his descriptions of the common man’s everyday life. He was raised in moderate circumstances, yet he was on equal terms with the workers’ families in this rather diversified area. He worked on ranches to put himself through college at Stanford University, but left Stanford without graduating.

In 1925 he went to New York, where he tried for a few years to establish himself as a freelance writer, but he failed and returned to California. After publishing some novels and short stories, Steinbeck first became widely known with Tortilla Flat (1935), a series of humorous stories about Monterey paisanos - asocial individuals who, in their wild revels, are almost caricatures of King Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table. It has been said that in the United States this book came as a welcome antidote to the gloom of the then prevailing depression. The laugh was now on Steinbeck’s side.

Steinbeck’s novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labour, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach. After the rough and earthy humour of Tortilla Flat, he moved on to more serious fiction, often aggressive in its social criticism, to In Dubious Battle (1936), which deals with the strikes of the migratory fruit pickers on California plantations. This was followed by Of Mice and Men (1937), the story of the imbecile giant Lennie (who, out of tenderness alone, squeezes the life out of every living creature that comes into his hands), and a series of admirable short stories collected in the volume The Long Valley (1938). In 1939 he published what is considered his best work, Pulitzer Prize-winning The Grapes of Wrath, the story of Oklahoma tenant farmers who, unable to earn a living from the land, moved to California where they became migratory workers.

Among his later works should be mentioned East of Eden (1952), The Winter of Our Discontent (1961), and Travels with Charley (1962), a travelogue in which Steinbeck wrote about his impressions during a three-month tour in a truck that led him through forty American states.

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1962 was awarded to John Steinbeck “for his realistic and imaginative writings, combining as they do sympathetic humour and keen social perception”. In his Presentation Speech, Anders Österling (Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, which awards the Nobel Prize) noted that in Steinbeck, there is

“a strain of grim humour which, to some extent, redeems his often cruel and crude motif. His sympathies always go out to the oppressed, to the misfits and the distressed; he likes to contrast the simple joy of life with the brutal and cynical craving for money. But in him we find the American temperament also in his great feeling for nature, for the tilled soil, the wasteland, the mountains, and the ocean coasts, all an inexhaustible source of inspiration to Steinbeck in the midst of, and beyond, the world of human beings.”

Steinbeck died in New York City in December of 1968.

SOURCES:


MORE ON JOHN STEINBECK:
The Steinbeck Center at San Jose State University: http://as.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/
The National Steinbeck Center: http://www.steinbeck.org/
**Of Mice and Men** was published as a novella in 1937, and premiered as a three-act play on Broadway in November of that year, running for 207 performances.¹ The play won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award in 1938,² and was revived on Broadway in 1974.³ **Of Mice and Men** was first adapted for the screen in 1939, and received four Oscar Nominations that year.⁴ Other film versions were made in 1981⁵ and 1992,⁶ and a TV miniseries was produced in 1968.⁷

Steinbeck originally titled this story *Something That Happened*, but changed it to the title we know today after reading Robert Burns’ poem *To a Mouse*.⁸ In the poem, the narrator talks about his regret at having destroyed the home of a mouse while plowing his field. *To a Mouse*, and particularly the line that Steinbeck references in the title of this story, suggests that no plan is foolproof and no one can be completely prepared for the future: “The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry” (English translation). Burns wrote the poem in 1785 in the Scots language, spoken in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and similar to English. You can read the original poem on the next page, along with translations and notes on interpretation.

*Of Mice and Men*, the novella, is required reading for many high school students in America today, but has a long history of being challenged and banned in school districts across the country. Among the reasons for the controversy surrounding *Of Mice and Men* are the following:

- the use of the ‘N’ word
- derogatory views of African Americans
- derogatory views of women
- the use of profanity
- the use of racial slurs
- the presence of violence
- the absence of traditional values

The most recent challenge came in 2007 from Newton (Iowa) High School, claiming concerns over the profanity contained in the book, and the portrayal of Jesus Christ.⁹

Bag&Baggage’s production of *Of Mice and Men* is one of several stagings and readings of the play in Oregon this year, and the novella is currently part of Oregon Public Schools’ ninth grade English and Language Arts curriculum.

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² "Steinbeck's Prizes and Awards". as.sjsu.edu. 11 July 2012 http://as.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/biography/index.jsp?val=biography_steinbeckes_prizes
⁸ "Of Mice and Men". as.sjsu.edu. 11 July 2012 http://as.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/teaching_steinbeck/index.jsp?val=teaching_of_mice_and_men_homepage
To A Mouse
by Robert Burns

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim’rous beastie,
O, what panic’s in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi’ bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an’ chase thee,
Wi’ murd’ring pattle!

I’m truly sorry Man’s dominion
Has broken Nature’s social union,
An’ justiies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An’ fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen-icker in a thrave ’S a sma’ request:
I’ll get a blessin wi’ the lave,
An’ never miss’t!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It’s silly wa’s the win’s are strewin!
An’ naething, now, to big a new ane,
O’ foggage green;
An’ bleak December’s winds ensuin,
Baith snell an’ keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an’ wast,
An’ weary Winter comin fast,
An’ cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro’ thy cell.

That wee-bit heap o’ leaves an’ stibble,
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou’s turn’d out, for a’ thy trouble,
But house or hald.
To thole the Winter’s sleety dribble,
An’ cranreuch cauld!

But Mousie, thou are no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o’ Mice an’ Men,
Gang aft agley,
An’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain,
For promis’d joy!

Still, thou art blest, compar’d wi’ me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But Och! I backward cast my e’e,
On prospects drear!
An’ forward, tho’ I canna see,
I guess an’ fear!

The poet is doing his utmost to assure this terrified little creature that he has no intention of causing it any harm. bickerin’ brattle = scurry, run; laith = loath; pattle = a small spade for cleaning a plough

He then goes on to apologise to the mouse for the behaviour of mankind using beautiful prose which requires neither translation nor interpretation. Listen to what he is saying, and you will be well on your way to understand what made Burns such a greatly loved man. Note how he equates himself with the mouse in life’s great plan.

Here he tells the mouse that he realizes its need to steal the odd ear of corn, and he does not really mind. He’ll get by with remainder and never miss it. daimen = occasional; icker = an ear of corn; thrave = twenty four sheaves; lave = remainder

Dismay at the enormity of the problems he has brought on the mouse causes him to reflect on what he has done - destroyed her home at a time when it is impossible to rebuild. There is no grass to build a new home and the December winds are cold and sharp. Her preparations for winter are gone! Big = build; foggage = moss; baith = both

Where the mouse had thought that she was prepared for winter in her comfortable little nest in the ground, now she is faced with trying to survive in a most unfriendly climate, with little or no hope in sight. cosie = comfortable; coulter; = iron cutter in front of a ploughshare

It seems probable that here the poet is really comparing his own hard times with that of the mouse – a life of harsh struggle, with little or no reward at the end. monie = many; thole = to endure; dribble = drizzle; cranreuch = hoar-frost; cauld = cold

How many times have people glibly trotted out, “The best laid schemes” without realising that they were quoting from Burns? The sadness, the despair, the insight contained within this verse are truly remarkable and deeply moving. no thy-lane = not alone; gan aft agley = often go awry

This final verse reveals the absolute despondency that Burns was feeling at this stage in his life. Not at all what one might expect from a young man of twenty-six, supposedly so popular with the lassies, and with his whole life ahead of him, but nevertheless expressing sentiments with which many of us today can easily relate.
In *Of Mice and Men*, George and Lennie are migrant workers in the Salinas River Valley during the Great Depression. The “Migrant Experience” is one that was shared by millions of Americans who picked up everything and moved to California during the 1930s and 1940s, hoping that the moderate climate and lengthy growing season would provide more work and greater stability in the midst of uncertain economic times. On the following pages are excerpts from Robin A. Fanslow’s April 6, 1998 article on “The Migrant Experience”, which documents this time period for the American Folklife Center, an extension of the Library of Congress.

At the beginning of the play, George and Lennie have travelled - by bus and by foot - to Soledad from a farm further North in Weed. Today, this trip - almost 400 miles - would take about 6½ hours in the car. For George and Lennie (and with a stop in San Francisco included) the journey has taken the better part of a week.
“A complex set of interacting forces both economic and ecological brought the migrant workers...to California. Following World War I, a recession led to a drop in the market price of farm crops and caused Great Plains farmers to increase their productivity through mechanization and the cultivation of more land. This increase in farming activity required an increase in spending that caused many farmers to become financially overextended. The stock market crash in 1929 only served to exacerbate this already tenuous economic situation. Many independent farmers lost their farms when banks came to collect on their notes, while tenant farmers were turned out when economic pressure was brought to bear on large landholders. The attempts of these displaced agricultural workers to find other work were met with frustration due to a 30 percent unemployment rate.

At the same time, the increase in farming activity placed greater strain on the land. As the naturally occurring grasslands of the southern Great Plains were replaced with cultivated fields, the rich soil lost its ability to retain moisture and nutrients and began to erode. Soil conservation practices were not widely employed by farmers during this era, so when a seven-year drought began in 1931, followed by the coming of dust storms in 1932, many of the farms literally dried up and blew away creating what became known as the “Dust Bowl.” Driven by the Great Depression, drought, and dust storms, thousands of farmers packed up their families and made the difficult journey to California where they hoped to find work...

Why did so many of the refugees pin their hopes for a better life on California? One reason was that the state’s mild climate allowed for a long growing season and a diversity of crops with staggered planting and harvesting cycles. For people whose lives had revolved around farming, this seemed like an ideal place to look for work. Popular songs and stories, circulating in oral tradition for decades exaggerated these attributes, depicting California as a veritable promised land. In addition, flyers advertising a need for farm workers in the Southwest were distributed in areas hard hit by unemployment... Finally, the country’s major east-west thoroughfare, U.S. Highway 66 -- also known as “Route 66,” “The Mother Road,” “The Main Street of America,” and “Will Rogers Highway” -- abetted the westward flight of the migrants. A trip of such length was not undertaken lightly in this pre-interstate era, and Highway 66 provided a direct route from the Dust Bowl region to an area just south of the Central Valley of California.

... Most [migrants] were of Anglo-American descent with family and cultural roots in the poor rural South. In the homes they left, few had been accustomed to living with modern conveniences such as electricity and indoor plumbing. The bulk of the people... shared conservative religious and political beliefs and were ethnocentric in their attitude toward other ethnic/cultural groups, with whom they had had little contact prior to their arrival in California. Such attitudes sometimes led to the use of derogatory language and negative stereotyping of cultural outsiders. “Voices from the Dust Bowl” [the Library of Congress’ ethnographic collection documenting the migrant experience] illustrates certain universals of human experience: the trauma of dislocation from one’s roots and homeplace; the tenacity of a community’s shared culture; and the solidarity within and friction among folk groups.

...California was emphatically not the promised land of the migrants’ dreams. Although the weather was comparatively balmy and farmers’ fields were bountiful with produce, Californians also felt the effects of the Depression. Local and state infrastructures were already overburdened, and the steady stream of newly arriving migrants was more than the system could bear. After struggling to make it to California, many found themselves turned away at its borders. Those who did cross over into California found that the available labor
pool was vastly disproportionate to the number of job openings that could be filled. Migrants who found employment soon learned that this surfeit of workers caused a significant reduction in the going wage rate. Even with an entire family working, migrants could not support themselves on these low wages. Many set up camps along irrigation ditches in the farmers’ fields.

Arrival in California did not put an end to the migrants’ travels. Their lives were characterized by transience. In an attempt to maintain a steady income, workers had to follow the harvest around the state. When potatoes were ready to be picked, the migrants needed to be where the potatoes were. The same principle applied to harvesting cotton, lemons, oranges, peas, and other crops. For this reason, migrant populations were most dense in agricultural centers...

The Arvin Migratory Labor Camp was the first federally operated camp opened by the FSA [Farm Security Administration] in 1937... The camps were intended to resolve poor sanitation and public health problems, as well as to mitigate the burden placed on state and local infrastructures. The FSA camps also furnished the migrants with a safe space in which to retire from the discrimination that plagued them and in which to practice their culture and rekindle a sense of community. Although each camp had a small staff of administrators, much of the responsibility for daily operations and governance devolved to the campers themselves. Civil activities were carried out through camp councils and camp courts...

When they were not working or looking for work, or tending to the civil and domestic operations of the camp, the migrants found time to engage in recreational activities. Singing and making music took place both in private living quarters and in public spaces. The music performed by the migrants came from a number of different sources... In addition to songs and instrumental music, the migrants enjoyed dancing and play-party activities (singing games accompanied by dance-like movements)... Newsletters produced by camp residents provided additional details about camp social life and recreational activities.

As World War II wore on, the state of the economy, both in California and across the nation, improved dramatically as the defense industry geared up to meet the needs of the war effort. Many of the migrants went off to fight in the war. Those who were left behind took advantage of the job opportunities that had become available in West Coast shipyards and defense plants. As a result of this more stable lifestyle, numerous Dust Bowl refugees put down new roots in California soil, where their descendants reside to this day...”

On the next page, listen to some migrants’ songs and interviews, recorded in California FSA camps between 1940 and 1941 by the American Memory Project of the Library of Congress.
“Coming to California”
interviews with
1) Mr. Turner,
2) Mr. Robertson,
3) an unnamed man

“Thoughts on Farming & the Government”
interview with Tom Higginbotham

“Life in FSA Camps”
interview with Mrs. J. W. Becker,
a memeber of her camp’s Welfare Group

“Sunny California”
by Mrs. Mary Sullivan,
an original song about her own experience of
coming to California

“The Cotton Picker’s Song”
an original song
by 14-year-old Lloyd Stalcup

* Please note that Adobe Acrobat or Reader is required to listen to audio files.
  Download it for free at http://get.adobe.com/reader/
As Steinbeck wrote his novella *Of Mice and Men*, he imagined it being performed on stage immediately, without anyone needing to adapt his work. The style of the play, therefore, is linear and dialogue-heavy. Ultimately, a few adjustments for the stage were necessary, and the play’s first director, George S. Kaufman (a playwright himself), was largely responsible for fitting *Of Mice and Men* to the theatre.

There are two dominant theatrical structures that are found – in some variation or combination – in nearly every staged work in existence: climactic form and episodic form. The table below illustrates the differences between the two forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climactic</th>
<th>Episodic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Plot begins late in the story, toward the very end or climax.</td>
<td>1. Plot begins relatively early in the story and moves through a series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Covers a short space of time, perhaps a few hours or at most a few</td>
<td>2. Covers a longer period of time: weeks, months, and sometimes many years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Contains a few solid, extended scenes, such as three acts with each</td>
<td>3. Has many short, fragmented scenes; sometimes an alternation of short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Occurs in a restricted locale, such as one room or one house.</td>
<td>4. May range over an entire city or even several countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Number of characters is severely limited - usually no more than six or</td>
<td>5. Has a profusion of characters, sometimes several dozen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Plot is linear and moves in a single line with few subplots or</td>
<td>6. Is frequently marked by several threads of action, such as two parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Line of action proceeds in a cause-and-effect chain. The characters</td>
<td>7. Scenes are juxtaposed to one another. An event may result from several</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 8. Is clear that the climactic and episodic forms differ from each other in their fundamental approaches. One emphasizes constriction and compression on all fronts; the other takes a far broader view and aims at a cumulative effect, piling up people, places, and events.¹

*Of Mice and Men* has a cast of ten characters, with the plot unfolding over the span of four days:

**Act I**

*Scene 1:* A sandy bank of the Salinas River. Thursday night.
*Scene 2:* The interior of a bunkhouse. Late Friday morning.

**Act II**

*Scene 1:* The same as Act I, scene 2. About 7:30 Friday evening.
*Scene 2:* The room of the stable buck, a lean-to. 10:00 Saturday evening.

**Act III**

*Scene 1:* One end of a great barn. Mid-afternoon, Sunday.
*Scene 2:* The same as Act I, scene 1. Sunday night.

This play can also be classified as a Modern Tragedy. Whereas traditional, or classical Tragedy deals with extraordinary (noble, royal, or godly) heroes and heroines grappling with their fate, Modern Tragedy focuses on everyday people encountering the choices they face in their everyday lives. Iconic American playwright Arthur Miller, the creator of many modern tragedies himself, writes:

“I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. ...The tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing — his sense of personal dignity. ...Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.”²

“Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place... They got nothing to look ahead to... With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to...”

- George (in the novella, Chapter 1)

The quote above captures the most dominant themes contained in *Of Mice and Men*: loneliness, friendship, and dreams for the future. In addition, themes of strength and weakness, race, the alienation of women, and the ostracization of people with differences run throughout the course of the story. Below are more details surrounding each of these themes.

**Loneliness:** Despite living in such close proximity to one another, most of the ranch hands talk about how terrible it is to be alone. This loneliness, which is physically fueled by the migrant workers’ inability to form lasting relationships since they are constantly on the move, is also psychological as there are many social barriers that prevent the men from experiencing or expressing empathy. Steinbeck illustrates in his characters the encroaching loneliness that he saw affecting America as a whole as, despite living closer and closer together, Americans placed personal, individual gain ahead of creating meaningful relationships. Steinbeck shows that the men had become so vigilant about protecting their secrets and their own skins that they were unable to reach out to fill the void of loneliness. George’s constant reminding of Lennie to keep quiet about their piece of land illustrates this theme as though others’ knowledge of it jeopardizes its possibility. Like the men, Curley’s Wife is also constantly talking about her loneliness: “Think I don’t like to talk to somebody ever’ once in a while?” She seeks the attention of the workers in an attempt to ease her pain, which ultimately leads to both her own and Lennie’s death. Steinbeck shows how destructive loneliness can be through the loss of life and the crushing of dreams. Loneliness runs throughout most of the other themes.

**Friendship:** The strong friendship and companionship we see between George and Lennie is atypical for the world in which they live. And while this friendship is rare, it is a connection that all of the farmhands crave - most vividly illustrated with Candy’s need for the companionship of his dog. While George often complains about the trials of caring for Lennie, he never abandons him, though he easily could. And though he did promise Aunt Clara that he would watch out for Lennie, it is obvious that he genuinely cares for him and values their friendship. At the end of the play, George, driven by this care and friendship, makes the sacrifice of shooting Lennie to save him from Curley’s wrath. While George wants to keep Lennie with him so that he does not have to face his own loneliness, he knows that sparing Lennie and allowing Curley to punish him would be terribly wrong. George is forced to choose mercy in the most self-sacrificing way possible: by giving up the person that he loves most, who also happens to be his only companion in life.

**The American Dream:** George and Lennie’s oft repeated dream of living “off the fat of the land” is Steinbeck’s representation of the iconic “American Dream” of achieving prosperity, success, and upward social mobility through hard work. Yet it is clear, from almost the very beginning, that this dream is completely unrealistic and will never be achieved. It is through this very act of striving for the impossible that Steinbeck illustrates how unattainable the American Dream had become for many Americans during the Great Depression. A century prior, it seemed anyone could come to America, work hard, and see a tangible gain; the story of Lennie and George shows how things have changed. All the farmhands work hard, but receive no personal benefit, aside from the bare minimum pay and lodging. Steinbeck ultimately demonstrates that working hard will not help people achieve either the financial success or emotional fulfillment they desire. Characters like Candy and Crooks, who have worked hard their entire lives, have gotten nowhere and are forced to be content with simply having a roof over their heads and three meals a day - though those privileges may be revoked at any time once the men are no longer deemed useful. The “mercy” killing of Candy’s old and crippled dog illustrates what may happen to men like this.
**Strength/Weakness:** The ideas of strength and weakness are displayed literally, as well as upended in this story. There are obvious examples of Lennie’s physical strength: as Slim says, after watching Lennie work for the first time, “...I never seen such a worker... I never seen such a strong guy.” But there are also instances, such as in the fight with Curley, where Lennie, enduring a pummeling, must first get permission from George before he defends himself. Lennie proves to be both weak and strong: he cannot control himself, yet he has the ability to cause great harm, and this, ultimately, is his downfall.

Curley, on the other hand, seeking to demonstrate his strength, picks a fight with the biggest man in the crew... only to learn he is himself the weakest man, both in losing the fight, and in picking a fight in the first place with a man of a lesser mind than he, who never wanted trouble.

**Race:** Steinbeck uses the brief appearance of the handicapped, African-American stable hand, Crooks, to comment on racial discrimination. Crooks, iconically, is far more educated and aware of the social differences that ostracize both him and the other white migrant workers than most of the men combined. Living in isolation, and intensely lonely, Crooks lacks the basic human companionship he longs for because of his skin color. Aware of this reality, he tells Lennie, “S’pose you didn’t have nobody. S’pose you couldn’t go in the bunkhouse and play rummy, ‘cause you was black... A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody... I tell you a guy gets too lonely, he gets sick.” Briefly fantasizing about joining George, Lennie, and Candy in their plan to buy a piece of land together, Crooks ends up as he began: miserable and alone in the barn.

**Alienation of Women:** While Curley’s Wife, who remains unnamed, appears to be a relatively insignificant character in the story, her presence initiates many of the story’s central plot turns: Curley is searching for his wife when he first meets George and Lennie and once again when he picks the fight with Lennie. Ultimately, Curley’s Wife’s need to ease her loneliness sends her into the barn that fateful afternoon, which results in both her own and Lennie’s death. The way she is simultaneously necessary to the plot of the story, and disregarded as a lesser character is a metaphor for the role of women in the migrant societies of the late 1930’s. Curley’s Wife’s loneliness, as well as her lack of given name, is representative of women’s loneliness in male-dominated societies, where they were not respected and not allowed to fill their desired social positions. Curley’s Wife is caught in a difficult trap, attempting to exercise her power as a feminine entity, but constantly running up against her social limits, as well as the underestimation and resentment of the farmhands.

**Ostracizing People with Differences:** There are multiple characters in the story who are ostracized because of their position as minorities: it is implied Lennie is mentally handicapped; besides being African-American, Crooks is handicapped, as is the old swamper Candy. Steinbeck shows how all three men are ostracized because of their differences, and are only tolerated because they are considered useful. While George, who understands Lennie, is able to accept his eccentricities, he realizes the rest of society, which privileges normalcy, is not so tolerant, and he is thus forced to shoot Lennie to rescue him from a terrible fate. The most obvious punishment for these outsiders is loneliness, as being “different” is sufficient cause for being cut off from the rest of society, and Steinbeck is not afraid to demonstrate the despicable manner in which people with differences are treated. George’s care of Lennie is a hopeful testament to the existence of altruistic people who are willing to help those who are unable to help themselves.

**Sources:**

“Major Themes”. Steinbeck in the Schools at sjsu.edu. 11 Jul 2012 http://as.sjsu.edu/sits/content.jsp?val=works_of-mice-and-men_major-themes

George Milton: A small, sharp-witted migrant worker/ranch hand who has befriended and travels with Lennie. George is a typical, realistic worker who tries to think ahead, anticipate any problems in his and Lennie’s future, and do what he can to keep Lennie in line.

Lennie Small: A physically large and strong man whose mind is slow. He has a short attention span and acts similar to a child, and because of his mental limitations, Lennie never really understands or anticipates the consequences of his actions. He travels with and is looked after by his friend George.

Candy: A ranch worker who lost his hand on the job a few years back. He wants to join George and Lennie in their dream of owning their own land, and offers to provide the down payment. Candy’s one faithful companion is his old dog, who is about as useless as Candy is at the ranch.

Slim: A tall, well-respected mule driver (jerk-line skinner) who is looked up to as a leader among the other ranch hands. He treats his work and everyone on the ranch with equal respect, is a hard and honest worker, and knows how to do his work without being told.

Curley: The short-tempered son of the Boss, as well as a former boxer. He is small in stature, but picks fights with those weaker than he is and attempts to intimidate those larger than him. Curley is also recently married, and is constantly thinking about his wife on the ranch as well.

Curley’s Wife: The only woman on the ranch and also in the play. She is continually around the ranch hands claiming that she is looking for Curley, but she is also remarkably lonely in her new life on the ranch and just wants to talk with someone. She is pretty, if not excessively so, and uses her looks to get attention.

The Boss: The superintendent of the ranch who oversees its day-to-day operations (though a big land corporation owns the ranch itself). He is a generally good person who treats his workers well if they work hard, but he is also a no-nonsense businessman when it comes to getting work done and getting the grain out.

Whit: A young ranch hand who fills the “younger brother” role among the ranch hands. He relates easily to Candy and his dog, and is quick to make friends with new men who arrive at the ranch.

Carlson: A ranch hand who is the opposite of Slim: coarse and insensitive to the other ranch hands. Carlson only cares about what is best for him.

Crooks: A proud and independent African American who also is an outcast on the ranch. Given the nickname “Crooks” for his crooked back where a horse kicked him, he is bitter because of the racial discrimination he experiences. Crooks later becomes friends with Lennie, and wants to join Lennie and George’s dream of having their own land.
**Glossary and Cultural References**

* indicates images on the following page

*Airedale*: A type of dog, specifically Terrier.

**Apple Box**: A box used for storage or as a stepstool capable of holding a person’s weight.

**Bindle**: A bag, sack, or carrying device.

**Bindle Stiff**: Hobo; a transient who carries his belongings in a sack.

**Buck Barley**: To throw large bags of barley on a truck.

**Bunk House**: A sleeping quarters intended for use by multiple people.

**Cesspool**: A well or pit filled with drainage or sewage.

**Cultivator**: A farming tool used to stir and soften the soil either before or after planting.

**Euchre**: A card game played in England, Canada, and some parts of the U.S.

**Graybacks**: The equivalent of ticks or lice.

**Gut Ache**: A stomach ache.

**Hutches**: A form of furniture, very similar to a wardrobe.

**Jerkline Skinner**: Lead driver of a team of mules

**Kewpie Doll**: A particular style of doll, one that was usually won at carnivals. Kewpie doll lamps were made out of the dolls.

**Liniment**: A topical cream for the skin that helps with pain or rashes.

**Luger**: The Luger pistol was an expensive, high maintenance weapon manufactured and used primarily in the German army.

**Lynch**: To illegally execute a person, generally applied to the hanging and/or burning of African-Americans in the south.

**Murray and Ready**: An employment agency, specializing in farm work.

**Nail Keg**: A wooden barrel that could usually hold 100 pounds or more inside.

**Pants Rabbits**: A sexually transmitted disease, known as pubic lice.

**Parlor House**: Could be considered a restaurant, but more often parlor houses were brothels.

**Phonograph**: The first device for recording and playing sound, most specifically music.

**Pulp Magazine**: During the 1920s-1950s, inexpensive fiction magazines. From 1950 on, includes mass market paperbacks.

**Rag Rug**: Rugs created from rags that were tied together by knots.

**Russian Hill**: Affluent residential neighborhood in San Francisco, California.

**Scoring Board**: A board with holes and pegs used to keep score in certain card games.

**Scourges**: A widespread affliction, an epidemic illness, or the consequence of some natural disaster (ex: fire, flood, a migration of locusts).

**Slough**: A muddy or marshy area.

**Slug of Whiskey**: Equivalent to a hiplask of whiskey.

**Stable Buck**: A derogatory name for an African-American man who works in the stables.

**Stetson Hat**: A famous brand of hats, especially cowboy hats.

**Swamper**: A general assistant; handyman.

**Talcum Powder**: Very similar in texture to baby powder, talcum powder was used mainly after bathing or shaving.

**Tart**: A woman who tempts men or who is sexually promiscuous.

**Two Bits**: Twenty-Five cents.

**Varro**: Marcus Terentius Varro (116-29 B.C.E.), Roman scholar/author and horticulturist.

**Velasquez’s Cardinal**: Seventeenth-century painting by Spanish painter Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez.

**Work Slips**: Proof that people had been hired to do a job.

**Welter**: To become very drunk or sorrowful.

**Zane Grey**: American adventure novelist (1872-1939).

**Watchin’ that blackboard**: During this era, employment agencies would post available jobs on a blackboard in front of their offices.

**Eatin’ raw eggs**: It’s thought by some that eating raw eggs can increase strength and, especially in men, sexual performance and stamina.

**Pan Gold**: A method of obtaining gold by using a pan to sift it out from other rocks and minerals that might flow through a river or stream.

**Writin’ to the patent medicine houses**: Patent medicines are medications that can be purchased without a doctor’s prescription and often through the mail. Some of these medicines would claim to increase sexual performance.

**Golden Gloves**: An amateur boxing organization.

**Run up the river**: During the salmon mating season, thousands of the fish will swim upstream, struggling against the current, spawn (lay their eggs), and then die. During a salmon run, the fish are easy to catch.

**Set the Pegs**: To set up the pegs on a scoring board before the beginning of a card game.

**Walkin’ Bow-legged**: To walk bow-legged is to walk with the knees turned out. Whit’s reference here is to the way a man might walk who had contracted a venereal disease from Clara’s place.

**Roll Your Hoop**: A popular amusement of children in the past was running while rolling a large metal hoop with a stick. Telling Curley’s wife to “roll your hoop,” is Candy’s way of calling her young and immature.

**an’ spoke in the radio**: Large Hollywood movie premiers were major events during the 1930s and were often broadcast on the radio.

**Bull’s-eye Glasses**: glasses with thick, convex (outward-curving) lenses.

*definitions from The Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University*
A Note from Bag&Baggage Artistic Director Scott Palmer

I have wanted to direct John Steinbeck’s masterpiece of American literature for more than 20 years. The work is, truly, an iconic American tale and one that feels all too relevant in today’s difficult economic climate.

I started my work as the Director of the show by looking, first, at the Robert Burns’ poem that inspired Steinbeck’s title, To A Mouse. A beautiful piece of poetry by Scotland’s greatest poet, To A Mouse includes two stanzas that have a direct influence on our approach to the show.

The narrator of Burns’ poem says, to the frightened mouse;

\[
\begin{align*}
I'm truly sorry man's dominion \\
Has broken Nature's social union, \\
And justifies that ill opinion \\
Which makes thee startle \\
At me, thy poor, earth born companion \\
And fellow mortal.
\end{align*}
\]

This passage speaks directly to the fear and suspicion that the mouse feels towards the man and Burns seems to be saying that, because of man’s behavior, the mouse is justified in being fearful.

Later, the narrator says to the mouse;

\[
\begin{align*}
Still you are blest, compared with me! \\
The present only touches you: \\
But oh! I backward cast my eye, \\
On prospects dreary! \\
And forward, though I cannot see, \\
I guess and fear.
\end{align*}
\]

This passage describes how lucky the mouse is to live only in the present, with no idea of its’ past or its’ future, especially because, as human beings, we can remember our past and imagine what our futures will be like.

Steinbeck’s story, like Burns’ poem, is truly about the effects of loneliness and our innate human desire to be connected to someone else. George and Lennie are more than just friends, more than protector and protected; they are also a symbol of our desperate human need to be close to another person, to be understood and appreciated, to be protected and to be loved.

Surrounding them, in the bunkhouse and all around the farm, are people who are profoundly isolated, desperately lonely, and both George and Lennie are forced to struggle with the suspicions, fears and (at times) cruelty that is born out of that deep, deep isolation.

I have tried, in this production, to help our audiences understand that isolation through a series of staging decisions; for example, I have tried to recreate (in some small way) the feelings of tension and anxiety that are experienced when a large group of people (the farm hands) are forced to live in close proximity to each other in a very small space (the cramped performance areas the actors use for the bunkhouse and Crooks’ shed, for example). Even surrounded by all of these people, the farm hands are still
very much alone in the world. Through staging, lighting design and the work of the actors, we are trying to uncover these feelings of isolation and the damaging impact of dreams that can never come true.

I also want to connect the story to the time that it was originally written (during the Great Depression) through the use of projected images of photography from the time and through the use of folk music written during the 1920s and 1930s. Both the photography and the music are from the period, but I also believe they have something to say to audiences today. Yes, the people in the photos may have been struggling during the Great Depression, but are they really that much different from the people we see on our streets and in our communities today? Yes, the music may have been written and performed in the 1930s, but the topics and issues addressed sound remarkably modern.

Our mission as a theatre company is to examine the classics of drama in new and innovative ways, to respond to these works with a view towards helping re-invigorate them for a modern audience, to question our assumptions and help our audiences think and experience these works in new, and often, surprising ways. I hope that this production will do just that; help you to explore and experience Of Mice and Men in ways that are both surprising and moving.

Design Inspiration Images from Costume Designer Melissa Heller
1. Why do you think the poem *To a Mouse* inspired Steinbeck to change the title of his book? Besides the two stanzas Scott mentioned (in the “Our Production” section), can you find any connections between scenes in the play and verses in the poem?

2. Do you think *Of Mice and Men* is a climactic or an episodic play?

3. What themes do you see in the story besides the ones we discussed in this guide? How do the themes in *Of Mice and Men* relate to themes you personally encounter in your daily life?

4. Can you understand why *Of Mice and Men* has been banned in schools for much of its existence? Do you agree or disagree with the idea of banning books, and specifically the banning of *Of Mice and Men*?

5. Do you think the story of *Of Mice and Men* has a moral to it? If so, what do you think that moral is?

6. Steinbeck was quoted saying, “Try to understand men, if you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate and nearly always leads to love ... Try to understand each other.” (Steinbeck’s journal entry, 1938.)
   a. Do you think the characters in *Of Mice and Men* try to understand each other?
   b. Which characters work towards understanding each other, and which are selfish? How does their perspective affect the way they relate to their co-workers, to their job, and to life on the ranch?

7. Who do you think is the protagonist or central character of this play? (A “protagonist” is defined in the theatre as the character that undergoes a change and usually learns something or takes something away from the change.)

8. Steinbeck based a great deal of *Of Mice and Men* on his experience as a migrant worker in California during the late 1930s. Why do you think he chose to turn his experiences into a book and later a play? Do you think that storytelling is a crucial part of human existence, or just something that we enjoy listening to and engaging in?

9. When you watched the play, how did the actors, set, lighting, sound, and costumes affect your perception and understanding of the story? Were things different from the way you imagined them when reading the novella?

10. If you were directing a performance of *Of Mice and Men*, what would you choose to focus on, and how might your production be different from Bag&Baggage’s?
The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society’s Production of ‘A Christmas Carol’
by David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jr.
Directed by Scott Palmer

December 6 - December 23, 2012

The Velveteen Rabbit
by Margery Williams
Adapted by David Jenkins
a co-production with Tears Of Joy
Directed by Jennifer Dick

December 10 - 14, 2012 in Portland
December 17 - 21, 2012 in Hillsboro

The Merry Wives of Windsor ...or The Amorous Adventures of The Comical Knight Sir John Falstaff
by John Dennis
Adapted and directed by Scott Palmer

March 3 - March 24, 2013

Rough Crossing
by Tom Stoppard
Directed by Scott Palmer

May 9 - May 26, 2013

Curious about attending Bag&Baggage shows with a student group?
Contact
Ten4One Program Manager
Cassie Greer
at
ten4one@bagnbaggage.org
or
503-345-9590 x 160