

What makes good literary writing?

In this learning sequence students read and deconstruct John Steinbeck's classic novel *Of Mice and Men*. They examine the influence of time, place, society, culture, politics and life experiences upon the writer and reflect upon his impact as a major twentieth century author. Students use these understandings to construct their own texts using the themes, characters, structural devices and literary techniques of Steinbeck as reference points.

Year levels: 9-10

Focus Essentials

Communicating – *Being arts literate and Being literate*

Standard 5: Understands the sophisticated ways in which the art form most suited to their expressive need may be used to reflect, challenge and shape values and understandings of a society.

Standard 5: Understands the sophisticated ways in which communications may be varied and combined to fulfil a range of requirements for learning, life and work.

Supporting Essentials

Thinking – *Inquiry and Reflective thinking*

Personal futures – *Being ethical and Valuing diversity*

Social responsibility – *Understanding the past and creating preferred futures*

Throughlines

1. Students will understand that social, cultural and historical perspectives influence the construction and interpretation of texts.

How does the social, cultural and historical context in which a story was written influence its construction and interpretation?

2. Students will understand the aesthetic choices that are available to authors in composing literary texts.

What aesthetic choices are available to authors when they compose literary texts?

Understanding goals

1. Students will understand the relationships between events, characters, structure, themes, literary techniques and the historical context of the novel *Of Mice and Men*.

How does Steinbeck combine plot, characters, structure, themes and historical events in the novel Of Mice and Men?

2. Students will understand that an author's life experiences influence what, how and why they write.

How did Steinbeck's life experience influence his writing?

3. Students will understand that emotional response and social context influence the actions of others.

How do emotions and situations influence the way people react to the actions of others?

4. Students will understand how to apply some of Steinbeck's literary techniques to create their own texts that explore notions of empathy and ethical decision making.

How can we use some of Steinbeck's literary techniques to create our own texts?

Key concepts

Literary text, time, place, society, context, perspective, ethical behaviour, ethical decision-making, empathy, values, moral dilemma, motif, plot, character, structure, theme, character, purpose, literary techniques.

Skills emphasis

Reading, narrative, analytical and reflective writing, speaking, listening, viewing, predicting, working collaboratively, asking questions, inquiring, reflective thinking, mind mapping, accessing the Internet.

UGs	Performances of understanding	Ongoing assessing and feedback from performances of understanding
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Introductory performances		
1	<p>a) Introduce the novel <i>Of Mice and Men</i>. Ask students to predict what the story may be about based on the novel's title and cover. Have students focus on questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you expect this story to be about? • What is the distinction between mice and men? • Why do you think the author has decided upon this title? • How are we different from and similar to animals? • What does it mean to be human? <p>Ask students to work in pairs to construct a Venn diagram that explores key differences and similarities between humans and animals.</p>	<p>Assessment as learning: Have students begin a reader's response journal, making notes throughout the learning sequence.</p> <p>Assessment for learning: Use students' responses to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess how well they make predictions about a literary text. Provide them with feedback about their predictions and intervene as required. • to identify their understanding about the differences between animals and humans. Provide them with feedback and intervene as required.
1, 2	<p>b) Read the Robbie Burns' poem 'To A Mouse' to students. Have them discuss the poem in small groups before sharing their responses in a whole class discussion. Have students explore the key question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What might Steinbeck be suggesting by his use of the title? 	<p>Assessment for learning: Use students' Venn diagrams to gauge their level of understanding of the key differences between animals and humans.</p> <p>Assessment for learning: Use students' responses to assess their ability to connect literary works.</p>
1, 2, 3	<p>c) Introduce students to the Great Depression and invite them to undertake an inquiry task</p>	<p>Assessment as learning: Have students reflect on their initial examination of the links between the novel and poem.</p>

<p>1, 2, 3</p>	<p>researching the impact of this period on people's lives.</p> <p>d) Present the class with a series of quotes, paintings, photographs and/or songs – sourced from the USA and Australia – and have students comment on what they show about the impact of the Great Depression on people's lives. See the resources list for suggestions. Alternatively, have students complete the WebQuest: 'Of Mice and Men, Back in Time'. (See research list)</p> <p>Lead a structured class discussion about values, possessions, dreams and aspirations. Ask students to explore the question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is required to sustain us as human beings? 	<p>Assessment for learning: Use students' responses to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess their level of understanding of the impact of the Great Depression upon people's lives in both the USA and their Australia. • Assess students' ability to interpret a range of texts to arrive at key understandings and connect past contexts to their own lives. Provide students with feedback and intervene as required. <p>Assessment as learning: Ask students to write reflectively in their journals about their dreams and aspirations. Have them particularly focus on what sustains us as human beings.</p>
<p>Guided inquiry performances</p>		
<p>1</p>	<p>e) Read the novel aloud in class. Introduce students to the notion of a study guide. Distribute a suitable proforma or have students draw one up in their reading journals. See resources list. Have students add ideas and observations to the proforma during the reading of the novel. At the conclusion of each chapter ask students to comment on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • significant events • characters • themes • literary techniques employed by Steinbeck. <p>Ask students to create an appropriate title for each chapter</p>	<p>Assessment for learning: Use students' responses in their proforma/journals to assess their level of understanding about significant events, characters, themes and literary techniques in the novel. Provide ongoing feedback to students during the reading of the novel and intervene as required.</p> <p>Assessment as learning: Have students reflect on their developing understanding of the textual elements in the novel.</p> <p>Assessment as learning: Have students seek peer feedback about the appropriateness of their</p>

	<p>and make a prediction about the direction of the story.</p> <p>When reading the book in class, stop every time a discussion of the Farm dream occurs.</p> <p>Ask students to think about context or moments when ethical decisions need to be made. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arriving late in the day • petting animals; shooting Candy's dog • Curly's hand • Curly's wife • treatment of Crooks • shooting of Lenny. <p>1 f) Ask students to construct a mind map of the textual elements of this story, showing the relationships between them. Invite students to reflect on how the textual elements combine to tell this story.</p> <p>3 g) Ask students to examine a series of ethical dilemmas. Establish a panel discussion with students assuming the role of 'experts'. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • animal rights campaigner • family priest • farm workers' lobby group • social welfare worker. <p>Model the process using the incident in Weed as an example. Invite students to explore other moral or ethical dilemmas using a selection of strategies including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic controversy ^{gl} • PMI ^{gl} • values continuum ^{gl} • 4 corners. ^{gl} <p>Ask students to explore how context</p>	<p>chapter titles.</p> <p>Assessment as learning: Have students write in their journals about some of these examples.</p> <p>Assessment for learning: Use students' mind maps to identify their level of understanding of the textual elements of the novel.</p> <p>Provide students with feedback and intervene as required.</p> <p>Assessment for learning: Use students' responses to the various scenarios to assess their developing understanding of perspective, ethical behaviour, empathy, values and moral dilemmas. Provide students with feedback and intervene as required.</p>
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2	<p>can change people's position. Lead a guided discussion with students, reflecting upon the ethics of decisions they have made. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cruelty to an animal • not dobbing on a friend who has done something wrong • stealing • lying, gossiping and undermining. <p>Ask each student to write a reflective piece that explains their moral dilemma and why they took the actions they did. Discuss with students the notion that not everything is black and white, right or wrong, 'cut and dried' and there are often shades of grey.</p> <p>h) Discuss with students Steinbeck's purposes for writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • political • practical – an income • literary <p>Ask students to find out about some of his other books and identify recurring themes, related to the above purposes for writing. See resources for suggested approaches. Invite students to focus on the following key questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have Steinbeck's experiences of the Great Depression influenced his writing? • What was Steinbeck like as a person? • Why might Steinbeck have been considered a troublemaker? 	<p>Assessment as learning: Have students reflect on how context can change people's position.</p> <p>Assessment as learning: Ask students to write a journal entry in a character's shoes. Invite them to reflect on the question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you do in this situation? <p>Assessment for learning: Use students' responses to identify their level of understanding of Steinbeck's purposes for writing. Provide students with feedback and intervene as required.</p> <p>Assessment for learning: Use students' responses to gauge their developing understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steinbeck's life and circumstances • the influence of Steinbeck's context upon his work • the impact of Steinbeck's writing upon the literary world.
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1, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why might this book have been banned in some states of America? • Why might he have been awarded a Nobel Prize? <p>i) Discuss with students the fact that <i>Of Mice and Men</i> was originally called <i>Something That Happened</i>. Have them write reflectively about the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now that you've read the book, which do you think is the better title and why do you think Steinbeck changed it? 	<p>Assessment as learning: Ask students to make reflective journal entries about their developing understanding of what makes a great novel and the characteristics of good literary writing.</p> <p>Assessment for learning: Use students' responses from the class discussion to assess their understanding of the novel and their ability to interpret meaning and justify a position.</p>
Culminating performances		
1, 2, 3, 4	<p>j) Set students an analytical essay that requires them to interpret Steinbeck's literary techniques and/or themes. Ask students to focus on elements such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repetition • dialogue and dialect • foreshadowing • characterisation • thematic concerns • episodic structure • use of flashback • simple, direct language style • setting and scene <p>Encourage students to consult the study guide constructed during their reading of the novel.</p> <p>k) Challenge students to create other imaginative texts by applying Steinbeck's techniques. Suggested examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing a significant scene for 	

	<p>a stage play designed for two characters and based on one of the novel's themes such as empathy, ethical decision making, isolation, dysfunctionality or friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rewriting a scene from the perspective of another character such as Curly's wife, George writing to Aunt Clara or George being interviewed by a sheriff • writing a series of letters in the language of the characters • researching the impact of the Great Depression in Australia and developing an Australian short story version of the text • writing a short story using photographic studies of FSA artists Dorothea Lange or Walker Evans as a starting point <p>Alternatively, have students write an extended piece that explores the idea of 'the dream' by focusing upon the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the dream? Literally? Metaphorically? • How is it talked about? • How does it change according to time and audience? • In what context does it arise? • What are the responses to the dream? • What is the impact of the 	<p>Assessment of learning: Assess students' ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define the relationship between events, characters, structure, themes, literary techniques and historical context of <i>Of Mice and Men</i> • apply these understandings to the creation of other texts • describe ways in which an author's life experiences influence what, how and why they write • demonstrate how emotional response and social context influence the actions of others • apply some of Steinbeck's literary techniques to construct their own texts • explore notions of empathy and ethical decision making in their own writing. <p>Provide students with feedback about their culminating performance/s of understanding and intervene as required.</p>
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1, 2, 3, 4	<p>repetition of the dream motif?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the dream sustain the individual characters? <p>l) Have students reflect on how their understanding of what makes a classic novel and the characteristics of good literary writing has developed during the learning sequence.</p>	<p>Assessment as learning: Have students reflect on what they have learned about John Steinbeck and his novel <i>Of Mice and Men</i>.</p>
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Resources

WebQuest: Of Mice and Men, Back in Time

<http://www.aacps.org/aacps/boe/INSTR/CURR/comed/HSwebquest/OfMiceAndMen/index.htm>

(Accessed 9 September 2005)

Ashton, P. & Denaro, D. (1980) *Of Mice and Men – Study Guide*, English Centre. See pp 20-21 for excerpts from Steinbecks' letters.

Williams, Susan. (1990) *John Steinbeck*, Wayland, Hove, UK.

Robbie Burns' classic poem 'To A Mouse'

Visit the World Burns Club website to access the original Burns poem and the standard English translation of the poem.

<http://www.worldburnsclub.com/poems/translations/554.htm>

(Accessed 9 September 2005)

Web sites to support the teaching of the novel *Of Mice and Men*

John Steinbeck Centre

<http://www.steinbeck.org/MainFrame.html>

(Accessed 23 September 2005)

English Resources

<http://www.newi.ac.uk/englishresources/workunits/ks4/fiction/ofmicemen/llshort/factsheet.html>

(Accessed 23 September 2005)

Teacher Cyber Guide

<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/mice/micetg.html>

(Accessed 23 September 2005)

Other supporting texts

Hartnett, Sonya. (2000) *Thursday's Child*, Penguin, Australia. Use the extract from pp 148-150 about the Great Depression.

Partridge, E. (2002) *This Land Was Made for You and Me: The Life and Songs of Woody Guthrie*, Viking Juvenile.

Lange, Dorothy, Taylor, Paul. S. & Taylor, Paul (1999), *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*, Jean Michel Place.

Evans, Walker. (1975), *Walker Evans: Photographs for the Farm Security Administration, 1935-38*, Da Capo Press.

Fonvielle, Lloyd, (1997) *Walker Evans: Masters of Photography*, Aperture.

Lange, Dorothea, (1981) *Dorothea Lange*, Aperture.

Using song lyrics

Some of the songs of Woody Guthrie may be used to help students explore the effects of the Great Depression.

Visual texts: regionalism and social realism

The works of painters such as Edward Bruce, Victor Arnautoff, Grant Wood, Ethel Magafan, Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, Alexandre Hogue, Jerry Bywaters, Jacob Lawrence, Aaron Douglas, Hale Woodruff, Ben Shahn, Reginald Marsh, Raphael Soyer, Isaac Soyer, Edward Hopper, Paul Cadmus and Philip Evergood provide rich background detail to the social landscape of 1930s America.

A good source text for these artists is:

Haskell, Barbara (1999) *The American Century: Art and Culture 1900-1950*. Whitney Museum of American Art, W.W. Norton and Co., New York.

Of Mice And Men – Characters

Lenny	George
Curley – boss' son	Candy
Curley's wife	Slim

Appendix C – reading journal proforma

Of Mice And Men – John Steinbeck

Plot Outline	
Chapter 1 pp. 3-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••
Your title	
Prediction	
Chapter 2 pp.19-38	<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••
Your title	
Prediction	
Chapter 3 pp.39-65	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••
Your title	
Prediction	

Chapter 4 pp. 66-82	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •
Your title	
Prediction	
Chapter 5 pp. 83-97	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •
Your title	
Prediction	
Chapter 6 pp. 98-106	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •
Your title	
Prediction	

Page numbers are for the Penguin Classics 2000 edition

Appendix D – themes

Of Mice and Men – Themes

Survival in hard times	Friendship
Disability and ability	Race, age, gender discrimination
Record evidence, events and quotes with page numbers	