

# ***Of Mice and Men* Overview**

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**1** *Of Mice and Men* (1937), one of Steinbeck's most acclaimed and beloved works, is a moving story of thwarted dreams, friendship, and sacrifice that chronicles four days in the lives of migrant workers, George Milton and Lennie Small. Set primarily on a ranch near Soledad, just south of Steinbeck's hometown, Salinas, California, Steinbeck creates a vivid picture of farm life in the area during the Great Depression, introducing readers to the loneliness of migrant workers, women, racial minorities, the old, and the infirm and the seeming impossibility of social outcasts ever achieving the dreams of rest, acceptance, and material prosperity for which they long. The novel takes its title from Robert Burns's poem "To a Mouse, on Turning Her up in Her Nest with the Plough" (1785) in which Burns writes, "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men/ Gang aft agley" (Burns). The line is often paraphrased in English as "The best-laid plans of mice and men/ Go oft awry" alluding to the novel's emphasis on how chance and uncontrollable circumstances interfere with intentions. Initially simply titled "Something That Happened," one of Steinbeck's primary goals for the text was to present an objective view of humans' position within social and natural conflicts that are outside the bounds of their control.

**2** Since its publication, *Of Mice and Men* has often been censored, among other reasons, for its use of offensive language. Appearing on the American Library Association's list of the Most Challenged Books of the 21st Century has not quelled the book's enormous popularity. Besides still being widely read, the novel has been staged numerous times since 1937 and even adapted into an opera. The first of three "play-novelettes" he wrote during his career, Steinbeck designed the novel to be easily adapted for stage. In the "Foreword" to *Burning Bright*, Steinbeck describes the play-novelette as "[...] a play that is easy to read or a short novel that can be played simply by lifting out the dialogue" (xi).

**3** At least four different film versions of *Of Mice and Men*, including two adapted for television, have been released. The most recent version was released in 1992 with director Gary Sinise starring as George Milton and John Malkovich performing the role of Lennie Small.