

OF MICE AND MEN PRACTICE QUESTION

PART A) In this passage, how does Steinbeck introduce the relationship between George and Lennie?

In the first line of the extract we get the impression that George is leading Lennie. For example, it says; "They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the open one stayed behind the other." This shows that Lennie seeks refuge in George's space and being behind him may feel secure and safe to Lennie. It could also symbolise to the reader that George has to take the blame for things that Lennie has done. Lennie seems guilty standing behind George and George seems to be leading the way, facing everything so that Lennie doesn't have to. We get the image of a naughty, immature child following their parent.

Steinbeck presents Lennie as clumsy and light-headed which shows up George in a type of paternal light. For example, it says; "The first man stopped short in the clearing, and the follower nearly ran over him." This could symbolise that George is always protecting Lennie, and stopping him before he does something stupid. This corresponds with a quote further down the extract when it says; "'Lennie!' he said sharply. 'Lennie for God' sakes don't drink so much.'" Again this shows the parental and child-like relationship Lennie and George both have. George seems to look after Lennie and Lennie seems dependant on George.

PART B) In the rest of the novel, how does Steinbeck present ideas about relationships on a ranch at the time the novel is set?

Steinbeck presents ideas about relationships on a ranch by showing the stark contrast between the relationship George and Lennie have, and the relationship two other men would have on a ranch. Steinbeck shows the rarity of George and Lennie's relationship when it says; "Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy. I just like to know what your interest is." This shows that close relationships between two men wasn't seen often in the USA. This could have been because society was largely broken at the time. Ageism, sexism and racism were three main factors that were commonplace in America.

For example, racism is shown in the novel when it says; "Sure. Ya see the stable buck's a nigger." The use of derogatory language and the fact that it is even mentioned that the stable work is of an African origin shows how narrow-minded and ignorant the people of that time were.

Ageism also put strain on relationships on a ranch at the time. Candy suffers ageism in the novel. One example would be when Carlson argues about Candy's old dog and it says; "If you want me to, I'll put the old devil out of his misery right now and get it over with. Ain't nothing left for him. Can't eat, can't see, can't even walk without hurtin'" This is ironic as the other ranch men probably think the same about Candy. At this time in America, there were no care homes or helpers for the old. They were discriminated against as they were seen as useless.

Sexism also broke many relationships at this time in America. Curley's wife is discriminated against because she is a woman. Often in the novel she is called things like 'a bitch' and 'a whore' and the fact we never get to find out her name shows how little importance she has in the eyes of the ranch men.

All of these factors backs up how good relationships were rare between people on a ranch, because people's differences; whether it be gender, age or skin colour, parted people. This is why George and Lennie's relationship is so rare and contrasts so much with the typical ranch lifestyle.