OF MICE AND MEN

Film Synopsis

Based on John Steinbeck's 1937 classic tale of two travelling companions, George and Lennie, who wander the country during the Depression, dreaming of a better life for themselves. Then, just as heaven is within their grasp, it is inevitably yanked away. The film follows Steinbeck's novel closely, exploring questions of strength, weakness, usefulness, reality and utopia, bringing Steinbeck's California vividly to life.
(Source www.imdb.com retrieved 7/30/09)

Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is designed to be used in conjunction with the 2009/2010 Common Book “Growing Up” and Residence Life Cinema showing of Of Mice and Men. It is intended to help college students look at issues addressed in the book and in the movie and at the ways those issues affect their lives. This guide can help you facilitate the discussion of these issues. It is not necessary to use all of the discussion questions. Instead, take a minute to look over the suggestions listed below and choose the ones that meet the needs and personality of your audience. These suggestions are intended to assist you, not to limit you. Feel free to modify or elaborate them to suit your needs. Most important, make an effort to see the movie and consider the questions in advance so that you do not approach the program “cold”. The movies are available accessible on campus on Cable Channel 20 and are also available for rent Blockbuster.com or Netflix.com. The discussion facilitator may choose to utilize one of the following activities as a means of developing discussion:

---

1 This guide is adapted from the discussion guide provided by Swank Motion Pictures Inc. for Residence Life Cinema.

© Swank Motion Pictures, Inc. MP4285 10.05 F9 - (21178)

Residence Life Cinema

201 South Jefferson Avenue • St. Louis, Missouri 63103-2579
Phone: (800) 244-6173 Fax: (314) 289-1776 Email: mail@reslife.com
Programming Suggestions

1. Invite an expert on disabilities (or students with disabilities) to provide additional information or commentary on the movie.

2. Invite a small panel of locals who grew up during the Great Depression to discuss their experiences. If they’ve read the common book or seen the movie, have them offer their perspective on their accuracy.

3. Have a roundtable discussion with all students present offering opinions based upon the questions listed below.

An important element to any of the three options is that all students present should have the opportunity to ask questions and voice opinions. A statement should be made at the beginning of the program concerning all participants’ freedom to voice opinions without fear of personal ridicule. This will provide an environment that is more open to discussing the issues at hand. It is the facilitator’s responsibility to protect the individual’s rights as well as the integrity of the program.

Movie Discussion Questions:

1. Describe Lenny. What did you like about his character? What did you dislike?

2. Was Lenny a dangerous character? If yes, do you think he intended to harm anyone or anything?

3. Describe George and Lenny’s relationship. Could you have taken care of Lenny or someone like Lenny? Why is George’s relationship with Lenny so caring?

4. What was the significance or relevance of the workmen being segregated?

5. Describe Curly’s wife. What was the role of women in this period of history? Is it true that “loneliness can drive a man insane”?

6. Compare and contrast the scene when Candy’s dog was shot and when Lenny was shot. Can Candy and Lenny ever buy their 10 acre dream?
7. Why did George shoot Lenny? Did he do it for Lenny or himself? Would you have shot him under the same circumstances? Are there other circumstances in which you would agree with euthanasia?

8. Are today’s view of people with disabilities similar or different from that time period? Could this situation happen today?

9. The film was based on a John Steinbeck novel so the plot of the film needed to be consistent with the book, yet there are a myriad of production and actor choices that affect the final outcome on screen. What did you think of the way the actors and producers in the film depicted individuals who suffer from mental retardation? What ethical and moral issues are involved in making a film like this?

10. In the film, George says, “Guys like us that work on ranches are the loneliest guys in the world. They ain't got no family and they don't belong no place.” Often Latin American immigrants are the ranch hands and farmers of the West today. How might their lives be similar to or different from George and Lennie’s? Does this movie give you a different perspective on migrant workers?

Common Book Connections

1. The tagline of the movie is “We have a dream. Someday, we'll have a little house and a couple of acres. A place to call home” which is exactly the same dream that Russell’s mother has. What is your dream?

2. Based on the details you gathered from the book and the film, what was life like during the great depression? Was it all bad or was there also some good that came out of it? Cut out words and images from magazines and make a collage that illustrates your view.

3. Characters in both the film and the book experience the loss of a loved one. This is something that many students have experienced as well. Invite Winthrop Sociologist Jennifer Solomon to your program to discuss death and grief as a social process.

4. Characters in both the film and the book find it emotionally difficult to move from place to place. They dream of one day laying down roots. Having left home for college, can you relate to this at all? Describe this transition. What has helped you cope with the transition?

5. The book and the film take place during the same time period, but in very different settings, one in East Coast urban areas, the other on rural West Coast farms. Compare and contrast the two settings and the lives of the characters in them. What about you? Are you from a more rural or more urban area and how do you think that this has this shaped your view of the world?
Connection to the Core Commitments

These films were chosen because they all examine the dual themes of growing up and striving for excellence from a different perspective. Cinderella Man compares directly with the book in showing the experiences of a white family struggling to make it during the Great Depression. In contrast, The Color Purple shows us how life was different during that same time period for women and African Americans. Of Mice and Men tells the story of two men, one with a disability, in the Deep South during the Great Depression, and Avalon tells the story of a family of Jewish immigrants in Baltimore during the same time period. Lastly, Into the Wild, is set in the present day, but shows a very different perspective on growing up in which a teenager from a relatively privileged background relinquishes all material possessions and tries to reconnect with nature in order to “make something of himself”.

Taking Seriously the Perspective of Others

These films encourage students to contrast the varied perspectives of males and females, members of racial minorities and dominant groups, able-bodied persons and persons with disabilities, along with the poor and the privileged. Discussing themes of disability, class privilege, racial and ethnic relations, poverty and oppression encourages students to consider how one’s position in the social hierarchy might influence the lives of individuals.

Striving for Excellence

Russel Baker’s mother was always pushing him to “make something of himself”. What does it mean to make something of oneself? Though the characters in the book and films might answer that question differently, each is striving for a better, more fulfilling life. Each of these films depicts a struggle in which characters face various obstacles and emerge as stronger, more determined individuals. While their goals are different, each takes the high road and makes the most out of his or her circumstances. These five films encourage students to strive for excellence despite tough economic times, racism, sexism, or physical barriers they may encounter along the way.

Refining Ethical and Moral Reasoning

This program invites students to compare the ideas institutions, philosophies, moral codes, and ethical principles of the past to those they have experienced in the present day. This program creates an atmosphere in which students can reflect on their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and habits while comparing them to the characters in the book and films.