

# *A Novel Look at Film*

O F M I C E A N D M E N

**VIEWING  
GUIDE**



**A Novel  
Look at Film**

is a screen education  
program presented  
by the American  
Film Institute in  
collaboration with  
Montgomery County  
Public Schools.

Sponsored by Sprint







Advancing and preserving  
the art of the moving image

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The American Film Institute is proud to present this Educational Guide as part of "A Novel Look at Film," a pilot program of AFI's national Screen Education Initiative.

This guide has been developed with support from Sprint through an extended collaboration between Montgomery County Public Schools and AFI. Every step of the process has been focused on providing a valuable instrument to enhance the "Relationships" component of the MCPS curriculum. This project has enjoyed strong support from educators nationally and from the creative community. Gary Sinise, the director and star of the film OF MICE AND MEN, was quite enthusiastic about participating in the video component of the program.

This introduction to the basic concepts of screen education takes a fundamental step toward understanding the moving image in the new millennium. AFI looks forward to further developing screen education programs in the years to come.

AFI hopes that you benefit as much from the Educational Guide as we have in creating it.

Sincerely,

Jean Picker Firstenberg  
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# OF MICE AND MEN

## *A Novel Look at Film*

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### Viewing Guide

*Novel by John Steinbeck (1937)*

*Film by Gary Sinise (1992)*

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**The American Film Institute**, the nation's preeminent arts organization dedicated to advancing and preserving the art of the moving image, is committed to informing the general public about the artistic and cultural significance of the motion picture. In collaboration with the Montgomery County Public Schools, AFI has prepared this guide to assist teachers with presenting the 1992 film *OF MICE AND MEN*, directed by Gary Sinise, in conjunction with John Steinbeck's 1937 novel. This film provides an excellent opportunity to educate students about the medium of film while reinforcing the literary significance of Steinbeck's story. The guide is designed to provide examples of how to use film language to complement the study of the novel in the classroom.

## PRE-VIEWING MATERIALS:

### *Preparing to See the Film*

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The following materials are intended to assist teachers with the preparation of students for viewing Gary Sinise's film after they have read the novel. Depending on the particular needs and interests of their students, teachers might choose any number of the following terms, issues and ideas when preparing their own lesson plans.

#### **The Novel/Film Connection: An Interconnected Relationship**

Since *Of Mice And Men* is presented as part of a unit on relationships, emphasizing the important relationship between novels and films would be a good way to make the transition between the book and the film. Indeed, a strong relationship between novels and films has existed since the invention of the motion picture. During the first decade of the twentieth century, when film first progressed beyond merely capturing movement to telling stories, novels were among the earliest sources for material. One of Hollywood's early blockbusters, D.W. Griffith's *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* (1915), was based on a popular novel. Films based on novels became particularly common with sound pictures or talkies, which were first made in the late 1920s. By the end of the 1930s, the period often called Hollywood's Golden Age, between 30 and 40 percent of the films produced were based on novels.

Film producers were drawn to novels for a variety of reasons. A novel's ready-made story, complete with characters, conflicts and conclusion, allowed filmmakers to extract as little or as much from the book as they wanted. Novel-based films were considered prestigious; if done well, they were often critically received and became top contenders for Academy Awards. In addition, films based on novels were perceived as potential moneymakers. Whether the book was an old classic or a new bestseller, its popularity was considered a good indicator of the film's box office success.

Literary classics including *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Wuthering Heights* were all made into films during the 1930s. Contemporary novels from the same period that addressed the social and cultural concerns of the day, including *The Good Earth*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Rebecca*, also inspired screen adaptations that were released shortly after the books' original publication. In most cases, these films caused the reading of the

original novels to skyrocket. More copies of *Wuthering Heights*, for example, were sold in 1939 than during the previous century, a direct result of the film bringing the story to a mass audience for the first time.

Although Hollywood and the films it produces have changed dramatically since the 1930s, novels are still an important source for filmmakers. Several recent adaptations of Jane Austen novels—*Persuasion*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*—have introduced a new generation of moviegoers to stories written almost 200 years ago. Recent novels, including *The English Patient*, *Remains of the Day*, *L.A. Confidential* and *Forrest Gump*, have also inspired critically-acclaimed motion pictures.

The proliferation of films based on novels results in the inevitable comparison of the two. Audiences familiar with novels bring a host of expectations with them when viewing their film versions. Frequent comments about films based on novels include:

- "The film is true to the spirit of the book."
- "It's incredible how they butchered the novel."
- "Thank goodness they changed the ending."

These statements are based on certain assumptions by the viewer, particularly that a film is intended to be a snapshot of the book, like a photo reproduces the image of a person. Statements like these also assume that the novel is the norm and the film deviates from it at its peril. According to this paradigm, the more the film strays from the novel, the more inferior it is to the original work.

Rather than considering a film a mere replica of a book, it is more constructive to emphasize the fundamental differences between the two. Analyzing these differences is not only essential to avoid considering a film merely as a replacement for the book, but it will also help students of film to understand and appreciate both novels and films more fully.

Both novels and feature films are stylized, contemporary examples of perhaps the oldest forms of human expression: storytelling. Because human consciousness embraces much more than the present moment, recounting events or stories requires the capacity to evoke other times and places, real or imagined. The sequencing of time, space and action

—ordering them and giving them coherence and meaning—creates a narrative, the spine on which to hang a story.

Literary narrative is basically a conventionalized abstraction, a linear sequence of words and ideas that evolves a story by being read. Film narrative is similarly conventionalized, moving freely through space and time to represent and portray action and resolution through images, sounds and spoken words. While film narrative is much more concrete, leaving so much less to the imagination, both forms of narrative speak to our senses and call on us to participate in an active world the artist has called up for us.

To reiterate, a novel is a work of linguistic art that is comprised exclusively of words. The weaving together of words into carefully crafted sentences, paragraphs and chapters is at the heart of a novel's power to tell a story by inspiring images within the reader's mind. Film, on the other hand, is essentially a visual art form composed of images enhanced with sound that are presented before an audience on a screen. With less emphasis on written language as the primary structural element, film eliminates many characteristics of a novel which text more easily approximates: dreams, memories and feelings, which in the novel are conjured up within the imagination of the reader. To replace them, film relies on endless visual, physical and spatial variations that are combined and juxtaposed through the editing of those images into a continuous moving picture.

A novel is a conceptual device that relies on the reader's ability to conceive what is being presented through words that conjure up ideas in the reader's imagination. A film, on the other hand, is a perceptual medium that relies on the presentation of images to the viewer that are perceived and understood once they are visible on the screen.

In the novel, the raw material is simply the words themselves. In film, the raw materials and sounds are the images imprinted on celluloid that runs through a projector. The camera becomes the eye of the viewer, provides the point of view and shapes the subject matter through the images it presents. The omniscient voice of the novel is replaced by the camera lens, through which the novel's language is filtered.



| <b>NOVEL</b>                       | <b>FILM</b>                                     |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>linguistic = words</b>          | <b>visual = images</b>                          |
| <b>conceptual</b>                  | <b>perceptual</b>                               |
| <b>raw material: written words</b> | <b>raw material: recorded images and sounds</b> |
| <b>one author</b>                  | <b>collaborative</b>                            |

When filmmakers turn a novel into a film, they ultimately create their own work of art inspired by the book but additionally influenced by visual forms. Instead of creating a snapshot of the book, the filmmaker reshapes the words into a visual medium that is completely different. The filmmaker does not convert the novel at all, but creates instead a paraphrase of the novel in which characters and incidents are approximated in visual terms. The novel communicates with established narrative conventions such as plot, characterization, point of view, setting, conflict and theme. The filmmaker can choose which of these elements are important to his or her visual interpretation of the narrative. Besides the filmmaker's personal choices, factors such as budget and time can also influence the final forms of the visual narrative. Just as the author of the novel chose the words, character descriptions, setting and other elements that conveyed a message or theme, similarly, the filmmaker has many choices, employing some of the same tools, that can result in the same theme or an entirely different one. It must be assumed, therefore, that changes are inevitable when a filmmaker transforms a linguistic medium into a visual one.

Like two intersecting lines, novel and film seem to meet at a point, then begin to diverge. At the intersection, book and shooting script may appear very similar. When these lines diverge, they do not resemble each other. An art form that depends on moving images, mass audience, industrial production and profit is bound to differ from an art form



that depends on language, a limited, literary audience and the individual creation of the author. The filmed novel, in spite of certain resemblances, will inevitably become a different artistic expression from the novel on which it is based.

Instead of searching for what aspects of the film are different from the book, it is more constructive to ask why those differences occurred and how they might illuminate the story's transition from a linguistic to a visual medium. Doing so in the classroom will sharpen the student's awareness of the novel and introduce the vocabulary of film and its intrinsic characteristics.

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#### **SUMMARY:**

##### *The Novel/Film Relationship*

- ▶ Films have been made from novels throughout the history of movies.
- ▶ Novels have consistently provided filmmakers with ready-made narratives that have often resulted in prestigious, popular motion pictures.
- ▶ Films have been made from both literary classics and contemporary novels since their beginnings, and still are today.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF NOVEL/FILM READING**

Select a movie you have viewed that was also a novel or children's story and describe in a brief, constructed response many of the differences in the two texts.

#### **OR**

Select a favorite scene from a story you have read that has not been made into a film. Explain in a brief, constructed response which present-day actors you would select to portray the main characters. Justify your choices.

- ▶ Viewers bring many assumptions to novel-inspired films, particularly that the film should be a photo album of the book.
- ▶ Films based on novels ultimately transform a story based in a linguistic medium into a story told in a visual medium that has its own distinctive characteristics.
- ▶ Explaining why the choices are made when transforming a literary work into a visual medium can help students understand the strengths and unique qualities of both.



### **Of Mice and Men: Novel, Play and Film**

*Of Mice and Men* is an excellent example of a novel that has been adapted to both the stage and screen. While Steinbeck was writing the novel during the mid-1930s, he was also considering how to rework it as a play. In a *Stage Magazine* article published in January 1938, he wrote, “Simply stated, *Of Mice and Men* was an attempt to write a novel that could be played from the lines, or a play that could be read.” Years later, he called this type of writing the “play-novelette” form. Steinbeck’s play, *Of Mice and Men*, premiered in New York City in 1937 shortly after the book was published in the same year. Just two years later, a film of the story was produced starring Lon Chaney, Jr. as Lennie and Burgess Meredith as George.



Gary Sinise’s 1992 film brings Steinbeck’s novel and play together in a motion picture that tells the story in strikingly visual terms. Sinise had always loved the book, which was one of his favorites from childhood. A veteran of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, he also starred as Tom Joad in an acclaimed stage production of John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. In crafting the film, Sinise utilized both theatrical and cinematic techniques to tell Steinbeck’s story. The film shows a respect for the novel but also departs from it. The result is a film from which students can gain much understanding of how a literary classic can be translated successfully to the screen.

### **Film Guide: Production Crew and Cast**

#### **OF MICE AND MEN (1992)**

**PRODUCTION:** Russ Smith and Gary Sinise; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)

**DIRECTION:** Gary Sinise

**SCREENPLAY:** Horton Foote

**EDITOR:** Robert L. Sinise

**CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Kenneth MacMillan

**PRODUCTION DESIGN:** David Gropman

**ART DIRECTION:** Dan Davis, Karen Schulz, and Cheryl T. Smith

**CASTING:** Amanda Mackey

**COSTUME DESIGN:** Shay Cunliffe

**MUSIC:** Mark Isham

**RUNNING TIME:** 110 minutes

Based on the novel and play *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck (1937)

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|                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| <b>LENNIE</b>        | John Malkovich   |
| <b>GEORGE</b>        | Gary Sinise      |
| <b>CANDY</b>         | Ray Walston      |
| <b>CURLEY</b>        | Casey Siemaszko  |
| <b>CURLEY’S WIFE</b> | Sherilyn Fenn    |
| <b>SLIM</b>          | John Terry       |
| <b>CARLSON</b>       | Richard Riehle   |
| <b>WHITT</b>         | Alexis Arquette  |
| <b>CROOKS</b>        | Joe Morton       |
| <b>THE BOSS</b>      | Noble Willingham |

## Cinematic Terms

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A consideration of the many arts and crafts involved in film production gives the motion picture a much larger and more complex dimension. No longer can a film of a novel be considered a mere visual record when so much talent is involved in such a creative effort. Just as the various tasks in film production can be broken down and analyzed individually, so can the individual elements of the film. Filmmaking, like any other art form, has its own language and vocabulary. Once that language is mastered, films can be understood at a new level.

**Camera angle:** The position of the camera in relation to the subject it shows: above it, looking down (a high angle); on the same level (a straight-on angle); looking up (a low angle). *OF MICE AND MEN* consists almost exclusively of straight-on angle shots. More extreme camera angles are used sparingly. The film's most dramatic high angle shot captures Lennie's realization that he has killed Curley's wife in a shot from high above which captures him crouched in terror over the woman's dead body.

**Close-up:** A framing in which the scale of the object shown is relatively large. Most commonly, a person's head is seen from the neck up, or an object fills most of the screen to emphasize its importance. *OF MICE AND MEN* is filled with important close-ups. George riding alone in a freight car, Lennie's bloody face after Curley's beating and Curley's wife dreaming of becoming a movie star are all shot in close-up to heighten mood and convey a certain cinematic intensity.

**Crane shot:** A shot accomplished by having the camera above the ground and moving through the air in any direction. When George and Lennie first arrive at Tyler Ranch, a crane shot follows them down the dusty road and the camera seems to take flight as they walk through the gate. Other crane shots are used during the scenes of men working in the barley fields.

**Crosscutting:** Editing that alternates shots of two or more lines of action occurring in different places, usually simultaneously. Crosscutting is often used during a key dramatic sequence to increase tension. In this film, crosscutting is used in two scenes when George and Lennie are being pursued by angry ranch hands. Since these occur at the beginning and end of the film, they also act as a kind of framing device.

**Deep Focus:** A use of the camera lens and lighting so that both close and distant planes are shown in sharp focus. This technique allows the filmmaker to emphasize a character or object that appears far away. In *OF MICE AND MEN*, the bus carrying George and Lennie to Salinas seems small as it travels through the California countryside, yet deep focus emphasizes its significance in the frame. Many characters are also photographed using this technique. Crooks and Curley's wife often appear distant from the camera. Deep focus helps remind the viewer of their constant—but often neglected—presence at the ranch.

**Depth of Field:** The area or field between the closest and farthest planes captured by the camera in which everything appears in sharp focus. A depth of field from

five to 16 feet, for example, would mean that everything closer than five feet and farther than 16 feet would be out of focus. *OF MICE AND MEN* is filled with shots in which depth of field is used to create distinctive images. In downtown Salinas, the streets are photographed showing both close-up passers-by and far away storefronts in sharp focus. The many aspects of the streetscape are arranged in the frame in overlapping planes, an effect that contributes to the film's rich sense of period.

**Dissolve:** A transition between two shots during which the first image gradually disappears while the second image gradually appears. For a moment, the two images blend in superimposition. To help make the transition between the fields and the ranch, a dissolve is used between the field shots and a shot of horses' hooves pulling wagons, which are carrying workers back to the ranch after a hard day's work.

**Establishing shot:** A shot that shows the relationship among important figures, objects, characters and setting at a distance. In *OF MICE AND MEN*, establishing shots introduce the viewer to Main Street in Salinas, Tyler Ranch and the barley fields where George and Lennie work. From the establishing shot, the film then cuts to more detailed shots (often called coverage) that bring the audience closer to the characters.

**Flashback:** An alteration in the story order in which the plot moves back in time to show events that have taken place earlier than those already shown. *OF MICE AND MEN* is actually structured entirely in flashback, though this is not clear at first. The film opens

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with George riding alone in a dark train car. That image dissolves and the story proceeds, causing the viewer to forget about it. When this image returns at the end of the film, it is clear that George is remembering his friend Lennie and the events that led to his death.

**Focus:** When light, people, places and objects are captured on film showing sharp outlines and distinct textures through the manipulating of the camera lens. There are different types of focus, which are used to achieve specific effects. In *OF MICE AND MEN*, the field workers are shot in sharp focus, which emphasizes the contrast between their red and blue clothing and the golden barley fields. In nighttime shots, soft focus is achieved through diffused lighting emanating from a concentrated source such as a kerosene lamp, which creates softer outlines and more subtle color tones.

**Frame:** The rectangular box that contains the image projected on the screen. This perimeter is one of the filmmaker's most important tools. The frame is the window into the world of a film. Within it, each shot is composed and the edges of the frame allow the filmmaker to create a picture. Movies were first known as moving pictures, and this description is still useful when considering the important role the frame plays as a compositional device. Through the camera's eye, the viewer is presented with images that convey the story. Within the frame, the filmmaker creates several different types of shots, which are generally characterized by the relationship between the size of the elements in the frame to each other and to the frame itself.

**Long shot:** A framing in which the scale of the object shown is not distant but relatively small. A standing human figure, for example, generally appears nearly the height of the screen. In *OF MICE AND MEN*, Candy is introduced in a long shot: shown from head to toe surrounded by barking dogs. The woman in the ripped red dress is also introduced in a long shot that shows her running through a barley field straight toward the camera.

**Medium shot:** A shot that shows human figures from the waist up. The first encounter between George, Lennie and the Boss at Tyler Ranch is composed entirely of medium shots. Lennie and George are shown from the waist up in shots that emphasize the extreme difference in their sizes. Similarly, the Boss is shot from the waist up sitting at a desk.

**Pan (or panning shot):** A camera movement with the camera body turning to the right or left. On the screen, it produces a mobile framing, which scans horizontally. In *OF MICE AND MEN*, this type of shot is often used to link George and Lennie, emphasizing their strong connection and interdependence. Panning shots can also emphasize movement. When the bus drives past George and Lennie walking along the road to Tyler Ranch, the camera follows it in a panning shot, making it appear to move even faster than it actually is.

**Point of View (POV) shot:** A shot taken with the camera placed where the character's eyes would be to show what the character would actually see. This type of shot is usually cut in before or after a shot of the character looking at whatever the POV shot contains.

When George and Lennie arrive at Tyler Ranch, their first encounter with the Boss is while he is eating breakfast. A POV shot shows his oatmeal—and the walnuts he crushes with an iron nutcracker—from their point of view. Although George and Lennie have not had breakfast, he offers them nothing and scolds them for not arriving the day before. The man with the food also has the power, and the POV shot immediately establishes this dynamic between George, Lennie and their employer.

**Wide angle:** The use of a wide-angle lens to create a shot that captures a wide range of elements or objects on a single plane while at the same time exaggerating the distance between foreground and background planes. While Curley practices boxing with his speed bag, a wide angle shot shows him in the center of the frame, the farmhouse to the left (where his wife reluctantly shells peas on the porch) and an old car at the right. While the Boss yells at Curley from the porch to “knock off that racket,” the wide angle shot captures all three family members in the frame yet also suggests their isolation from one another.

**Zoom:** A lens which allows the focal length—the distance between the camera and the object being filmed—to change during a single shot. The camera can zoom in by going closer to an object or it can zoom out by pulling back from an object. In *OF MICE AND MEN*, the zoom lens is most often used to zoom out from a character. The zoom in is reserved for crucial moments, such as when Curley's wife confesses to Lennie that “Curley is not a nice fella.”

## Steinbeck's Relationships Translated from Novel to Screen

The numerous relationships in *OF MICE AND MEN* provide the story's fundamental framework. While viewing the film, focusing on three types of relationships may reveal some differences in the two media. While the relationship between George and Lennie is at the heart of the novel, their interactions with other characters reinforce the plot's depth and complexity. In addition, the relationship of the setting to these characters and their actions should be observed. Finally, the relationship of the cinematic elements to character and theme should be a key focus.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIEWING THE FILM

Divide the class into groups before they view the film. The following questions cover three elements of the film: character, setting and cinematic relationships. Give each group a different relationship on which to focus their viewing of the film or each group may divide the questions equally among its members.



### Questions on Character Relationships to Consider While Viewing the Film

How is the relationship between George and Lennie expressed in the film through camera placement or shot selection? Through clothing, setting or spatial relationships? What types of shots reinforce their strong connection?

How does George explain his relationship with Lennie to others? His explanation to the Boss at Tyler Ranch, for example, is very different from what he tells Slim. What do these conversations convey about George's attitude toward Lennie and their relationship?

George's feelings about his connection to Lennie vary throughout the story. How are his anguish, frustration and affection for Lennie expressed in visual terms? Shot composition? Lighting? The expressions and reactions of the actors?

How does Lennie express his feelings about his relationship with George in visual terms? Gestures? Facial expressions? Conversations?

While watching the film, think about how the filmmaker shows the relationship between the following characters:

- George and Slim
- Curley and his wife
- Curley's wife and George
- Curley's wife and Lennie
- Candy and his old dog
- Lennie and his puppy

Which other characters in the film do not seem to have relationships with anyone? What does this tell us about them?

Look for parental relationships in this story. Curley and his father are the only blood relatives. Which relationships suggest the nurturing guidance or responsibility of a dominant parent and his dependent child?

How are characters portrayed in both positive and negative ways? Are there good and bad characters, or are they a combination? For example, Crooks is referred to with a term with strongly negative connotations. Why is he referred to this way? George calls Curley's wife a "rat trap" when he first encounters her—a judgment made after seeing her for just a few minutes. Why does he say this, and is he right about her?

Except for Curley's wife, men overwhelmingly dominate this film. What is it like for her to exist in this environment? How does she react to it?



### **Questions on the Relationship between Setting and Other Elements to Consider While Viewing the Film:**

Characterize the setting. What words and ideas would you use to describe it? How do various types of shots convey the film's physical qualities (e.g. landscapes, buildings, interiors)?

The relationship of the story to its setting: Why does the story take place in its particular time and place?

The relationship of characters to setting. How do characters react to it and express their feelings about their surroundings?

Could the settings alone—without characters in them—convey anything about the people who live there and their relationships? How?

### **Questions on Cinematic Relationships to Consider While Viewing the Film**

Identify basic shots while you watch the film: long shots, medium shots and close-ups.

Notice when the camera moves—during panning or

crane shots, for example. Why does the director choose to move the camera at these times, and how does this help tell the story?

What do the setting and other visual cues tell you about the time period? How do clothes, cars and other visual elements indicate that the film takes place in the 1930s?

Try to time how long each scene is. One minute? Five minutes? Are some scenes longer than others? Why?

Try to determine when one scene ends and another begins. How does this give the film a certain rhythm? Note the importance of editing in the pacing of scenes and the film as a whole.

Why do you think the actors were chosen? Type? Style? Look? Age?

How are the animals filmed? Why are they important to the story?

Which scenes are accompanied by music and which are not? What is the effect of the scenes without music? How does music enhance or alter the other scenes?

## POST-VIEWING MATERIALS:

### *Understanding the Film/Novel Relationship—A List of Questions for Reflection Immediately After the Film*

*Directions: In brief, constructed responses answer three of the following questions based on your viewing of the film.*

How did seeing this film on a large theater screen affect your experience? How was it different than seeing it on a television screen?

At what points during the film did you feel happy? Hopeful? Excited? Tense? Bored? Sad? Uncomfortable? List the film elements that contributed to these particular feelings.

Select a specific moment or scene in the film and describe how the music influenced your feelings.

Describe how some film techniques made you identify with any particular character. Why?

If you were the filmmaker, how might you have made the film differently? What elements would you have changed? What elements would you leave the same?

Choose a scene from the film and consider how you would change one film technique (e.g. shot selection, lighting, music). Describe how the change would affect the scene.



#### **Suggested Post-viewing Classroom Activities**

Screenwriter Horton Foote has added several scenes to the film which are not present in the novel to clarify certain parts of the story or to give certain characters more depth. Choose a character you would like to know more about and write a scene to add to the film. It can be in the form of a simple story or narrative. Try including dialogue.

Imagine some of the places that are mentioned in the film but not shown: the “little place” with the rabbit hutch that George describes for Lennie; the Riverside Dance Palace where Curley meets his wife; the interior of the ranch house where Curley’s wife listens to her records (and where Curley smashes them). As the production designer for these scenes, create drawings of what they might look like. Sketch a storyboard of how you might arrange actors within these settings and how you might shoot a scene that takes place there.

Choose a scene from the film and recreate its shots through simple sketches after reviewing the scene in class. Once the sketches are created, put them together the way they are edited in the film, and then re-edit the scene by rearranging the long shots, medium shots, and close-ups.

Pick scenes from the novel that contain dialogue to read aloud in class. Some students can be the actors. Others might direct by asking their colleagues to read a line differently, with a certain emphasis, more quietly and so forth. Others could be assigned to hold the camera. How hard is it to read lines with a camera less than three feet away?



## The People Behind the Production

To prepare for viewing the interview of Gary Sinise and other people behind the production of the film, read the following overview of the individual jobs involved in making a film.

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Because it combines the novel with the fundamentals of filmmaking, Gary Sinise's *OF MICE AND MEN* can also be used to introduce students to the basic language of film. While a novel is the creation of one person, a film is a collaboration among many creative individuals. In order to understand film as an art form, it is important to consider the jobs of the numerous individuals who work together to make the film a reality.

**Producer:** The person or group responsible for financing a film and managing the production from start to finish. The producer develops the project from the initial idea, makes sure the script is finalized, arranges the financing, hires the personnel to make the film and oversees its distribution to theaters. The producer also coordinates the filmmaking process to ensure that everyone involved in the project is working on schedule and on budget. *OF MICE AND MEN* was produced by Russ Smith and Gary Sinise, who worked together to secure financing and to organize the production. Ironically, the producer's role is often invisible to the moviegoing public, who tends to focus on actors and directors. Yet, without the producer at the helm, films do not get made.

**Director:** The individual primarily responsible for overseeing the shooting and assembly of a film. He or she is most directly responsible for the picture's final appearance. The director is sometimes referred to as the author or auteur of a film because of his or her essential involvement with its creation. While the director might be compared to a novel's author as a film's primary visionary, he or she would not be able to make the film

without the help of numerous other artists and technicians. In fact, the notion of the director as author is misleading, because it assumes the director does everything—just like an author writes an entire book—which is not the case. A director works at the center of film production, but is inextricably linked with dozens of other people to get the job done. For *OF MICE AND MEN*, Gary Sinise served as both producer and director, which is common with low-budget, independent productions. Although he wore two very important hats during this production, he depended on many others to help make the film.

**Screenwriter:** Although John Steinbeck created a play based on his own novel, he did not write the screenplay. Screenwriter Horton Foote, who has adapted both novels (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) and plays (*The Trip to Bountiful*) to the screen, combined elements from both Steinbeck's novel and play into a single screenplay or shooting script. While the dialogue in a film may seem natural to the viewer, it is carefully crafted by a writer. The screenwriter does far more than provide dialogue for the actors. He or she also shapes the sequence of events in a film to ensure that one scene leads logically to the next and the film tells its story in a logical and interesting way. When using a novel or play as a starting point, the screenwriter inevitably rearranges, adds or eliminates scenes to make sure the final order or sequence of scenes makes sense when presented on the screen. The screenwriter also includes descriptions of settings and often suggests movements or gestures for the actors. Like the producer, the screenwriter's role is

generally overlooked by the moviegoing public, yet is essential to the completion of any film. If there is no script, there is no movie.

**Production Designer:** Before one inch of film is shot, the production designer is the first artist to translate the script into visual form. He or she creates a series of storyboards that serve as the film's first draft. A storyboard is a series of sketches, paintings or watercolors arranged on large panels to show the visual progression of the story from one scene to the next. The production designer determines the palette of colors to be used and often provides important suggestions about the composition of individual shots. Creating this sketch of the film on storyboards also ensures the visual continuity of the film from start to finish. Storyboards serve as the director's visual guide throughout the production. In *OF MICE AND MEN*, production designer David Gropman created a palette of primary colors—yellow California hills and blue denim clothing of the ranch hands—highlighted by occasional but significant splashes of red: a bandana, a hat band, a ripped red dress.

**Art Director:** The art director is responsible for the film's settings: the buildings, landscapes and interiors that provide the physical context for the characters. Art direction and production design is often and easily confused. While the production designer determines the big picture—the overall appearance, color palette and basic visual composition of the film—the art director provides the individual pieces within this framework, which includes everything but the actors themselves. In

OF MICE AND MEN, art directors Dan Davis, Karen Schulz and Cheryl T. Smith recreated 1930s downtown Salinas, complete with Main Street storefronts and automobiles from the period. They also determined the locations for each significant place in the film, from the Tyler Ranch to the sheltered grove where George and Lennie meet by the river. Tyler Ranch, where most of the film takes place, makes Lennie immediately uncomfortable. While this is certainly due in part to his stormy initial encounters with the characters that live there, the ranch's physical characteristics are far from inviting. The bunkhouse is cheaply built with a dusty wood floor and knotted planks that let in daylight. Even the farmhouse, with its peeling paint and broken screen door, conveys a sense of neglect that reinforces the film's undercurrents of loneliness and isolation. Although these details are subtle, they suggest how the story can be complemented by the film's physical elements. This craft is referred to as art direction.

**Costume Designer:** Costumes convey a great deal about the film's time period and the characters who wear them, their economic status, occupation and attitude toward themselves. Costume designer Shay Cunliffe outfitted George, Lennie and the Tyler Ranch hands in worn denim work clothes, yet distinguished each man from the other through different hats, a mix of plaid and solid shirts, and other small but significant details. Slim's gray sweat-stained hat, Curley's black leather glove and the cotton A-line dresses worn by Curley's wife are among the carefully selected elements that are woven together in this essential aspect of the film.

**Cinematographer:** After the production designer, art director

and costume designer have finished their work on the film's physical elements, the director of photography, or DP, is responsible for capturing their handiwork on celluloid. The DP is an expert in photographic processes, lighting and the camera's technical capabilities. When the director wants a shot to achieve certain visual or atmospheric qualities, the DP achieves it through his or her choice of lighting, film stock and careful manipulation of the camera. In this film, cinematographer Kenneth MacMillan photographed the Salinas Valley of California, capturing its golden hills and dusty sunshine in shots that lovingly recreate the area's striking yet harsh beauty. During shooting, the director and cinematographer work closely to shape each shot, using the storyboards created by the production designer as a guide. This craft is referred to as cinematography.

**Editor:** Shortly after shooting begins, the editor begins to organize the footage—known as the daily rushes—and arranges individual shots into one continuous sequence. Even in a single scene, dozens of different shots have to be chosen and assembled from hundreds of feet of film. The editor's choices about which shots to use and the order in which to place them have a profound effect on the appearance of the final film. OF MICE AND MEN'S editor Robert L. Sinise used a juxtaposition of shots and a number of cuts to give each scene its own rhythm. In scenes that reveal the film's Salinas Valley setting, fewer, lengthier shots suggest the landscape's vast, monumental qualities. To quicken the action in other scenes—men working in the fields or playing horseshoes—quicker cutting, or

the assembly of several shorter shots in rapid succession, heightens the pace and reinforces the action or emotion taking place on the screen. This process is known as editing.

**Actors:** For the audience, actors are the most visible and tangible part of the production. While they are obviously essential to any film, they are pieces in a much larger puzzle. Behind every actor is a director guiding his or her performance, a cinematographer creating the perfect light and film exposure, a screenwriter providing plot and dialogue, an art director designing the physical environment and a costume designer providing the proper attire. Considering an actor's role within this larger context also suggests that his or her job is much more difficult than just appearing on the set and reciting lines.

**Music:** Music has been an integral part of movies since their invention in the 1890s. Even the simplest silent films were accompanied by a piano or organ player. The silent movie palaces of the 1920s were equipped with elaborate organs and orchestra pits to accommodate large groups of live musicians. When sound was integrated into the filmmaking process, music, sound effects and dialogue became essential tools for enhancing a film's visual qualities. Writing movie music has been a full-time profession since the 1930s and is still a critical component in filmmaking. Composer Mark Isham created a score for OF MICE AND MEN reminiscent of the music of Aaron Copeland in its distinctly American melodies comprised largely of strings and woodwinds. In some sequences, banjos lend the film a regional folk quality.



## Questions and Activities for the Sinise Interview

### RECOMMENDATION:

Teachers should show students the videotaped interview of Gary Sinise after students have viewed and discussed the film.

## Questions and Activities for the Interview Videotape

How did Gary Sinise become interested in producing a film version of *OF MICE AND MEN*?

List the steps he took to produce the film.

What did screenwriter Horton Foote consider before writing the screenplay?

What is a “buddy movie”?

With what change from the novel does Gary Sinise choose to start the film? Why?

What are the characteristics of Gary Sinise’s directing style?

How did production designer David Gropman prepare for his role in the film?

Cite some problems the production designer faced.

What problems did Gary Sinise face with casting his actors? How did he solve those problems?

According to Gary Sinise, what made it easy to adapt the novel to film?

What adjustments to the plot did Gary Sinise make?

How did Gary Sinise choose to portray Crooks?

How did Gary Sinise choose to portray Curley’s wife?

What scenes were added that were not in the novel? Why were they added?

What change in the ending does Sinise give the film? Why?

What is the affect, in the last shot at the river, of George being bigger than Lenny in the frame?

In a brief, constructed response, explain Sinise’s message about relationships.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY

In small groups, create a list of questions you would like to ask Gary Sinise or other members of the production crew.



## Assessments

It is recommended that teachers and students who have participated in the “A Novel Look at Film” program complete the first assessment.

Compose a letter to James Hindman, Co-Director and Chief Operating Officer of AFI, to thank the organization for coordinating the project. In the letter, describe your film-going experience and how your understanding of the novel or the theme of relationships was affected.

Answer three essential questions for the Relationships Unit after reading the novel; then answer them again after viewing the film and the Sinise interview. List the differences, if any, in those responses.

Gary Sinise had a dream to make the novel *Of Mice and Men* into a film. He had to consider many factors and face many choices before his dream became reality. Write a well-organized essay about the relationship of a novel to a film. Support your ideas with appropriate details, examples from the interview with Gary Sinise and your study of the novel and the film. Choose language carefully to express your ideas clearly to a student who has not been involved with the “A Novel Look at Film” project.



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### MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### SPRINT

### REGAL CINEMAS

## OF MICE AND MEN

### HORTON FOOTE

Screenwriter

### GARY SINISE

Director, Producer, and Actor

### DAVID GROPMAN

Production Designer

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**The American Film Institute**, the nation's preeminent arts organization dedicated to advancing and preserving the art of the moving image, is committed to informing the general public about the artistic and cultural significance of the motion picture. In collaboration with the Montgomery County Public Schools, AFI has prepared this guide to assist teachers with presenting the 1992 film *OF MICE AND MEN*, directed by Gary Sinise, in conjunction with John Steinbeck's 1937 novel. This film provides an excellent opportunity to educate students about the medium of film while reinforcing the literary significance of Steinbeck's story. The guide is designed to provide examples of how to use film language to complement the study of the novel in the classroom.

