

*O*F MICE AND MEN



INSTITUTION:

- Why make another film version of the book?
- What influence does the need to make money have over the way the book is adapted for the screen?

AUDIENCE:

- What audience has the film been made for?
- How will the film be promoted?
- How is casting influenced by the need to attract audiences?

REPRESENTATION:

- Is the representation of women and black people influenced by 1990's perception?
- How is Curley's wife portrayed?
- How does her representation differ in the film to the characterisation in the novel?
- Who are the goodies and baddies? How do we recognise them?

IDEOLOGY:

- What are the values in the story?
- In what context is work represented? From whose point of view is it seen?

A framework for looking at:**OF MICE AND MEN**

Film version 1992

Director: Gary Sinise

NARRATIVE:

- Through whose eyes do we see the story?
- What part does music play in the story? Does it influence where our sympathies lie?
- Which elements of the story are emphasised?

GENRE:

- Does the film fall into any particular genre? What other movies have you seen in this genre?
- Does a particular genre affect the way we see the film or whether we choose to go to see it?
- Does the genre influence the way the film will be promoted?

CONSTRUCTION:

- What choices does the director make in transforming the novel into film?
- How would you adapt the book for the screen?

This chart offers some questions about the film within a conceptual framework. The Study Guide deals with some of these questions in detail. Other questions are here for your consideration. You may want to add questions of your own.

BEFORE SEEING THE FILM

THE INGREDIENTS OF A POPULAR MOVIE

- Using your own knowledge of films and cinema going, make a list of the things which make a film popular. Pool all the ideas on the board.
- Make a list of the ingredients of the story of "Of Mice and Men"
- Study both lists. Note any items common to both lists.

Having compared the two lists, consider the following:

- What do you think are the qualities which could make "Of Mice and Men" a box office success?
- Note down any ways you think the need to make money will affect the way the book is adapted for the screen.

PERSUADING A PRODUCER TO FINANCE THE FILM

For this activity you will need to work in pairs and then groups of six.

- Half the pairs write an outline of "Of Mice and Men" as a director who wants to persuade a producer to put up the money for a film version. Your outline should emphasise the positive qualities of the story and its potential as a film. You may want to make some casting suggestions.
- The other pairs write the outline as the executive producer's consultant advising on the advantages and disadvantages of producing the film.
- Hold a meeting to discuss the proposal to make the film with group members taking on different roles: the director; members of the director's team; the producer; members of the producer's team, with someone chairing the meeting. Justify whatever decision your group reaches.
- Report back your to the class, giving reasons for your final decision.

WHY ANOTHER VERSION?

"Of Mice and Men" has been filmed several times before. You may have seen one or more of these versions. In the light of the ideas you have considered during the previous activities, why do you think anyone would make a new version in the 1990s?

THE OPENING

Analysing the opening of the book When writers write stories, they deal with much more than what happens. By analysing a passage from the book you can find out something about the way the story is written and the choices the writer has made in creating the story/constructing the narrative.

- Photocopy the opening two pages of "Of Mice and Men"; cut out the text and glue it in the middle of a large sheet of paper.

Working in pairs:

1. Read the passage aloud
2. Underline the action, i.e. the things people (and animals) do.
3. In the left hand margin, note what you learn beyond the action. This might be what you learn about the characters, the setting, the atmosphere, previous events and so on.
4. In the right hand margin, note down anything you notice about the way the story is written. Use the following questions for guidance:
 - * Through whose eyes is the story told?
 - * Does the story change pace - go slowly or speed up?
 - * What kinds of writing are used for dealing with actions, setting, conversation?
 - * In what ways do we learn about the characters?
 - * How does the writer emphasise aspects of the story? Compare your analysis with others and summarise the techniques John Steinbeck has used in the opening.

PLANNING THE OPENING SEQUENCE OF THE FILM

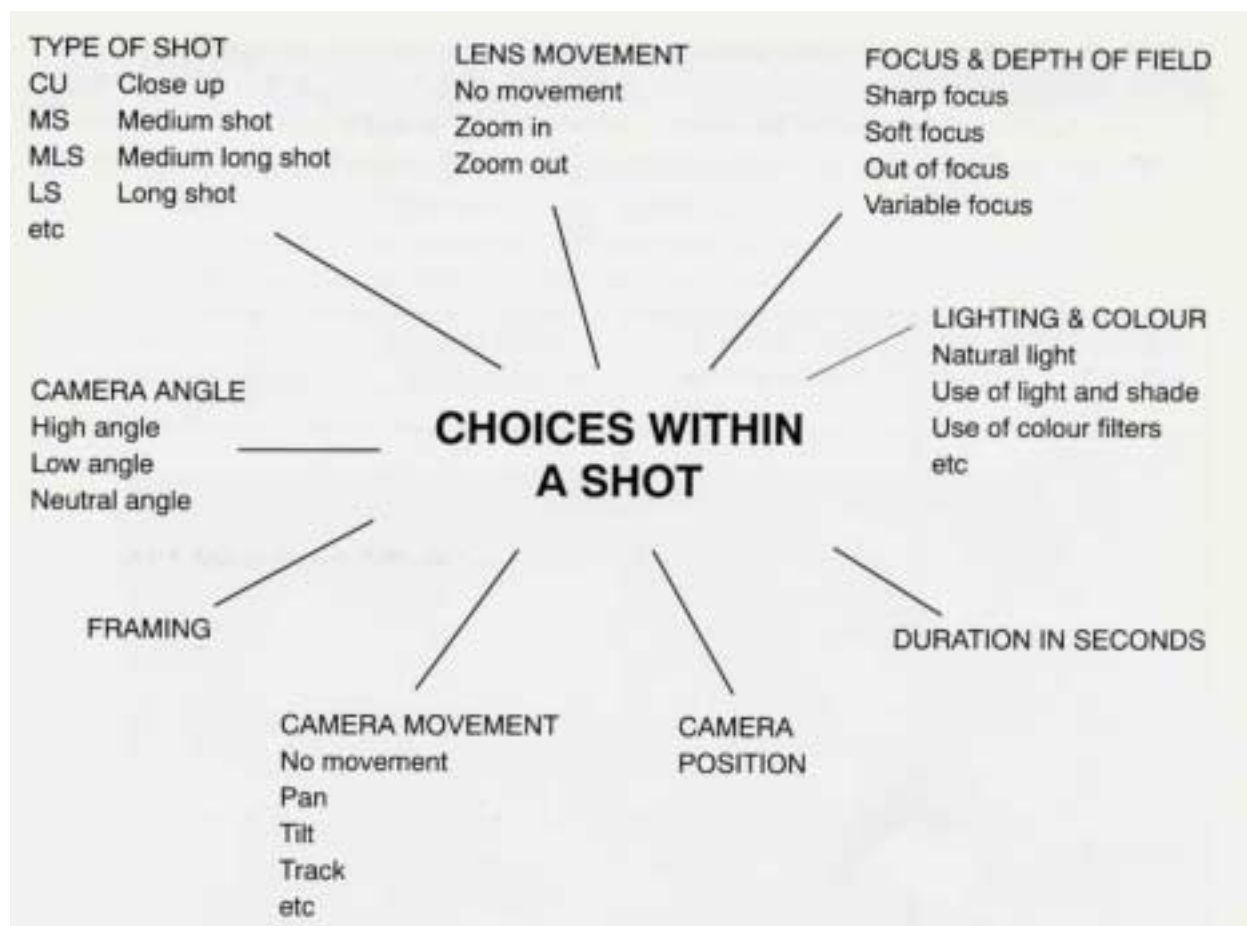
In adapting the book for another medium such as film, a film maker has to make choices in transforming the narrative into words and pictures. A film version is not a translation but a transformation. Events may take place in a different order; settings may be altered; aspects of the narrative will be highlighted in film terms: choices will be made about the kinds of shots used in each sequence to convey the meaning of the story; decisions will be made about editing, lighting, music and so on.

In "Of Mice and Men", the book, we learn through dialogue of events which happened before the book starts: the incident with the girl in the red dress in Weed, Lennie killing the mice Aunt Clara gave him and so on. In a film version, a film maker may choose to make one of these events the opening sequence of the film or deal with them through flashback rather than having the actors just speak the dialogue from the book.

What choices would you make in constructing the opening sequence? Where would you start? What kinds of shots do you need to capture the atmosphere, convey the setting, portray the characters? Do you need to write more dialogue? Use the chart overleaf as a checklist to help you think in film terms.

Use the storyboard paper to outline your ideas. Compare your storyboard with others.

After you have seen the film, compare your opening with Gary Sinise's opening.(see Assignments)



You also have to consider how the shots are edited into a sequence to achieve atmosphere and pace and to move the story along.



OTHER IDEAS FOR FILM TREATMENT

• In small groups, make three predictions about what you think the film maker will do with the book. You could choose incidents, settings, a character, the ending etc. Think in film terms and note down your ideas on the chart below so that you can make comparisons after you have seen the film.

PREDICTION CHART	Your ideas for film treatment	What the film maker did	Your comments after seeing the film
Prediction 1			
Prediction 2			
Prediction 3			

Before you see the film, read through the rest of the study guide. It may help you to look out for some of the things the film maker does in adapting the book.

AFTER SEEING THE FILM

Look again at your prediction chart opposite and complete the comments section. Having completed the chart, consider the following questions:

- Was there anything which surprised about the film?
- Was there anything which annoyed about the film?
- Was there anything which made understand aspects of the book more clearly?
- Did any of the casting surprise you?
- What did you think of the ending?



you
you
you



VISUAL IMPACT

From your study of "Of Mice and Men", you will have discussed the themes John Steinbeck deals with in the book: friendship, love, loyalty, sacrifice, loneliness, dreams.

Use the chart below and note down your strongest visual memories from the film. Note which theme or themes the images reflect and try to explain why you found the images powerful.

Visual image	Themes	Why you found the image effective

CANDY'S DOG

By taking a sequence to pieces you can find out how the film shapes the narrative to make us see an incident in a particular way. You can then see how the film highlights the narrative compared to the book. You can apply this approach to any part of the film.

Use the Candy's Dog Sequence chart to analyse the film treatment of the killing of Candy's dog.

Re-read the passage from the book and note the ways John Steinbeck builds up the tension. What does the film treatment add to your understanding of the sequence?

KILLING OF CANDY'S DOG SEQUENCE

	Camerawork: (refer to Choices within a Shot on Page 5) How is tension built up?	Editing: how is tension built up? Does the pace change? How is this done?	Use of Music	Your feelings (Think about the way you are positioned to observe the on-screen emotions)
Carlson getting his gun				
Candy on his bunk				
Reactions of other characters				

It may not be appropriate to fill in all the boxes. The chart aims to focus your attention on some of the ways tension is built up, how the emotions of the characters are shown and the relationship between the audience and the events on the screen.

CHARACTERISATION 1

In a book, a writer builds up characters through what they say, the dialogue; what they do, their actions; what they look like, description; their thoughts and feelings, for instance through interior monologue.

Make a list of the ways a film maker builds up characters. Pool your ideas.

Now distinguish between what the acting and the filming contribute to the way the characters are presented, by completing the following chart. Refer to the Choices within a Shot check list on page 5 to focus your thinking:

	What the acting contributes to the characterisation	What the film adds
Lennie		
George		
Curley's wife		
Crooks		

(You can obviously choose to look at other characters here.)

CHARACTER ANALYSIS CHART

Character	Character type	Clothing	Facial expressions / gestures	Way of speaking	Attitudes & behaviour	Comments

CHARACTERISATION 2

There are typical character types in many stories, some relying on stereotypes. We have certain expectations about these types: how they will behave, what will happen to them, their role in the story - depending on whether they are active or passive, sympathetic or unsympathetic and so on.

List the typical characteristics of the following:

an active unsympathetic character (female) an active unsympathetic character (male) a passive sympathetic character (female) a passive sympathetic character (male) an active sympathetic character (female) an active sympathetic character (male)

Add characters from films you have seen and books you have read to each list.

Working in pairs, complete the character matrix below for "Of Mice and Men"

CHARACTER MATRIX	GOODIES	BADDIES
ACTIVE		
PASSIVE		

Join up with another pair and compare your classifications. You may have found some characters hard to classify. If this is so, talk about what makes a particular character hard to classify.

Now compare the characteristics of the characters in the matrix with your previous list. Are they typical heroes or victims? Do they conform to our expectations or surprise us?

You can now choose two contrasting characters and look in more detail at the way they are portrayed in the film using the character analysis chart.

CURLEY – LENNIE CONFLICT CHART

KEY MOMENTS IN THE NARRATIVE	TREATMENT IN FILM	TREATMENT IN BOOK	COMMENTS
First meeting with Lennie			
Fight in the bunkhouse			
Finding wife dead			
Organising the pursuit			
Setting out in pursuit			

CONFLICT - CURLEY AND LENNIE

Why is Curley so eager to go after Lennie? How is this conveyed in the film?

- Use the Curley - Lennie Conflict Chart opposite to look at the film treatment of the conflict. You may not be able to fill in every aspect of the chart on one viewing. Note the things which made an impact on you.

PROMOTING THE FILM

Look through your work on the film and consider how you would you promote the film: a) to attract a general audience b) to attract teachers to take students to the film.

Divide into groups. Some group should devise a promotional package for schools; others should devise a promotional package for a general audience. The pack should contain the following:

- * Outline of the story
- * Extracts from reviews of the film. (Get hold of a cross section of reviews from magazine and newspapers - both serious and popular - to help you write your reviews.)
- * Poster
- * Spin-off ideas
- * Script for radio or television advertisement

ASSIGNMENTS

In writing an assignment, refer to your notes and charts so that you can support what you say with detailed examples from the film and the book.

- Compare the opening of the book with the opening of the film focusing on how the writer and the director achieve their effects.
- in what ways does the film add to your understanding of the book?
- The press-kit for the film claims that 'The character of Curley's Wife was written more sympathetically in the screenplay than in the book The film version is intended to allow audiences to discover some insights into her motivation.'

Write a dialogue between two students discussing the differences in the way Curley's wife is represented in the book and in the film.