

Of mice and men: lennie, crooks, and candy

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We all have felt left out at one time or another. There may have been that time, in second grade, where you were shunned from the most popular game of four-square over something silly. Maybe you liked a certain movie, was not into a certain game, or maybe you ate crayons. Whatever the circumstance may be, most all of us have been left behind. Peers have a way of leaving out those that they choose to reject, be there a reason or not.

Yet, as any anthropologist will tell you, these supposed “ misfits” will ban together; finding their way that they can be accepted as themselves. This is found true in the novel *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck when three outcast characters find themselves a social aggregate*. What each of these three men choose to do after their peers leave uncovers the reasons they were chosen to be left out. What Crooks, the stable man, chose to do after the others left involved rejuvenation. The book first describes Crooks applying liniment*, “ In one hand he held a bottle of liniment, and with the other he rubbed his spine” (Steinbeck 67). This shows that Crooks is either a hard-working man or he has been beaten because of his race.

This activity is interrupted when Lennie comes through the door looking a bit lost, “ Noiselessly Lennie appeared in the open doorway and stood there looking in” (Steinbeck 67). Crooks, at first, showed contempt at Lennie coming into his territory, “ For a moment Crooks did not see him, but on raising his eyes he stiffened and a scowl came on his face” (Steinbeck 68). From this point on, Crooks seems to be trying to prove something. He wants to remind anyone that evades his space that he has rights as any other human does. He expresses extreme sensitivity to this fact, “ Well, I got a right to have a light.

You go on get outta my room. I ain't wanted in the bunk house, and you ain't wanted in my room" (Steinbeck 68). When the others went to town, Crooks chose to be alone in his room with his books and his belongings. Crooks only wanted to know that he had something of his own, because where he worked it hardly looked to him like he was a human. Crooks makes it clear that he is fully aware of the reason he is left out from the " group", his race.

He outright states this to Lennie, " If I say something, why it's just a n***** sayin' it" (Steinbeck 70). While all the other ranch hands leave, Crooks stays behind to heal and be alone. He then encounters Lennie, who chooses to do the same...in his own kind of way.

Lennie stumbled into the barn after everyone left so he could see his puppy. This puppy was the thing that brought him comfort from missing George. He repeatedly refers to how he had come to see the pup but because of his mental disability he won't say exactly why. It seems that he gets a sense of something belonging to him, " I come to see my pup" (Steinbeck 69). Lennie says that he came to see his pup, so he understands that it belongs to him. Lennie didn't get a lot that belonged to him due to things he had done in his past.

George feels he must take care of him, however he knows and dislikes the thing that makes Lennie such an outcast, " I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. Jus' keep me shovin' all over the country all the time. An' that ain't the worst. You get in trouble. You do bad things and I got to get you out" George explained to Lennie at the beginning of the story,

and he went on to say, " You crazy son-of-a-b****. You keep me in hot water all the time.

" (Steinbeck 11). Lennie understands that George doesn't like how he is, and Lennie himself doesn't really like being so left out either. This can be shown in his answer to Crook's question as to whether or not Lennie knew what George was talking about, " Yeah...sometimes.

But...not always." (Steinbeck 70).

Lennie is left out of the others when they go to town because he is always getting himself into trouble. However, it's not quite as simple with Candy. Candy stayed behind to dream about the house, land, and animals Lennie and George were working to earn. Since he was newly in on the deal he was figuring out different ways to make money, " Tell ya what, Lennie. I been figuring about them rabbits..

. I got it figured out. We can make some money on them rabbits if we go about it right" (Steinbeck 74-75). Though he was left behind, it isn't nearly as obvious a reason why as with the other two. Candy, as a character, is not very strong in the novel. So, not knowing much about him as a person the only conclusion to be made is that he was left behind because he was older and missing a hand.

Because of these handicaps Candy, Lennie and Crooks seem to have something in common. All three of these characters were left behind for a reason. They all had certain handicaps that prevented them from getting along normally in society as seen by the other ranch hands. Crooks was

racially unexcepted, due to his darker skin in the area he was in he became an outcast, for example he wasn't allowed to play cards in the bunk house. "Cause I'm black.

They play cards in there, but I can't play because I'm black. They say I stink"(Steinbeck 68). Lennie was mentally handicapped and was constantly getting into trouble. He was as innocent as a child but always seemed to end up doing nothing but harm, " Sure he's jes' like a kid. There ain't no more harm in him than a kid neither, except he's so strong"(Steinbeck 43).

Candy was left out for something as simple as missing a hand, but no matter how large or small the handicap, they all had one. The things these characters decided to spend their time on while the others left revealed a lot about their circumstances. They each had a certain handicap that put them on the " outside" of the " normal" group of ranch hands. However, just like in second grade the crayon eaters, movie haters, and game dislikers found a way to fit in.