

# Explore the way violence is treated in the novella "of mice and men"

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John Steinbeck shows that he can portray different, unique methods of how violence is carried out in *Of Mice and Men*. He uses unintentional violence to set a reputation for his characters which can create an effective atmosphere also by adding nature descriptions in to enhance our understanding of personality of the character. Firstly, throughout this whole novella there is not a rule against violence and this could mean that the people on the ranch have simply accepted this as a part of life. Therefore, the workers are always ready to use violence and not afraid to be aggressive.

This is Steinbeck showing how low the people must have been during the 1930s depression, which generally suggests that the people in America were discontented and it's shown by the acceptance of violence in their society. Once the reader has become familiar with all the characters we instantly assume that Lennie is the most violent. Even when he is first introduced Steinbeck compares him to an aggressive animal and describes him as " a bear" which instantly puts an image into the reader's mind of what Lennie will be like.

However, later on, we do find out that Lennie doesn't inflict violence for the sake of it as he is described as " not that bright", which demonstrates that Lennie doesn't have a violent or aggressive personality or potential to inflict it on others. As the story unfolds, we get a sense of Lennie's strength, when he unintentionally kills one of Slim's puppies and he reacts by throwing it against the wall which shows his violent potential.

However, the reader is first introduced to Lennie's true physical strength in an incident when Lennie completely crushes Curly's hand in a fight yet he's still powerless as he shrieks " I dint mean it George" which shows how  
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powerless Lennie really is and it makes the reader think what would have happened if George wasn't there for Lennie. This incident of severe violence is treated as an accident and all of the men who were involved make an excuse saying " he got his hand caught in a machine" which shows that such a serious incident is still treated as almost acceptable.

However from this fight the reader gets to feel pity for Lennie, which Steinbeck has done to contrast with his violent potential. This is an important factor in our understanding of Lennie, as if it wasn't for this Lennie would be seen as a purely aggressive and unsympathetic character. The second character that we are introduced to as a potentially violent person is The Boss and this is proven when Candy describes him as " a nice fella but can get real mad" . We therefore learn that the majority of workers on the ranch are afraid to stand up to the boss.

However, despite the fact we don't get a great deal of information about the Boss we do learn that his son, Curly is a disliked and aggressive character. When Lennie is introduced to Curly for the first time, Steinbeck uses body posture to express his aggression as " his hands closed into fists and stiffened up and went into a crouch". This shows the reader how pugnacious Curly is and this could reflect on his father's behaviour. The fact that Curly can be aggressive with someone he hasn't met before, with no one on the ranch seeing this as wrong demonstrates that violence is generally accepted here.

Throughout the story, we also find out that Curly is probably the most violent person on the ranch and that all of his violence is intentional, this is the key difference between him and Lennie, as Curly can act independently, whereas <https://assignbuster.com/explore-the-way-violence-is-treated-in-the-novella-of-mice-and-men/>

Lennie does not have the intelligence to think things through and purely relies on George. However, there is a point in the story line when Curly has been too aggressive towards other characters. Subsequently a lot of people are against and ganging up on Curly and threatening him as Slim says “ I’ll kick your god damn head off”.

This annoys Curly so much that eventually “ his anger exploded” which expresses that he is a very violent man and he struggles to control his violence. However the aftermath for Curly was that he had to be rushed to hospital. The overall result is that Steinbeck manages to maintain Lennie’s powerless reputation. This shows on how violence was commonplace during the depression and Steinbeck shows how unfair life was back then. On the other hand we know that almost all of Lennie’s violence is unintentional as most incidents are described as “ accidents”.

After Slim’s dog is murdered he is very calm about it even when George describes him as “ dumb as hell” which shows that Slim’s forgiving. Slim is a very different character from both Lennie and Curly, as he doesn’t use physical aggression and is a more passive character, yet is respected by other men. Another violent scene that Lennie is in is the death of Curly’s wife where he is yet again using his strength as a unintentional weapon just like he did to Curly when he broke his hand.

However, there is a point that Curly’s wife was asking for something like this as she offered for Lennie to “ stroke my hair” even though she knows how strong Lennie really is. Yet when Curly finds out about this the first thing he thinks about is revenge. This makes the reader wonder whether Curly was really that full of grief for his wife or all he cared about was revenge and <https://assignbuster.com/explore-the-way-violence-is-treated-in-the-novella-of-mice-and-men/>

attempting to harm Lennie. On the other hand the ranch workers are all helping Curly, with the exception of George and Candy.

This situation changes the way violence is now tolerated as Curly now has all of the ranch workers on his side which is unexpected as the reader thinks that Curly is the only violent worker on the ranch, yet the situation even gets Slim on his side. In the final scene Steinbeck adds to the suspense by adding nature to the context for example when George is running through the forest to try and save Lennie there is a “ heron plucking a snake out the water by the head while it waves frantically”.

This could possibly be foreshadowing Lennie’s fate. As the final violent act, George is faced with the tough decision whether to kill Lennie to stop him getting into Curly’s hands. However, George decides to shoot Lennie himself, I believe this is out of an act of kindness as he does not want any harm to come to him from Curly and we know that George would never shoot him normally as he was always saying “ it wasn’t your fault” after Lennie had done bad things.

To conclude, I believe that both Lennie’s and Curly’s wife’s death are both unintentional. Lennie cannot control his strength and George only kills Lennie out of kindness. However, Steinbeck treats Curly’s violence differently as his was intentional, he only cared about killing Lennie. After the death of Lennie Slim feels sorry for George as he says “ I swear you hadda” which is kind and reassuring to George. Slim’s support for George’s act of violence somehow makes it seem that it was the right thing to do.

Violence is everywhere in the book. The people have little money, they have little hope, and there is no law and order or education. The only way of coping and surviving for many is through physical violence, although Steinbeck shows, through Slim's character there can be another way. This novella, *Of Mice and Men*, illustrates that at times people of the 1930s Great American Depression sometimes took the law into their own hands.