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STUDY OF *OF MICE AND MEN* ENCOURAGES DEBATE AND CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT IMPORTANT SOCIETAL MATTERS

Eighth grade Language Arts class has finished studying *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck's famous novella. During the unit, students have been considering the impact of historical events such as the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl on the psyche of 20th century American life, and have been encouraged to debate and think critically about important societal matters--women's right to vote, 20th-century racism, and the acceptance of intellectually and mentally disabled peoples. The focus on the role of "The Other," as well as the students' learning about the medical ethics issues of euthanasia and doctor-ordered cessation of life, as is addressed in the book, has become one of the most discussed topics in our classroom. Students' newfound awareness of such matters afforded them the opportunity to re-frame how they consider contentious, hotly-debated topics such as modern-day feminism, 'reverse racism', and "pulling the plug," and are amazed that this nearly century-old novel has proven entirely relevant and enabled them to craft thoughtful analyses and opinions on the impact these issues continue to have on modern-day society.

