

- (c) 'Real friendship is impossible in the grim world John Steinbeck creates in *Of Mice and Men*.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? Remember to refer to the social, historical and cultural context of the novel in your answer. [20]

c)



'Real friendship is impossible in the grim world John Steinbeck creates in *Of Mice and Men*.' To what extent do I agree with this statement. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck creates a harsh world of loneliness and isolation. He wants to reflect the true life of the men he saw around him during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

At first, George and Lennie provide a contrast to this statement. They have a strong relationship which shows their true friendship. George is Lennie's parental figure, he is always caring for Lennie. They have each other 'to give a hoot in hell about us.'

Both George and Lennie gain from this friendship. George gains power of Lennie yet also realizes he has a responsibility too, after what happened at the 'Sacramento River'. Lennie gains a friend who guides him in a world he doesn't understand and a father figure who watches out for him.

However, even their strong relationship dies in the harsh world of the ranch. George sacrifices the friendship in itself, yet then condemns himself to the lonely existence of the other men 'I'll work my month an' I'll take my fifty bucks an' sit all night in a cat house'. Ironically this was what he told Lennie he could do if he didn't have to look after him 'If I didn't have you, I could live so easy'. Their friendship is ultimately destroyed by the harsh world. This is because Steinbeck wanted to reflect the harsh reality he saw around him in 1930s America where friendships were destroyed by uncaring circumstances.

As well as George and Lennie, John Steinbeck shows that the other characters are unable to form friendships and are isolated. Crooks is unable to form any friendships because he is isolated from everyone by his colour. He lives in the 'barn' because he

'ain't allowed in the bunk house'. This portrayal of the racism which was present in society means that he cannot form any friendship with the other men on the ranch. 'A guy gets lonely and he gets sick' shows us that a lack of friendships in the harsh world of the ranch mean that all the men are suspicious of each other and can have no trust, as we see with George and the 'greybacks'. People are 'crazy with loneliness' yet the mood of fear means they have no-one to trust.

Another example is Curly's wife. She cannot form any friendships with any of the men on the ranch because they see her as 'trouble'. She is able to see that all the men are unable to trust one another 'why when I catch one man on his own.... on each other'. She is unable to break free of the narrow view the men have over her which means she is unable to connect with anybody other than Lennie which ultimately leads to her death.

'Everyone in the whole damn world is scared of each other' highlights the harsh, untrusting world of the ranch that Steinbeck creates. He uses this atmosphere of fear to show how uncaring and grim America was during the Great Depression.

To conclude, Steinbeck creates a untrusting fearful atmosphere on the ranch in *Mice and Men* to highlight how even the strongest friendships are inevitable crushed by the uncaring society of 1930s America.