

How is the character of **George** important to the novella as a whole? (20)

The Great Depression began after the Wall Street Crash in October 1929, drastically impacting the world's economy. Companies closed, causing mass unemployment; at its peak, around 15 million people lost their jobs. Banks collapsed, leading to the loss of life savings, and plunging previously stable Americans into extreme poverty. The financial crisis affected not only urban areas but also farmers, whose lands were destroyed by the Dust Bowl, a massive sandstorm that hindered crop growth. Consequently, laborers like George had to move from job to job to survive. This instability caused family separation and extreme loneliness for itinerant workers. A "survival of the fittest" mentality emerged, with individuals preying on others for power and authority instead of forming meaningful friendships. Discrimination, including sexism and ageism, became prevalent in the competitive environment. George is crucial to the novella, as his character represents an itinerant worker facing these challenges. Steinbeck uses George to explore themes like the unattainable nature of the 'American Dream' post-Great Depression, loneliness, and the harsh reality of Californian ranch life. Although 'sharp' and 'defined', traits associated with intelligence, George struggles to grasp the destructive nature of society at the time—a society determined to shatter dreams and friendships.

Steinbeck uses the character of George his relationship with Lennie, to highlight how unusual it was for people to have a loving companion in America at the time. The concept of a loving friendship is so alien to the other ranch workers that Curley states '*Oh, it's like that*', insinuating that George and Lennie are romantically involved. The thought of showing love, compassion, and affection for another person was beyond most people in 1930s America. The Great Depression/Dust Bowl meant that itinerant workers had to move from job to job to survive. With the prospects of remaining in a post for a sustained period of time-limited, the opportunity or desire to form genuine friendships with others was not there. George and Lennie's symbiotic friendship is used by Steinbeck as a contrast with others on the ranch. Whether it is the loveless marriage of Curley and his wife, the segregation suffered by Crooks, or the loss of Candy's lifelong companion - Steinbeck uses each character to highlight the impact that loneliness had on people at the time. In doing so, we get an insight into what George's life will be like when he inevitably loses Lennie. As Crooks suggests, despite their differences there was significant value to be placed on '*just being with another guy*'. This echoes Steinbeck's idea of friendship, as George is presented as being better off compared to others on the ranch that have goals and dreams because of his friendship. Steinbeck uses George to highlight this key message; that companionship, regardless of who the companion is, is vitally important for the well-being of a person. Steinbeck has purposely conveyed this message of the necessity of companionship by contrasting characters like Crooks, who has a bitter/cynical personality, due to being neglected by the other men on the ranch.

It is difficult to determine if George would have been successful without having to care for Lennie. While George is depicted as intelligent and resourceful, the harsh realities of 1930s America present numerous obstacles. Throughout the novella, George laments the burden of looking after Lennie, stating, "*If I was alone, I could live so easy... I could get a job an' not have no mess*". This statement suggests that George believes his life would be simpler without Lennie. However, it is important to remember that even skilled workers faced challenges during the Great Depression, with high unemployment rates and widespread poverty. Moreover, George's friendship with Lennie provides him with emotional support and a sense of purpose, which might have been crucial to his survival during those difficult times. As he confesses to Lennie, "*I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why*". This mutual support system may have been essential in keeping George motivated to continue pursuing their dream. Despite his resourcefulness, George's success would have still been uncertain in 1930s America. The novella illustrates the unattainable nature of the American Dream, with characters like Candy and Crooks struggling to achieve their aspirations. The ranch workers' transient lifestyle, the competitive job market, and the overall economic hardship of the era would have made it challenging for George to attain long-term success and stability, even without Lennie. Thus, while Lennie's presence posed difficulties, there is no definitive evidence that George's life would have been significantly more successful without him.

Steinbeck also uses George to show how pointless these dreams are. George's dream to '*live off the fatta of the land*', is a biblical reference which connects with Crooks' insistence that no one '*goes to heaven*' or gets the land they want. A skepticism is created in the reader's mind, as we question how an intelligent person like George cannot see that his dream is futile. The fact that George refuses to continue the dream with Candy after Lennie's death suggests that his dreams offered a welcome distraction from his everyday life, but that that he knew '*from the very first*' that they'd '*never do her*'. The reality, which George failed to appreciate, is that 1930s America was a harsh and unforgiving world for those without power or money.

In conclusion, George is used to represent the life of an itinerant worker in 1930s America. Steinbeck carefully crafts events which demonstrate the reality of ranch life against the pointlessness of dreams and ambitions. George is used to show that Slim's approach to ranch life is best; be content with the hand that life has given you, because it isn't likely to improve.

