

How is the character of **Slim** important to the novel as a whole?

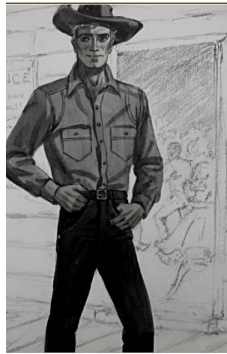
The Great Depression began after the 1929 Wall Street Crash, devastating the global economy. Companies folded, leading to mass unemployment, with 15 million people jobless at its peak. Most banks also collapsed, erasing people's life savings. Once stable Americans faced extreme poverty. The financial crisis also impacted farmers, their lands ruined by the Dust Bowl, a severe sandstorm that made crop growth impossible. Financial ruin led to workers moving between jobs to survive, causing family separations and extreme loneliness. A 'survival of the fittest' mentality permeated American culture, resulting in discrimination, including sexism and ageism. Amidst this adversity, Slim, a character in Steinbeck's novella, stands out for his compassion and empathy, highlighting an alternative to the anger and hatred prevalent in 1930s America. He serves as a stark contrast to the depression and discrimination embodied by other characters in the novella.

The 'prince of the ranch' is admired by the ranch workers but does not abuse his position to intermediate and belittle others like Curley. Instead, as he often 'heard more than was said to him', Slim's compassionate nature is encapsulated when he "looked kindly" at Lennie and George on their arrival, a quote that highlights his inherent empathy, unusual in the harsh environment of 1930s America. His actions demonstrate an indifference to the prevalent prejudices of the time. He converses with Curley's wife, treating her with dignity rather than derogatory remarks. Slim's kindness extends to Candy, offering him "any of them pups" to ease his sorrow after his dog's death. This is a testament to Slim's capacity to forge genuine connections. Steinbeck uses Slim to highlight that the hatred and bile that spreads amongst the ranch is learned behaviour. By having Slim show respect and dignity to the other people on the ranch, behaviour which is then reciprocated, Steinbeck is showing that it is human nature for people to change depending on their environment. Crooks, despite his cynicism, addresses him as 'Mr Slim', underscoring the respect Slim commands across the ranch's social hierarchy. Steinbeck uses Slim to underscore that the pervasive bitterness and prejudice are learned behaviours, not inherent. His actions evoke reciprocal respect and dignity, suggesting that human nature can change based on environmental influences. Unfortunately, as prejudice was rife in 1930s America and people were competing against each other for their livelihoods many people were unable to follow the example set by people like Slim. Slim's consistent moral approach is used as a tool of comparison by Steinbeck, as he offers is God like authority to proceedings.

Steinbeck subtly demonstrates how all members of society found the harsh reality of life in 1930s America unavoidable through his presentation of Slim. It is clear that by describing him as 'master craftsman' Steinbeck is presenting Slim as being a skilled itinerant worker. In spite of this, there is no suggestion that Slim will (or has the desire) to progress any further on the ranch. Unlike other workers, Slim does not profess to have any dreams or aspirations. This may be, owing to his obvious intelligence, Slim understands the futility of dreams in 1930s America, as they were destined to fail. Slim's presence on the ranch despite having the ability to achieve more suggests that economic impact of the Great Depression was felt by all. Alternatively, Slim's seeming lack of ambition could simply be down to his appreciation for the small amount of stability that he has. Unlike George and Lennie that are forced to live a nomadic lifestyle, Slim has a job which appears to be relatively stable as a result of his ability and the esteem in which he is held. Against the backdrop of a volatile job market, Steinbeck may be suggesting that people had to appreciate the little that they had.

Without ever stating as such, Slim suffers from the same loneliness as the other men on the ranch. When he speaks to George about his unique relationship he does so with admiration, suggesting that it is good for a person to have a companion in their line of work. Steinbeck presents Slim as understanding the value of companionship, without the bitterness that Crooks conveys. Instead of trying to sabotage their friendship like Crooks does when he speaks to Lennie in his room, Slim is pleased for the pair. In doing so Steinbeck is presenting Slim as having an emotional intelligence that other characters simply do not have. The fact that Slim's word was taken on any subject 'be it politics or love' is of no surprise because he is able to access complex ideas and emotions that other ranch workers do not. This is because Slim has compassion - which allows him to care for his fellow man without suffering from any type of jealousy. Steinbeck's 'God like eyes' description of Slim is an example of how he wishes the character to be viewed; as a morally principled person, that others should aspire to be like rather than simply admiring him from a distance.

In conclusion, Slim's character is important to the novella as he offers a different perspective to the competing themes presented. Whether it is loneliness or dreams, Slim is presented as having a sense of morality and realism, without being impacted by the cynicism that others on the ranch suffer from. While Slim is clearly impeded by life in 1930s America, his dignified approach to all of his dealings with the other people on the ranch shows that it is possible to remain principled even against the greatest adversity.



Slim