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Humanities - 1/2

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**Friendship, Loneliness and Discrimination**

John Steinbeck once wrote to his son; “First—if you are in love—that’s a good thing—that’s about the best thing that can happen to anyone. Don’t let anyone make it small or light to you.” when he asked about love. This quote relates to this novella because nobody seems to love themselves. The book *Of Mice and Men,* by John Steinbeck, is about the discrimination faced by many in the 1930’s. It is about Lennie and George, two men who are trying to find work to save money to buy a house. Along the way they end up on a ranch in Salinas, California and make friends with an old, disabled swamper named Candy. and they plan to bring him along as well. Three of the main themes are friendship, loneliness, and the discrimination against people with mental disabilities. By including these themes, Steinbeck tried to bring awareness to the very important issues during his time.

Steinbeck uses Slim as an example of loneliness because of his god-like views and Crooks because of his race. For example, Crooks says; “‘S’pose you didn’t have nobody. S’pose you couldn’t go into the bunk house and play rummy ‘cause you was black. How’d you like that? S’pose you had sit out here an’ read read books. Sure you could play horseshoes till got dark, but then you get to go read books. Books ain’t no good. A guy needs somebody- to be near him.’ He whined, ‘A guy goes if he ain’t got nobody. Don’t make no difference who the guy is, long’s he’s with you. I tell is,’ he cried, ‘I tell ya a guy get too lonely an’ he gets sick’” (Steinbeck 72-73). Sadly Crooks is talking from experience about his social isolation. He has nobody to talk to since people avoid him because of his race. He has no friends, ‘nobody to scratch his back’. Crooks longs for companionship, but because of the color of his skin, knows that he is doomed to continue living in isolation. Slim has similar views on loneliness. Slim, while speaking to George, says, “‘Ain’t many guys travel around together,’ he mused. I

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don’t know why. Maybe ever’body in the whole damn world is scared of each other’”(Steinbeck 35). Slim has a different view of loneliness than Crooks does, but it is still very obvious that he also craves the company of a friend.. There were very few people who look after each other at that time. To find two men reaching for a dream together. Slim is touched by George and Lennie’s friendship because it was very strange, but, also touching. Crooks and Slim both make very valuable points about loneliness and every human’s need for companionship.

Another main theme in *Of Mice and Men* is friendship. Lennie and George are very close and they show what friendship is all about. George says, “‘He’s my cousin. I told his old lady I’d take care of him’”(Steinbeck 22). George is very careful about protecting Lennie, whether it means he has to lie that they are related. The fact that he is so willing to lie to keep Lennie safe and close to him shows that friendship is very important. Although, this is not the only time George is careful about keeping Lennie close, proving Steinbeck’s theme. George says, “‘We kinda look after each other.’ He indicated Lennie with his thumb”(Steinbeck 34). This shows George’s devotion to Lennie. He easily talks about how close he and Lennie are. This shows how much George cares for Lennie. In short, Lennie means very much to George -even though he does not always show it- and he does as much as he can to keep Lennie safe.

The final theme Steinbeck includes is discrimination. There is a lot of discrimination -as much then as there is now- against people with mental disabilities. For example George says to Lennie, “‘You crazy fool. Don’t you think I could see your feet was wet where you went across the river to get it?’ He heard Lennie’s whimpering cry and wheeled about. ‘Blubbering like a baby! Jesus Christ! A big guy like you!’”(Steinbeck 9). George is getting fed up with Lennie’s childlike disposition. All Lennie wants to do

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is feel something soft, but after George tells him that he can not have the mouse, he starts to cry. George tries to get him to stop by making him feel weak and picking on him, but it does not work. However, that is not the only time George gets tired of Lennie’s ways and discriminates against him.. George says while talking about their dream, “‘O.K.-O.K. I’ll tell ya again. I ain’t got nothing better to do. Might just’ as well spen’ all my time tellin’ you things and then you forget ’em and I tell you again’”(Steinbeck 4). Lennie has problems remembering, so when he is constantly asking George to tell his story, George is easily agitated. Lennie actually has no problem remembering any of their dream, but he likes listening to George tell it even though George sometimes gets fed up and yells at him. The discrimination against Lennie, whether intentional or not, still happens.

Friendship, loneliness, and the discrimination against mental disabilities are three of the main themes readers will find in *Of Mice and Men*. Steinbeck wrote about these themes because they were very important to him. It is important to recognize when people are being discriminated against and to help them. Being aware when people are lonely and need a new friend is always a great deed. The way John Steinbeck wrote about the discrimination of people with mental disabilities, the importance of friendship, and loneliness associated with social isolation hopefully makes people more aware their actions and the injustice going on around them.

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**Work Cited**

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. New York, Penguin Books: 1993.