Of Mice and Men

WebQuest Description: Students will research the Dust Bowl and study images from this bleak and challenging period in American history. Their quest will culminate in having to write a diary or journal entry from a teenager's point of view, pretending they are someone who might have lived during this period.

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum: English / Language Arts

Keywords: Dust Bowl; The American Dream; California; Migrant Farm Workers; poverty

Published On: 2011-09-01 16:59:57

Last Modified: 2011-08-30 20:58:09

WebQuest URL: http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=111974

Introduction

The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
This is a quote taken from a poem by Robert Burns which tells of how he, while ploughing a field, upturned a mouse's nest. The resulting poem "To a Mouse", is an apology to said mouse. This poem had such an effect on John Steinbeck that he used it as the title for the book you are about to read, Of Mice and Men. With a partner read the full poem and discuss what possible links there could be between a poem written in 1785 in Scotland and a book set in the United States in the 1930's. Now listen to one of the recitals on the link below and attempt your own recital of one of the stanzas.

Burns original

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty
Wi bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murdering pattle.
I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth born companion
An' fellow mortal!
I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen icker in a thrave
'S a sma' request;
'I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
An' never miss't.
Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's win's ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!
Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,
An' weary winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.
That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou's turned out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld.
But Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!
Still thou are blest, compared wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But och! I backward cast my e'e,
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!

Small, crafty, cowering, timorous little beast,
O, what a panic is in your little breast!
You need not start away so hasty
With argumentative chatter!
I would be loath to run and chase you,
With murdering plough-staff.
I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
And justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth born companion
And fellow mortals!
I doubt not, sometimes, but you may steal;
What then? Poor little beast, you must live!
An' odd ear in twenty-four sheaves
Is a small request;
I will get a blessing with what is left,
And never miss it.
Your small house, too, in ruin!
Its feeble walls the winds are scattering!
And nothing now, to build a new one,
Of coarse grass green!
And bleak December's winds coming,
Both bitter and keen!
You saw the fields laid bare and wasted,
And weary winter coming fast,
And cozy here, beneath the blast,
You thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel plough passed
Out through your cell.
That small bit heap of leaves and stubble,
Has cost you many a weary nibble!
Now you are turned out, for all your trouble,
Without house or holding,
To endure the winter's sleety dribble,
And hoar-frost cold.
But little Mouse, you are not alone,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes of mice and men
Go often askew,
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,
For promised joy!
Still you are blessed, compared with me!
The present only touches you;
But och! I backward cast my eye,
On prospects dreary!
And forward, though I cannot see,
I guess and fear!

Tasks

In order to fully understand and appreciate a text it is important to have the whole picture that is associated with the text in question. This could include many diverse aspects such as when it was written and what was going on at that time, perhaps it is saying something bigger than the words alone seem to suggest. The culture surrounding the author or setting may also have a bearing not obvious at first sight, perhaps cultural norms are being challenged in the text, societal expectations are being held up to a powerful light for closer examination. In this web-quest, which will accompany you throughout the reading process of Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men", you will be investigating the world of the 1930's America, the life of the author and the place where he chose to set his book. Along the way you will be expected to produce various pieces of work for evaluation, some of which will be in groups, and some that will be done individually, and all of which should give you insight into the world of the characters in the book.
The United States in the 1920's and 30's

1. Our first task is to become acquainted with the world of the 1920's and 30's. In the box on the left marked "The 20's and 30's" you will find links and videos that explore the world of music, fashion, architecture and art, and crime. You will split up into four groups with a minimum number of five students, each group will take one of the topics and create a PowerPoint presentation for the class explaining your topic and answering questions from your classmates.

2. The next task will be to assign a role to each team-member from the options bar on the left. These roles are, Dust Bowl, The Great depression, Migrant Workers, John Steinbeck and Salinas Valley. If you have more than five in the group then double up in some of the topics. Your job is to explore the links, watch the videos and generally become an expert in your area.

3. You will then bring your expertise together to create two timelines per group. One on the life of John Steinbeck and the other on the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Production: Your last group task is to split your group into two parts, one will produce a brochure for tourists visiting the Salinas Valley. It must include information regarding places of interest, book settings and information about John Steinbeck. The second group will produce a newspaper set in the 1930's carrying various stories about The Wall Street Crash, the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Both pieces of work must be formatted appropriately for their function.

Creative writing

In the individual work, you will take the role of a young teenage migrant worker. You are going to create a seven day diary entry in which you talk about your daily routine, your family, worries and plans for the future. This is not to be written over seven days, it is not your diary, but a piece of creative writing. This will be going through the drafting and peer correction process. A quick reminder that all your work will be going through Turnitin and as such will be checked for plagiarism.

Conclusion

Students will be able to synthesize information from several sources and produce a culminating written piece that shows empathy and historical detail. Students will also learn to express voice, tone, and mood based on the diction used in their writing. Overall, students should have a clearer understanding of the time period they as they are reading Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men.

I have also included two additional videos here, I wanted to keep these till last, they cover almost everything and if you have read ahead then these are your reward.

Evaluation

The grading rubrics that I will be using are contained below, please spend some time going through them to fully understand what you need to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and Score</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ideas - Writer clearly conveys accurate details of life during the Dust Bowl.</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATION: Writing shows logical, organized thoughts. Narrative tells accurate, detailed story.</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word Choice - Style of letter and voice clearly reflect the appropriate time period.</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Conventions - Writer follows basic rules of punctuation, spelling, usage and grammar.</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>100</td>
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