Introduction

You are about to embark upon a journey in order to find out what it was like to be a migrant worker in the Salinas Valley of California during the 1930s. John Steinbeck wrote Of Mice and Men as a vehicle to express his social conscience about the period. Of Mice and Men is a novel about poverty and dreams, friendship and loneliness, and despair and hope. In order to help you to understand the context of the novel and how it still resonates today, you are to embark on a WebQuest that will lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of this simple, yet profound story.

Tasks

You will read several internet articles about a variety of subjects pertinent to your understanding of the novel. When you finish reading you will answer questions that prove your understanding of the material. Finally, you will take on the persona of a migrant worker and write two journal entries from that perspective. This activity will thoroughly prepare you for reading Of Mice and Men.

Process

Answer the following questions based on the websites resources below:

1. Between 1929 and 1932 by what percentage was the average income reduced?
2. How did American education change during the Great Depression?
3. What was the Dust Bowl? How did it come about?
4. How did it make the economic problems in the United States even worse?
5. Why was California seen as a refugee for farmers escaping the Dust Bowl?
6. Why or why not?
7. Go to Migrant Labor Now, scroll to the bottom of the page and find the blurb entitled "Children in the Fields." Underneath is a link to essays written by migrant children. Read at least two. How is it different and/or similar to your childhood?
8. Look at The History Place pictures. Explain what the pictures reveal about the lives of those represented. Describe the living conditions and mood portrayed by the pictures.
9. What causes intellectual disability (mental retardation) and what are some of the characteristics?
10. How does intellectual disability affect the daily life of that person and the people caring for him?
11. Explain, in a few sentences, some of the history of intellectual disability.
12. How do you think the problems associated with intellectual disability may have been dealt with during the Great Depression?
13. Explain how Steinbeck's background made him qualified and unqualified to write about the migrant experience.

BONUS QUESTION:

Imagine you are a migrant worker (or the wife of a migrant worker) in the 1930s. Write a journal entry from this perspective. Be sure to explain your living conditions, work conditions, clothing, what you do with your free time if you have any, and any other information pertinent to the people of that era. If you read all the articles you should not need to do any extra research.

Evaluation

Advanced: Answered all questions in complete sentences. Responses were thoughtful and showed in-depth understanding of the material. Journal entries exceptionally synthesized information from the websites.

Proficient: Answered all questions in complete sentences. Responses were adequate and showed a basic understanding of the material. Some responses were more insightful than others. Journal entries adequately synthesized information from the websites.

Needs Improvement: Most questions were answered in complete sentences. Responses were acceptable and did not show an ability to synthesize information. Journal entries were sparse and did not synthesize information from the websites.

Beginning: Responses to questions were basic and almost no analysis was shown. Journal entries were not on topic and failed to adhere to the set-out requirements.
Now that you have a better understanding of the geographical, social, and historical context of the novel, it is time to start reading! As we progress through our reading, use your newfound background knowledge to inform your understanding and our classroom discussions...

I synthesized this webquest from many others already out there. I am teaching Of Mice and Men to 9th graders in an urban high school, many of whom do not understand the background of migrant workers. I hope this webquest will help them understand the time period, Steinbeck's thinking, and intellectual disability.

Standards

Credits

Other