Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

Slim and masculinity

Teaching ideas

1) Give groups or pairs the name Slim (or another of the male characters) as an acronym – they must fill in something about the character for each letter.

2) Give groups (or pairs or individuals) one of the statements below about Slim (Resource A below). They should work to find quotes and points to support and develop this. Then feedback to the class who take notes on the following statements:
   - Described as the ‘prince of the ranch’, Slim is a strong leader with good insight.
   - Without Slim, the novel would be less moving.
   - Steinbeck uses Slim to portray rare compassion (and therefore hope) in a harsh world and environment.
   - Slim is a narrative device for Steinbeck. As Slim is such a good listener, the reader learns more about Lennie and George’s history and emotions.

3) Give out key quotations (Resource B) about Slim – analyse together if not already covered in feedback from the activity above. You could give students all of these quotes or split them up among groups. Which of the statements about Slim do these quotations support or challenge?

4) Students could now rate the male characters on a scale of 1-10 (1 = not v masculine, 10 = hypermasculine). Discuss as a class, picking up on stereotypical/conventional traits of masculinity.

5) Start a big bubblemap in groups or pairs to consider the following question:
   How does Steinbeck present Slim and the men on the ranch?

Possible prompts:
   - Men are emasculated by the context of the novel (great depression, economic hardship, no control over destiny/dreams/future).
   - Crooks emasculated by other men (Christmas fight) and Curley’s wife.
   - Candy emasculated by old age, intimidated etc.
   - Curley (hypermasculinity, insecure so overcompensates, sexually aggressive – glove and brothel).
   - Contrasts in the novel – George v Lennie (brains v brawn), Curley v Slim (aggressive v gentle leader).
   - Men’s names begin with C (is Steinbeck making a point about the majority of men?).

6) If time allows, write a PEE paragraph together on IWB or set for homework.
Slim is a strong leader, arguably making him the hero of the novel.

Without Slim, the novel would not be as moving.

Steinbeck uses Slim to portray rare compassion (and therefore hope) in a harsh world and environment.

Slim is a narrative device for Steinbeck. As Slim is such a good listener, the reader learns more about Lennie and George’s history and emotions.

Described as 'the prince of the ranch', Slim shows great skill, and depth of perception.

‘He moved with a majesty only achieved by royalty and master craftsmen … the prince of the ranch.’

‘There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love … His hatchet face was ageless … His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought. His hands, large and lean were as delicate in their action.’

‘Ain’t many guys travel around together … I don’t know why. Maybe ever’body in the whole damned world is scared of each other.’

‘George looked over at Slim and saw the calm, Godlike eyes fastened on him.’

‘Candy looked helplessly at him, for Slim’s opinions were law.’

‘Slim came directly to George and sat down beside him, sat very close to him. “Never you mind”, said Slim. “A guy got to sometimes.”’