Every author has their own style and themes that they focus on in their books. For John Steinbeck, one of those themes is Underdogs. John Steinbeck was an American Author who was born on February 27th, 1902 in Salinas, California. Salinas, California is the setting of his book *Of Mice and Men*. He began writing when he was 14 years old (A). He then went to Stanford University for six years on and off. He ended up dropping out without his degree. He eventually wrote his first book *Cup of Gold* in 1929 (B). Some of Steinbeck’s famous works are *the Grapes of wrath, East of Eden,* and *The Pearl.* Steinbeck died on December 20, 1968 (A). Steinbeck grew up on the early 1900s and peaked in the 1930s. As he watched the Great depression take place, he was able to accurately document stories from this time period. John Steinbeck demonstrates the theme of underdogs in the 1930s by using his characters.

(A) John Steinbeck uses character traits in his works to help portray the theme of underdogs. Near the end of *Of Mice and Men* when Lennie accidentally murders Curley’s wife, he is described as confused. (C) “Lennie was in a panic. His face was contorted. She screamed then, and Lennie’s other hand closed over her mouth and nose. ‘please don’t,’ he begged. ‘OH! Please don’t do that. George’ll be mad.’” (Steinbeck 91). (E) When Curley’s wife began struggling as he was petting her hair, he was too oblivious to notice that he should let go. Instead, in his panic, he killed her. (I) Because of Lennie’s obliviousness to Curley’s wife’s struggle, he ends up killing her. This eventually results in his own death. Had it not been for his ignorance, both him and Curley’s wife would still be alive. This ignorance makes him an underdog. Steinbeck also makes use of characters for the theme of underdogs in *Pastures of Heaven* when Tulareceto attacks his classmates*. (C)* “The fourth grade struggled out, seized erasers and began to remove the animals to make room for their numbers. They had made but two sweeps when Tularecito charged.” (Steinbeck 48). (E) The fourth-grade students were just about to begin their math lesson, and were erasing the board, but Tularecito thought that they were erasing his masterpiece that he had spent hours on the prior day, so he attacked them. (I) Tulareceto was completely incognizant that the students were not making a personal attack on his artwork but were simply making room for their math practice. He is an underdog through his unknowingness. (C) Critic Thomas Scarseth wrote about how Lennie is too strong and stupid for his own good. “Lennie, big and ignorant, tries to give love. But he is too weak in the mind, too strong in the body. His tenderness is too powerful for weaker, unsuspecting creatures” (np). (E) Scarseth summarizes Lennie’s whole character in only a couple sentences. He states that because Lennie tries to be tender in the only way he knows how, by accidentally overusing his strength, he ends up hurting those he loves. (I) Through Lennie’s inability to love, he is a victim. In essence, Scarseth paints Lennie as a victim to his own strength. (T) Steinbeck, who grew up in the 1930s, portrays the experience of being an underdog through his characters also set in the 1930s.

Adapted: kf2015

WORKS CITED:

“Biography.” *National Steinbeck Center*, www.steinbeck.org/about-john/biography/.

“John Steinbeck.” *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 17 Oct. 2019, www.biography.com/writer/john-steinbeck.

Scarseth, Thomas. "A Teachable Good Book: Of Mice and Men." Censored Books:

    Critical Viewpoints, edited by Nicholas J. Karolides, Lee Burress, and John

    Kean, Scarecrow Press, 1993, pp. 388–94. Reprinted in "Of Mice and

    Men." Novels for Students, edited by Diane Telgen, vol. 1, Gale, 1997, pp.     240-262. Gale Virtual Reference Library, <[http://link.galegroup.com](http://link.galegroup.com/)>

Steinbeck, John.  Of Mice and Men. Penguin Books, 1993.

---. “The Pastures of Heaven.” Claggett, Fran et al. Daybook of Critical Reading and Writing. Great Source, 2000.