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**The “Rules” of Society**

Aristotle once said, “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” John Steinbeck has this mark of intelligence and insight which he shows in his book *Of Mice and Men.* His book is about the friendship between two men, Lennie and George, and how they struggle through their life during the Great Depression. Crooks, Candy, Carlson, and Curley’s wife are all important characters who live at the ranch that George and Lennie work at throughout the novella. In the book, Steinbeck illustrates many of the injustices that occur regularly during this time in society through these characters. Three strong themes that reveal injustices in the book include discrimination against mental disabilities, discrimination of the elderly, and gender inequality. Steinbeck included these themes because he wanted to express his displeasure towards discrimination and raise awareness about it in society.

Steinbeck includes the theme of mental discrimination because he wanted his audience to see how wrong it is. An example of this discrimination is when Lennie is insulted by Crooks for his incompetence, “ ‘Want me to tell ya what’ll happen? They’ll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog’ ” (Steinbeck 72). In this quote, Lennie is told what will happen to him if George leaves him. It is obvious that this is mental discrimination because he is being told that he is more like an animal than a human and that he needs to be put on a leash. He is being compared to an animal in a negative way. Sadly, this is not the only time Steinbeck shows the injustice of mental discrimination. Lennie is again insulted for his actions by his only friend, George. “ ‘Blubberin’ like a baby! Jesus Christ! A big guy like you’ ”

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(Steinbeck 9). In this quote, George takes a dead rat away from Lennie, who starts to cry from wanting the rat and feeling hurt that George would take it. George insults him by comparing him to a baby for not controlling his emotions. This is mental discrimination because Lennie is not a baby, but a grown man. From these examples, it is obvious that the author purposefully included the theme of mental discrimination to show his audience his disapproval towards it.

Steinbeck includes the theme of discrimination of the elderly to show the lack of independence and security that the elders had during this time period. A character who represents this theme is Candy. For example, “Candy looked a long time at Slim to try and find some reversal, and Slim gave him none. At last Candy said softly and hopelessly, ‘awright---take ‘im’ ” (Steinbeck 47). In this quote, Carlson wants to kill Candy’s dog because he is old and smells bad. The other men on the ranch agree with Carlson. Candy does not want his dog to be killed but his voice and his opinion are ignored. This shows how helpless elderly people can be because although it is Candy’s dog, it is not up to him to decide the dog’s fate. He is controlled by the powerful, younger men which is obvious discrimination. This is not the only time that Steinbeck illustrates discrimination against the elderly. Candy is scared about his future because he knows he is only cared for because he can work. For instance, “ ‘Jus’ as soon as I can’t swamp out no bunk houses they’ll put me on the county’ ” (Steinbeck 69). In this quote, Candy is explaining how he will be put in a horrible, state run nursing home when he can no longer work. This is discrimination because the other men do not actually care about Candy and are willing to turn the other cheek once he is taken away. His years of hard work and dedication to the ranch will no longer matter. These examples show how Steinbeck has incorporated the theme of discrimination against the elderly and it is obvious he wanted the reader to understand how morally wrong it is.

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Another strong theme that Steinbeck wanted his readers to be aware of is gender inequality. Curley’s wife is victim of this theme, “‘Jesus, what a tramp’” (Steinbeck 32). In this quote, one of the men on the ranch has called her a tramp because she is seeking attention from other men because she is lonely. This shows gender inequality because she should have the right to talk to whoever she wants, whereas the men believe she should stay home where a married woman “belongs”. However, this is not the only time Curley’s wife is insulted. She is also believed to be unloyal and untrustworthy because she is a woman. For example, “‘Bet she’d clear out for twenty bucks’” (Steinbeck 32). In this quote, the men are talking and say she would leave her husband for money, just because she talks to other men. This is gender inequality because they do not give her a chance. Even though she has never done anything wrong, they judge her harshly and unfairly. It is obvious from these examples of discrimination that Steinbeck wanted the reader to see and understand the injustice of gender inequality.

Steinbeck was greatly displeased by the amount of discrimination against people with differences pertaining to their mental ability, gender, and age. He included these three themes in his book to raise awareness about the injustices cultivated by society. He wanted the world to see how wrong and morally incorrect it is to hurt these groups of people based on things they cannot control. Even in modern day, readers everywhere still learn from this book about not judging others and accepting everyone not just by what they are are what they look like, but *who* they are as people.

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**Work Cited**

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