



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Classic Literature in the Modern Classroom

-A literary analysis of *Of Mice and Men* from a historical and a pedagogical perspective

A little stocky man stood in the open doorway. He wore blue jean trousers, a flannel shirt, a black unbuttoned vest and a black coat. His thumbs were stuck in his belt, on each side of a square steel buckle. On his head was a soiled brown Stetson hat, and he wore high-heeled boots to prove he was not a laboring man.

(Steinbeck, p.23)

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ABSTRACT

Title: Classic literature in the modern classroom

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Abstract: The literature in focus in this essay is *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck which was written during The Great Depression in America. The aspects of the novel concentrated on is firstly the historical aspect of it and secondly the message of the story and how it is significant to the modern student. My literary analysis suggests that since the issues raised in the story (gender, age and race discrimination, psychological instability and an overall generalization of human beings) are issues which still exist today, the characters and the issues raised alleviates the students' ability to relate and connect to the story. This essay also discusses and presents teaching techniques for how literature can be used in the language classroom. It is meant to function as an aid for teachers and teacher trainees searching for guidance when using literature in their classroom education. When searching for the best suitable teaching methods I have referred to and found help and inspiration from Tricia Hedge, Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater. The final discussion in this work is a summary of the entire essay with a combination of my personal opinions and experiences.

Keywords: *Of Mice and Men*, The Great Depression, teaching methods, literature, classroom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	4-5
1.1 Thesis/Claim	5-6
1.2 Essay structure	6-7
2. BACKGROUND MATERIAL	8
2.1 An Overview	8-9
2.2 Theoretical Material	9-10
3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	11
3.1 The Civilian Conservation Reforestation Relief Act	12
3.2 Naturalism	12-13
3.3 Always an Up-to-date Story	13-14
4. LITERARY ANALYSIS	15
4.1 Analysis of Characters	15-18
4.1.1 Summary	18-19
4.2 Literature in the Language Classroom	19-20
4.2.1 Curriculum and Assessment Criteria	20
5. TEACHING METHODS	21
5.1 Working with a Whole Text	21-27
5.2 Class oral discussion	27
6. DISCUSSION	28-30
REFERENCES	31

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has become the era of multi-media where books and newspapers are being replaced by television and the internet. Young men and women are looking for new and faster ways to entertain themselves that does not require as much effort as reading and thinking. Reading has become a chore you have been told to do by your parents or your teachers; it is no longer seen as activity young students enjoy doing. The outcome of this is that the multi-media world is rapidly growing while the literature era is slowly fading away. As teachers it is our responsibility to once again reunify our students with the literary world and rebuild the gradually diminishing bond. But bear in mind that it will be a struggle competing with the multi-media for the students' interest.

Throughout this work my main target will be students studying the course *EN1201* in upper secondary school. The reason I have chosen to focus on this specific group of students is because I will in the future become an upper secondary school teacher and the *EN1201* course is the only obligatory English course at that level.

In Swedish schools *English A* ([EN1201](#)) is a core subject course, which is an obligatory course the students have to study in order to complete their education at the upper secondary school. According to the syllabus for *English A* one of the goals the students in upper secondary schools must attain is to "...be able to read and understand simple literature and through literature acquire a knowledge of cultural traditions in English-speaking countries." (Skolverket, EN1201) Seeing as *English B* and *English C* are not core subject courses the teacher's task is to arouse the students' interest during the *English A* course and thus motivate the students to have the desire to continue with their English studies with *English B* and *English C*. By using more literary work in the education the teacher may be able to open up a whole new world for the students, a world where reading books is not as boring and terrifying as they might have thought. Consequently, this may trigger the students' interest in a higher

education within English literature. It is indeed a very difficult task for teachers; to successfully maintaining the students' interests in literature such as John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937, 2006) and possibly even ignite ideas of future education in English. To turn this ambition into reality a teacher must think outside the box and visualize the literary world from the students' perspective. In order to make the literature exciting for young students it is essential that teachers realize the students are from a younger generation and therefore have different interests and a different way of thinking. Keeping that in mind the tutor ought to use functional techniques for teaching literature such as *Of Mice and Men* to their students, which will hopefully in the end help the students relate to the book and aid them to consequently find the book appealing to read.

1.1 Thesis/Claim

There are three main reasons as to why I selected *Of Mice and Men* as a suitable literature to work with in the modern classroom in Sweden even though the story portrays American society during the Great Depression.

One reason as to why I chose this literature to be suitable is because of the historical time it was written in and which is continuously mirrored throughout the story. *Of Mice and Men* was written during the Great Depression which is a significant era for the whole world. It is an era students today must be aware of since it is a historic time that changed the entire world both financially and culturally and made it what it is today. By reading such stories the students gain an insight into the issues caused by the Great Depression and its impact on America as well as the whole world.

Another reason for the choice of *Of Mice and Men* is because it tells the story of the struggling working-class citizens in America during the depression. The oppressed "others" have been given a voice to tell the story from their perspective which is enormously

educational for the modern students. In history books you are told the history from an outside point of view while in this story the reader gets a closer look at the history through the characters and their life experiences.

The primary motive for my selection of *Of Mice and Men* is due to the fact that it will always be a relevant story for all generations. Even though students today live completely different lives than the characters of the story the struggle of the characters and the friendship between George and Lennie can always be related to. The clothes, the hairstyles and the industrial world may develop and change but people's feelings and their yearning for closeness and love will never change. Even though the story was written over seventy years ago it is just as relevant today as it was then.

My main aim with this paper is to analyze *Of Mice and Men* and demonstrate how different teaching methods can be used when teaching literature such as *Of Mice and Men* in the classroom. The purpose of this essay is to serve as a teaching aid for teacher trainees and tutors who wish to use literature in their education. The questions at issue which I aim to answer throughout my work are:

- Why is *Of Mice and Men* suitable to work with in the classroom education?
- In what way is the story of *Of Mice and Men*, which was written over seventy years ago, still relevant today?
- Which teaching techniques are appropriate when working with *Of Mice and Men* as a full-text in the classroom?

1.2 Essay Structure

This essay is divided into four main chapters, *Background Material*, *Historical Background*, *Literary Analysis and Teaching Methods*. The main chapters are introduced by the *Introduction* chapter and finally concluded by the *Discussion* chapter. The *Background*

Material chapter contains a list of theoretical resources and explanations as to why these resources have been used as references in order to support the essay. *Historical Background* is the chapter that presents the historical background of *Of Mice and Men* and its coherent connection to the Great Depression in America. The following chapter, *Literary Analysis*, focuses on the characters and their connection to the different social issues in America during the depression (probably even today). A justification of why the story should be used in the classroom education can also be found in the same chapter. In *Teaching Methods* the novel, *Of Mice and Men*, is divided into its six chapters with a demonstration of how each chapter can be used in the classroom education with suitable teaching methods. In the latter chapter, *Discussion*, a short summary of the main chapters in the essay takes place as well as an explanation of how the questions at issue have been answered throughout the essay.

2. BACKGROUND MATERIAL

When working with literature it is crucial that the educator selects literature that has a comprehensive story that deals with social and cultural problems relevant for the modern student. *Of Mice and Men* contains a profound story important to understand before using it in the classroom; it is essential that the tutor is able to interpret the story's historical background and relate it to the characters and the plot. To achieve an understanding of the story's background the tutor is required to do a great deal of research and seek help from resources which will be provided in this chapter.

2.1 An Overview

The primary material that is the center of this whole essay is *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, an intriguing story that takes you on a journey to America during the Great Depression. It is a story about two friends, Lennie and George, searching for the ultimate dream together, the dream of one day owning their own farm and working for themselves and not for strangers. George is the typical hardworking American man who strives to someday save enough money to live the American dream. Lennie, on the other hand, is more like a child who does not actually comprehend the depth of the American dream and tries to be like his idol, George, by following him around and imitating his behaviors. Lennie and George, unlike all the other workers, are travel companions who go from workplace to workplace, saving every penny they earn with the intentions of buying their own farm and living happily in peace. However, for some reason they never seem to earn enough money until one day when Candy, the one-armed old ranch worker, comes with a suggestion that makes the dream feel more like a reality. Since this is a naturalistic and a realistic story, and in order to illustrate how the lives of the working-class people really were at that time, Lennie and

George's dream is not easily handed over to them. The story captures the reader's attention but at the same time reveals the true colors of the American society in the 1930s, social truths which are always below the surface.

Through the story of *Of Mice and Men* readers can imagine the setting of the story and in a way "experience" the life of an American in the 1930s. According to Collie and Slater: "Reading the literature of a historical period is, after all, one of the ways we have to help us imagine what life was like in that other foreign territory: our own country's past." (p.4)

Applying literature to the language classroom can be a great resource for the teacher as it may be utilized to teach students the foreign language and its structure. Exposing the students as often as possible to literature in the foreign language is a great way to teach them about the culture and the history of the foreign country.

2.2 Theoretical Material

The resources that have been used to support the essay are history books/encyclopedias, other research works within the same field and works about John Steinbeck and *Of Mice and Men*. The primary research work that has been used as a reference is *Literature in the Language Classroom* (2003) by Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater. It was greatly helpful as it explains why and how literature is taught and what sort of literature should be used as a teaching aid in the language classroom. The other research work that was functional for the essay is *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* (2000) by Tricia Hedge; it is a research work on how a foreign language is taught and learnt and how it can be used to develop the students' language skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing. The history books that were very beneficial for the writing of this essay are *From Colony to Superpower* (2008) by George C. Herring and *Encyclopedia of American History* (1976) by the brothers Richard and Jeffery B. Morris. *From Colony to Superpower* conveys America's domestic and foreign issues

during the Great Depression while the *Encyclopedia of American History* focuses more on the American literature during the Great Depression. *The Great Depression and World War II* by Gerald D. Nash is specifically about both American society/culture and the great changes in American politics during the depression, which was for that reason highly useful as a reference. Another important constructive resource is *The African-American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps* which specifically targets the Civilian Conservation Corps Reforestation Relief Act and the African-American people's experience in this act.

Of Mice and Men: A Kinship of Powerlessness (1995) by Charlotte Cook Hadella and *John Steinbeck* (1975) by Warren French were extremely useful for my literary analysis. *John Steinbeck* is the biography of the author; it describes his literary period, the type of literature he wrote which portrays the American society and history at that time. *Of Mice and Men: A Kinship of Powerlessness* is Hadella's own analysis of *Of Mice and Men* in a literary and historical context, which was very useful for my essay.

Finally, in order to understand the Swedish upper secondary school system today and what the school requires from the students the *Lpf94*, *Språkboken* and *Skolverket* were excellent resources. The curriculum and assessment criteria for the *English A* course helped me as well; here the aim and the structure of the subject can be found.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the 1930s the world was going through its biggest financial crisis which affected the whole industrial world and its citizens. The Great Depression was caused by the Great Crash in America in 1929 and spread quickly through the rest of the world during the decade.

Governments all around the world made self-governing decisions such as raising taxes and hoarding of currencies which ultimately resulted in catastrophic consequences, for instance banks closing, enormously high unemployment and the World Trade decreasing with 33.3 % (Herring, p.485). From 1930 to 1932 5504 banks closed down in America. But President Roosevelt seemed the right person to handle the crisis and assured the people that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” (Morris & Morris, p.403). Even though the economic crisis disastrously affected the whole world those who suffered the most by the crisis were the working-class people who lost their jobs and their source of income. “The economic crisis crushed the human spirit, particularly of the growing number of individuals who lost their livelihood.” (Nash, p.7) During the Great Depression factories were closed down and the working-man, who was stricken the worst, lost his source of revenue. The consequences were that in 1932 more than 13 million Americans and about 50 percent African-Americans (no exact data exists) were unemployed (Cole, p.11).

In the midst of the depression (1932) the American people elected Franklin D. Roosevelt as their President in the hope that he would save the nation from its worst crisis in the history. Roosevelt, during a period which is referred to as The Hundred Days, suggested several legislations in order to “create order and stability in the nation” (Nash, p.21). He proposed a torrent of legislation with the purpose of demolishing the depression and saving the American democracy.

3.1. The Civilian Conservation Reforestation Relief Act

An important legislation suggested by Roosevelt, which was passed by the Congress, was the Civilian Conservation Corps Reforestation Relief Act (CCC), which was designed to decrease the amount of unemployed people (Morris & Morris, p.404). The CCC was created with the intention to provide jobs for male citizens at the ages of 18 to 25. The occupational fields were, amongst others, mainly within the agricultural. The young men received \$30 per month and a part of it went to their families which were depending on the small income to survive (Morris & Morris, p.404-405). The legislation was a solution to decrease the unemployment caused by the crisis and it was also a way to bring the spirit back in people. By working and making money the men had hopes of one day earning enough money to buy their own land as the farm workers in *Of Mice and Men* (Hadella, p.3).

3.2. Naturalism

John Steinbeck was an American depression-era author whose work is classified as naturalistic. According to Warren French, who wrote John Steinbeck's biography, the definition of naturalism is: "It conceives of man as controlled by his passions, or by his social and economic environment and circumstances. ...the naturalistic writer does not attempt to make moral judgment, and as a determinist he leans toward pessimism." (French, p.37) In other words, a naturalistic author writes stories which portray the fundamental issues in society by being realistic and not giving the story a "positive twist" for the reader's sake.

Of Mice and Men is a novella written by John Steinbeck during the Great Depression in America. It is a story about two men migrating from workplace to workplace during a difficult time in hopes of someday being free and living the American dream. Steinbeck clearly depicts the troubles in the society at that time through the characters and their work

milieu. By using characters that portray and represent what people experienced and felt during the Great Depression Steinbeck became known as a naturalistic depression-era writer who wrote stories millions could relate to: “Steinbeck was a realistic and critical observer of the American scene, but he also endowed his characters with a romanticism that made them representative of the values and feelings shared by millions.” (Nash, p.79) The critics were not that fond of *Of Mice and Men* but the people embraced it; they recognized themselves in the characters and were able to feel some kind of comfort through the story (French, p.88). The stories Steinbeck wrote, even if they were intended for the depression-era people, can be just as comforting for people who live in more modern times. Even though the story was written over 70 years ago it is continuously referred to as “a human drama for all places and times” (Hadella, p.7).

3.3 Always an Up-to-date Story

Of Mice and Men is a clear example of literature that is a valuable and relatable regardless of the time it was written in, in particularly in educational contexts. Using *Of Mice and Men* in the language classroom can be a good opportunity to teach the students about American history, culture and literature. A teacher has the opportunity to take advantage of the story to capture the students’ interest in order for them to desire learning more about America.

According to Lpf94 it is the teacher’s responsibility to “...use specialist literature, fiction and other forms of culture as a source of knowledge, insight and joy...” in the classroom. (Lpf94, p.11) John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* is a great resource to use in the classroom since it can be explored from several different angles. It is a story which raises many social issues in the society during The Great Depression in America and because the issues raised (racism, discrimination etc.) still exists today the story is therefore relatable for the modern student. By using the story in the classroom a teacher is able to educate the students about the culture and

the history of America through the characters and if the teacher wishes to go further in-depth she/he could also teach literary periods and movements. In the next chapter I will review a few methods of teaching literature in the language classroom and discuss what each method's aim is.

4. LITERARY ANALYSIS

Of Mice and Men is a literary work by John Ernst Steinbeck, Jr. and was first published in 1937 by Covici, Friede, Inc. in America. It was written around the time when America was going through its biggest financial depression (the Great Depression), which the story also revolves around. The problems at the time in the United States are clearly, but still discretely portrayed throughout the book where the reader is given a sense of American society during the Great Depression.

The story takes place in the fields and valleys of Soledad, California, where the two main characters, George and Lennie, are on their way to a job assignment on a farm. George and Lennie are two travel companions who in the midst of the depression are searching for the American dream, a dream of one day gaining financial independence and be their own servants.

In the course of reading the book you are introduced to several characters that are all residents of the farm and each different character represent different issues that existed in America during that time. Even though the characters represent a troubled time in America they still have a hint of hope inside them; the hope of maybe someday living the American dream.

4.1 Analysis of Characters

Below a list of different characters I have chosen to analyze can be found. The analyzed characters are selected for being uncommon and for being non-stereotypical American citizens.

Lennie:

Lennie represents the outcast in society because of his intellectual status. At that time men

were supposed to be masculine and even aggressive and Lennie is the exact opposite. He is portrayed as an enormous man with great strength who has the intellectual brain capacity of a child. His childlike innocent behavior in contrast to his enormous physique always misleads the people he meets; they always reach the conclusion that there is something wrong with him and he is therefore perceived as a pariah. Lennie's character represents how people that are not characterized as "the norm" by the society are sneered at and suppressed.

Candy:

Candy is the old man who is of no value on the farm and is only occupying useful space and wasting money because of his old age and weak body. As an elderly man he does not have any place to go and fears he will have a worse destiny than his dog had; to be assigned from his job because he is too old and useless. If they could just shoot him like they shot his dog he would have been out of his misery, but he feels it is worse to be thrown out than killed because he has nowhere to go and nobody to be with.

You seen what they done to my dog tonight? They says he wasn't no good to himself nor nobody else. When they can me here I wisht somebody'd shoot me. But they won't do nothing like that. I won't have no place to go, an' I can't get no more jobs. (Steinbeck, p.68)

Candy's situation symbolizes the corrupt working conditions; there are no safety-net for the elderly, for the injured, for the sick etc... People are required to work as hard as they can in terrible conditions and face the fact that if they someday for some reason cannot work anymore they must fend for themselves.

Crooks:

Crooks is the black stable buck who stands for the black minority who were ill-treated and suppressed by the white majority. Through different events in the story you obtain a vision of how black people were viewed at that time and how in return the black worker always obeyed

his white master. Even though Crooks is a smart civilized man who can read, unlike many white workers, he is still very much looked down upon and almost never spoken to. He is only spoken to when his job is referred and apart from that he is always ignored. "They play cards in there, but I can't play because I'm black. They say I stink." (Steinbeck, p.77) No one takes the time or the effort to become acquainted with Crooks; they do not even want him to sleep in the same room as the others and therefore he has his own small room in the barn. As a result Crooks has become a man full of hate and abhorrence for his coworkers and the society. After years of isolation and being sneered at Crooks has become a lonely man with full of anger. He does not seem to understand why his coworkers have no respect for him and do not take him seriously because of his color. "If I say something, why it's just a nigger sayin' it?" (Steinbeck, p.80)

The Boss:

In the book the boss is portrayed as the classic superior: "On his head was a Stetson hat, and he wore high-heeled boots and spurs to prove he was not a laboring man." (Steinbeck, p.23) You do not hear much of the boss throughout the book and therefore the reader can only get a sense of the boss when he is mentioned by the others and must assume his character. By reading the book you get the impression that the boss is a proud rich man who has to show his superiority by wearing certain clothes, by having an attitude and by regularly abusing the black stable buck. The boss represents the rough work environment where the manager is seen as the God and the workers treated as animals. It is a work environment full of hatred where the workers are doing hard labor for lousy money.

Curley's Wife:

Curley's wife is only mentioned in association with Curley and her name is therefore never mentioned. She is the only living female character in the story and is considered a prostitute by the male workers. At that time there was a secret code between men where you were not

allowed to talk to another man's woman if he is not present, because the talking was considered flirting. For that reason Curley's wife became very lonely at a farm full of people she was not allowed to communicate with. Since Curley's wife did not care much for the men's secret code she went out and tried to speak to the workers on a regular basis, but this was not appreciated by the workers. They saw her as a ticking bomb and tried to stay as far away from her as they could. They could not understand that all she wanted was company and they only saw her as a lustful woman. Unhappily married women at that time were destined to stay in that marriage until they died and if you tried to get out of your marriage you would be considered a prostitute. The culture at that time did not celebrate independent women who were happy; the woman was doomed to be unhappy and in a bad marriage.

4.1.1 Summary

These are some of the characters that stand out the most amongst the others mainly on account of their gender, color, age, status and intellectual level. The characters that protrude from the mass are not perceived as unique and special; they are, on the contrary, oppressed and mocked for being different or they are, like the boss, feared because of their status and power. Regardless of the reasons, being different and standing out of the mass is mostly adverse in the story; the "odd" characters are ignored and are put at a distance by the "normal" characters. To be accepted as an equal fellowman you must be at the same level as others both inside and outside; the same financial status, the same dreams, the same thoughts and feelings, the same clothes and have the same color. As a member of a certain type of class (working-class in *Of Mice of Men*) it is evident to understand that your place in the society is predetermined, and you can never move beyond it. Even though everyone wants the American dream and dreams of a better future sooner or later they are forced to face the fact that as members of the working-class they are doomed. "You guys is just kiddin' yourself. You'll

talk about it a hell of a lot, but you won't get no land. You'll be a swamper here till they take you out in a box. Hell, I seen too many guys.” (Steinbeck, p.85)

4.2 Literature in the Language Classroom

Using literature in the language classroom can be both worthwhile and ineffective depending on the literature and in what context it is used. By choosing literature that is both relevant and current, regardless of the time it is written in, can become very educational for the students. A book, such as *Of Mice and Men* can be taught from a historical perspective as well as utilized in a manner which helps the students improve their language by reading. Collie and Slater state that the main element literature used in the classroom should have is; “... that literature offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written material which is ‘important’ in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is enduring rather than ephemeral.” (p.3)

As mentioned above by Collie & Slater, the type of literature teachers should use in their classrooms ought to contain “fundamental human issues”; issues such as racism/discrimination, segregation of different classes in the society, gender issues, financial issues and oppression, can be discovered in *Of Mice and Men*. The literature should exceed time and culture where a reader from another country and from a different historical period is able to relate to the literary work (Collie & Slater, p.3). Another positive aspect of reading a contextualized text is that it contributes to improving the students’ vocabulary and even grammar. According to Collie & Slater, by reading texts the students “gain familiarity with many features of the written language” which will ultimately enhance and develop their writing skills (p.5).

Choosing the “right” texts to use in the classroom is not an easy task for the teacher, mainly because the texts must be suitable in the context they are used in and, at the same time, the literature must be educational for the students. The literature you choose to use in your

classroom ought to consist of several different features which should ultimately be beneficial for your students' language education. Texts that are both enduring and raise issues significant and improve the reader's vocabulary and writing skills ought to be the ultimate aim for teachers to use in their classroom as it can get great results among the students. "... with well-chosen works, the investment of effort can be immensely rewarding, the resulting sense of achievement highly satisfying." (Collie & Slater, p.5) By reading an interesting book the reader is captured by the story and therefore does not pay attention to the language, which according to Collie & Slater has a "beneficial effect upon the language learning process" as the vocabulary and the language of the reader is automatically enhanced (p.6)

4.2.1 Curriculum and Assessment Criteria

The curriculum for the non-compulsory school system (Lpf94) states that it is the school's responsibility that no student is "... subjected to discrimination at school based on gender, ethnic belonging, religion or other belief, sexual orientation or disability, or subjected to other degrading treatment." (p.7) It is the tutor's task to integrate the fundamental values of society into their teaching in a way where the students, along with the teacher, analyze different values, views and issues in the society in school projects and in open discussions (Lpf94, p.18). By employing literature, which is both educational and entertaining, in the classroom the teacher can utilize the literature with the purpose to help students understand the ethics in society and subsequently accustom students' views with values of people different than themselves. Literature such as *Of Mice and Men* presents teachers with the opportunity to construct a lesson where the focus is on the students and their perception of society as well as society's perception of the students. As a result, topics such as discrimination, gender, disability and culture can develop into a sincere discussion participated in by the entire class.

5. TEACHING METHODS

There are several different methods that can be used in the classroom, but the main aim is to apply (in your opinion) the best suitable method/s to the literature you are using. When working with an entire text in the education it is, as argued by Collie & Slater, most convenient to divide the novel into its different chapters and work with one chapter at the time (p.93). For example, *Of Mice and Men* possesses six different chapters and as the tutor you choose to use the teaching method/s, which suit your class best, working with individual chapters, given that the students read each chapter before each lesson. In this essay I have divided *Of Mice and Men* into its six chapters and have chosen the methods that in my opinion, supported by my earlier experiences in my VFU, capture the students' interest and have been very effective. Each individual chapters contain teaching method(s) which are selected for their creativity and for their ability to develop the students' reading, listening, talking and writing skills.

5.1 Working with a Whole Text

Chapter 1:

The chapter starts with describing the scenery and the two main characters (Lennie and George) to set the mood of the story. Through reading the first chapter the reader gets an impression of Lennie and George's relationship, but without knowing much about their background. Even though the reader is informed about how the two characters have gotten in the situation they are in we are still left in the dark about how Lennie and George became travel companions.

An appropriate method to use for the first chapter is named *In the mood* by Collie & Slater (p.94). This method works as a guide to help the students picture the mood in the story and imagine that they are one of the characters. The teacher asks them what they can see, hear,

touch and feel in the scenery that they are imagining and the students are even asked to pretend that they are either Lennie or George. By doing this the students are able to picture how the milieu was like at that time and how/why people dressed, talked and acted as they did. This is a great exercise to generate a discussion in the classroom in order for the students to realize that the same story can be interpreted in several different ways. The syllabus for *English A* in upper secondary schools express that one of the goals the students must attain is; “Pupils should desire, have the confidence and be able without preparation to take part in discussions on familiar subjects and exchange information, personal views and experiences.” (Skolverket, EN1201)

In the course of doing exercises such as *In the mood* in the lessons students are, according to Hedge, able to “...practice using the language they have learned until it is automatized.” (p.263) By working with such exercises in the classroom the teacher contributes to developing the students’ speaking skills which might gradually give them the confidence to speak the learned language automatically in the classroom without being nervous.

Chapter 2:

The second chapter introduces the other characters of the story and describes their work environment on the farm. The reader gets an impression of the other farm workers from George’s perspective and is almost forced to share George’s opinion about the other characters. This chapter also portrays the typical perception of the female gender, black people, old people and unintelligent people; people that are not the “norm” are suppressed or not sympathized with.

A whole lot is going on in the second chapter; several new characters are introduced simultaneously in the chapter which can be very confusing for the students/reader. With chapters like this the teaching method that in my judgment is quite appropriate is referred to as *Connectors and summary writing* by Collie & Slater (p.57). This task requires the students

to work in groups and write a summary of chapter 2 by using the connectors (about 10) that have been provided for them by the teacher. The students must use each connector once and it is not permitted to repeat the same connector. Collie and Slater argue that activities like this helps students connect the text together and develop their awareness of ways in which ideas can be connected (p.58). It is a very logical technique to use for texts with too much information in order for the students to get a better grasp of the story and see it with new and clear eyes. At the end of the lesson each group reads their summary to the rest of the class which may finally be discussed with the whole class. The teacher may even take the opportunity to guide the discussion towards topics such as discrimination, segregation, gender issues hierarchy within the work environment in *Of Mice and Men*.

Chapter 3:

The story continues with George and Lennie's dream of someday being independent and owning their own land. Their goal is to work a few months until they have enough money to buy their own land and be their own bosses, but an event in the chapter keeps the reader hesitant about their dream. At the end of the chapter the boss's son Curley picks a fight with Lennie for no other reason than Lennie being the closest big man. "Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's all the time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy." (p.29)

A method that can be very suitable for this chapter is identified as *Using authentic formats – newspaper article* by Collie & Slater (p. 63). During this activity the students are shown an authentic newspaper article by the teacher as guidance and their task is to write an article with the same format at layout and imagine that they are writing an article that will be published in the same newspaper. In the context of working with *Of Mice and Men*, the exercise is to write a newspaper article about Lennie and Curley's fight. This task works extremely well when exercising the students' writing skills as well as teaching the students about the layout, style,

length and register of a newspaper article. Hedge states that writing is a process of gradually building a text which involves several activities such as: "...setting goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language. ..." (p.302) Activities like these open the students' eyes to how a newspaper article is written and structured which is a great benefit for them since, according to the syllabus for the *English* subject, one of the goal the students must attain is: "...refine their ability to express themselves in writing in different contexts. ..." (Skolverket, English)

At the end of the lesson the teacher either passes around all the articles or hangs up all the articles on a wall for the class to read and possibly even discuss. If the teacher feels to take it one step further he/she could also staple together all the articles to make a whole newspaper and copy a specimen for all the students.

Chapter 4:

Chapter four mostly takes place in the black stable buck's room where he has the company of Lennie and Candy. The chapter clearly depicts the racial differences between the black worker and the two white workers. Even though all the white men work in the same field as the black man every day, there is still an animosity between them. The white men refuse to recognize the black stable buck as a fellow colleague and therefore only socialize with him when necessary, which is clearly depicted in this chapter.

When working with a chapter like this it is very important that the students have the opportunity to express their own personal feelings and thoughts regarding the main deed in the chapter. When working with texts like this chapter the *Poems* method would be very appropriate (Collie & Slater, p.61). At the beginning of the lesson the students are shown a specific type of a poem (chosen by the teacher) which the students will later on use as a guide. The task is that the students write a poem, with the same scheme as the one shown by the teacher, where they must reflect their personal thoughts and feelings concerning the situation

in the chapter. If there is any time left of the lesson the teacher could ask the students to read their poems out loud and finally discuss the form, structure and the content with the rest of the class. This is an opportunity to teach the students about the form and structure of a poem and at the same time teach them to express their personal feelings through a poem concerning issues such as racism and discrimination. According to the curriculum for the non-compulsory school system it is the school's responsibility to make sure that the students are able to critically examine texts in order to take a standpoint and argue the different issues in what they have read (Lpf94, p.11-12).

Chapter 5:

The main plot occurs in the fifth chapter when Lennie accidentally kills both Curley's wife and his new puppy. During these accidents the reader actually feels sorry for Lennie since he cannot comprehend the seriousness of his actions and genuinely feels sorry for what he has done. The chapter reveals a gloomy scenario where Lennie, who has all through the book been portrayed as a child trapped in an enormous man's body, must go through the same punishment as an adult man. From the reader's view it seems unfair that Lennie is sentenced to death for killing a person purely by accident. It is as if the reader witnesses a child being convicted for the death of an adult woman and sentenced to death – it feels wrong.

A method that would work well with a chapter like this is referred to as *Cries for help* by Collie & Slater (p.61). The teacher asks the students to write a letter from Lennie to someone who has the possibility to save him or to the authorities to overturn any verdict that might sentence Lennie to death by hanging. Since the letter is a cry for help the formality of it is very free; the students' task is to focus more on the content of the letter and on expressing Lennie's cry for help than on the letter's form and structure. At the end of the lesson the whole class may orally discuss the pros and cons of the Death Penalty and the issue of people being sentenced to jail or to death when they are innocent.

Chapter 6:

The final chapter is about George's big dilemma; whether to let the other guys find Lennie and hang him, or to kill Lennie himself and spare him the pain of a painful death. George struggles with his decision and has a hard time shooting his dear friend but finally finds the strength to pull the trigger.

The end of this story is one that stirs up mixed emotions within the reader; there is a feeling of grief for the death of Lennie, a feeling of anger for society and the feeling of powerlessness that George might be experiencing. The method that in my opinion is suitable for this final chapter is called *Press conference* (Collie & Slater, p.89). The aim with this approach is to create a press conference in the classroom where the whole class has been given roles and must participate. The role of the Press Conference Officers is given to one of the students whose job is to keep order, decide which reporter speaks and decides when the conference must end. Five of the students are characters from the final chapter (Lennie, George, Curley, Slim and Carlson) who will be questioned by the reporters. The rest of the class is reporters who interrogate the five characters with questions. Collie & Slater mention that this exercise is: "...a way of getting students to put themselves back into the literary work they have just finished, and to discuss it." (p.89) It gives the students a general view of the whole story as the reporters must retract to the story and ask the characters questions about the past which may still be relevant. The exercise also enables the students to work together and as a unity present a press conference.

Sum-up activity:

As a final exercise, to recap the whole story, the *Dramatic adaptations* is an ideal method to use, in particular working with texts like *Of Mice and Men* which is similar to plays and can easily be dramatized (Collie & Slater, p.90). The students are divided into six groups and each group is given a scene/chapter to dramatize. The students work independently and decide

on their own who plays which characters and if there are too few characters for a group they must collaborate as a group and find the best possible solution in order for the whole group to participate in the presentation. By letting the groups dramatize in chronological order the whole class gets the opportunity to see, hear and experience the story from beginning to end instead of just reading it.

5.2 Class oral discussion

As seen in the methods presented above I have chosen to end each method with some kind of an oral presentation or discussion. The reason is mainly because by integrating oral activities as much as possible in the lessons the teacher expands the students' ability to use more accurate and appropriate language (Hedge, p.13). Hedge confirms that "...being pushed to produce output obliges learners to cope with their lack of language knowledge. ...” (p.13)

Oral activities are aids with the aim to strengthen the students' confidence in oral speaking where they gradually become more accustomed to speaking in the whole class. To be able to critically examine and discuss different issues in society and questions concerning life and values is also a goal that must be attained by the students according to the curriculum (Lpf94, p.12). In order for the students to pass the *English A* course the students must: "...be able with preparation to verbally provide information about or describe a subject or area of interest, and show evidence of adapting their language to the requirements of the situation.” (Skolverket, English A) In order for the students to attain these goals it is crucial that teachers integrate oral activities as often as possible in their lessons for the students to develop their English speaking skills.

6. DISCUSSION

The main aim of this essay has always been to give current and future teachers an idea of how to utilize teaching methods in the classroom when teaching literature such as *Of Mice and Men*. This essay is divided into three different parts; the first part focuses on the analysis of the story and the characters, the next part is where the history and the background of the era of *Of Mice and Men* takes place and the final part concentrates on how *Of Mice and Men* can be used in the classroom. By doing so the goal was to clarify and facilitate for tutors the process of applying literature to the classroom. When teacher trainees and teachers see an example (in this essay) of how literature can be analyzed and used in the classroom, it could be seen as a tool for those who wish to use literature in their classroom education.

When using literature in the language classroom it is important as a teacher to analyze and understand the literature before using it in the education. In order to be able to truly understand the literature that is to be used in the classroom, one has firstly to go deep into the background and the history of the literature, as in chapter 4. *Historical Background*. Every story has a history, the particular era it was written in, which the story reflects upon. In order to be able to connect the story to its history it is important to do research about the author and the era the literature was written in. When a teacher is capable of comprehending the relationship between the story and the time it was written in and is able to link the two together the teaching of the literature automatically becomes obvious.

The next step toward being able to comprehend how to apply literature to the classroom education is to analyze the characters of the story and within that process be capable of understanding in what way the characters highlight the society of that time, as in chapter 3. *Literary Analysis*. Authors often use characters in their stories to emphasize current issues or other subjects in society in order to bring the reader's emotions concerning the issue up to the surface. Characters are not created by authors for no reason at all; there are more profound

motives for telling a story through its characters and there is a reason/several reasons for each specific character being created by the author.

When finally reaching the stage where the aim is to apply the literature to the classroom education it is essential that the teacher first and foremost is aware of different teaching methods. In chapter 5, *Teaching Methods*, this step has been made easy for the teachers as a list of different teaching methods and advice about when to use the teaching methods can be found. When deciding to use a teaching method (or several teaching methods) there has to be a focus on what the aim of the teaching method is and whether or not the teaching methods suit the content of the teaching. Best results can, in my opinion, only be produced when applying the most suitable teaching methods to the literature that is to be taught, and for that reason a tutor must always be aware of all the teaching methods on the market. The more teaching methods the tutors are aware of the more range of choice the tutor has, which is always a great knowledge to have when using literature in the classroom.

In my opinion, I would say that one must go through each of these three steps in order to achieve the best results. An educator cannot just use literature in the classroom and expect that the students will just figure it out on their own. It is important that the teacher goes through the whole process of connecting the background of the book to the society of the time and to take time to analyze the characters and understand their true meaning before deciding which teaching methods are best suitable for the specific literature. By taking one's time and not just rush it through this process the outcome may be greater than expected. From my own experience I understand how much literature, which is used in a proper way, can create a new interest in the students, an interest in reading and understanding the story which they may not have had before. The importance of using literature in the classroom cannot be emphasized enough. I was 15 years old when my teacher decided to use *Of Mice and Men* in his classroom and from that day on I fell in love with literature. The teacher I had did not even use new and

creative ways to include *Of Mice and Men* in the classroom; he just asked us to read it and write a book report about it. When I think about the little effort he put into his teaching generated my great love for literature I can just imagine the results when teachers put more effort and caring in their teaching.

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