

## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### TEACHER DEBRIEFING SHEET

Unit: Of Mice and Men

Big Idea: Myths and Realities

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the role ‘social status’ plays in Of Mice and Men.
2. How does Steinbeck make use of a variety of literary devices to address the theme of social status? Be sure to discuss at least three of the following literary devices: setting, dialogue, foreshadowing, symbolism, conflict, metaphor, and characterization.
3. Compare and contrast what your Resource Cards reveal about the myths and the realities of social status with what is revealed in Of Mice and Men about the myths and realities of social status.
4. Describe how race, ethnicity, gender, income, immigrant status, mental and physical disabilities, and sexual orientation are integral to social status. As you answer, consider Of Mice and Men, your Resource Cards, your own experiences and observations, and how social status is portrayed in popular culture (TV, movies, music, etc.)
5. To what extent is social status a myth, and to what extent is social status a reality?

#### TASK:

Create a 3-dimensional structure to symbolize social status. The structure must exhibit social status as it was portrayed in Of Mice and Men **or** exhibit social status from a modern-day community (i.e a television family or community, your school, your family, your work, your home town, etc.).

#### TASK EVALUATION CRITERIA:



- The Of Mice and Men or the modern-day structure is 3-dimensional and a symbolic representation of social status.
- Structure includes three or more of the following: color, texture, perspective, words, scale, and/or 3-d materials (clay, cotton balls, paper clips, textured paper, cardboard, etc.).
- The message and symbol of the selected structure can be easily grasped without the need of a verbal interpretation.
- Structure and/or presentation address multiple points of view about social status.
- Presentation addresses the extent to which social status is a myth, and the extent to which social status is a reality.

#### Extension Questions:

1. Define social status as it relates to your society.
2. What do you think gives Americans more status; wealth or education?
3. How are institutionalized systems of status harmful? How are they helpful?
4. Describe a situation where social stratification has positive effects for people at the top. Negative effects for people at the top?
5. In Of Mice and Men, how would the story be different if there wasn't social stratification?
6. In Of Mice and Men, how would the story be different if Lennie was not an “undesirable”?
7. In Of Mice and Men, how would the story be different if Crooks were white?

## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### ACTIVITY CARD

-  Read the CONTEXT-SETTING CARD. Then use the information on your RESOURCE CARDS as well as the chapters of OF MICE AND MEN you have read, to talk about the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
-  Examine the TASK and complete the project to meet all of the TASK EVALUATION CRITERIA.

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## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### CONTEXT-SETTING CARD

#### Social Status and Social Stratification

Social status is the level of honor or prestige that is given to a person in any given society. A society can be defined as a group of people who work or live together in a community. In a society, individuals believe that some principles (rules to live by) are more important than others. These principles are usually created and enforced by the people with the highest social status. Social stratification is the established hierarchy (ladder) within a society that classifies who receives the most and least status.

Most societies have a form of hierarchy where some people have stronger, more dominant positions, and other people are in weaker, lower positions. An individual's social and economic role determines where they fit on the hierarchy. Different communities assign different values to any given social or economic role. For example, in many U.S. communities, a low-skilled worker (economic role) who earns more than a college student (social role) working at a fast food restaurant will have less social status because the society gives more status to higher education. In other U.S. communities the reverse is true because more money equals more status, regardless of level of education.

*From Of Mice and Men:*

George patted a wrinkle out of his bed, and sat down. "Give the stable buck hell?" he asked.

"Sure. Ya see the stable buck's a nigger."

"Nigger, huh?"

"Yeah. Nice fella too. Got a crooked back where a horse kicked him. The boss gives him hell when he's mad. But the stable buck don't give a damn about that. He reads a lot. Got books in his room."

"What kind of a guy is the boss?" George asked.

"Well, he's a pretty nice fella. Gets pretty mad sometimes, but he's pretty nice. Tell ya what-know what he done Christmas? Brang a gallon of whisky right in here and says, 'Drink hearty, boys. Christmas comes but once a year.'"

"The hell he did! Whole gallon?"

"Yes sir. Jesus, we had fun. They let the nigger come in that night. Little skinner name of Smitty took after the nigger. Done pretty good, too. The guys wouldn't let him use his feet, so the nigger got him. If he coulda used his feet, Smitty says he woulda killed the nigger. The guys said on account of the nigger's got a crooked back, Smitty can't use his feet." He paused in relish of the memory. "After that the guys went into Soledad and raised hell. I didn't go in there. I ain't got the poop no more."

## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### RESOURCE CARD 1 (OF 4)

#### Social Status in the South and the Great Migration

At the time of World War I (1914-1918), many African-Americans moved from the southern United States to the northern United States. Two main factors contributed to this movement that became known as the Great Migration. The first factor was to escape discrimination and the second was to seek economic opportunity.

Racism in the southern U.S. came in many forms and was used to maintain social stratification (separateness) that kept whites on top and African-Americans at the bottom of the economic and social ladder. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court repealed the laws that protected African-Americans and the southern states responded with Jim Crow laws. The laws barred blacks from voting, public office, and jury service and officials felt no obligation (duty) to respect minority interests or safeguard minority lives. This disregard led to an increase of mob-led lynchings (hanging), and dozens of race riots, with blacks as victims, scarred the southern states.

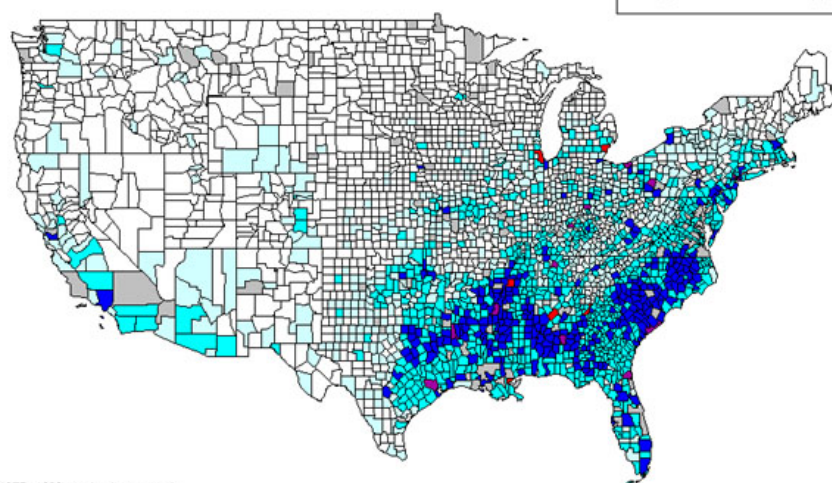
The second reason African-Americans moved north was to seek economic opportunity. The southern white population owned the majority of land and businesses and occupied all of the local political offices. This advantage allowed for separate and unequal schooling, housing, and employment that made it nearly impossible for black Americans to escape poverty. At the same time, the nation's economic base was shifting from agriculture (the source for much of the South's wealth) to industry. Many northern manufacturers recruited African-Americans from the south to fill important industrial jobs left behind by whites who fought in the war.



People looked forward to these lynchings and had no shame in attending.

#### 1930 African American population

Source: U.S. Census, Historical Census Data web site



NOTE: 1990 county shapes used  
Approximately 90% of historical counties represented

The Great Migration continued into the 1920s and led to increased racial tension in the northern U.S. as many whites felt threatened by the racial change in their cities. Race riots resulted and lynchings worsened. With the start in the late 1920s of the Great Depression, conditions for northern and southern black Americans and other minorities worsened as unemployment rose and whites had to compete with them for jobs.

## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### RESOURCE CARD 2 (OF 4)

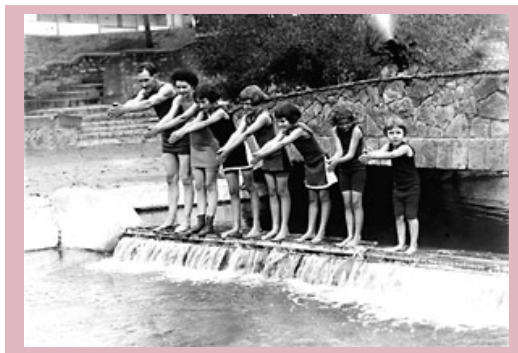
#### Eugenics in America

Eugenics is the study of human genetics (heredity) and of methods to improve the inherited characteristics, physical and mental, of the human race. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Americans embraced eugenics and used the concept to conquer their fears and further their desires. Many whites believed that their once-great nation was threatened by demographic (race, gender, age, etc. of a population) and economic change. American eugenicists took the original principles of genetic inheritance and created a campaign to rid the country of “undesirables”. It was their belief that genetically defective members of society, including the “feeble-minded,” criminals, the sexually active, epileptics, the insane, and non-white races, were rapidly out-reproducing the “normal” members of society. Furthermore, the eugenicists believed that the undesirables were passing on their bad genes at the expense of “normal” genes and the social cost of such a situation, they feared, would be devastating.

The American eugenics movement pursued a social agenda that wanted to prevent defective breeding (where “undesirables” have children) and concentrated on encouraging the genetically gifted to have children. By the 1930s, most states had passed eugenical laws that authorized the sterilization (most commonly a vasectomy for males and tubal ligation for females) of “defectives”. These laws were supported by the U.S. Supreme Court. American eugenicists also lobbied politicians for powerful anti-immigration laws. They used their scientific studies to argue that non-whites and immigrants were inferior to native-born white Americans in intelligence, physical condition, and moral stature (standing).

In addition to political lobbying, the American Eugenics Society (AES) gathered support from “normal” Americans through more appealing ways. At state and local fairs during the 1920s and 1930s, the AES sponsored lectures and exhibits to demonstrate principles of heredity and the threat of breeding among the “undesirables”. Signs with flashing lights were displayed to share the message that, “Some people are born to be a burden to the rest.” Fair crowds listened to speeches that claimed;

“While a new child is born in America every 16 seconds, every 48 seconds a feeble-minded child is born, every 50 seconds comes a criminal, but only every seven and a half minutes is a truly creative and capable person born.” The AES also sponsored “Fitter Family” contests that used measures of physical appearance, health, behavior, and intelligence to judge which family displayed the greatest potential to produce genetically superior children. Divided into small, medium, and large family categories, as well as couples, the contests were enormously popular. The family (at left) won the large family class at the Texas State Fair in 1925.



Scientific studies that demonstrated the failure of eugenical methodology (techniques) and the falsity of their claims did nothing to hold back the growing support of the eugenics movement. Only after the Second World War, when the horrific results of the Nazi eugenic program became fully evident, did the movement lose steam. Though much smaller in scope, it continues today.

#### Cumulative Record of Operations for Eugenic Sterilization in the U.S. from 1907-1935

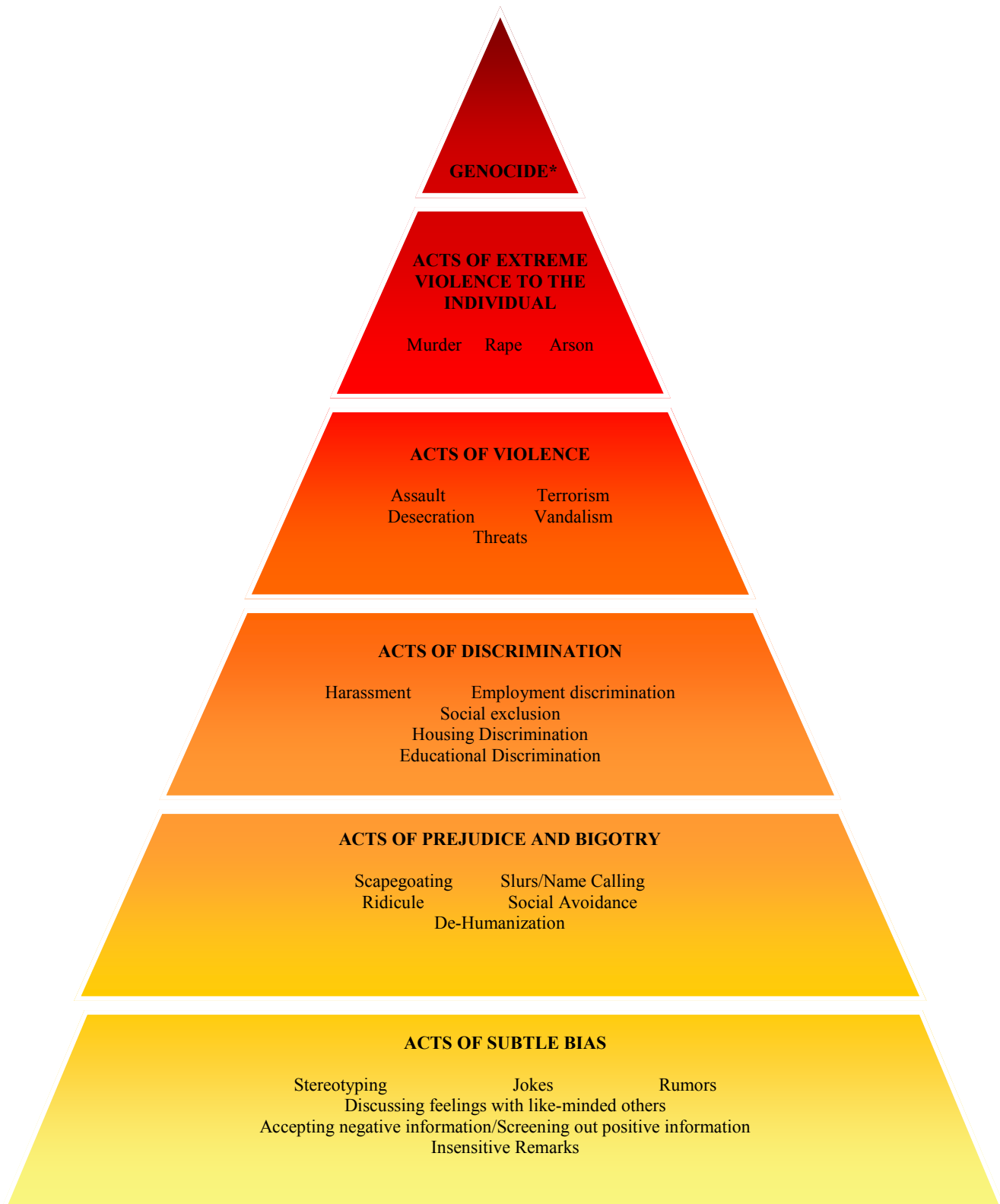
Date	Number of Operations
3-9-1907	0
1-1-1921	3,233
7-1-25	6,244
1-1-1928	8,515
12-1-1931	15,156
1-1-1933	16,688
1-1-1934	19,285
1-1-1935	21,539

## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### RESOURCE CARD 3 (OF 4)

#### The Anti-Defamation League's "Pyramid of Hate"

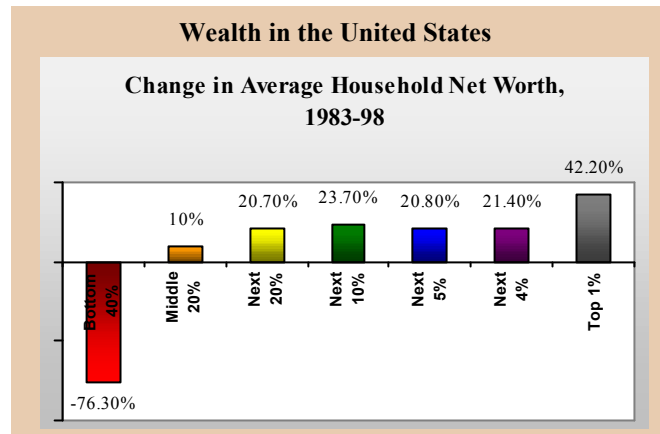
\*Genocide is the deliberate, systematic extermination of an entire people



## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### RESOURCE CARD 4 (OF 4) Institutionalized Systems of Status

Institutionalized inequality refers to the ways by which socially defined categories of persons are rewarded unevenly for their social contributions regardless of their talents and abilities. The “rewards” differ within and across cultures and come in many forms; power, wealth, social power, prestige, self-esteem, and one’s satisfaction and happiness in life. The socially defined categories are mostly based on gender, ethnicity, race, religion, age and generation and the level of reward or discrimination varies, in part, on the basis of a society’s stratification order (caste, class, or mixed) and its cultural history (i.e., the legacy of slavery and race relations in the U.S. or Brazil).



### Caste System of India

A caste is a social class defined by heredity, profession, and wealth. Members of each caste are restricted in their choice of occupation and degree of social participation. Marriage outside the caste is prohibited. Social status is determined by the caste of one's birth and may only rarely be escaped.

Thousands of castes and subcastes have existed in India since ancient times and each has its own distinctive rules, customs, and modes of government. The Indian castes are most commonly defined by their occupation: Brahman (priest), Kshatriya (ruler), Vaishya (merchant), Shudra (artisans, agriculturalists), and the lowest ranking Harijans (outside the caste system, also known as the “untouchables”).



Brahman priest



Kshatriya ruler



Vaishya merchant



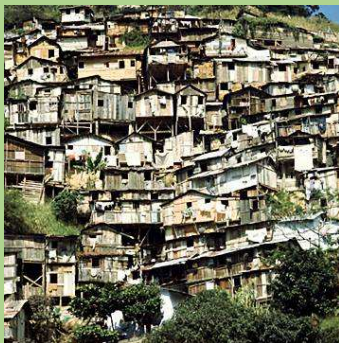
Shudra artisan



Harijan “untouchable”

### Wealth Distribution in Brazil

The distribution of income in Brazil is among the most unequal in the world and also widely varied across the country. The richest state enjoys a per capita income seven times that of the poorest state. Countrywide, the gap of wealth is huge. The richest 20 percent of the population receives 64 percent of the nation’s income, while the poorest 20 percent earns only 2 percent.



Catumbi favela

The difference between rich and poor citizens is also evident in access (or lack thereof) to education, medical care, and services such as water supply, sewage, and electricity. Housing in Brazil’s big cities reflect this inequality. Catumbi is a very poor district of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Favelas* such as Catumbi are areas of poorly built housing usually located on hillsides, and constructed mostly out of wooden planks.

## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### LITERARY DEVICES CARD

**Characterization:** The author's means of conveying to the reader a character's personality, life history, values, physical attributes, etc. Also refers directly to a description thereof.

**Conflict:** A struggle between opposing forces that are the driving force of a story. The outcome of any story provides a resolution of the conflict(s); this is what keeps the reader reading. Conflicts can exist between individual characters, between groups of characters, between a character and society, etc., and can also be purely abstract (conflicting ideas).

**Dialogue:** Where characters speak to one another; may often be used to substitute for exposition.

**Foreshadowing:** Where future events in a story, or perhaps the outcome, are suggested by the author before they happen. Foreshadowing can take many forms and be accomplished in many ways, with varying degrees of subtlety. However, if the outcome is deliberately and explicitly revealed early in a story (such as by the use of a narrator or flashback structure), such information does not constitute foreshadowing.

**Imagery:** Language that describes something in detail, using words to substitute for and create sensory stimulation, including visual imagery and sound imagery. Also refers to specific and recurring types of images, such as food imagery and nature imagery.

**Metaphor:** A direct relationship where one thing or idea substitutes for another.

**Mood:** The atmosphere or emotional condition created by the piece, within the setting.

**Setting:** The time and place where a story occurs. The setting can be specific (e.g. Salinas in 1930) or ambiguous (e.g. a large farm during economic hard times. Also refers directly to a description thereof.

**Symbolism:** The use of specific objects or images to represent abstract ideas. This term is commonly misused, describing any and all representational relationships, which in fact are more often metaphorical than symbolic. A symbol must be something tangible or visible, while the idea it symbolizes must be something abstract or universal.

**Verbal irony:** Where the meaning is intended to be the exact opposite of what the words actually mean.

## ACTIVITY TWO: SOCIAL STATUS

### INDIVIDUAL REPORT

Write an essay that describes what you believe to be the social hierarchy of the characters portrayed in the story, Of Mice and Men.

#### Evaluation Criteria:

- Essay structures ideas and arguments in a sustained and logical fashion.
- Essay uses specific rhetorical devices to support assertions (e.g. appeal to logic through reasoning, appeal to emotion or ethical belief, relate a personal anecdote, case study, or analogy).
- Clarify and defend positions with precise and relevant evidence from Of Mice and Men and your Resource Cards, including facts and/or quotes.
- Essay addresses readers' concerns, counterclaims, biases, and expectations.