



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2011 Volume I: Writing with Words and Images

Exploring Steinbeck's World through Words and Images

Curriculum Unit 11.01.08
by Sean T. Griffin

Introduction

Educators have long known that images of all kinds help students to effectively grasp and retain knowledge or lessons being taught in the classroom. When introducing a poet, a portrait will catch students' attention, building interest and curiosity while attaching a concrete image to a bard that might otherwise disappear with the ring of a bell. Historical novels, complemented by a map or a photograph, make the past come to life. Tracing the process of photosynthesis will surely be remembered much more completely with colored charts and time lines that help tell the story. Look in any classroom: images, paintings, photographs, artwork, and maps adorn the walls, supporting learning and providing that extra step that is needed for so many visual learners. In a world in which teachers increasingly find themselves competing with cell phones, text messages, high-speed images and shortening attention spans, these images become important reference points that can be focused on throughout a unit, anchors that will help students visualize the literature being studied. At the same time these images--the photos, the illustrations, the maps, the reproductions of different colors, textures and mediums--can become an individual student's launching point from which he or she can, as an individual and as a part of a larger group or community, deepen his or her learning.

But the question now is, where does the teacher cease to actively lead the students through this enhancement of images and media, and where does the interaction between image and student take over in the learning process? In *Classroom Instruction that Works*, Robert Marazano, Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock, as part of their work on how best to manage a classroom, explore the ways in which students process information. The authors assert that "knowledge is stored in two forms--a linguistic form and an imagery form." ¹ While teachers often rely on the "linguistic form" or what we associate with language and the use of words, the "imagery form" of knowledge is often underdeveloped in the classroom. The authors go on to assert that when teachers do help students with this type of work, "the effects on achievement are strong. It has even been shown that explicitly engaging students in the creation of nonlinguistic representations stimulates and increases activity in the brain." ² Here Marazano and his colleagues are asserting through research-based strategies something that many teachers have known in their hearts for years: that introducing imagery and nonlinguistic elements into any lesson is a sure way to heighten learning and increase student engagement in the classroom. Marazano, Pickering, and Pollock go on to explore the utilization of graphic organizers, pictographs and kinesthetic activity among other techniques, to illustrate how

nonlinguistic elements can be used in the classroom.

We often forget the importance of building background knowledge in today's classroom. How thoroughly can we teach Elie Wiesel's *Night* if students know nothing about the Holocaust? How deeply can students comprehend the author's message, without knowing the source of the misery and pain in the story? Can students really visualize and understand what is taking place in a Shakespearean plays without being given some context first? How can students empathize with and truly understand the plight of Oliver or Pip without learning some background on Dickens' Victorian England? Building background knowledge, giving students some context before reading literature of a different era places the student in that world, takes him or her away from the 21st century, into a world about which he or she knows very little. Students are more likely to enjoy the literature if they are easily able to interpret nuances and significant differences from their worlds.

This unit is meant to build background knowledge in my ninth-grade class before beginning to read Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* , but its strategies can be applied to the study of any novel or author on which a teacher wishes to focus. My intention is to encourage students to create pieces of knowledge in a variety of forms that, when looked at together displayed in the classroom, will foster a solid image-based understanding of Steinbeck and his world that students will refer to throughout their reading. The students will be encouraged to unlock Steinbeck's world through a host of activities and assignments that will help them to maintain a higher level of interest throughout the reading and simultaneously encourage higher-level learning and a broader knowledge base that will help them better analyze literature.

In this unit the arrangement and manipulation of images becomes a group activity that propels the learning process within the learning community. Edward R. Tufte in his book *Visual Explanations* comments on the process of creating images:

The idea is to make designs that enhance the richness, complexity, resolution, dimensionality, and clarity of the content. By extending the visual capacities of paper, video, and computer screen, we are able to extend the depth of our own knowledge and experience. ³

Tufte's examination of images in his book highlights their importance in the world, not only for the building of background and the strengthening of knowledge, but in all our understandings and lack thereof. Complementing information with images, with graphs, with photographs, artwork and visual representations brings a new dimension of interpretation to information and a new level or dimension to students' knowledge. In this unit students will expand their knowledge on a wide array of topics and grow through the experience they will share as image gatherers.

Purpose

I have several general goals I would like to achieve in the creation of this unit. It is really meant to be a large-scale nonlinguistic element of learning in which students are allowed for a week or so before reading, to turn the classroom into a living, imagery-based learning community that will not only enhance the reading of Steinbeck (or other authors that the reader may choose to focus on), but also transform the classroom itself

into a sort of museum of image-driven background knowledge utilizing cooperative learning and student choice.

The materials assembled will serve as a focal point throughout the reading of the novel. We will turn to our images for journal writing (see below), clarification when reading, class discussion and a classroom display of students' work.

I am also interested in creating a unit that can be utilized by a large number of teachers in a variety of subjects. This unit would work well as an interdisciplinary one on which Language Arts and History or Social Studies teachers could easily collaborate. I believe both Language Arts and History teachers can easily adapt this unit to make it fit their curriculum.

The unit is also designed to help teachers build their background knowledge on Steinbeck and the Depression era. I provide some materials for teachers to explore so that they can become experts on the era and will be able to guide students through their exploration of the ideas and facts of a time long past. Although I expect the implementation of this unit will and should be a learning experience for teachers as well, they should be somewhat versed in the knowledge of the period before the project begins so that they will be able to provide guidance and insights for students as they explore the material. Providing insightful background knowledge to students will help them interpret and understand the literature and the images of Steinbeck's world. It will also provide students with the material needed to make connections and read between the lines as they might otherwise not be able to do.

Words alone will not suffice in an explanation of the devastating facts of the Great Depression, the brutal nature of the Great Dust Bowl, or the need for "Okies" to travel across the country in search of a better life in California's "Salad Bowl." Images of these and other subjects are pivotal in really understanding what is going on in *Of Mice and Men* and other Steinbeck novels such as *East of Eden* or *The Grapes of Wrath* .

Finally, I hope that this unit will encourage teachers to explore the technology that has taken over our world and is slowly making its way into America's classrooms. The technology is here to stay (at least until something more advanced replaces it), and our students have embraced it. It is our duty as teachers not only to embrace it, but also to find ways to utilize technology in the classroom, to find ways to stay ahead of the curve, to find new ways to teach today's students.

Technology

I have a colleague in my school who does wonderful things with his students due mostly to the fact that he is an incredible teacher, but due in part to the fact that he embraces technology. Jim is like the AV guy from years past who has a room full of monitors, computers and recording and sound equipment connecting speakers and cameras all over his room. Recently I brought my students into his room to record some speeches they had written. I also joined his class when they did a live question-and-answer session with demonstrators from Egypt via Skype. Students love Jim's classes and learn much from participating in his teaching. Jim teaches in the 21st century, and he and his students explore worlds through technology and recordings that help students and teachers to appreciate the possibilities that technology offers in today's classroom. One of my goals with this unit is to push my teaching, my students, my classroom more towards

that use of modern technology and resources. I would like students to create recordings, in the spirit of Studs Terkel, make videos, PowerPoints, and sound bytes utilizing technology to link images, sound, and knowledge in a way that will make the reading of the novel an exciting reflection on the work the students have done. I want students and teachers to work together to discover and share knowledge on the latest trends on the Internet, the world of Skype, Garage Band, Audacity, Pandora, YouTube, podcasts and blogs, and to apply the knowledge enhanced through the technology to a novel written nearly a century ago. This unit provides a new way to explore literature, a new kind of pre-reading that attempts to keep up with the times.

Journal Writing

One of the most important items on my students' supply list every school year is their journal. In this unit students will be asked to write about the images incorporated into their mini-research topics and throughout the reading of *Of Mice and Men* .

I ask students to pick up the black-and-white, hardcover composition books that are available everywhere at the beginning of the school year. I keep their journals in my classroom in milk crates labeled for each class period. In this unit journal writing will help to extend the conversation that we have about the novel, *Of Mice and Men* , and make connections with the images that we will be using.

We begin journal writing right at the beginning of the year, and by the end of the year students have gathered some of the most exciting and creative writing that is really their own. The emphasis in writing is on creativity and fluidity. Students are never penalized for spelling or grammar mistakes. Their journals become a personal, diary-like collection of reflections, thoughts, ideas and reflections on literature. I want students to feel free to express themselves in their writing. I want them to enjoy their ideas and allow themselves the freedom not to worry about form, structure, grammar, and the elements that we regularly focus on during other types of writing such as essay and research writing. Entries that are too personal for my eyes are folded as a signal to me not to read them as I go through their journals to make comments on students' writing. Student journals will be especially important in this unit, as we will be referring back to our images throughout the reading of *Of Mice and Men* .

I also keep a journal at my desk, and whenever I ask students to partake in journal writing, I join them. The teacher joining the students in writing not only sets a good example for students to follow, but it helps to create a community of writers within the classroom that will be respected throughout the year. Similarly, we share our writing with the class or one-on-one with other students whenever we have a chance. This is an equally important part of journal writing. Students need to feel comfortable sharing their work with each other as sharing written ideas is key to a successful writing program in school. It is a good idea to begin sharing journals early in the year, so students reach that level of comfort.

Journal writing combined with the reading of literature is meant to lead students to the type of higher-order thinking that the latest changes in educational curriculum (including New Haven's) aim to enhance. Students make connections, compare/contrast, make predictions, take critical stances, and are taught to think beyond the literal interpretation of the text, as they learn to interpret and analyze a work of literature.

As you can see, journal writing plays a key role in my class every year and will be especially important before,

during, and after the reading of *Of Mice and Men* . I always ask students to share what they have written with classmates when they are done writing. It is not mandatory to share, but it is encouraged. I find that most students enjoy reading their work out loud. The more they share, the more they enjoy writing. Some possible journal topics that may be included in this unit are:

- Do a quick write on one of the Lange images from our collection.
- Make a timeline of the important events in John Steinbeck's or a character's life.
- Write a poem or story about an image of the Dust Bowl.
- Write a first-person narrative from the point of view of someone forced to live in a "Hooverville."
- Write a poem about one of the images.
- Write a poem or song about the Great Depression and record it.
- Compare an image of the Dust Bowl with one of a blizzard.
- Write a newspaper interview with someone who just escaped the Dust Bowl.
- Describe your dream home (as does George repeatedly for Lenny).
- Describe the life of a migrant worker based on the images presented.
- Write about a migrant family.
- Write a journal entry from the Migrant Mother's point of view.
- Compare the Great Depression to today's economy.
- Write a journal entry placing George and Lenny in another setting.

The Images

Ask any student to find an image on a certain topic and chances are he or she will go to one of two sites: *Google images* or *Wikipedia* . Both are a great source of images, or tools to get to images, but are not the end to the search for images on any given subject. A Google image search on "The Dust Bowl," for example, turns up nearly two million images in under half a second. There are some fabulous images here, but little

information on them: where they came from, who took them, etc. Students gathering images from this site are doing little to further their knowledge on a topic if they are simply cutting and pasting.

Similarly the *Wikipedia* entry for "The Great Dust Bowl" also provides an extensive write up on the Dust Bowl and includes images and subheadings on several related topics. Again, students are tempted to simply cut and paste from this site, but there is much more to *Wikipedia* than first meets the eye. At the time of the writing of this unit, there were twenty-five references associated with the entry, nine bibliographical entries and twelve external links. Wikipedia is a great place to start a search for images.

Teachers with smartboards in their classroom can use them to illustrate this point before letting students get started. If you don't have a smartboard, there are other ways to project your computer screen in the classroom. If it comes down to it, ask students to come and gather around your computer so they can see what you are talking about. Encourage students to seek out sites that are not only appealing to the eye, but are informative as well.

For Dorothea Lange images have students check the Oakland Museum of California's site at http://museumca.org/global/art/collections_dorothea_lange.html. The museum boasts the largest collection of Lange photos in the country and has thousands on line. Another interesting site for students to browse is www.thehistoryplace.com. The large collection of Lange photos on this page is accompanied by narrative, as are the images at

Images from the Dust Bowl are plentiful on the internet. Have students look at www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginth30s for not only photos of the Great Dust Bowl, but also videoed narratives from people who lived through the drought. Students can listen as farmers explain what it was like to be alive during those difficult times. A PBS collection found at www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/dustbowl/ not only contains a photo gallery, but it also has a film that can be watched on line as well.

As with the Dust Bowl, images of Hoovervilles are also plentiful on the internet. A search on the Library of Congress website (www.loc.gov/pictures) located over one hundred images of Hoovervilles in the collection. The Library of Congress also holds a collection from the Farm Security Administration that could be browsed for Lange photos.

Visit www.history1900s.about.com/od/photographs/tp/greatdepressionpictures for a host of images and information on the Great Depression. Use these sites and others like them to show students what is available to them if they take the time to search.

The Unit

Widely read amongst high school students, *Of Mice and Men* is a classic tale of love and friendship and the life and death of the American Dream. The work is often used in ninth- grade English, partially because it is one of Steinbeck's shorter and simpler works, but also because it is a classic tale in American literature. The protagonists in the story, Lenny and George, are the quintessential American heroes, the underdogs in search of their piece of the pie, their piece of the American Dream. George is the caretaker, the brains of the duo, while Lenny is an innocent workhorse of a man whose mental handicaps make him seem childlike

Like the story of American settlement itself, the novel focuses on the journey of the two men. At the beginning of the novel, George and Lenny are on their way to a ranch to find work, having been chased out of the last town after Lenny is accused of attacking a woman there. Lenny's fondness for soft things (he carries a dead mouse around in his pocket, stroking it like a baby's blanket) has led to trouble in the past, and, Steinbeck hints early on, it will lead to more trouble in the future.

Always in the back of the pair's minds, the motivation for their hard work, what keeps them going, is the hope that someday they will be able to settle down with their own place, with their own ranch and their own land and "live off the fat of the land." The pair is in search of the American Dream, a dream that students will quickly realize was not easy to come by during the 1930's.

Part of what makes this unit unique is that it is designed to be implemented before the actual reading of the novel takes place. The focus of the unit is not so much on literature, but on the process of gathering images that will serve as tools before, during and after the reading of *Of Mice and Men*. The process itself--the search for images, the use of the internet sources and technology, the group work--is the most important part of this unit. The images and the search for images will not only bring the literature into focus, but will also bring the class together and help build a classroom community as students spend time working in pairs and small groups to assemble images into a whole-class display.

In fact, this brief, five-day unit features very little direct instruction as students will be expected to explore their topics at first individually and then in their respective groups. The work on this unit should take place before the actual reading of the novel is undertaken, but can be referred to throughout the reading. Students are expected to explore Steinbeck's world through a host of images and nonlinguistic information that will provide them with both a substantial background on the novel and the world from which it came, while also providing a sort of living reference point that students can refer to throughout the actual reading of the novel. I try to provide teachers with ideas and information in this unit which will assist in the building of background knowledge. For my students themselves, however, I will provide little more than topics to explore and ideas on how to effectively display their findings. In other words the information gathered here will be gathered and displayed by the students. The teacher is on the sidelines, coaching, encouraging, and guiding students in their own discoveries. The end product here, which is really just the beginning of your own *Of Mice and Men* unit, will be a room or area of a room displaying images in print, photography, computer graphics, maps, recordings, and other forms in what becomes a sort of mini museum on Steinbeck's world.

Something as simple as a class-designed bulletin board or as complex as a Web site will provide students and teachers with easy access to the material that they have gathered. Students will build their background knowledge on Steinbeck and his characters through the gathering and sharing of images and ideas, including photos, maps, artwork, and text, and audio that come from researching the material from the unit. The following subtopics serve as mini-research topics for students in this unit and can be added to or eliminated as teachers see fit.

Steinbeck and His Work

John Steinbeck is one of the most successful and widely read authors of the twentieth century. Born in Salinas, California in 1902, Steinbeck used his boyhood home as one of the major settings of most of his novels, becoming one of the leading regional American writers of our times. He attended Stanford University and began his publication career with the *Stanford Speculator*. His years at Stanford were marked by a noticeable uneasiness in which he dropped in and out of his studies, eventually leaving Stanford without a degree. A series of manual labor jobs during this period of time allowed him to study the common man who came to be

the hero of many of his novels. His first novel, *Cup of Gold*, was published in 1929, and so began an illustrious career for the author that led to the publication of scores of pieces, short stories, plays and novels, one of which *The Grapes of Wrath*, won him the Pulitzer prize in 1940.

Many of Steinbeck's novels deal with the plight of the common man at the height of Depression Era America and the plight of the migrant worker. This focus seems to stem directly from the author's work reporting on migrant conditions in a series of articles for *The San Francisco News* in 1936. The resulting series, entitled "The Harvest Gypsies," detailed the desperate situation that the migrants faced as they followed the crops, racing to eke out a living in desperate times. ⁴ Steinbeck became a voice for workers as his literature became more popular and his message was related more widely through print and film. *East of Eden*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Of Mice and Men* explore the journey his characters undertake and utilize the Salinas Valley in California as a sort of Mecca where dreams are sometimes fulfilled and other times defiled.

Of Mice and Men is one of Steinbeck's most widely read masterpieces. Set in Salinas Valley, California during the 1930s, the novella really reaches back to an era now long gone in America. It was a time of ranch hands and migrant workers, of hard work and hard times. Lenny and George have come west like so many other migrants before them, to the land of golden opportunity and the rich "salad bowl" of California and the nation.

The Salinas Valley

Steinbeck's boyhood home shows up in many of his novels and becomes an important recurring symbol of the American dream. This vast area of California, stretching over 90 miles and encompassing over a dozen towns, is the promised land, the destination of many of Steinbeck's characters, including Lenny and George from *Of Mice and Men*. There are moments in many of his books that the author seems to pause, sit back and observe the wonder of the "salad bowl" of California. It is the destination of the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the promised land in *East of Eden*, and it is the setting for the rise and fall of Lenny and George in *Of Mice and Men*. The valley always remained a special place for Steinbeck, and it shows up throughout his many of his novels. It is the land of dreams and hopes. George tells Lenny about the place they will someday share in *Of Mice and Men*, "Got a little win'mill. Got a little shack on it, an a chicken run. Got a kitchen, orchard, cherries, apples, peaches. cots, nuts, got a few berries. They's a place for alfalfa, and plenty water to flood it." ⁵

Lenny and George are on a journey in pursuit of the American Dream and the Salinas Valley is as close as they ever get to it. R.W. B. Lewis comments in *John Steinbeck: The Fitful Daemon* :

But in seeing his native Salinas Valley in California as a new Eden, the scene of a new chance for man and for men, and in transporting his heroes thither from an exhausted East, Steinbeck is not only continuing in an American tradition, enacting again an old American dream. He is also suggesting that the dream itself has moved west and has settled there, that it is now California which stimulates in its inhabitants the intoxicating sense of fresh beginnings and untroubled potentialities which the eastern scene once stimulated in Emerson, in Thoreau, in Whitman. ⁶

The Salinas Valley has surely earned a place in the collection of images that will make up the end product of this unit and will begin students on their exploration of the writing of one of America's best authors.

Of Mice and Men and the Great Depression

Any study of the Great Depression and its impact on American society and the culture of our country will surely include references to John Steinbeck. As Dorothea Lange became the purveyor of visual representation, and FDR the political icon of the era, John Steinbeck became the literal voice of the people throughout his novels and articles. From as early on as the publication of the "Harvest Gypsies" to the writing of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*, Steinbeck's response to the crumbling of the American dream under the pressure of economic and political elements resounded throughout his writing. He became the voice of the many that he had labored side by side with during his teen and college years. And although Steinbeck does not speak directly about the Depression Era in *Of Mice and Men*, it is clear that Lenny and George are byproducts of that event. Their journey really began, like so many others at that time, as a search for employment in Depression Era America. Lenny and George set out to capture the American dream. They move from ranch to ranch as so many other laborers and migrant workers did at that time, going from farm to farm, job to job just trying to make an honest living and put some food on the table. These hard times shaped American culture, politics, and literature like no other since those of the Civil War.

Several factors can be cited as having some influence on our understanding of the Great Depression and therefore on our understanding of the life and work of John Steinbeck. These other aspects of the Great Depression need to be explored by the students in order to really understand the age that Steinbeck was writing about. I have briefly mentioned some of them here.

The Dust Bowl

The Dust Bowl was one of the contributing factors to the migration that accompanied the Great Depression. A drought that hit the Midwest left many farms useless and sent farm families searching for better times. Robert McElvaine comments in *The Great Depression*, "The drought may have helped raise farm prices, but that was small consolation to the roughly one million 'Okies' who were driven off their land by the dry weather and farm mechanization." ⁷

Although the event itself is not mentioned in *Of Mice and Men*, images of the Dust Bowl showing homes and machinery buried in a dark, all-encompassing dust, like snow mounds of the northeast, give students a behind-the-scenes look at what farmers and ranchers in the Midwest were dealing with. The Dust Bowl and farm takeovers sent millions of Americans westward in search of a better life and a way to make a living. Lenny and George are a part of that migration, part of that desperate journey that sent so many to the West, to California, to the Promised Land.

Dorothea Lange

Much as Steinbeck became the voice of the migrant worker during the depression, so too did Dorothea Lange come to represent the face of the Great Depression as she took to the road to document the people who were suffering throughout those years. Anyone searching for images of the era is certain to come up with famous photos taken by Lange. With a career in photography that lasted more than four decades, Lange, much like Steinbeck, focused her lens on what was happening to the American people in those incredibly hard times. Much like Steinbeck's words, Lange's photography revealed both the struggle and the spirit of the common man in America. Keith Davis in *The Photographs of Dorothea Lange* comments on the power of Lange's photography:

Motivated by the social turmoil around her, Lange took her camera from the studio into the streets, tentatively at first and then compulsively. She recorded the despair and uncertainty of the urban unemployed and the grinding poverty of migrant families living in crude roadside camps. Her photographs are at once bluntly factual and deeply sympathetic. While Lange recorded innumerable scenes of destitution, she consistently evoked the resilience, faith, and determination of her subjects. As a result, her photographs celebrate the basic strength of the American character--the strength required to carry millions of people through this long, frightening chapter in the nation's history. ⁸

Lange's photographs complement the writing of John Steinbeck perfectly. Students reading *Of Mice and Men* need look no further than the photo entitled *Hardeman County, Texas, 1937* to see the ranch hands whom George and Lenny join at the beginning of the novel. Wearing tattered jeans and sideways hats, the group of five men standing in front of what could be a bunk house much like the one that Steinbeck's characters called their home during the novel, epitomize the hard-working American worker: hard, tough as nails and looking as destitute as his surroundings. Lange's most famous photo, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, March 1936*, shows a woman with a look of anxiety and despair on her face as her children huddle around her. This is the Lange image most associated with the Great Depression. Much as Tom Joad from *The Grapes of Wrath* became the voice of the depression in literature, Florence Thompson from the Lange photo became the face of the era. Other images from Lange's photography that will work well in this unit include *Migratory Cotton Picker, Eloy, Arizona, November 1940*, showing the weathered hands and face of a cotton picker, sunburned and tired even in the black-and-white photo. *White Angel Breadline, San Francisco, 1933* is another Depression-era image that reveals the desperation of the times. In it one man stands alone, his back towards the breadline, hands clasped and hat over his eyes, revealing only a frown on his face. There are numerous other Lange photos that will be useful to look back on once the reading of the novel has begun.

Studs Terkel and *Hard Times*

Studs Terkel was one of our nation's first to document the Great Depression through the eyes of the common man. He traveled the country interviewing hundreds of Americans from all backgrounds about their situations during the Depression. Terkel's interviewing process allowed history to be recorded and remembered (he recorded most of his interviews) through the eyes of a wide array of Americans. Students can benefit greatly by reading or hearing the words of real people who lived through or have some personal connection to that era. In his book *Hard Times*, Terkel divides his narratives into several chapters (The March, The Song, Hard Travelin, etc.) which focus on different aspects of the era. Many of the narratives are just a few pages and will make great parallel reading for students as they prepare themselves to read the novel. Emma Tiller, whom Terkel describes only as a woman who "worked in Western Texas as a cook" ⁹ is great example of the first-hand narrative that is used in the book. Speaking of how she and her colleagues tried to help the migrants coming through town, Emma comments, "We would gather stuff out in the field, pull our corn, roastin' ears, and put 'em in a cloth bag, because a paper bag would tear. When they get hungry, they can stop and build a fire and roast this corn. We did this ourselves, we loved it like that. And give them salt and stuff we figured would last 'em until he gets to the next place." ¹⁰

Tiller's narrative, as well as the hundreds of others documented in this and other Terkel books, becomes a valuable tool in helping students piece together images that they gather. Students might want to play the role of the narrator, making recordings of the narratives or make up their own characters and narratives that might mimic Terkel's nonfiction pieces as well as Steinbeck's fictional ones. Soundbites made through

Audacity or *Garage Band* can be set to images in a display that will peak students' interest on the narratives.

Hoovervilles

"Hoovervilles" were small ramshackle settlements that sprouted up across the trail of the migrant workers heading west as they searched for work. Workers used any means possible to build shelters for themselves, and as they followed the crops, they left the settlements behind them. The settlements began being called "Hoovervilles" after President Herbert Hoover who, having served from 1929 to 1933, was blamed for much of the policies that led the country to the Great Depression.

Although Lenny and George did not live in a "Hooverville" during the time period covered in *Of Mice and Men*, many thousands of their contemporaries would have. Images of Hoovervilles are available on the web, and much like the photos of the Great Dust Bowl, they will serve as a reminder to students as to the conditions many lived in at the time of the Great Depression.

Mini-Research Projects

I start my students out by letting them choose from the topics listed above. I actually cut the topics out and allow the students to choose them as if they are taking a card from a deck during a card trick. Students are given a few minutes to trade if they want to, and then we converge as a class to discuss how we will go about beginning the research that will make up the body of images for our classroom display. Students are required to create both a written "mini-research paper" and a visual representation of the topic.

All students, in all schools should be able to write a two-page mini-research paper on their topic and find an image that can accompany it. Doing a "dry run" of the project this year, my students were able to utilize the school library to do the research for the papers and find images that accompanied their projects. Some students created time lines on the life of John Steinbeck, others simply framed black-and-white images from the Dust Bowl, another reproduced the seal of Stanford University, and made a mini poster displaying information on the university that Steinbeck attended. Still another student created a newspaper front page on the stock market crash and the start of the Great Depression. Maps of Salinas valley or of the area devastated by the Great Dust Bowl, and another tracing the migration route of the migrant workers all adorned my walls at the beginning of this unit. All the students needed was a library, pens, pencils markers, rulers and construction paper, and they were able to put together a fabulous display on Steinbeck and his world.

But this display would have been quite different if it had been in my classroom two years ago in one of New Haven's most successful middle schools. In that setting students had access to eight classroom computers that lined the back of the room. In that setting my approach to the building of the background knowledge would have included more technology: recordings, slide shows, web designs, etc. While the unit will work without an abundance of technology, when students have access to the technology, especially in the classroom, of course teachers should utilize it.

Start out with a classroom blog. Sites like *bloggster.com* allow you to create a site for free where students can communicate, post photos, comment on each other's work, etc. The site could become a sort of virtual meeting place for students to share their findings as they begin putting their projects together. The site allows you to personalize your blog so that everyone in the world is not viewing your students' work, and the site also monitors what goes onto the site so that students are not exposed to what can be inappropriate material. Nevertheless, if you decide to use the *bloggster* site or a similar internet workspace site, you will still have to

monitor the exchanges your students partake in.

With the technology available, I would also allow students to create slide shows or PowerPoint presentations utilizing the computers available. If you have not worked with students using PowerPoint before, don't be dissuaded. Students usually can pick up on how to make a presentation quite easily. I ask students to plan their slides before using the computers. Students can import photos and images from the internet and can add sound as well. There is really quite a bit you can do with PowerPoint alone: arranging slides of images, adding animation, sound, narration, creating a show or a photo album. Take some time before beginning the unit to explore PowerPoint and its functions, even creating your own show as a sample for students of what you expect them to achieve.

Another program worth exploring is *Audacity* (or *Garage Band* for Mac users). These programs will allow you and your students to experiment with audio that can accompany the images you have discovered. The programs allow you to record several layers of audio, manipulating tone and pitch and adding sound effects to make soundtracks that would complement the images and research your students have done. Recordings can be imported to a PowerPoint presentation or slide show. Students might consider recording their original mini reports and setting the recordings to images. A dramatic reading on the Dust Bowl with sound effects and accompanying images is sure to peak students' interest in the subject. Once again, explore the programs, make your own recordings and demonstrate how you might use *Audacity* or *Garage Band* in your presentation.

There are numerous other ways to utilize technology in this pre-reading unit. Students may want to create a fictitious *Facebook* page for John Steinbeck, Dorothea Lange's subjects or a migrant worker. Websites such as *ezclasssites.com* and *ehow.com* guide teachers in the production of free class websites. Create a class website early in the year and use it to document the work you do in this unit.

Once again, it is up to the teacher and his or her limitations as far as classroom technology and resources goes as to how far this pre-reading session develops. Whether your students make a simple bulletin board with markers, construction paper and scissors, or they delve into the ever-expanding world of technological wonders, the results will hopefully be the same: students will enjoy working together to create something that not only builds background information and will help them better understand the novel at hand, but will also lead to a new understanding as to how many aspects of life and history are connected and intertwined.

Lesson Plans

The following sample lesson plans are provided for key moments in this unit. I have tried to provide a sample from what I envision as the beginning, middle, and end of the unit. The lessons are based on fifty-minute class periods.

Sample Lesson Plan One: Getting Started

Objectives

- Students will be able to "quick write" journal entries on Steinbeck and the Great Depression

- Students will be able to share information as a class
- Students will be able to choose research topics
- Students will be able to make predictions on topics to be researched
- Students will be able to understand assignment

Materials

- Student journals
- Pre-reading topics written out on flashcards

Initiation

Ask students what they know about the Great Depression or John Steinbeck. Write down a few of their ideas on the board.

Procedure

After your brief discussion, remind students what a "quick write" is (a short writing session in which everyone continuously writes whatever comes to mind on a given subject). Give students about four or five minutes to write about what they know about the Great Depression. The teacher should also be writing during the writing time.

After students have had a chance to write, ask volunteers to read their entries out loud. Often students are reluctant to share what they have written, but the more you allow them to share, the more they will, and you will soon have a community of writers in your classroom.

Finally ask students to "pick a card." They will be choosing their mini-research topics. Give them three minutes to trade with each other in case they don't like what they chose and then ask them all to write predictions on what they expect to find in their research. Share predictions as a class.

Closure

At this point in the unit, students have no idea what they are about to undertake. It may be best to handle the unit and research in that way so that students do not become overwhelmed at the task associated with the mini-research papers. Give the students some instruction as to how you want the paper completed and give them a deadline of when you would like to see a first (if you would like to incorporate writer workshop) or a final draft.

Sample Lesson Plan Two: Discussing Images

Objectives

- Students will be able to understand important role an image plays in the conveyance of information
- Students will be able to brainstorm types of images
- Students will be able to list types of images in journals and decide on which best suits their topic
- Students will be able to write a plan for incorporating images into their projects

Materials

- Student journals
- completed mini-research topics

Initiation

Ask students to define *image* , discuss how an image changes or deepens knowledge in viewers.

Procedure

Explain to students that many people became homeless and lost their jobs during the Great Depression. In order to highlight the difference the introduction of an image to a lesson can make, lecture the students on the topic for five to ten minutes and see what kind of reaction you elicit.

Next, display a series of Lange photos: *Against the Wall, San Francisco, 1934* ; *Scene Along "Skid Row," Howard Street, San Francisco, February, 1937* ; *Oklahoma Family on Highway between Blythe and Indio, California, August 1936* . Ask students to write down their feelings about the photos in their journals. Take a few minutes to share their thoughts.

Ask students how introducing images into the discussion changed how they felt about homelessness and the Great Depression or how they felt about learning about the topic. Have student share their experience with images and learning in other classrooms. How do other teachers use images? How does this help a lesson? Why?

Help students brainstorm sources of images and decide in general terms what images would fit which reports that they have completed.

Closure

Ask students to get into small groups and discuss what images and sources of images they could add to their

reports and to the class in order to enhance learning. Ask students to write a full-page plan of action on how they will enhance their own report and add to the classroom project on Steinbeck.

Sample Lesson Plan Three--The Grand Finale

Objectives

- Students will be able to present completed projects to class
- Students will be able to generate questions on topics
- Students will be able to predict significance of topics in regards to *Of Mice and Men*

Materials

- Student journals
- completed projects

Initiation

Explain to students that the last couple of days of the unit are meant for class sharing of research and images gathered thus far. Allow students to get materials ready, and you should also be ready to assist students with any technology needed for presentations today.

Procedure

After students have set up, ask for volunteers to present materials. Before the presentations begin, write the initials T-A-G on the board. Many of my students will recognize this as a way to get feedback on projects (tell something you liked, ask a question, give a suggestion as to how to improve the project). As students present their work, encourage others to use the TAG method in order to keep everyone engaged. Allow students to share their feedback.

After students have presented their projects, have them set them up in the room, on the bulletin board, in an area that you have designated for display of the images

Closure

Remind students that these projects will serve as reference points throughout the reading of *Of Mice and Men*. Remind students that part of their final grade on the project is based on individual's setting up the material gathered (with your supervision). Ask students to comment in their journals on how working with images has expanded their knowledge of their mini-research topics.

Annotated Bibliography

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Hard Times, the 30's . New York: Time-Life Books, 1998. This book provides a complete overview of the 1930's along with text and photography made famous by the publishers of Time-Life Books.

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Notes

- 1 Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering and Jane E. Pollock. *Classroom Instruction* , 73.
- 2 Marazano, Pickering and Pollock, *Classroom Instruction* , 73.
- 3 Edward R. Tufte, *Visual Explanations* , 9.
- 4 T.H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years* , 456.
- 5 John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* , 57.
- 6 R.W.B. Lewis, "John Steinbeck: The Fitful Daemon," 168.
- 7 Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression* , 150.
- 8 Keith F. Davis *The Photographs of Dorothea Lange* , 7.
- 9 Studs Terkel, *Hard Times* , 44.
- 10 Terkel, *Hard Times* , 44.

Appendix: Implementing District Standards

Connecticut's Common Core of Learning Program Goals

Having completed this unit, students will have achieved the following Connecticut's Common Core of Learning Program Goals for Language Arts:

- Create works using the language arts in visual, oral and written texts;
- Read, write, speak, listen and view to construct meaning of written, visual and oral texts;
- Choose and apply strategies that enhance the fluent and proficient use of the language arts; (brainstorming, use of graphic

organizers)

- Read with understanding and respond thoughtfully to a variety of texts.

When done with this unit, students will have achieved the following Connecticut's Common Core of Learning Program Goals for the arts:

- Create (imagine, experiment, plan, make, evaluate, refine and present/exhibit) art works that express concepts, ideas and feelings in each art form;
- Respond (select, experience, describe, analyze, interpret and evaluate) with understanding to diverse art works and performances in each art form;
- Understand the connections among the arts, other disciplines and daily life.

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