

OF MICE AND MEN

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL

- John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902.
- He worked on farms and ranches during vacations from university.
- He always intended becoming a writer.
- Of Mice and Men was first published in 1937 and is set in the early to middle 1930's.
- Steinbeck also adapted the novel into a three-act play, also published in 1937.

The Dustbowl and migrant workers

- A recession which began in the mid 1920's coupled with a severe drought caused mass migration to **California**.

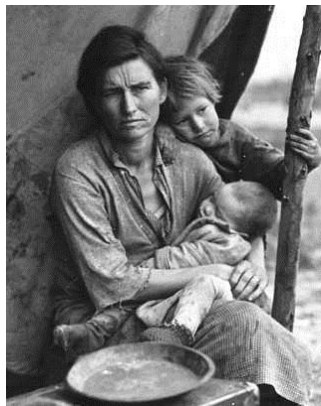


- Farmers had to sell more crops to make the same amount of money.
- Due to this increased demand farmers bought up more land and invested in expensive agricultural equipment to farm.
- This put most farmers in debt.
- 1929 – **Wall Street Crash** – banks collapsed – demanded money back that had been loaned to farmers.
- Many farmers lost everything and became homeless.
- The average income between 1929 and 1932 was reduced by 40%.
- Some ranches became larger as those that could afford to, purchased neighbouring farms.
- 1930's the **American Dream** became the **American Nightmare** as the population plunged into poverty and hunger.
- The best hope for a better life was California.
- 1931 a seven year drought began affecting the area known as the **Great Plains** – Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, resulting in huge migration of workers to California.

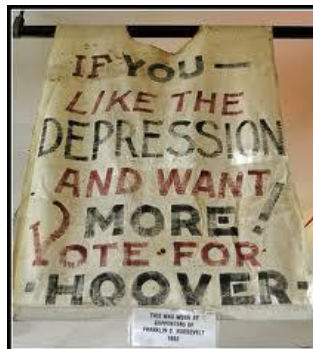
- These areas became known as the '**Dust Bowl**'. Listen to Roosevelt talking about this from link on Mice and Men homepage.



- 20% of migrant workers were from Oklahoma and they collectively became known as **Okies**.



- From 1929 – 1932 **Herbert Hoover** was President – he offered prosperity but did little to help or support poor families. He created shanty towns known as '**Hoovervilles**' for the poor to live in. he promised better times but delivered nothing and during his presidency most poor people lost hope of ever having a better life.



- Hoover said that

'Patience and self-reliance are all that the American people need to get them through this passing incident in their National Lives' – he completely misunderstood and mishandled the situation.



- By 1933 unemployment was at 25% (15 million).
- In 1932 **Franklin D Roosevelt** was elected as President and came up with a **'New Deal'**, to restore prosperity for poor Americans.
- In his inaugural address to the American people he famously said:

'The only thing we have to fear is fear itself'.

- On his election he immediately put in place a sweeping programme of economic and agricultural reforms to help the poor.
- He regularly broadcast on the radio – known as **'Fireside Chats'** to give hope to millions of Americans.