

# The New Criterion

## Notebook

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### Of mice & melodrama

by [Jonathan Leaf](#)

On John Steinbeck's place in the American curriculum.

However much it may disappoint cynics, we must confess a hopeful fact: most of the books assigned by high school English teachers in this country are worth reading. Many of them may well be termed classics.

One recent study of what books were most often taught in American public schools had these as the top ten: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Julius Caesar*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Hamlet*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Lord of the Flies*. Although the order varied, the list for private schools was identical but for one difference: *The Odyssey* took *Of Mice and Men*'s place. This is a powerful argument for privatizing public education.

It is not that John Steinbeck's novel is of a slightly inferior quality to the other books listed. Rather, it is that it would be like submitti ...

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