The Importance of Whit

Although he doesn’t play a prominent role in the action, Whit is the most important character in John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men. While George and Lennie are the focus of the novel, the other characters contribute in different ways to help the reader understand the novel’s message. Whit is a solitary worker on the ranch. The narrator introduces him as a “young” worker whose “sloping shoulders were bent forward and he walked heavily on his heels, as though he carried the invisible grain bag” (45). Whit, although described as young, still has the worn-down appearance of a guy who has worked on ranches for years. Steinbeck wants to highlight the negative effects of working on ranches, and in particular, going through life as a lonely ranch worker. Not only is Whit physically worn down, he comes across as a character who is uncaring. Only moments after Candy’s dog is put down by Carlson, Whit is joking around with other characters. He is twice described by the narrator as “laughing” while playing cards with George, despite the obvious emotional pain Candy is going through. Like Carlson, Whit is a character whose time on the ranch has taken away his compassion for others, making him only concerned with himself and his own well-being. Steinbeck uses Whit to symbolize what George or Lennie could become if they did not have the other to look out for him.