



# **OF MICE AND MEN**

BY JOHN STEINBECK

YEAR 9 ENGLISH  
RESOURCE BOOKLET

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Homeroom: \_\_\_\_\_



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## List of Sources

*Any materials that are not original works by St Leonard's staff were sourced from the following websites:*

- Curve Learn ([englishtutorhome2.blogspot.com](http://englishtutorhome2.blogspot.com))
- Digital History ([www.digitalhistory.uh.edu](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu))
- The Hypertexts ([www.thehypertexts.com](http://www.thehypertexts.com))
- Library of Congress ([www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov))
- Litcharts ([www.litcharts.com](http://www.litcharts.com))
- Sparknotes ([www.sparknotes.com](http://www.sparknotes.com))
- TES Connect ([www.tes.co.uk](http://www.tes.co.uk))
- United States History ([www.u-s-history.com](http://www.u-s-history.com))
- University of NSW ([student.unsw.edu.au](http://student.unsw.edu.au))

# YEAR 9 ENGLISH: 'OF MICE AND MEN' UNIT OVERVIEW

## Overarching Question:

- Do we all need a dream and a friend to share it with?

## Essential Questions:

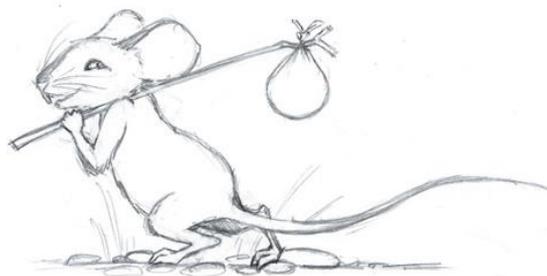
- What is meant by the American Dream?
- Is the American dream a destructive or empowering force?
- What leads a person to become isolated in a community?
- Can social disadvantage be overcome?
- How much control does an individual have over their destiny?
- What is the value of loyalty in friendship?
- Can you be cruel to be kind?

## Assessment:

- Text Response Essay: 80 minute in-class test (Term 2 Week 2)
- Text Response Essay: Mid-Year Exam (Term 2 Week 8)



# INTRODUCTORY MATERIALS





# 'US TWO'

Poem by A.A. Milne

Wherever I am, there's always Pooh,  
There's always Pooh and Me.  
Whatever I do, he wants to do,  
"Where are you going today?" says Pooh:  
"Well, that's very odd 'cos I was too.  
Let's go together," says Pooh, says he.  
"Let's go together," says Pooh.

"What's twice eleven?" I said to Pooh.  
("Twice what?" said Pooh to Me.)  
"I think it ought to be twenty-two."  
"Just what I think myself," said Pooh.  
"It wasn't an easy sum to do,  
But that's what it is," said Pooh, said he.  
"That's what it is," said Pooh.

"Let's look for dragons," I said to Pooh.  
"Yes, let's," said Pooh to Me.  
We crossed the river and found a few-  
"Yes, those are dragons all right," said Pooh.  
"As soon as I saw their beaks I knew.  
That's what they are," said Pooh, said he.  
"That's what they are," said Pooh.

"Let's frighten the dragons," I said to Pooh.  
"That's right," said Pooh to Me.  
"I'm not afraid," I said to Pooh,  
And I held his paw and I shouted "Shoo!  
Silly old dragons!"- and off they flew.

"I wasn't afraid," said Pooh, said he,  
"I'm never afraid with you."

So wherever I am, there's always Pooh,  
There's always Pooh and Me.  
"What would I do?" I said to Pooh,  
"If it wasn't for you," and Pooh said: "True,  
It isn't much fun for One, but Two,  
Can stick together, says Pooh, says he. "That's how it is," says Pooh.

Using the poem 'Us Two' as inspiration, answer the following questions. Use examples, from the poem if possible, in order to illustrate your responses:

1. What exactly is 'friendship'?
2. What will determine whether or not a person is a 'friend'?
3. Why is friendship important?
4. What can a strong friendship allow us to do?



# 'TO A MOUSE'

Original poem by Robert Burns

Modern translation by Michael Burch

## ORIGINAL TEXT

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie,  
O, what panic's in thy breastie!  
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,  
Wi' bickering brattle!  
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,  
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
An' justifies that ill opinion,  
Which makes thee startle,  
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,  
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;  
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!  
A daimen-icker in a thrave  
'S a sma' request:  
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,  
An' never miss't!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!  
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!  
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,  
O' foggage green!  
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,  
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' wast,  
An' weary Winter comin fast,  
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,  
Thou thought to dwell,  
Till crash! the cruel coulter past  
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee-bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,  
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!  
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,  
But house or hald.  
To thole the Winter's sleety dribble,  
An' cranreuch cauld!

## MODERN TRANSLATION

Sleek, tiny, timorous, cowering beast,  
why's such panic in your breast?  
Why dash away, so quick, so rash,  
in a frenzied flash  
when I would be loath to run after you  
with a murderous plowstaff!

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion  
has broken Nature's social union,  
and justifies that bad opinion  
which makes you startle,  
when I'm your poor, earth-born companion  
and fellow mortal!

I have no doubt you sometimes thieve;  
What of it, friend? You too must live!  
A random corn-ear in a shock's  
a small behest; it-  
'll give me a blessing to know such a loss;  
I'll never miss it!

Your tiny house lies in a ruin,  
its fragile walls wind-rent and strewn!  
Now nothing's left to construct you a new one  
of mosses green  
since bleak December's winds, ensuing,  
blow fast and keen!

You saw your fields laid bare and waste  
with weary winter closing fast,  
and cozy here, beneath the blast,  
you thought to dwell,  
till crash! the cruel iron ploughshare passed  
straight through your cell!

That flimsy heap of leaves and stubble  
had cost you many a weary nibble!  
Now you're turned out, for all your trouble,  
less house and hold,  
to endure cold winter's icy dribble  
and hoarfrosts cold!

But Mousie, thou are no thy-lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men,  
Gang aft agley,  
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,  
For promis'd joy!

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!  
The present only toucheth thee:  
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,  
On prospects drear!  
An' forward, tho' I canna see,  
I guess an' fear!

But mouse-friend, you are not alone  
in proving foresight may be vain:  
the best-laid schemes of Mice and Men  
go oft awry,  
and leave us only grief and pain,  
for promised joy!

Still, friend, you're blessed compared with me!  
Only *present* dangers make *you* flee:  
But, ouch!, behind me I can see  
grim prospects drear!  
While forward-looking seers, we  
humans guess and fear!



The title of Steinbeck's novel comes from a poem by the 18th century Scottish poet Robbie Burns, which is written in an old Scottish dialect. It is about a mouse which carefully builds a winter nest in a wheat field, only for it to be destroyed by a ploughman. The mouse had dreamed of a safe, warm winter and is now faced with the harsh reality of cold, loneliness and possible death. There is a parallel here with George and Lennie's joyful fantasy of a farm of their own, and its all-too-predictable destruction at the end of the story. The two main themes in *Of Mice and Men* – foreshadowed by the reference to Burns' mouse – are loneliness and dreams. These two themes interlock: people who are lonely have most need of dreams to help them through.



# **BACKGROUND: THE AMERICAN DREAM**

## **What is the American Dream?**

James Truslow Adams, in his book *The Epic of America*, which was written in 1931, stated that the American dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." (p.214-215)

The authors of the United States' Declaration of Independence held certain truths to be self-evident: "that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." Might this sentiment be considered the foundation of the American Dream?

Were homesteaders who left the big cities of the east to find happiness and their piece of land in the unknown wilderness pursuing these inalienable Rights? Were the immigrants who came to the United States looking for their bit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, their Dream? And what did the desire of the veteran of World War II - to settle down, to have a home, a car and a family - tell us about this evolving Dream? Is the American Dream attainable by all Americans?

Some say, that the American Dream has become the pursuit of material prosperity - that people work more hours to get bigger cars, fancier homes, the fruits of prosperity for their families - but have less time to enjoy their prosperity. Others say that the American Dream is beyond the grasp of the working poor who must work two jobs to insure their family's survival. Yet others look toward a new American Dream with less focus on financial gain and more emphasis on living a simple, fulfilling life.

Thomas Wolfe said, "...to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunity ....the right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him."

# **BACKGROUND: THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

On October 4 1929, millions of dollars were wiped out in an event that became known as the Wall Street Crash. It led to the Depression in America which crippled the country from 1930 - 1936. People lost their life savings when firms and banks went bust, and 12 - 15 million men and women - one third of America's population - were unemployed.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

The Great Depression was steeper and more protracted in the United States than in other industrialized countries. The unemployment rate rose higher and remained higher longer than in any other western country. As it deepened, the Depression had far-reaching political consequences. The Depression vastly expanded the scope and scale of the federal government and created the modern welfare state. It gave rise to a philosophy that the federal government should provide a safety net for the elderly, the jobless, the disabled, and the poor, and that the federal government was responsible for ensuring the health of the nation's economy and the welfare of its citizens.

The stock market crash of October 1929 brought the economic prosperity of the 1920s to a symbolic end. For the next ten years, the United States was mired in a deep economic depression. By 1933, unemployment had soared to 25 percent, up from 3.2 percent in 1929. Industrial production declined by 50 percent, international trade plunged 30 percent, and investment fell 98 percent.

## **CAUSES OF THE DEPRESSION**

Causes of the Great Depression included: insufficient purchasing power among the middle class and the working class to sustain high levels of production; falling crop and commodity prices prior to the Depression; the stock market's dependence on borrowed money; and wrongheaded government policies, including high tariffs that reduced international trade and contracted the money supply.

## **POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES**

The Great Depression transformed the American political and economic landscape. It produced a major political realignment. It strengthened the government's presence in American life, spawning such innovations as national old-age pensions, unemployment compensation, aid to dependent children, public housing, federally-subsidized school lunches, the minimum wage, and stock market regulation. It fundamentally altered labour relations, producing a revived union movement and a national labour policy protective of collective bargaining. It transformed the farm economy by introducing federal subsidies. Above all, it led Americans to view the federal government as an agency of action and reform and the ultimate protector of public well-being.

## **THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND AMERICAN CULTURE**

The Great Depression challenged certain basic precepts of American culture, especially the faith in individual self-help, business, the inevitability of progress, and limited government. The Depression encouraged a search for the real America.

*Source: Digital History*

# **BACKGROUND: THE DUST BOWL**

## **A PROMISED LAND**

When pioneers began to migrate across the country in the middle of the 19th century, they were in search of ideal farmland. What they saw, in the vast expanse of prairie in the Midwest, was a promised land. The grass that covered the plains stood six feet high and stretched all the way from Canada south to Texas. Homesteaders flocked to the grasslands, certain that they had found the richest soil in the world and the ideal place to settle down. Men began to clear the land — using the endless prairie to grow wheat, and the trees to build houses, barns and outbuildings.

What was unknown to these early pioneers was that the grass and trees of the plains essentially nourished and held the soil in place with their tough roots. When they were gone, the moisture that would have gone to the roots ran off into creeks, streams and rivers — basically carrying the land with it. The scene was set for the Dust Bowl.

In 1930, there was no better place to be a farmer than in the Southern Plains, where men and women had turned untamed prairie into one of the most prosperous regions in the whole country. The rest of the nation was struggling with the initial effects of the Great Depression, but in wheat country, farmers were reaping a record-breaking crop.

With the onset of World War I, the demand for wheat had been astonishing. Farmers were paid record prices. Thus, to the farmer, it made sense to turn every inch of the Southern Plains into profit. During the war, the land produced millions and millions of bushels of wheat and corn, which helped to feed America as well as numerous nations overseas.

The farming practices that made the plains so productive were beginning to take a toll on the land. The grasslands had been deeply ploughed and planted. During the years when there was adequate rainfall, the land produced bountiful crops. However, as a drought that started in the early 1930s persisted, the farmers kept ploughing and planting with increasingly dismal results.

In 1930 and early 1931, the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles were known as the most prosperous regions in the nation. For plains farmers, the decade opened with prosperity and growth. But in the summer of 1931, those farmers would face the most difficult eight years of their lives. The rain simply stopped.

## **CAUSE AND EFFECT**

It had taken a thousand years for Nature to build an inch of topsoil on the Southern Plains, but it took only minutes for one good blow to sweep it all away. The water level of lakes dropped by five feet or more. The wind picked up the dry soil that had nothing to hold it down. Great black clouds of dust began to blot out the sun. In some places, the dust drifted like snow, darkening the sky for days, covering even well-sealed homes with a thick layer of dust on everything. Dust storms engulfed entire towns.

The primary impact area of the Dust Bowl, as it came to be known, was on the Southern Plains. The Northern Plains weren't so badly affected, but the drought, dust, and agricultural decline were felt there as well. The agricultural devastation helped to lengthen the Great Depression, whose effects were felt worldwide.

One hundred million acres of the Southern Plains were turning into a wasteland of the Dust Bowl. Large sections of five states were affected — Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico.

In 1932, the national weather bureau reported 14 dust storms. The next year, they were up to 38. The dust was so thick that people scooped up bucketsful while cleaning house. Dust blocked exterior doors; to get outside, people had to climb out their windows and shovel the dust away. Dust coated everything.

Nevertheless, farmers kept on ploughing, hopeful that the rains would return in a matter of days, or perhaps months. In the spring of 1934, the massive drought impacted 27 states severely and affected more than 75 percent of the country. The Dust Bowl was result of the worst drought in U.S. history.

## A MEAGRE EXISTENCE

Families survived on cornbread, beans, and milk. People were beginning to give up hope, and a mass exodus — the largest migration in American history — ensued from the plains. Many families packed their belongings, piled them on their cars and moved westward, fleeing the dust and desert of the Midwest for Washington, Oregon and California. They were willing to work for any wage at all, planting and harvesting other people`s lands.

When those families reached the borders of those western states, they were not well received — too many people already there were out of work. Many California farms were corporate owned, meaning they were larger and more modernized than what the farmers were used to. Families often lived in tar-paper shacks with no floor or plumbing. By 1940, 2.5 million people had moved out of the Dust Bowl states toward the Pacific states.

In the fall of 1934, with cattle feed depleted, the government began to buy and destroy thousands of starving livestock. Of all the government programs during that time, the cattle slaughter was the most wrenching for farmers. Although it was difficult for farmers to give up their herds, the cattle slaughter helped many of them avoid bankruptcy.

In the spring of 1935, the wind blew 27 days and nights without stopping. People and animals began to die of suffocation and "dust pneumonia."

## SOIL CONSERVATION

In 1937, the federal government began an aggressive campaign to encourage Dust Bowlers to adopt planting and ploughing methods that conserve the soil. The government paid the reluctant farmers a dollar an acre to practice one of the new methods. By 1938, the massive conservation effort had reduced the amount of blowing soil by 65 percent. Nevertheless, the land failed to yield a decent living.

In the fall of 1939, after nearly a decade of dirt and dust, the skies finally opened. With the rain`s return, dry fields soon yielded their golden wheat once more, and just as quickly as it had begun, the Dust Bowl was, thankfully, over.

Source: <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1583.html>

# IMAGES OF THE DUST BOWL



A farmer shows how high the wheat should be.  
North Dakota, July 1936.

*Source: PBS*



Dust storm approaching town.  
Texas, 1935.

*Source: Wikimedia Commons*



A gigantic dust cloud looms over a ranch in Boise City.  
Oklahoma, April 1935.

*Source: National Geographic*



Abandoned farm and windmill.  
Texas, June 1938.

*Source: PBS*



Migrant man looking up at  
billboard.  
Iowa, April 1940.

*Source: PBS*



A migrant family on the road.  
Oklahoma, June 1938.

*Source: PBS*



Two migrant workers travelling along the highway toward Los Angeles passing a billboard for the train. Perhaps 2.5 million people abandoned their homes in the South and the Great Plains during the Great Depression and went on the road.  
California, 1935.

*Source: Library of Congress*



Florence Thompson and her children.  
California, March 1936.

*Source: PBS*



Migrant families camp by the side of the road near Calipatria, California.  
California, March 1937.

*Source: Library of Congress*



Migrant workers' camp, outskirts of Marysville, California. Eventually new migratory camps are built by the Resettlement Administration in order to remove people from unsatisfactory living conditions such as these and establish at least minimum sanitation.

*Source: The History Place*



Near Meloland, Imperial Valley, California. Large scale agriculture using gang labour. Pull, clean, tie and crate carrots for the eastern market for eleven cents per crate of forty-eight bunches. Many can make barely one dollar a day. Heavy oversupply of labour and competition for jobs means wages remain low.

*Source: The History Place*



Squatter makes coffee in kitchen of the home he has made in an abandoned warehouse in Caruthersville. Missouri, August 1938.

*Source: Library of Congress*

# BACKGROUND: THE NOVEL

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

John Steinbeck (1902-1968) was born in Salinas, California. He came from a middle class family. His father was the county treasurer, and his mother was a former schoolteacher. She inspired and encouraged his love of books and reading.

He attended Stanford University, but he did not graduate. In his twenties, he travelled to New York City with the dream of supporting himself as a freelance writer. When his efforts failed, he went home to California. He then began to work seriously on novels and short stories.

When Steinbeck was a young adult, he spent his summer vacations working as a hired hand on local ranches. His interactions with the people he met during those summers greatly influenced the characters he created throughout his career. In an interview following the publication of *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck revealed that all the characters in the novel are composites based on real people.

Steinbeck said in his essay "Advice For Beginning Writers" (1963) that he still felt afraid every time he began writing a story, even though he had a long successful writing career behind him. He went on to say that a writer who does not experience this fear may not have an appropriate respect for the art of writing.

## NOVEL BACKGROUND

*Of Mice and Men* was published in 1937, after John Steinbeck had achieved literary acclaim with his novel *Tortilla Flat* but before he wrote his better known works *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*. The story epitomizes the themes and ideas that Steinbeck propounded throughout his novels: the plight of the labourers, the perils of isolation, and the hope for a better future. Set in California during the Great Depression, *Of Mice and Men* is an excellent vehicle to learn about the life and times of migrant workers in the 1930s. With its beautiful descriptive passages, easily accessible dialogue, and fast-paced timeline, it is very easy to follow along. Readers are drawn in by the memorable characters that, ironically, represent a segment of society that was largely ignored in its day. Analysing the balance of power, the importance of friendship, and the role of dreams in our lives allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the text while applying valuable lessons to their own lives.

## NOVEL SETTING

*Of Mice and Men* is set in the Salinas Valley of Southern California in the late 1930's, the era of the Great Depression. Like many writers of the Modern Period (1915-1945), John Steinbeck attempts to make sense of the early decades of the 20th century; he sees the humanity in a class of people who are often ignored by writers and by society at large. These issues are further developed in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

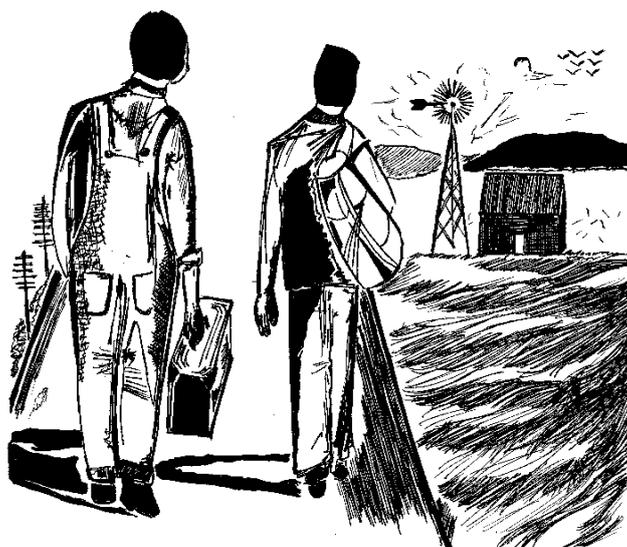
## CHARACTER LIST

Below is a list of the major characters from *Of Mice and Men*:

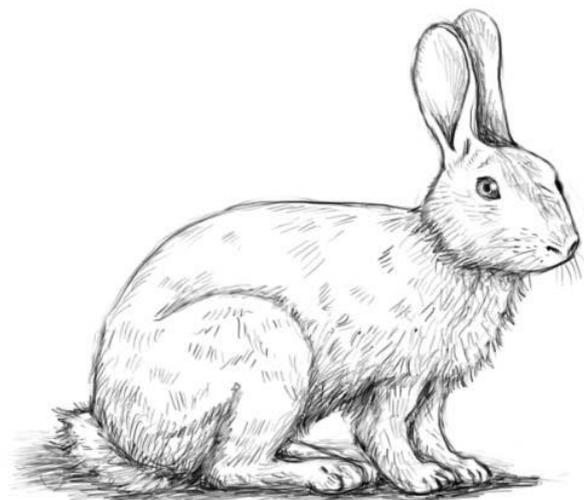
- **Lennie Small:** a nondescript, hulking creature of a man whose childlike mentality continually gets him into scrapes with men who neither respect nor understand him.
- **George Milton:** a small, lean man, used to fighting for his place in the world. He oversees and protects Lennie.
- **Slim:** a tall skinner (a highly skilled mule-driver) that serves as a counsellor to the ranch hands.
- **Candy:** The one-handed ranch worker who has lived past his prime.
- **Curley's wife:** never named, she is not respected by the men on the ranch.
- **Crooks:** the African-American stable buck is called Crooks because of a spinal injury inflicted by a kicking horse.
- **Curley:** the boss' son, he possesses a jealous, cruel streak.

## SYNOPSIS

John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* places the reader in Depression-era California, traveling from job to job with two migrant labourers, George Milton and Lennie Small. The novel explores their friendship, in contrast to the isolation of their peers, and the way dreams can either sustain or discourage people. It also addresses a variety of issues, including racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, that play out against the backdrop of lonely people seeking happiness. In addition examining important ethical dilemmas, studying *Of Mice and Men* provides an opportunity to discuss literary devices such as foreshadowing, symbolism, and point of view.



# **CHAPTER QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES**





# - Chapter One -

Record answers for the following questions in your exercise book.  
Unless otherwise directed, you should answer in full sentences.

1. The Salinas Valley was an area that Steinbeck knew extremely well. In the opening two paragraphs, he draws upon this knowledge to describe the natural world. Find quotations from this section that describe each of the following:
  - a) The river.
  - b) The trees.
  - c) The mountains.
  
2. From the third paragraph onwards, Steinbeck begins describing the characters of Lennie and George for the first time. He takes great care in describing them, and provides the reader with a very strong image of them from the outset of the novel.
  - a) Find at least three quotes that help describe Lenny.
  - b) Write down three more dot points, identifying what key information we learn about Lennie.
  - c) Find at least three quotes that help describe George.
  - d) Write down three more dot points, identifying what key information we learn about George.
  
3. On the second and third page, Steinbeck uses animal imagery to describe Lennie's characteristics.
  - a) Find and write out two such quotes.
  - b) Why do you think Steinbeck describes Lennie in this way?
  - c) What happened to George and Lennie that meant they had to leave Weed?
  - d) Why do you think Lennie likes hearing the story about the ranch so much?
  
4. George and Lennie have a very unique and strong relationship, which is introduced and emphasised in the first chapter. Reread the conversation between George and Lennie, and answer the following questions:
  - a) Find two examples of Lennie acting like a child.
  - b) Why does Lennie like the mouse?
  - c) Why is George worried about Lennie?
  - d) Why do you think George stays with Lennie?
  
5. One of the major themes of the book is 'The American Dream' – the hope of creating a better life. Look at the description of Lennie and George's dream to own a farm. How does this story relate to 'The American Dream'?

## - Chapter Two -

Record answers for the following questions in your exercise book.  
Unless otherwise directed, you should answer in full sentences.

1. Reread the first paragraph. Steinbeck sets the scene by providing a detailed description of the bunkhouse before the characters arrive.
  - a) What details of the bunkhouse are emphasised?
  - b) Why do you think he provides this detailed description?
  
2. We meet several important characters in this chapter, including the boss, Curley, Curley's Wife and Slim. For each of these three characters, write down at least three dot points on the following:
  - a) Their appearance.
  - b) Their personality.
  - c) One useful quotation relating to that character.
  
3. Why do you think George lies to the Boss about his relationship with Lennie?
  
4. Look closely at the conversation between Slim and George. What sort of man does Slim seem to be?
  
5. During this chapter, Steinbeck drops hints about what might happen later in the novel. This is called 'foreshadowing'. Find the quotations below and write down what events you think they could be foreshadowing:
  - a) "You keep away from Curley, Lennie." (George)
  - b) "Why'n't you get Candy to shoot his old dog..." (Carlson)
  - c) "Hide till I come for you. Don't let nobody see you." (George)
  - d) "Gosh, she was purty." (Lennie)
  
6. Reread the last paragraph of the scene. Referring back to the events so far in the novel, what do you think the significance of Candy's old dog might be? What does his description suggest? What is the significance of mentioning Slim's pups in this same section? What similarities does he share with other characters? What might be foreshadowed here? Write down in dot points at least five of your ideas.

## - Chapter Three -

Record answers for the following questions in your exercise book.  
Unless otherwise directed, you should answer in full sentences.

1. A lot of new information and foreshadowing is delivered in this chapter. Take a close look at the opening description of George and Slim's conversation in particular, and answer the following questions:
  - a) What aspects of Lennie's character are emphasised through this conversation?
  - b) What do we learn about Lennie's relationship with George?
  - c) Why is the story of the woman in the red dress important?
  - d) What risk do you think Lennie poses to the puppies?
2. What do we learn about Slim, and how would you describe his personality?
3. Look at the descriptions and discussions of women in this section (namely Curley's wife and the prostitutes). How do the men on the ranch view these women?
4. At this point, we really get introduced to the concept of the 'American Dream' and how George and Lennie are trying to fulfil their version of the 'dream'.
  - a) What exactly is their 'dream'?
  - b) What reasons are we given to think their 'dream' will succeed or fail?
5. Reread the description of Curley's attack on Lennie, and Lennie's defence of himself.
  - a) Find three examples of animal imagery, and explain why you think Steinbeck connects these images with Lennie.
  - b) What is revealed about Lennie and George's friendship in this passage?
6. In the scene where Candy's dog is taken away and shot, Steinbeck creates an extremely tense atmosphere. This is also an incredibly important event that foreshadows what will happen later in the novel.
  - a) Find at least three quotations that show how Steinbeck creates this sense of tension (hint: look for references to quietness, stillness, waiting, etc).
  - b) Why is Candy's dog put down, and do you think this the right thing to do?
  - c) Why do you think Candy says: "I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to have let no stranger shoot my dog"?

# - Chapter Four -

Record answers for the following questions in your exercise book.  
Unless otherwise directed, you should answer in full sentences.

1. Many of the characters on the ranch can be described as 'outsiders': they don't fit into normal society because they have characteristics that make them different from supposedly 'normal' people. For each of the following characters, identify the characteristics that make them outsiders (including at least one quote):
  - a) Candy
  - b) Curley's Wife
  - c) Lennie
  - d) Crooks
  
2. Look at the conversation between Crooks and Lennie.
  - a) What does Crooks say that makes Lennie so upset?
  - b) How does Lennie react?
  - c) What does this reveal about Lennie and George's friendship?
  - d) Why is Crooks so angry and mean towards Lennie, what makes him change his behaviour?
  
3. Crooks questions Lennie and George's dream and whether it can ever be achieved. What does he say, and do you think he is correct?
  
4. Curley's wife interrupts the conversation between the men.
  - a) How do they respond to her?
  - b) What does this reveal about her life on the ranch?
  - c) How is this foreshadowing her role in the problems to come?
  
5. Crooks eventually buys into Lennie and George's 'dream' and offers to work on their farm for free. However by the end of this chapter his dream is dead. What exactly causes him to retract his request and abandon his dream?

# - Chapter Five -

Record answers for the following questions in your exercise book.

Unless otherwise directed, you should answer in full sentences.

1. This chapter is the real turning point in the novel, the moment to which all the previous discussion of hopes, dreams and friendship has been leading, and to which all the previous foreshadowing has been hinting. It is therefore telling that this chapter opens with Lennie stroking his puppy, which is now dead.
  - a) What has happened, and how has Lennie responded? *Use at least one quote in your answer.*
  - b) What is the role of this passage? What does it reveal about Lennie, and what coming events could it be foreshadowing?
  
2. Curley's wife does not appear very often, but she plays a crucial role in events. She is also ultimately presented as quite a sympathetic, if flawed, character. Look at the description of Curley's wife and the passage where she tells her life's story.
  - a) Why do you think Steinbeck never gives Curley's wife a name?
  - b) What is her position on the farm, and how do the other men view her? *Include at least one quote in your answer.*
  - c) What was Curley's wife's dream, and what caused it to die? *Include at least one quote in your answer.*
  
3. Steinbeck has used events throughout the novel to foreshadow what will happen in this interaction between Lennie and Curley's wife. What does the reader see that Curley's wife cannot, and what events have led you to this conclusion? *Include one quote that illustrates her naiveté.*
  
4. Reread the section where Lennie kills Curley's wife. This is an extremely descriptive passage. Pay particular attention to Steinbeck's use of simple, sharp statements, and sensory imagery.
  - a) How would you describe the tone of this section?
  - b) Why does Lennie kill Curley's wife?
  - c) How does Lennie react to her death? *Include at least one quote in your answer.*
  - d) How does Candy react to her death, what does he do, and why does he do this?
  
5. Explain the following quotes:
  - a) George: "All the time he [Lennie] done bad things but he never done one of 'em mean."
  - b) "Now Candy spoke his greatest fear. "You an' me can get that little place, can't we, George?" ... George said softly, "—I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we'd never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would." "

## - Chapter Six -

Record answers for the following questions in your exercise book.  
Unless otherwise directed, you should answer in full sentences.

1. Steinbeck uses the setting of this chapter to help mirror the opening of the book. In particular, he uses phrases and images that are similar to both: for example “[a] water-snake slipped along on the pool, its head held up like a little periscope...” (Chapter 1) and “[a] water-snake glided smoothly up the pool, twisting its periscope head from side to side...” (Chapter 6).
  - a) Find one other example of this, and use quotes to illustrate the similarity.
  - b) Why do you think Steinbeck uses this mirroring technique?
2. What is the significance of Lennie’s two visions (Aunt Clara and the Giant Rabbit, both of whom speak in Lennie’s own voice)? *Use at least two quotes in your answer.*
3. The story of the farm and Lennie and George’s dream is repeated once again. Given what we have seen throughout Steinbeck’s novel, what point do you think he is making about the American Dream? *Use at least one quote in your answer.*
4. The events of the past two chapters, while tragic, would come as no surprise to an astute reader. Explain how the following aspects of the novel have foreshadowed the final tragedy of Lennie’s death:
  - a) The discussion of Lennie and George’s ‘contingency plan’ in Chapter 1.
  - b) The symbolism of Lennie’s mice.
  - c) The incident between Lennie and the girl in the red dress.
  - d) The symbolism of Candy’s dog.
  - e) The symbolism of Lennie’s puppy.
5. We have now reached the climax of the novel: the heartbreaking moment when George feels forced to kill his closest and only true friend.
  - a) What drove George to believe he had to kill Lennie?
  - b) Do you think George did the right thing? Why/Why not?
6. Throughout the book Lennie has remained an outsider. He has been unable interact with others and fulfil the role that society dictates he should, and as a result he has remained separate from all other people except George. Considering what happens to Lennie, what do you think Steinbeck is saying about how society relates to outsiders? *Use at least one quote in your answer.*

# GEORGE AND LENNIE: SETTING THE SCENE

The opening pages of the novel subtly establish several key aspects of Lennie and George's relationship. Reread this section closely, and look at the following interactions between Lennie and George. Fill in the following table with what each interaction reveals about each character and their relationship with one another.

Event	What is revealed about George	What is revealed about Lennie
Lennie is told off by George for drinking the stagnant water in the pool.		
George tells Lennie to get rid of the dead mouse.		
Lennie is given instructions not to speak to the new boss.		
George wishes to spend the night freely in the open.		
George directs Lennie to collect wood for a fire.		
Lennie reclaims the dead mouse and is caught by George		

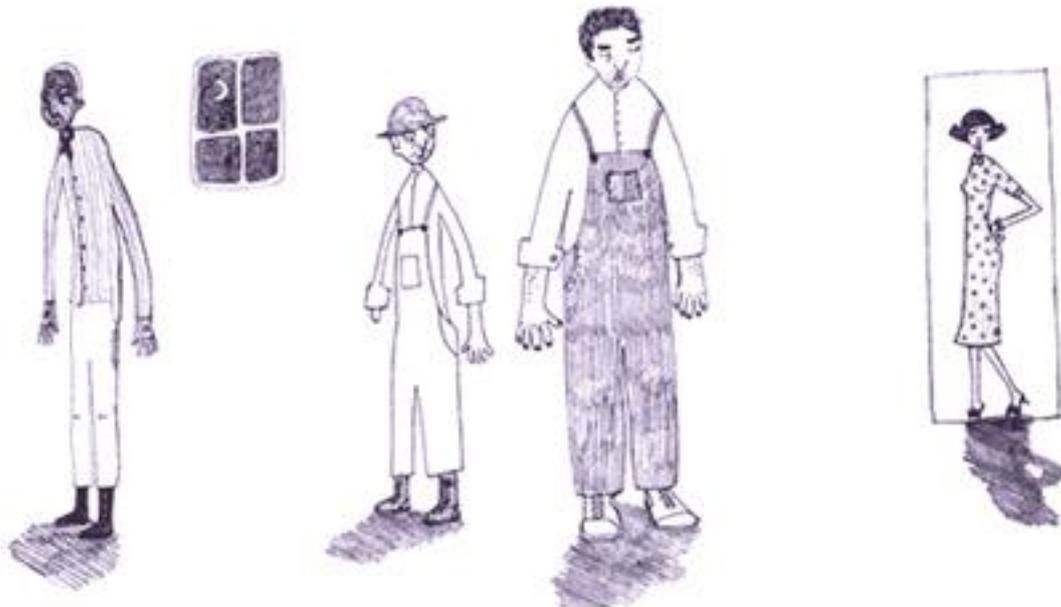
# DREAMS

Nearly every character in *Of Mice and Men* harbours a dream of some sort. Some of them already have dreams when we meet them, such as George's dream of owning their own ranch. Some discover new dreams during the course of the novel, such as Candy wanting to join George and Lennie on their farm. Others once had dreams, but their dreams have since been destroyed, such as Curley's wife's hopes of becoming a movie star.

In some ways, dreams help the characters to deal with their isolation and loneliness. However, dreams can also be a trap, leading characters down a path of false hope as they strive towards a life that, for various reasons, is unattainable for them. Dreams can bring hope, but their loss can also bring great hardship.

The tables on the following pages will guide you through an analysis of four of the most important dreams seen in the novel: those of Lennie and George, Curley's Wife, Crooks and Candy. Complete the table, and aim to record at least one quote that supports your answer to each question.

Your aim should be to not only identify what each characters' dream is, but to also be able to explain why it is/was important to them, and why, given the lives of these characters and the nature of their society, it may be unattainable.



# LENNIE AND GEORGE'S DREAM

What is Lennie and George's dream?

Why is this dream important to Lennie and George?

How is this dream destroyed?

What effect does the destruction of this dream have on Lennie and George?



# CURLLEY'S WIFE'S DREAM

What was Curley's Wife's dream?

Why was this dream important to Curley's Wife?

How was this dream destroyed?

What effect did the destruction of this dream have on Curley's Wife?



# CROOKS' DREAM

What was Crooks' dream?

Why was this dream important to Crooks?

How was this dream destroyed?

What effect does the destruction of this dream have on Crooks?



# CANDY'S DREAM

What is  
Candy's  
dream?

Why is this  
dream  
important  
to Candy?

How is this  
dream  
destroyed?

What effect  
does the  
destruction  
of this  
dream have  
on Candy?



# **“LIVIN’ OFF THE FATTA THE LAN’!”**

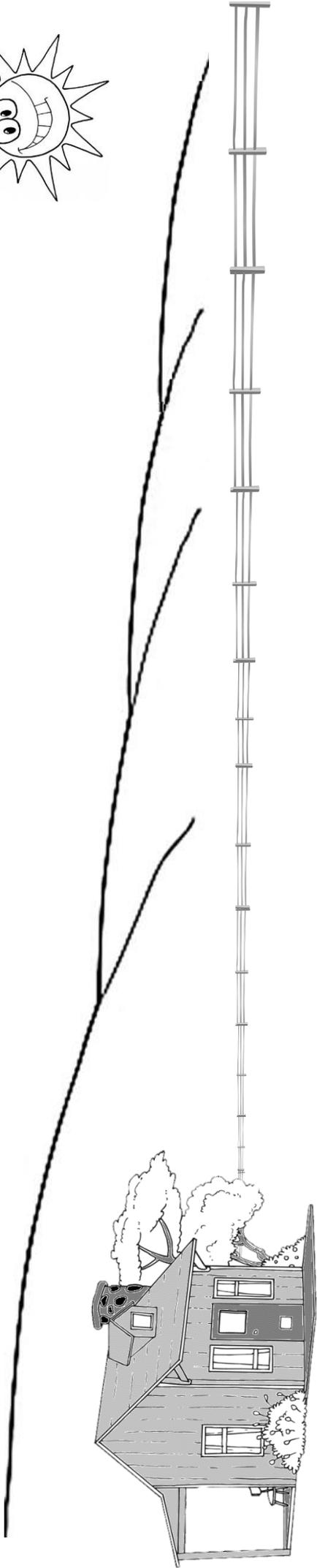
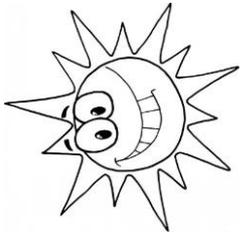
## **THE DREAM OF LENNIE AND GEORGE’S RANCH**

Using QUOTES from the novel, design George and Lennie’s dream ranch. Remember to make special note of the details of the farm and what it will contain.

You will need to ANNOTATE your design with quotes to show what exactly the characters want and how this reflects the ideal of the ‘American Dream’.

You can use the template on the following page to draw and annotate your farm.





# CHARACTER

## facebook profiles

On the following pages you will find blank Facebook profiles for the following characters:

- George
- Lennie
- Curley's Wife
- Crooks
- Curley

Using your knowledge of the novel, consider what their lives were like and what they would be feeling.

Each profile will need to include:

- A status update
- Personal information, including their top 'friends' and their likes.
- A series of nine posts on their wall. These posts should be linked to key events from the novel and need to convey how they effected the character or how they felt about the event. The posts need to appear in chronological order (from most recent to least recent).

**Extension:** Some characters have a message in their inbox. If they do, figure out (a) who the message could be from and (b) what you think it would say. If they don't have any messages, explain why you think this would be the case.



George Milton:

5 minutes ago

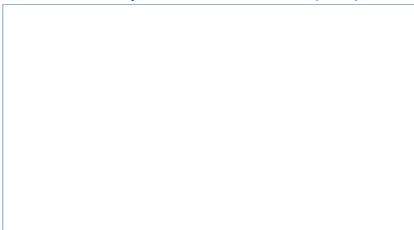
- Wall
- Info
- Photos
- +

What's on your mind?

Attach:

Share

View photos of me (34)



Information

Relationship Status:

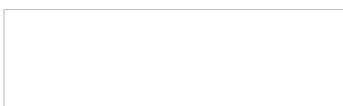
Current City:

Birthday:

Friends



Likes





Lennie Small:

5 minutes ago

- Wall
- Info
- Photos
- +

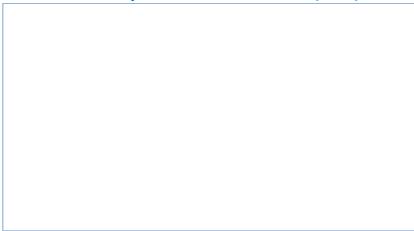
What's on your mind?

Attach:



Share

View photos of me (27)



Information



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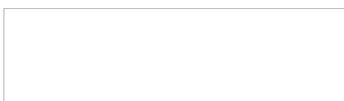
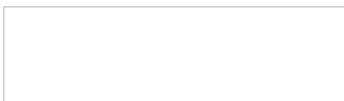
Current City:

Birthday:

Friends



Likes





Curley's Wife:

5 minutes ago

- Wall
- Info
- Photos
- +

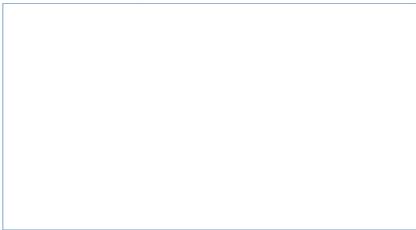
What's on your mind?

Attach:



Share

View photos of me (6)



Information



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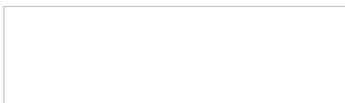
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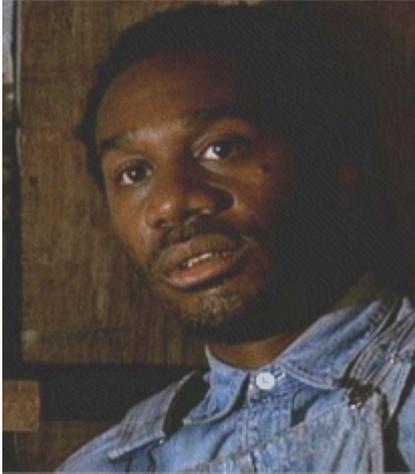
Birthday:

Friends



Likes





View photos of me (4)



Information



Relationship Status:

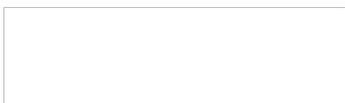
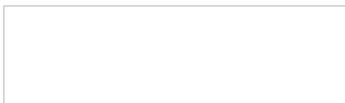
Current City:

Birthday:

Friends



Likes



Crooks:

5 minutes ago

- Wall
- Info
- Photos
- +

What's on your mind?

Attach:



Share





Curley:

Status goes here

5 minutes ago

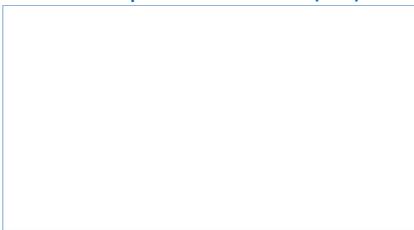
- Wall
- Info
- Photos
- +

What's on your mind?

Attach:

Share

View photos of me (26)



Information

Relationship Status:

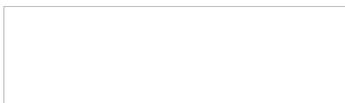
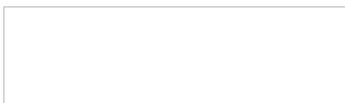
Current City:

Birthday:

Friends



Likes



# CURLEY'S WIFE

Find a total of six quotations: three that support the idea that Curley's wife is an 'innocent victim' who is trapped by circumstance, and three that present her as 'jail bait' that poses a danger to the other men. You should look at what other characters say about her, what she says about her own circumstances and how Steinbeck describes her appearance.

The Innocent Victim	v	Dangerous 'Jail Bait'

Once you have completed the above tables with relevant quotes, answer the following questions, using at least one quote to support each answer:

**Question 1:** How is Curley's wife presented to the reader?

**Question 2:** What does Steinbeck's novel reveal about attitudes towards women in the society in which the novel is set?

## Steinbeck's View of Curley's Wife

In 1938 John Steinbeck wrote the following about Curley's wife in a letter to the actress who was playing her in a play that was based upon his novel. It offers a different perspective on her and helps to show some of the complexity that lay behind her character:

*She grew up in an atmosphere of fighting and suspicion. Quite early she learned that she must never trust anyone but she was never able to carry out what she learned. A natural trustfulness broke through constantly and every time it did, she got her...*

*...If anyone - a man or woman - ever gave her a break - treated her like a person - she would be a slave to that person. Her craving for contact is immense but she, with her background, is incapable of conceiving any contact without some sexual context. With all this - if you knew her, if you could ever break down a thousand little defences she has built up, you would find a nice person, an honest person, and you would end up by loving her. But such a thing could never happen.*

*...I've known this girl and I'm just trying to tell you what she is like. She is afraid of everyone in the world. You've known girls like that, haven't you? You can see them in Central Park on a hot night. They travel in groups for protection. They pretend to be wise and hard and voluptuous. ...*

**Question 3:** How does Steinbeck present Curley's wife in this letter?

**Question 4:** Does Steinbeck's letter change your view of Curley's wife? Why/Why not? Consider whether you believe there are any differences between the descriptions in the letter and the novel.



# THE MARGINALISED

Many of the characters in *Of Mice and Men* are isolated and lonely. For some, their experiences are exasperated as a result of their social circumstances. This is seen particularly clearly in Crooks and Curley's wife. Complete the table below, and consider what each of them may represent:

CROOKS	CURLEY'S WIFE
APPEARANCE AND SOCIAL STANDING	
EXPERIENCE OF LONELINESS AND ISOLATION	
HOPES AND DREAMS	
REPRESENTATIVE OF...	

# FORESHADOWING

John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* tells a story of two very different friends who share the same dream. Throughout the novel, starting with the title, Steinbeck provides clues as to what will happen next. This is done through a process known as 'foreshadowing'.

**Foreshadowing** is a literary device in which a writer gives an advance hint of what is to come later in the story.

Foreshadowing can be done through many means: dialogue, character actions, scene descriptions and the titles of chapters or the novel itself.

Generally, the function of foreshadowing is to build anticipation in the reader about what might happen next and adds dramatic tension to a story. It adds emphasis to the event when it finally occurs.



## Task 1: Cartoon

Look carefully at the above cartoon of a turkey teaching a class.

- What is being 'foreshadowed' in this cartoon?
- How are dialogue and visual elements being used to convey this idea?

## Task 2: Title

Reflect on the titles of the novel ("Of Mice and Men") and go back to the start of this booklet and re-read Robert Burns' poem 'To a mouse'.

- Given the title of the novel, what would a reader expect to happen to the "men" (meaning all humans) in the novel?
- How does the poem, and particularly its most famous lines- "the best-laid schemes of Mice and Men go oft awry" - reflect the plot and ideas explored in the novel?

## Foreshadowing Sequence 1: "I like to pet nice things."

### **Extract 1: George is reminding Lennie why they had to leave their last job in the town of Weed.**

"'Jus' wanted to feel that girl's dress—jus' wanted to pet it like it was a mouse—Well, how the hell did she know you jus' wanted to feel her dress? ... She yells and we got to...sneak out in the dark and get outta the country. All the time somethin' like that—all the time'...

'Well, look. Lennie—if you jus' happen to get in trouble like you always done before, I want you to come right here an' hide in the brush.'" (Chapter 1)

### **Extract 2: Lennie is alone in the barn while the other men are playing horseshoes.**

"... Lennie sat in the hay and looked at a little dead puppy that lay in front of him....

And Lennie said softly to the puppy, 'Why do you got to get killed? You ain't so little as mice. I didn't bounce you hard... You wasn't big enough,' he said. 'They tol' me and tol' me you wasn't. I di'n't know you'd get killed so easy.'" (Chapter 5)

### **Extract 3: Curley's wife sits with Lennie in the barn and asks about his love of rabbits.**

"Lennie...moved cautiously close to her.... 'I like to pet nice things...'

'... Well, who don't?... When I'm doin' my hair sometimes I jus' set an' stroke it 'cause it's so soft.... Feel right aroun' there an' see how soft it is.'

Lennie's big fingers fell to stroking her hair...

'Look out, now, you'll muss it.' ... She jerked her head sideways, and Lennie's fingers closed on her hair and hung on. 'Let go,' she cried. 'You let go!'

Lennie was in a panic.... She screamed then, and Lennie's other hand closed over her mouth and nose.... 'You gonna get me in trouble jus' like George says you will. Now don't you do that.' And she continued to struggle.... He shook her...[a]nd then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck.

... And then he whispered in fright, 'I done a bad thing. I done another bad thing.'

... Lennie went back and looked at the dead girl. The puppy lay close to her.'" (Chapter 5)

### **Sequence 1 Extract Analysis Questions:**

1. What happened in Weed that made it necessary for George and Lennie to "hide" and "sneak" away? What does George say to indicate that things like this have happened before?
2. What animals does Lennie like to pet? Why does he say he likes to pet them?
3. How does the puppy die?
4. Juxtaposition is a literary tool where two things are put next to each other to create emphasis or add a layer of meaning. In the last sentence of the final excerpt, what two things are juxtaposed? What is being emphasized?
5. How does Steinbeck use foreshadowing to signal that Curley's wife will die? Give at least two specific examples.

## Foreshadowing Sequence 2: "A little piece of land."

**Extract 1: The night before they arrive at their new job, Lennie and George spend the night alone by the water.**

"Lennie pleaded, 'Come on, George. Tell me. Please George. Like you done before.'

... George's voice became deeper. He repeated his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before.... 'O.K. Someday—we're gonna...have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and...we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof—Nuts!... I ain't got time for no more....'" (Chapter 1)

**Extract 2: Lennie is talking with Crooks, the stable hand, about their plan to get their own farm.**

"'You're nuts.'

'We are too. You ast George.'

'You're nuts.' Crooks was scornful. 'I seen hunderds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads. Hunderds of them. They come, an' they quit an' go on; an' every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it.... You guys is just kiddin' yourself. You'll talk about it a hell of a lot, but you won't get no land.'" (Chapter 4)

**Extract 3: After Lennie kills Curley's wife, George and Candy are discussing what they will do next.**

"Now Candy spoke his greatest fear. 'You an' me can get that little place, can't we, George? You an' me can go there an' live nice, can't we, George? Can't we?'

Before George answered, Candy dropped his head and looked down at the hay. He knew.

George said softly, '—I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we'd never do her.'" (Chapter 5)

### Sequence 2 Extract Analysis Questions:

1. In the first excerpt, as he has "done before," what does George describe to Lennie?
2. At the end of the first excerpt, George breaks off suddenly, saying he "ain't got time for no more." Why does George stop his description so abruptly?
3. Does Crooks think Lennie and George will get their own "little piece of land"? Explain his reason.
4. In the final excerpt, what is it that George "knowed from the very first"?
5. How does Steinbeck use foreshadowing to hint that George and Lennie will not get their own farm? Find two examples, one from the first excerpt and another from the second excerpt.

## Foreshadowing Sequence 3: "Right in the back of the head."

**Extract 1: Carlson, one of the ranch hands, has been complaining about Candy's old dog.**

"Well, I can't stand him in here,' said Carlson. 'That stink hangs around even after he's gone.' He walked over...and looked down at the dog. 'Got no teeth,' he said. 'He's all stiff with rheumatism. He ain't no good to you, Candy. An' he ain't no good to himself. Why'n't you shoot him, Candy?'

The old man squirmed uncomfortably. 'Well—hell! I had him...since he was a pup....

Carlson was not to be put off. 'Look, Candy.... If you was to take him out and shoot him right in the back of the head...why he'd never know what hit him.... I'll shoot him for you. Then it won't be you that does it.... Right back of the head. He wouldn't even quiver.'

... Candy said, 'Maybe tomorra. Le's wait till tomorra.'

'I don't see no reason for it,' said Carlson. He went to his bunk, pulled his bag from underneath it and took out a Luger pistol. 'Let's get it over with.'" (Chapter 3)

**Extract 2: After Carlson shoots Candy's dog, Candy asks George and Lennie if he can join them in buying their little piece of land.**

"You seen what they done to my dog tonight?... I oughtta of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't oughtta of let no stranger shoot my dog.'" (Chapter 3)

**Extract 3: After Lennie kills Curley's wife, Curley is searching for Lennie in order to shoot him painfully "in the guts." George finds Lennie at their agreed-upon meeting place "in the brush."**

"George...reached in his side pocket and brought out Carlson's Luger.... He looked at the back of Lennie's head, at the place where the spine and skull were joined....

Lennie turned his head.

'No, Lennie. Look down acrost the river, like you can almost see the place.... I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know.'

... And George raised the gun and steadied it, and he brought the muzzle of it close to the back of Lennie's head. The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger. The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again. Lennie jarred, and then settled slowly forward to the sand, and he lay without quivering." (Chapter 6)

### Sequence 3 Extract Analysis Questions:

1. Why does Carlson offer to shoot Candy's dog?
2. How does Carlson say he will shoot the dog? What gun does he use?
3. Why does Candy tell George that he "oughtta of shot that dog myself"?
4. Why does George shoot Lennie?
5. How does George shoot Lennie? What gun does he use?
6. How does Steinbeck use foreshadowing to suggest how Lennie will die? Be specific.

# EMPATHY

Empathy is the intellectual process of identifying and trying to understand or experience the feelings, thoughts or attitudes of someone other than yourself.

Try to put yourself into the shoes of the characters from *Of Mice and Men*. Think about their lives, their hopes and dreams, their circumstances, their feelings, their values and their experiences. Empathise with them, and try to see things from their point of view.

Pick two or more situations from the list below. Pretend you are the stated character and prepare an empathetic response to the questions asked. Your goal is to try and present the view point of the character, writing down what you think the character would say.

**1. Curley**

*Are you happily married? Is your life what you wanted and expected? Are you good to your wife?*

**2. Curley's Wife**

*What made you go into the barn that afternoon when Lennie was in there alone? Why are you drawn towards Lennie?*

**3. Candy**

*How did you feel the night your dog was shot? What do you regret most about how it was done?*

**4. George**

*Why do you travel with Lennie? Wouldn't it be much simple to be alone?*

**5. George**

*Why did you kill your best friend? Can you justify what you did?*

**6. Curley**

*How did you feel as you set out to find Lennie? Was your strongest feeling sadness at the loss of your wife, or a desire for personal revenge? What did you want to do to Lennie?*

**7. Slim**

*Do you know how Lennie really died? How do you feel about George? Did he do 'the right thing'?*

**8. Slim**

*Of all the people you've met in the last month, who do you feel the most sorry for? Curley's wife? George? Lennie?*

# COURTROOM DRAMA

Your group is going to present a 'courtroom drama' set after the events in chapter six of *Of Mice and Men*. You will need to create a scene where either Lennie or George is put on trial for the death of Curley's Wife or Lennie respectively.

Each member of your group will need to take on the role of either the prosecution lawyer, defence lawyer or a character from the play. Your group will need to work together to present an accurate, informative and gripping performance of the trial.

To prove murder, the prosecution needs to show that the defendant possessed both performed the 'guilty act' (i.e. they willingly performed the action that caused the victim's death) and possessed a 'guilty mind' (i.e. they knew what they were doing was likely to either seriously injure or kill the victim).

## Option One: The Trial of Lennie Small

Assume that, rather than being killed by George or one of the lynch mob pursuing him, Lennie is instead captured and placed under arrest for the murder of Curley's Wife. Present a courtroom scene from the trial of Lennie where you explore why Lennie did what he did, whether he should be held responsible, legally or morally, for the death of Curley's wife, and if any other characters should also be held responsible.

With the exception of Lennie's survival, all other aspects of the novel must be presented accurately.

**Required witnesses:** Lennie (defendant), George, Curley.

**Possible witnesses:** Crooks, Candy, Slim.

## Option Two: The Trial of George Milton

Assume that, after the events of the novel, George is brought to trial for the murder of Lennie Small. Present a courtroom scene from the trial of George where you explore why George did what he did, whether he should be held responsible, legally or morally, for the death of Lennie, and if any other characters should also be held responsible.

All aspects of the novel must be presented accurately. Lennie cannot be called as a witness as he is dead.

**Required witnesses:** George (defendant), Curley.

**Possible witnesses:** Slim, Candy, Crooks.

## The Trial

Both trials will need a prosecution lawyer and a defence lawyer.

- The defence lawyer's job is to defend the accused and to cross exam and question characters that are brought to the witness stand.
- The Prosecution is trying to prove that the character on trial is guilty of the accused offensive. They too should question characters to show the character is guilty of the offence with which they are charged.

Both the defence lawyer and the prosecution lawyer will need to ask questions of the witnesses. These questions and answers should be planned jointly by the lawyers and the witnesses.

Both the defence lawyer and the prosecution lawyer will need to have a summative speech to present at the end where they try and persuade a jury about why the accused should be found guilty or innocent.

The trial will open with brief statements by both the prosecution and the defence stating what they will prove. Witnesses will then be called one-at-a-time, and the prosecution and defence lawyers will questions them in turn. Once all witnesses have been called, the prosecution and defence lawyers will offer their closing speeches.

## What your group needs to do...

You will have limited class time to prepare your group's trial. In order to use this time productively and effectively, you should work through the following steps:

1. Organise your group and decide who will be the prosecution lawyer, defence lawyer and which characters will appear as witnesses.
2. Decide which characters/witnesses will be most useful to the prosecution and the defence. Lawyers can question any witness, but there will be certain characters that are more useful for their side.
3. Brainstorm questions that the prosecution and defence lawyers could ask the witnesses in order to (a) determine what happened and, more importantly, (b) the character's opinion about what happened.
4. Once the questions have been decided upon, characters will need to develop their answers. These answers will require you to draw upon the novel. The character's responses must be accurate and honest. Where possible, use quotes from the novel in your answers and try to emulate the voice of the character you are presenting.
5. While the witnesses are preparing their responses, lawyers should be planning their closing remarks. This is a brief persuasive speech that explains why the person on trial should be found innocent (if you are the defence) or guilty (if you are the prosecution).
6. Rehearse your performance and be ready to present to the class. Bonus points for accents!

## Questioning a Character

Just like a real trial, most of your performance will take the form of witness testimony. With the exception of their opening and closing remarks, everything that the prosecution and defence lawyers say will need to take the form of a question. These questions are designed to gain testimony from witnesses that assist in demonstrating the accused's guilt or innocence.

Once a lawyer has finished questioning their witness, the other lawyer will have the opportunity to 'cross examine' that witness. Cross examination is used to show the limits of a witness' knowledge, expose their biases or show flaws in their recollection, reasoning or knowledge.

You should have the questions written down, but you do not need to have a complete script. However, both the witness and the lawyers will need notes, as all information presented must be accurate according to the novel. After all, your character is under oath!

Below is an example of how you can question a witness to get certain information. In this example the defence lawyer is questioning Candy in a court case where Lennie is on trial for killing Curley's wife:

<b>Defence Lawyer:</b>	'You say you think that Lennie Small killed Curley's wife?'
<b>Candy:</b>	'Yes sir that's correct.'
<b>Defence Lawyer:</b>	'How can you prove that? Did you see Lennie Small actually kill her?'
<b>Candy:</b>	'No, sir but someone had bust her neck and he is mighty strong'
<b>Defence Lawyer:</b>	'So you cannot say for sure that Lennie killed Curley's wife?'
<b>Candy:</b>	'No, sir. I didn't see him but I seen him get in a fight and he can hurt a man real bad when he wanna.'
<b>Defence Lawyer:</b>	'But did you actually see anything that suggested that Lennie acted with malice this time?'



# WRITE LIKE STEINBECK

Your task is to craft a piece of descriptive writing in a style reminiscent of Steinbeck's prose.

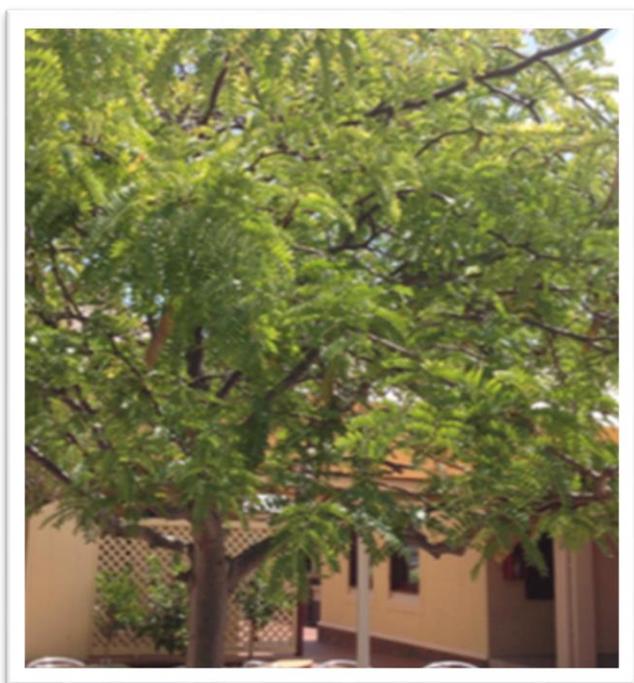
In order to do this, you will need to take a photo of an area of the school and then write a paragraph that will paint this picture with words. Your aim is to not only describe what the place looks like, but to also convey the mood or atmosphere that the place evokes within you.

Re-read the start of chapter 1 and chapter 2 for examples of how Steinbeck uses descriptive language to create a vividly setting for the novel and establish a mood.

Vary your **sentence length** and consider your **vocabulary** carefully. Select **precise and strong words** to 'paint' a lively and engaging 'picture'. **Avoid too many adjectives** and overly 'wordy' or 'floury' writing. Consider how Steinbeck brings an environment alive. He adds **clever little details** that make his writing interesting; for example, "And these shelves were loaded with little articles, soap and talcum powder, razors and those Western magazines ranch men love to read and scoff at and secretly believe."

You should also try to include some of the **figurative language techniques** described on the following page: alliteration, onomatopoeia, metaphor, personification and simile. Each technique is followed by examples of where it is used in the novel. Consider what effect each technique is intended to have on the audience, and experiment with using them yourself.

Below is an extract from a sample student response to this task:



*In the courtyard north of the canteen is a bright, short but wide tree. Surrounded by the flickering of silver furniture it stands alone and on show. Centred by a ring, it greets many hungry and tired people each day. Encircled by conversations, this tree listens to lunch and recess gossip in silence. The sun's rays light the trunk, leaves and branches overhead, but create a shaded cool area beneath. Birds come from around to perch on this tree but in the evening it is left naked of all life except its own. ...*

# FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN *OF MICE AND MEN*

## Alliteration

Alliteration is where a consonant sound is repeated at the start of several words in a row.

- "The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight before reaching the narrow pool." (p3)
- "From outside came the clang of horseshoes on the playing peg and the shouts of men, playing, encouraging, jeering." (p83)

## Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is where a word represents the sound it is describing, like "bang", "clap" or "tweet."

- "The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and down again." (p106)
- "His huge companion...drank with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse." (p4)

## Metaphor

A metaphor is a direct comparison where one thing is described as being something else.

- "Lennie covered his face with huge paws and bleated with terror." (p63)
- "He was a jerkline skinner, prince off the ranch." (p33)
- "...she's a rat trap if I ever seen one." (p32)

## Personification

Personification is where an object, place or abstract concept is given human actions or qualities.

- "The sycamore leaves whispered in a little night breeze." (p16)
- "As happens sometimes, a moment settled and hovered and remained for much more than a moment." (p93)
- "The shade climbed up the hills toward the top." (p2)
- "Already the sun had left the valley to go climbing up the slopes of the Galilan mountains and the hilltops were rosy in the sun (p99)

## Simile

A simile is a comparison between two things that uses the word "as" or "like".

- "At about ten o'clock in the morning the sun threw a bright dust-laden bar through one of the side windows, and in and out of the beam flies shot like rushing stars." (p17-18)
- "A water snake slipped along the pool, its head held up like a little periscope." (p7)
- "Her hair hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages." (p31)



# GLOSSARY





# COLLOQUIALISMS

The following table includes various colloquialisms (i.e. 'slang') that are used in the novel.

COLLOQUIALISM	DEFINITION
'coons'	raccoons
split-wedge	a crack or tear which is triangular in shape.
jungle-up	a camp for tramps who spend the night in just about any place.
bucking grain bags	carrying bags of grain
bindle	a bundle binding all the necessary things with a cloth or blanket
cat-house	whore house
foundin' their tail	working really hard
blowen' in our jack	spending or wasting all our money
Burcap	a coarse canvas for wall coverings etc.
pants rabbits	fleas
swamper	a cleaner
grey-backs	ice
gimme my time	give me my salary
tick	mattress cover.
stable buck	the black man in charge of the stable
brang	brought
little skinner	a driver of a small mule team
rassel grain-bags	load bags of grain
flapper	mouth
she got the eye	eyeing men, a flirt
two bits	a quarter (i.e. 25 cents)
whing-ding	an expression meaning approval
enchre	a card game played by two people
roll up a stake	save up money
looloo	a loose woman
hoosegow	prison
yella as a frog belly	cowardly
welter	welterweight, a category in boxing
bootry hatch	lunatic asylum
baloney	deceptive talk; nonsense
doped out	thought out
jack you outa the sewer	keep you out of trouble
fambly	family

# NOVEL VOCABULARY

The following table includes useful words from the novel that you may not be familiar with. Use a dictionary to clarify the definition of any word you need to, and add any additional words that you aren't familiar with, and record their definition in the table.

WORD	PAGE	DEFINITION
scummy	3	
morosely	4	
droned	7	
imperiously	9	
dejectedly	10	
anguished	12	
yammered	17	
mollified	27	
pugnacious	28	
ominously	29	
slough	30	
derogatory	30	
contorted	33	
bridled	34	
brusquely	35	



# ESSAY VOCABULARY

The following table includes vocabulary that may help to improve the quality of your expression when you write an essay on *Of Mice and Men*. Use a dictionary to find the definition of any words you are not familiar with and record the definition in the table.

TERM	DEFINITION
alienation	
antagonist	
aspirations	
brutality	
companion	
comradery	
degrading	
dependent	
dignity	
hardship	
monotonous	
poverty	
protagonist	
squalor	
stability	
transient worker	
welfare	

# TRANSITION WORDS

Using transitional words and phrases helps essays read more smoothly, and at the same time allows the reader to flow more smoothly from one point to the next. Transitions enhance logical organization and understandability and improve the connections between thoughts. They indicate relations, whether within a sentence, paragraph, or paper. This list illustrates categories of "relationships" between ideas, followed by words and phrases that can make the connections.

Without Transition Words	With Transition Words
<p>The cat sat on the mat. The mat's fibers were flattened. The mat was less comfortable. The mat's appearance was spoiled. The owner gave the mat to the dog to lie on. The dog was greatly pleased by the new mat. The cat was very resentful. There was tension between the cat and the dog. They had been good companions for years. They fought over the mat. The cat had tactical superiority. The dog had greater physical strength. The dog killed the cat. The owner wrapped the cat's body in the mat. The owner buried it in the yard. The dog died of grief.</p>	<p>The cat sat on the mat. <b>As a result</b>, the mat's fibres were flattened. <b>The consequence of this</b> was to make the mat less comfortable. <b>Furthermore</b>, the mat's appearance was also spoiled. The owner <b>therefore</b> gave the mat to the dog to lie on. <b>Although</b> the dog was greatly pleased by the new mat, the cat was very resentful. <b>The result of this</b> was to create tension between the cat and the dog, <b>despite the fact that</b> they had been good companions for years. <b>Ultimately</b>, they fought over the mat. <b>Unfortunately, in spite of</b> the cat's tactical superiority, the dog had greater physical strength <b>and</b> killed the cat. The owner <b>then</b> wrapped the cat's body in the mat and buried it in the yard. <b>Subsequently</b>, the dog died of grief.</p>

You can find a list of transition words on the following page. Use them in your essay to connect ideas between sentences, to show the relationships between arguments and to show the relationships between arguments, evidence and analysis.

# LIST OF COMMON TRANSITION WORDS

ADDITION	COMPARISON	CONTRAST	RESULT	CONSEQUENCE
further	similarly	however	hence	causes
furthermore	comparable	nevertheless	therefore	leads to
moreover	in the same way	on the other hand	accordingly	because of
in addition	likewise	on the contrary	consequently	due to
additionally	as with	even so	thus	since
then	equally	notwithstanding	as a result	as a result
also	just as...so too	alternatively	in consequence	consequently
besides	a similar...	at the same time	so	
again	another...like	though	then	
equally important		otherwise	such a...that	<b>PURPOSE</b>
firstly, secondly		instead	because	
finally, last		nonetheless	due to	in order to
as well as		conversely		so as to
		yet		so that

SUMMARY	ILLUSTRATING	QUALIFYING	EMPHASISING	TIME
in short	for example	but	above all	meanwhile
on the whole	as such	however	in particular	presently
in other words	for instance	although	especially	at last
to be sure	in the case of	unless	significantly	finally
clearly	as revealed by	except	indeed	immediately
anyway	illustrated by	apart from	notably	thereafter
on the whole	as seen in	as long as	specifically	at that time
after all	is seen in	aside from	particularly	subsequently
in general	is reflected in			currently
it seems	an example of			in the meantime
	is exemplified by			in the past

# ESSAY RESOURCES





# TEXT RESPONSE ESSAY OVERVIEW

A text response essay is a formal piece of structured analytical writing. It provides an argumentative response to a topic and is supported by evidence from the text being studied. Every text response essay will follow a similar structure, but will require you to discuss different evidence and ideas depending upon the given topic.

## Introduction

- The introduction should identify the text and author
- Necessary background information on the topic should be briefly outlined.
- A contention must be provided. This is a clear, concise response to the topic.
- An indication of the main points to be taken up in the body paragraphs should be provided.

## Body

- The introduction should be followed by three or four body paragraphs.
- Each body paragraph explores one main idea/argument.

A body paragraph uses the “TEEL” structure:

- **Topic Sentence:** state the main idea/argument of the paragraph. It should ‘set up’ the main point to be discussed.
- **Explanation:** expand and elaborate on this key idea in greater detail.
- **Evidence:** provide quotes and examples from the text to support your idea. You must DISCUSS and ANALYSE this evidence, explaining how it supports your topic sentence.
- **Link:** A final statement that ties your ideas together. You should return to the key terms of the essay topic.

Note that, at this stage in your schooling, it is expected that you will be using multiple pieces of evidence in your paragraphs. This means that you will need to provide multiple EXPLANATION and EVIDENCE sections in your paragraph, repeated as needed, in order to fully explore your idea.

## Conclusion

- Your conclusion provides a clear response to the topic
- You should include a concise statement about your central argument (i.e. your contention)
- It should include a brief summary of your arguments that draws together the main points of the essay

# Essay Language

## Rule 1: Use FORMAL language

"I think their dreams are very important because they distract the characters from their lives."

- **INFORMAL**

"Dreams function as a coping mechanism, allowing the central characters to escape their reality."

- **FORMAL**

## Rule 2: Write in the THIRD person!

This is your piece of writing so the reader already knows that this is your opinion. You should therefore never use 'I...'. It is much stronger to write in the third person:

('Lennie...' 'Crooks...' 'The characters...' 'The reader...')

- Instead of: *'I think..'*
- Use: *'It could be argued that...'* or *'This is evident when...'*

You should also avoid using the second person "you". It is too imprecise and inaccurate. Be specific and identify who you are really referring to: "the author" or "the reader" or "the character", and so on.

## Rule 3: Do NOT use contractions

A contraction is where you abbreviate a word by adding an apostrophe. They are a form of informal language and should not be used in a formal analytical essay.

- For example, do not use: don't, can't, should've, etc.
- Instead use: do not, cannot, should **have**

## Rule 4: Underline the title

The TITLE of the novel should always be underlined when you are writing an essay by hand. (*Italics* are used when writing the title of the novel when using a computer.)

## Rule 5: Embed Quotations

Avoid using a long quote and 'dumping' it into your paragraph. Instead, select a short quote/part of a quote and try placing it into one of your sentences. This is what we call EMBEDDING QUOTATIONS.

Note: If you need to change a quote slightly by adding a word or letter, you can use [square brackets].

Example: *Their realisation that they could have "[their] own ranch to go to, an' [their] own house" provides a sense of comfort and hope that "[they] ain't got to stay here."*

The original words begin, "have our own ranch, an' our own house." However, "our" does not fit the grammar of our sentence so we need to change the verb to "their", using the square brackets to show that the quote is not quite as written in the novel.

## Sample Topic: What is the importance of dreams to the characters in *Of Mice and Men*?

### Brainstorming

In order to plan an essay in response to this topic, we need to do the following:

1. Unpack the topic – list the KEY TERMS
2. Develop a list of synonyms of these key terms
3. Explore key ideas within topic
4. Gather evidence (examples and QUOTES from the text)
5. Organise ideas (EXPLANATION) and examples (EVIDENCE) into a plan in order to structure our essay.

In this topic, the most important key terms are “importance” and “dreams”. The wording of the topic indicates that you will need to go beyond describing the dreams of the various characters. Instead, your main focus needs to be on exploring why their dreams are important to the novel. You will need to look at why they are important to the characters/what they provide them with, and why they ultimately fail.

Begin by exploring the KEY IDEAS that are suggested by this topic. For each of the following questions, brainstorm as many points as you can, recording your answers in either dot points or a mind map:

1. What are the dreams of the central characters?
2. What is the purpose of these dreams?
3. Why are their dreams ultimately unattainable?

Once you have reviewed the novel and brainstormed your points, use the table on the following page to organise, collate and extend your ideas. Remember that you are going to need a range of quotes to support each of your arguments.

Character	Dream	Purpose of dream (what does the dream bring this character?)	Reasons why dream fails	Supporting Quotations
Lennie and George	To own their own property, be their own bosses, grow their own vegetables, tend to animals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brings hope and possibility of a stable life and home</li> <li>• Gives them a sense of purpose to work and save.</li> <li>• Will make them accountable only to each other</li> <li>• Self-sufficiency</li> <li>• Will unite them as brothers</li> </ul>		<p>'live off the fatta the lan.'</p> <p>"Guys like us, that work on ranches... they ain't got nothing to look ahead to."</p>
Crooks				
Candy				
Curley's Wife				

### Sample Introduction:

John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* explores the idea of the 'American Dream,' as many of its central characters search for a better life. Set against the backdrop of the Great Depression, the lives of the itinerant farm workers often appear mundane, unstable and pointless. Dreams are pivotal to these characters' lives, as they provide them with a sense of hope, purpose and belonging. George and Lennie's dream to have their own property unites many of the isolated characters in the novel and provides a common goal. These dreams also function as coping mechanisms, to take characters such as Curley's wife out of their miserable reality. Despite the character's aspirations, Steinbeck foreshadows trouble throughout the novel, ultimately suggesting that they are unattainable and that merely having a dream may not always be enough.

### Sample Body Paragraph:

For most of the characters in *Of Mice and Men*, dreams function as coping mechanisms. George, Lennie, Candy and Curley's wife all cling to their dreams as a means of survival. George and Lennie's dream to have their own property is to "live off the fatta the lan" and become self-sufficient. Candy soon shares this dream, as he is "bemused by the beauty of the thing." George and Lennie inspire in Candy a dream that takes the men outside of themselves and their current reality. As their dream gives them a sense of purpose, they are able to focus on more than simply getting through the mundane daily life of the ranch. Their realisation that they could have "[their] own ranch to go to, an' [their] own house" provides a sense of comfort and hope that "[they] ain't got to stay here." They are able to emotionally detach themselves from the ranch, as it is only temporary. Curley's wife also uses her dream to separate herself from her reality. She holds onto her dreams of the past, constantly reminding the reader that she "coulda been in the movies, an' had nice clothes." Her dream allows her to deny her reality and escape from the loneliness and brutality of her situation. By reminding herself that she could have been something more – something extraordinary – she doesn't have to take any personal responsibility for her choices. Her unhappiness isn't a reflection of herself. Despite their dreams, the reader is positioned to feel great sympathy for these characters. George, Lennie, Candy and Curley's wife all cling to their dreams so desperately and appear to have little else in their lives. If their dreams cannot be realised, the reader doubts whether they have any chance for survival.

### Sample Conclusion:

Dreams are a significant motif in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The author presents a couple of destitute workers driven by a single dream that seems unattainable. However, their friendship keeps the dream alive, and Steinbeck uses other characters to cause the reader to believe that they might actually succeed in their goals. Nevertheless, the dream is never fulfilled and the characters who have counted on it the most are the ones who are the most devastated.

## Sample Topic: How are the concepts of isolation and loneliness explored in *Of Mice and Men*?

Many of the characters in *Of Mice and Men* experience loneliness in their lives and feel isolated from other people, and their lives lack meaning as a result. This isolation comes about through many means: through gender, age, race, poverty or disability. Friendship is the only means of overcoming this loneliness, but even where there is the hope of companionship, these dreams often end in tragedy and despair.

### Curley's Wife

- In the first meeting, Steinbeck stresses how incongruous her clothes and appearance are, with her "full, rouged lips", "heavily made up" eyes, "red fingernails" and "red mules on the insteps of which were little bouquets of red ostrich feathers." She is immediately isolated, partly by being the only female and also by being the sort of woman who would not easily fit in on a hard-working ranch.
- Steinbeck makes her seem more friendless and remote by never giving her a name.
- She makes several visits to the bunkhouse, always claiming that she is looking for Curley but clearly she is looking for company.
- The men know that, as Curley's wife, she is too dangerous to befriend and so they are never chatty, and just want her to leave. George has to teach this to Lennie, telling him to "leave her be."
- She announces her isolation to these men, "Think I don't like to talk to somebody ever' once in a while? Think I like to stick in that house alla time?"
- She lashes out viciously because they do not want her to talk to them, calling them "a bunch of bindle stiffs" and claiming that she is only here because "They ain't nobody else."
- In the barn with Lennie she pleads, "I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely." She is, perhaps, more friendless than anyone else.
- As she realises that she can talk to Lennie, she confides that she only married Curley to get away from home. The dream world that she lives in, the belief that she could have been a film star only isolates her further; her real world is lonely and miserable whilst her dream is unattainable.

### Candy

- His dog is his company and his equivalent of a friend: "I had 'im since he was a pup."
- The other men simply want the dog shot because it is no longer useful and is a nuisance in the bunkhouse. They do not recognise, nor sympathise with, Candy's affection for the dog as he pleads with them to let the subject drop, "I'm so used to him" and "he was the best damn sheepdog I ever seen."
- He knows that his future is more loneliness and then death, "They'll can me purty soon...I won't have no place to go to."
- When Crooks sneers at the idea of owning their own place, his answer shows the comfort he gains from his new friends and the end to loneliness, "we gonna do it...Me and Lennie and George."

- The importance of friendship and the self-esteem it now gives to him is also shown in the way that he answers back to Curley's wife when she insults him and Crooks and Lennie, "We got fren's, that's what we got." (Page 111)
- Seeing the collapse of his dream, he takes out his anger on Curley's wife's corpse, "You wasn't no good....I could of hoed the garden and washed dishes for them guys" but now there is only his lonely old aged existence on the ranch.

### Crooks

- He is segregated in the barn, demonstrating racial discrimination of the 1930s.
- Candy tells a story from Christmas when "they let the nigger come in that night."
- Excluded from the companionship that exists in the bunkhouse – no cards or chat. When he comes to speak to Slim about a mule's foot, he does not enter – "the stable buck put in his head."
- At the beginning of Section 4, we see where and how he lives, his possessions including books as he reads instead of having company.
- "Crooks was a proud, aloof man" because he has no choice but to endure this prejudice and isolation. Consequently, he bitterly guards his enforced privacy, saying to Lennie, "This here's my room...I ain't wanted in the bunkhouse, and you ain't wanted in my room."
- He is regretting the way that he taunted Lennie, "A guy needs somebody – to be near him" and "a guy gets too lonely " and "A guy sets alone out here at night."

### George and Lennie

- Different from the other ranch hands, "we got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us" because they have each other.
- George enjoys the dream of the two friends owning land together as much as Lennie "An' if a fren' come along....we'd say "Why don't you spen' the night?"
- George tells Slim, "I seen the guys that go around the ranches alone. That ain't no good", revealing that he benefits by avoiding their loneliness. He says that he and Lennie "got kinda used to each other" and "it's nicer to go around with a guy you know."
- George tells Slim how he once used Lennie for fun but he learned his lesson after an incident in the river and "I ain't done nothing like that no more." He protects and defends Lennie, for example not allowing Slim to call him "cuckoo", proudly telling the Boss that "he can put up more grain alone than most pairs can" and not allowing Curley to beat him up.
- Lennie, despite being slow and easily confused, is sure of this friendship, answering Crooks's threat that George might abandon him, "George wouldn't do nothing like that."
- Lennie is also protective of George "Ain't nobody goin' to talk no hurt to George."
- When he kills Lennie, George makes sure that he dies happy, Lennie's last words being, "Le's get that place now" as George pulls the trigger behind his head.

**TASK:** Organise the above notes into an essay plan, identifying your contention, topic sentences and the evidence that you will use. Once you have produced a detailed plan and selected the aspects of each character that you wish to discuss, write a practise response. Make sure you identify any similarities and contrasts that are seen between these characters in terms of the causes, responses and effects of loneliness and isolation.

Sample Topic: Several characters in *Of Mice and Men* are trapped or feel as if they are caught in a trap. Discuss.

Looking at the characters on the ranch, with only one or two exceptions (Slim, Curley and the Boss), they feel trapped:

- George is in some ways trapped by his responsibilities with Lennie – talks about what a good time he could have without him. He has made a promise to Aunt Clara and genuinely cares deeply for Lennie.
- Lennie is trapped by his intellectual shortcomings – he has caused problems in the past and will go on doing so.
- Candy and Crooks are trapped in lives that are going nowhere – symbolised in them both having a physical disability. Candy is trapped by age and Crooks by attitudes to his colour.
- Curley's wife is trapped in a loveless marriage – unable to communicate with anyone on the farm. She had a dream that is no longer a possibility.

The dream of George and Lennie can be seen as an attempt to escape – other characters are anxious to 'escape' with them and want to become part of their plans. It seems that the dream may come true and some of the characters will be able to escape their existence on the ranch.

Dream ultimately fails, due to the characters being trapped. Characters had sensed this would happen – Curley's wife talked of other men dreaming of owning their own land and Crooks soon decided things would fail.

Lennie's intellectual failings did cause him to mess things up and George's sense of responsibility for him made him feel that he was forced to end Lennie's life.

## Sample Topic: How is the idea of the American Dream explored in *Of Mice and Men*?

This topic requires you to explain how the novel indicates the attraction of the dream and how it shows the dreams of characters being dashed.

When planning your response, you will need to find two a minimum of two quotations that link to each of the following points:

- What the American Dream is within the novel.
- Why the American Dream is so important to George and Lennie.
- How other people on the ranch have lost hope in the American Dream.
- How the ending of the novel offers a negative (or, if you prefer, positive) comment on the American Dream.

When you have selected the quotations, your task is then to write a detailed paragraph about each bullet point in which you use at least two quotations to support and develop your points.

An example paragraph is written below:

Within the novel, the American Dream represents the possibility of success and future happiness to those people who would otherwise be without hope. George and Lennie are reassured by the thought that they are not like the other men who 'ain't got nothing to look ahead to'. They are moving from ranch to ranch because of the trouble that Lennie gets into, but they have the possibility of one day coming to a standstill as he knows a place where they could 'get it for six hundred bucks'. The fact that the place is 'real' encourages the men to think that their Dream could be reality, although whether George really believes it will come true is another matter. Judging from his excitement when Candy becomes part of the dream and his exclamation that they now 'could swing her', it appears that he did not believe the dream was realistic beforehand. Ultimately George allows himself to believe in the dream too, and it brings him hope that hard work and perseverance will lead to a better future than the life that he and Lennie were living at the moment.

# SAMPLE ESSAY TOPICS

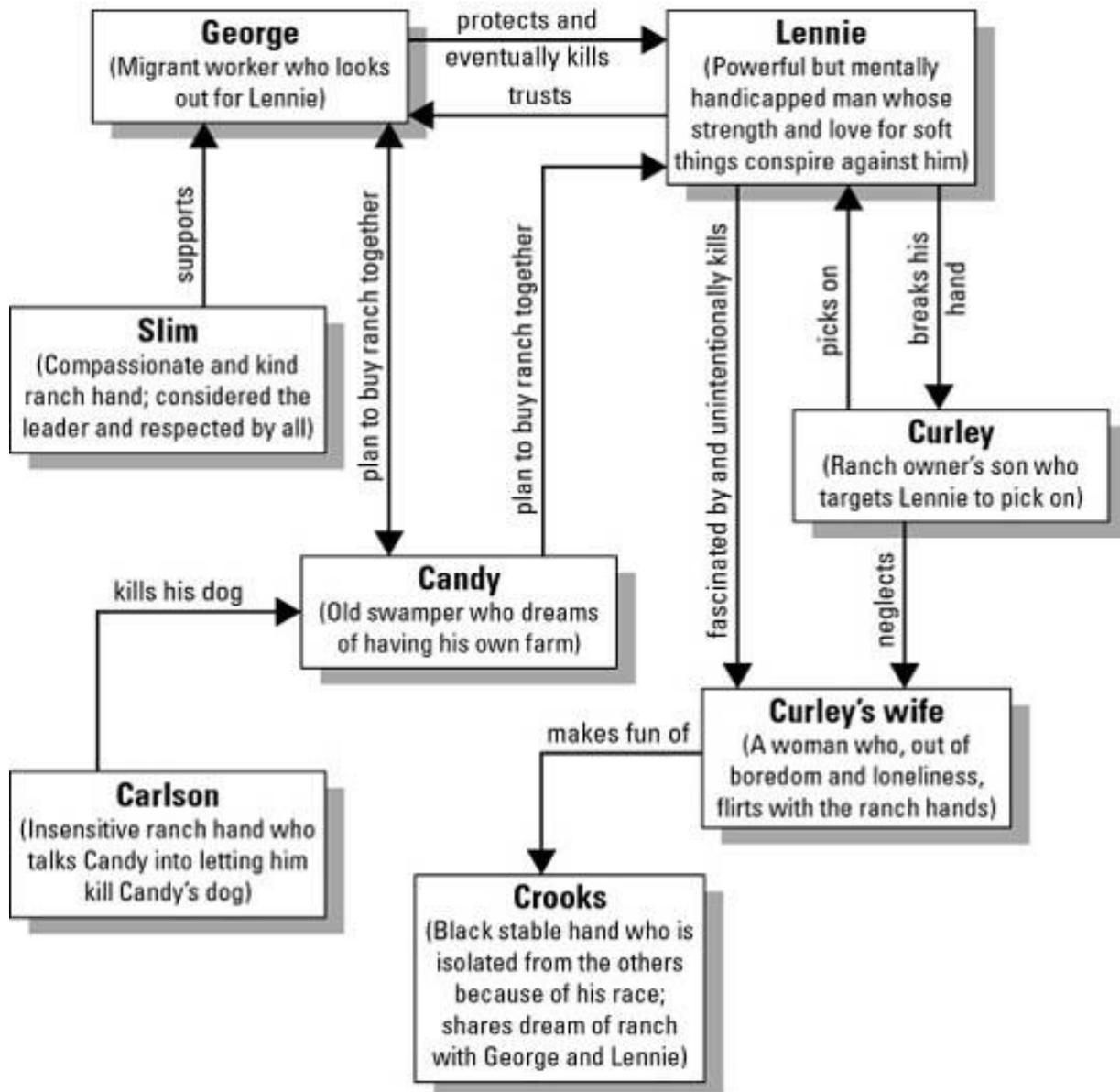
1. How is the importance of friendship and the perils of its absence explored in *Of Mice and Men*?
2. What effect does loneliness have upon the men and women in *Of Mice and Men*?
3. 'Hopes and dreams can help people to survive, even if they can never become real.' Discuss.
4. 'Cruelty and kindness are not always distinct.' Discuss.
5. How do the challenges faced by Curley's Wife as a woman differ from those faced by male characters in *Of Mice and Men*?
6. 'Guys like us are the loneliest guys in the world... They ain't got nothing to look ahead to.' How do dreams help characters to overcome the misery caused by their circumstances?
7. 'Because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you.' Why is Lennie and George's relationship important to both characters?
8. How does Lennie and George's friendship set them apart from the other characters in *Of Mice and Men*?
9. Was George's decision to kill Lennie justified?
10. What is the importance of animal symbolism in *Of Mice and Men*?
11. 'The best laid plans of Mice and Men often go awry.' Why do so many of the dreams and plans of characters in *Of Mice and Men* end in failure?
12. Discuss the importance of Slim, Candy and Crooks and what they represent.

# **SUMMARIES, ANALYSIS AND OTHER RESOURCES**





# CHARACTERS MIND MAP



# TIMELINE OF EVENTS

<p>Lennie petted a girl's red dress, but she thought he was trying to attack her and accused him of rape.</p> <p>George and Lennie hide in an irrigation ditch all day until the lynch mob hunting for them has gone.</p>	<p><b>BEFORE</b></p>	<p><b>SOME TIME</b></p>	<p>FOUR DAYS</p> 
<p>George and Lennie camp in the brush beside the pool, a few miles south of Soledad.</p>		<p>Evening</p>	
<p>10a.m.</p> <p>George and Lennie arrive at the ranch.</p> <p>They meet the other men.</p>	<p>Morning</p>	<p><b>FRIDAY</b></p>	
<p>George and Lennie join the workers bucking barley.</p> <p>Lennie impresses everyone with his strength.</p>	<p>Afternoon</p>	<p><b>FRIDAY</b></p>	
<p>In the bunk house.</p> <p>Candy's dog is shot.</p> <p>Hopes are raised when Candy offers his money to buy land.</p> <p>The fight takes place between Lennie and Curley.</p>	<p>Evening</p>	<p><b>FRIDAY</b></p>	
<p>Lennie, Candy and Curley's wife gather in Crooks' room.</p>	<p>Evening</p>	<p><b>SATURDAY</b></p>	
<p>Lennie kills his puppy.</p> <p>Then he kills Curley's wife.</p>	<p>Afternoon</p>	<p><b>SUNDAY</b></p>	
<p>George finds Lennie hiding in the brush and shoots him.</p>	<p>Evening</p>	<p><b>SUNDAY</b></p>	

# CHAPTER SUMMARIES

## CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

### Synopsis:

- George and Lennie camp in the brush, by a pool, the night before starting new jobs as ranch hands.
- George finds Lennie stroking a dead mouse in his pocket. He complains that caring for Lennie prevents him from living a freer life. We find out that Lennie's innocent petting of a girl's dress led to them losing their last jobs in Weed.
- However, when they talk about their dream of getting a piece of land together, we know they really depend on each other.

The story opens with the description of a riverbed in rural California, a beautiful, wooded area at the base of “golden foothill slopes.” A path runs to the river, used by boys going swimming and riffraff coming down from the highway. Two men walk along the path. The first, George, is small, wiry, and sharp-featured, while his companion, Lennie, is large and awkward. They are both dressed in denim, farmhand attire.

As they reach a clearing, Lennie stops to drink from the river, and George warns him not to drink too much or he will get sick, as he did the night before. As their conversation continues, it becomes clear that the larger man has a mild mental disability, and that his companion looks out for his safety. George begins to complain about the bus driver who dropped them off a long way from their intended destination—a ranch on which they are due to begin work. Lennie interrupts him to ask where they are going. His companion impatiently reminds him of their movements over the past few days, and then notices that Lennie is holding a dead mouse. George takes it away from him. Lennie insists that he is not responsible for killing the mouse, and that he just wanted to pet it, but George loses his temper and throws it across the stream. George warns Lennie that they are going to work on a ranch, and that he must behave himself when they meet the boss. George does not want any trouble of the kind they encountered in Weed, the last place they worked.

George decides that they will stay in the clearing for the night, and as they prepare their bean supper, Lennie crosses the stream and recovers the mouse, only to have George find him out immediately and take the mouse away again. Apparently, Lennie's Aunt Clara used to give him mice to pet, but he tends to “break” small creatures unintentionally when he shows his affection for them, killing them because he doesn't know his own strength. As the two men sit down to eat, Lennie asks for ketchup. This request launches George into a long speech about Lennie's ungratefulness. George complains that he could get along much better if he didn't have to care for Lennie. He uses the incident that got them chased out of Weed as a case in point. Lennie, a lover of soft things, stroked the fabric of a girl's dress, and would not let go. The locals assumed he assaulted her, and ran them out of town.

*With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us.*

After this tirade, George feels sorry for losing his temper and apologizes by telling Lennie's favorite story, the plan for their future happiness. The life of a ranch-hand, according to George, is one of the loneliest in the world, and most men working on ranches have no one to look out for them. But he

and Lennie have each other, and someday, as soon as they manage to save enough money, they will buy a farm together and, as Lennie puts it, “live off the fatta the lan’.” They will grow their own food, raise livestock, and keep rabbits, which Lennie will tend. This familiar story cheers both of them up. As night falls, George tells

Lennie that if he encounters any trouble while working at the ranch, he is to return to this clearing, hide in the bushes, and wait for George to come.

## CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY

### Synopsis:

- When they arrive at the ranch in the morning, George and Lennie are shown around by old Candy.
- They meet their boss and, later, his son, Curley - George is suspicious of Curley's manner and warns Lennie to stay away from him.
- They see Curley's pretty and, apparently, flirtatious wife and meet some of their fellow workers, Slim and Carlson.

The next day, Lennie and George make their way to the ranch bunkhouse, where they are greeted by Candy, an aging “swamper,” or handyman, who has lost his right hand. The bunkhouse is an unadorned building where the men sleep on “burlap ticking” and keep their few possessions in apple boxes that have been nailed to the walls. George is dismayed to find a can of lice powder in his bunk, but Candy assures him that he’s in no danger of being infested, since the man who slept there before George was remarkably clean. George asks about the boss, and Candy reports that although the boss was angry that George and Lennie did not arrive the previous night as he had expected them to, he can be a “pretty nice fella.” Candy relates how the boss gave the men a gallon of whiskey for Christmas, which immediately impresses George.

The boss appears and questions the pair about their late arrival. George blames it on the bus driver, who, he claims, lied to them about their proximity to the ranch. When the boss asks about their skills and previous employment, George speaks for Lennie to prevent him from revealing his lack of intelligence. When Lennie momentarily forgets George’s instructions and speaks, George becomes visibly nervous. Their behaviour strikes the boss as suspicious, and he asks why George feels the need to take such good care of his companion. He wonders if George is taking advantage of a man who lacks the faculties to take care of himself. George replies that Lennie is his cousin and was kicked in the head by a horse when he was young, so George has to look out for him. The boss remains suspicious and warns George not to try to pull anything over on him. Nonetheless, they are assigned to one of the grain teams, working under a man named Slim.

Once the boss leaves the bunkhouse, George berates Lennie for having spoken up. Candy overhears George telling Lennie that he is glad they are not actually related. George warns Candy that he doesn’t appreciate other people sticking their noses in his business, but Candy assures him that he minds his own business and has no interest in their affairs. Accompanying Candy is an ancient, half-blind sheepdog, an animal that the old man has raised since it was a puppy. Soon enough, Curley, the boss’s son, a small young man who wears a Vaseline-filled work glove on his left hand and high-heeled boots to distinguish himself from the labourers, joins them. Curley, an aggressive and malicious ex-boxer, immediately senses that he might have some fun at Lennie’s expense, and

begins to demand that “the big guy talk.” After Curley leaves, Candy explains that Curley loves beating up big guys, “kind of like he’s mad at ’em because he ain’t a big guy.” Curley’s temper has only gotten worse since his recent marriage to a “tart” who enjoys flirting with the ranch-hands.

Candy leaves to prepare wash basins for the men who will soon return from the fields, and George tells Lennie to steer clear of Curley, because fighting the “bastard” will likely cost them their jobs. Lennie agrees, assuring George that he doesn’t want any trouble. George reminds him again of the meeting place they agreed on should anything go wrong. At that moment, Curley’s wife, a pretty, heavily made-up woman with a nasal voice, appears. She claims to be looking for her husband and flirts with the two men and Slim, the skilled mule driver, who passes by outside. Slim tells her that Curley has gone into the house, and she hurries off. Lennie speaks admiringly of how “purty” the woman is, and George angrily orders him to stay away from “that bitch.” Lennie, suddenly frightened, complains that he wants to leave the ranch, but George reminds him that they need to make some money before they can buy their own land and live their dream.

Slim enters the bunkhouse. His talents make him one of the most important and respected men on the ranch. There is a “gravity in his manner,” and everyone stops talking and listens when he speaks. He converses with Lennie and George, and is quietly impressed by their friendship, appreciating the fact that they look out for one another. The men are joined by Carlson, another ranch-hand. Carlson asks about Slim’s dog, which has just given birth to nine puppies. Slim reports that he drowned four of the puppies immediately because their mother would have been unable to feed them. Carlson suggests that they convince Candy to shoot his old, worthless mutt and raise one of the pups instead. The triangle rings for dinner, and the men filter out of the bunkhouse, with Lennie suddenly excited by the prospect of having a puppy. As George and Lennie prepare to leave, Curley appears again, looking for his wife, and hurries off angrily when they tell him where she went. George expresses his dislike for Curley, and comments that he is afraid he will “tangle” with Curley himself.

## CHAPTER 3 SUMMARY

### Synopsis:

- Later that evening, George tells Slim about why he and Lennie travel together and more about what happened in Weed.
- The men talk about Candy's ancient dog, which is tired and ill. Carlson shoots it, as an act of kindness.
- George tells Candy about their dream of getting a piece of land and Candy eagerly offers to join them - he has capital, so they could make it happen almost immediately.
- Curley provokes Lennie into a fight, which ends up with Lennie severely injuring Curley's hand.

At the end of the workday, Slim and George return to the bunkhouse. Slim has agreed to give one of the pups to Lennie, and George thanks him for his kindness, insisting that Lennie is “dumb as hell,” but is neither crazy nor mean. Slim appreciates George’s friendship with Lennie, saying that it is a welcome change in a world where no one ever “seems to give a damn about nobody.” George confides in Slim the story of how he and Lennie came to be companions. They were born in the same town, and George took charge of Lennie after the death of Lennie’s Aunt Clara. At first, George admits, he pushed Lennie around, getting him to do ridiculous things, such as jumping into a river even though he didn’t know how to swim. After watching his friend nearly drown, George felt

ashamed of his behaviour. Since that day, he has taken good care of his companion, protecting him even when he gets in trouble. For example, in Weed, the last town where they worked, Lennie wanted to touch the fabric of a girl's red dress. When she pulled away, Lennie became frightened and held on to her until George hit him over the head to make him let go. The girl accused Lennie of rape, and George and Lennie had to hide in an irrigation ditch to escape a lynch mob.

Lennie comes into the bunkhouse, carrying his new puppy under his coat. George berates him for taking the little creature away from its mother. As Lennie returns the puppy to the litter, Candy and Carlson appear. Carlson begins to complain again about Candy's dog, saying that it stinks and that it "ain't no good to himself." He urges Candy to shoot the animal. Candy replies that he has had the dog for too many years to kill it, but Carlson continues to pressure him. Eventually Slim joins in, suggesting that Candy would be putting a suffering animal out of its misery. Slim offers him a puppy and urges him to let Carlson shoot the dog. Another farmhand, Whit, enters and shows Slim a letter written by a man they used to work with published in a pulp magazine. The short letter praises the magazine. As the men marvel over it, Carlson offers to kill the dog quickly by shooting it in the back of the head. Reluctantly, Candy gives in. Carlson takes the dog outside, promising Slim that he will bury the corpse. After a few awkward moments of silence, the men hear a shot ring out, and Candy turns his face to the wall.

Crooks, the black stable-hand, comes in and tells Slim that he has warmed some tar to put on a mule's foot. After Slim leaves, the other men play cards and discuss Curley's wife, agreeing that she will make trouble for someone; as George says, "She's a jailbait all set on the trigger." Whit invites George to accompany them to a local whorehouse the following night. Whit discusses the merits of old Susy's place over Clara's, it being cheaper and having nice chairs, but George comments that he cannot afford to waste his money because he and Lennie are trying to put together a "stake." Lennie and Carlson come in. Carlson cleans his gun and avoids looking at Candy. Curley appears looking for his wife again. Full of jealousy and suspicion, he asks where Slim is. When he learns that Slim is in the barn, he storms off in that direction, followed by Whit and Carlson, who hope to see a fight.

George asks Lennie if he saw Slim with Curley's wife in the barn, and Lennie says no. George warns his companion against the trouble that women cause, and then Lennie asks him to describe the farm that they hope to buy. As George talks, Candy listens and becomes excited by the idea of such a beautiful place. He asks if the place really exists. George is guarded at first, but soon says that it does and that the owners are desperate to sell it. Overcome with hope, Candy offers to contribute his life's savings if they allow him to live there too. Since he is old and crippled, he worries that the ranch will let him go soon. The men agree that after a month of work at this ranch, they will have enough money saved to make a down payment on the house. George tells the other two not to tell anyone else about their plan. As they hear the other men's voices approaching, Candy says quietly to George that he should have shot his old dog himself, and not let a stranger do it.

Slim, Curley, Carlson, and Whit return. Curley apologizes to Slim for his suspicions, and then the other men mock him. Knowing that Slim is too strong to be beaten in a fight, Curley looks to vent his rage elsewhere. He finds an easy target in Lennie, who is still dreaming of the farm and smiling with childlike delight. Though Lennie begs to be left alone, Curley attacks him. He throws several punches, bloodying Lennie's face, and hits him in the gut before George urges Lennie to fight back. On George's command, Lennie grabs Curley's right hand and breaks it effortlessly. As Slim leads Curley away to a doctor, he warns him not to have George and Lennie fired, or he will be made the laughingstock of the ranch. Curley consents not to attempt to have them fired. George comforts Lennie, telling him that the fight was not his fault and that he has nothing to fear.

Lennie's only fear is that he will not be allowed to tend the rabbits on their farm. George assures him that he will.

## CHAPTER 4 SUMMARY

### Synopsis:

- The following night, most men on the ranch go into town. Crooks is alone in his room when Lennie joins him.
- They talk about land - Crooks is sceptical, not believing that George and Lennie are going to do what so many other men he's known have failed to do, and get land of their own. Yet when Candy happens to come in as well, Crooks is convinced and asks to be in on it too.
- Curley's wife arrives. She threatens Crooks and an argument develops. Crooks realises he can never really be part of George, Lennie and Candy's plan.

The next evening, Saturday, Crooks sits on his bunk in the harness room. The black stable-hand has a crooked back—the source of his nickname—and is described as a “proud, aloof man” who spends much of his time reading. Lennie, who has been in the barn tending to his puppy, appears in the doorway, looking for company. Crooks tells him to go away, saying that if he, as a black man, is not allowed in the white quarters, then white men are not allowed in his. Lennie does not understand. He innocently reports that everyone else has gone into town and that he saw Crooks’s light on and thought he could come in and keep him company. Finally, despite himself, Crooks yields to Lennie’s “disarming smile” and invites him in.

*Just like heaven. Ever’body wants a little piece of lan’. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land.*

Soon enough, Lennie forgets his promise to keep the farm a secret and begins to babble cheerfully about the place that he and George will buy someday. Crooks does not believe him, assuming that the fantasy is part of Lennie’s mental disability. He tells Lennie about his own life, recounting his early days on a chicken farm when white children visited and played with him. Still, he says, he felt keenly alone even then. His family was the only black family for miles, and his father constantly warned him against keeping company with their white neighbours. The importance of this instruction escaped Crooks as a child, but he says that he has come to understand it perfectly. Now, as the only black man on the ranch, he resents the unfair social norms that require him to sleep alone in the stable. Feeling weak and vulnerable himself, Crooks cruelly suggests that George might never return from town. He enjoys torturing Lennie, until Lennie becomes angry and threatens Crooks, demanding to know “Who hurt George?” Crooks hastily backs down, promising that George will come back, and begins to talk about his childhood again, which returns Lennie to his dreams of owning the farm. Crooks bitterly says that every ranch-hand has the same dream. He adds that he has seen countless men go on about the same piece of land, but nothing ever comes of it. A little piece of land, Crooks claims, is as hard to find as heaven.

Candy eventually joins them, entering Crooks’s room for the first time in all of the years they have worked together. Both men are uncomfortable at first but Candy is respectful and Crooks pleased to have more company. Candy talks to Lennie about raising rabbits on the farm. He has been busy calculating numbers and thinks he knows how the farm can make some money with rabbits. Crooks continues to belittle their dream until Candy insists that they already have the land picked out and nearly all the money they’ll need to buy it. This news piques the black man’s interest. Shyly, Crooks suggests that maybe they could take him along with them. But Curley’s wife appears and interrupts the men’s daydreaming.

Curley’s wife asks about her husband, then says she knows that the men went to a brothel, cruelly observing that “they left all the weak ones here.” Crooks and Candy tell her to go away, but instead she starts talking about her loneliness and her unhappy marriage. Candy insists that she leave and

says proudly that even if she got them fired, they could go off and buy their own place to live. Curley's wife laughs at him, then bitterly complains about her life with Curley. She sums up her situation, admitting that she feels pathetic to want company so desperately that she is willing to talk to the likes of Crooks, Candy, and Lennie. She asks what happened to her husband's hand, and does not believe the men when they insist that he got it caught in a machine. She teases Lennie about the bruises on his face, deducing that he got injured in the scuffle with Curley.

Fed up, Crooks insists that she leave before he tells the boss about her wicked ways, and she responds by asking if he knows what she can do to him if he says anything. The implication is clear that she could easily have him lynched, and he cowers. Candy says that he hears the men coming back, which finally makes her leave, but not before she tells Lennie that she is glad he beat her husband. George appears, and criticizes Candy for talking about their farm in front of other people. As the white men leave Crooks, he changes his mind about going to the farm with them, calling out, "I wouldn't want to go no place like that."

## CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY

### Synopsis:

- Next afternoon, Lennie accidentally kills the puppy that Slim had given him by petting it too much. He's sad.
- Curley's wife finds him and starts talking very openly about her feelings. She invites Lennie to stroke her soft hair, but he does it so strongly she panics and he ends up killing her too. He runs away to hide, as George had told him.
- Candy finds the body and tells George. They tell the other men - Curley wants revenge.

It is Sunday afternoon and Lennie is alone in the barn, sitting in the hay and stroking the dead body of his puppy. He talks to himself, asking the animal why it died: "You ain't so little as mice. I didn't bounce you hard." Worrying that George will be angry and will not let him raise the rabbits on their farm, he starts to bury it in the hay. He decides to tell George that he found it dead but then realizes that George will see through this lie. Frustrated, he curses the dog for dying and hurls it across the room. Soon, though, Lennie retrieves the puppy, strokes it again, and reasons that perhaps George won't care, since the puppy meant nothing to George.

As he talks to himself, Curley's wife enters and sits beside him. He hastily hides the puppy and tells her that George ordered him not to speak to her. She reassures him that it is safe for him to talk to her, pointing out that the other men are occupied with a horseshoe tournament outside and will not interrupt them. She discovers the puppy and consoles him about its death, declaring that "the whole country is fulla mutts." She then complains about her loneliness and the cold treatment she gets from the ranch-hands. She tells Lennie about her dreams of living a different life. She reveals that her mother denied her the opportunity to join a traveling show when she was fifteen and then, years later, a talent scout spotted her and promised to take her to Hollywood to become a movie star. When nothing came of it, she decided to marry Curley, whom she dislikes.

Lennie continues to talk about his rabbits, and she asks him why he likes animals so much. Lennie replies that he likes to touch soft things with his fingers. She admits that she likes the same thing, and offers to let him stroke her hair. She warns him not to "muss it," but he quickly becomes excited and holds on too tight, frightening her. When she cries out, Lennie panics and clamps his strong

hands over her mouth to silence her. The more she struggles, the tighter his grip becomes, and he shakes her until her body goes limp. Lennie has broken her neck.

The barn goes still as Lennie realizes what he has done. He tries to bury Curley's wife in the hay, worrying chiefly that George will be angry with him. Taking the puppy's body with him, he flees toward the meeting place that George designates at the book's opening—the clearing in the woods. Candy comes looking for Lennie and finds the body. He calls George, who realizes immediately what has happened. George expresses the hope that maybe Lennie will just be locked up and still be treated well, but Candy tells him that Curley is sure to have Lennie lynched. Candy asks George if the two of them can still buy the farm, but sees from George's face that the idea is now impossible. George says quietly that he thinks he knew all along that it would never happen, but because Lennie liked the idea so much, he had started to believe it himself.

George worries that the other men will think that he had something to do with the death of Curley's wife, so he instructs Candy how to inform them. George will pretend that he has not seen the body and act surprised when Candy delivers the news. George exits, and Candy curses Curley's wife for destroying their dream of a farm. After a few moments, his eyes full of tears,

## CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY

### Synopsis:

- Lennie hides in the brush by the pool. He dreams of his Aunt Clara and the rabbits he will tend when he and George get their land.
- George finds Lennie and talks reassuringly to him about the little place they will have together - then shoots him with Carlson's gun.
- When the other men find George, they assume he shot Lennie in self-defence. Only Slim understands what George did and why.

In the same riverbed where the story began, it is a beautiful, serene late afternoon. A heron stands in a shaded green pool, eating water snakes that glide between its legs. Lennie comes stealing through the undergrowth and kneels by the water to drink. He is proud of himself for remembering to come here to wait for George, but soon has two unpleasant visions. His Aunt Clara appears “from out of Lennie's head” and berates him, speaking in Lennie's own voice, for not listening to George, for getting himself into trouble, and for causing so many problems for his only friend. Then a gigantic rabbit appears to him, also speaking in Lennie's own voice, and tells him that George will probably beat him and abandon him. Just then, George appears. He is uncommonly quiet and listless. He does not berate Lennie. Even when Lennie himself insists on it, George's tirade is unconvincing and scripted. He repeats his usual words of reproach without emotion. Lennie makes his usual offer to go away and live in a cave, and George tells him to stay, making Lennie feel comforted and hopeful.

Lennie asks him to tell the story of their farm, and George begins, talking about how most men drift along, without any companions, but he and Lennie have one another. The noises of men in the woods come closer, and George tells Lennie to take off his hat and look across the river while he describes their farm. He tells Lennie about the rabbits, and promises that nobody will ever be mean to him again. “Le's do it now,” Lennie says. “Le's get that place now.” George agrees. He raises Carlson's gun, which he has removed from his jacket, and shoots Lennie in the back of the head. As Lennie falls to the ground and becomes still, George tosses the gun away and sits down on the riverbank.

The sound of the shot brings the lynch party running to the clearing. Carlson questions George, who lets them believe that he wrestled the gun from Lennie and shot him with it. Only Slim understands what really happened: "You hadda, George. I swear you hadda," he tells him. Slim leads George, who is numb with grief, away from the scene, while Carlson and Curley watch incredulously, wondering what is "eatin' them two guys."

# CHAPTER ANALYSIS

## CHAPTER 1 ANALYSIS

The clearing into which Lennie and George wander evokes Eden in its serenity and beauty. Steinbeck wisely opens the novella with this idyllic scene, for it creates a background for the idealized friendship between the men and introduces the romanticized dream of farm life that they share. The opening pages establish a sense of purity and perfection that the world, which will prove to be cruel and predatory, cannot sustain. Steinbeck also solidly establishes the relationship between George and Lennie within the first few pages of dialogue. Their speech is that of uneducated labourers, but is emotionally rich and often lyrical.

Because George and Lennie are not particularly dynamic characters (neither of them changes significantly during the course of the narrative), the impression the reader gets from these early pages persists throughout the novella. Lennie's and George's behaviour is relatively static. Lennie's sweet innocence, the undying devotion he shows George, and his habit of petting soft things are his major defining traits from the opening pages to the final scene. Just as constant are George's blustery rants about how much easier life would be without the burden of caring for Lennie, and unconvincing speeches that always end by revealing his love for and desire to protect his friend.

Some critics of the work consider George, and especially Lennie, somewhat flat representations of purity, goodness, and fraternal devotion, rather than convincing portraits of complex, conflicted human beings. They charge Steinbeck with being excessively sentimental in his portrayal of his protagonists, his romanticisation of male friendship, and in the deterministic plot that seems designed to destroy this friendship. Others, however, contend that any exaggeration in *Of Mice and Men*, like in so many of Steinbeck's other works, is meant to comment on the plight of the downtrodden, to make the reader sympathize with people who society and storytellers often deem unworthy because of their class, physical or mental capabilities, or the colour of their skin.

Whether or not these issues constitute a flaw in the novella, it is true that Steinbeck places George, Lennie, and their relationship on a rather high pedestal. Nowhere is this clearer than in the story George constantly tells about the farm they one day plan to own. This piece of land represents a world in which the two men can live together just as they are, without dangers and without apologies. No longer will they be run out of towns like Weed or be subject to the demeaning and backbreaking will of others. As the novella progresses and their situation worsens, George and Lennie's desire to attain the farm they dream about grows more desperate. Their vision becomes so powerful that it will eventually attract other men, who will beg to be a part of it. George's story of the farm, as well as George and Lennie's mutual devotion, lays the groundwork for one of the book's dominant themes: the idealized sense of friendship among men.

True to the nature of tragedy, Steinbeck makes the vision of the farm so beautiful and the fraternal bond between George and Lennie so strong in order to place his protagonists at a considerable height from which to fall. From the very beginning, Steinbeck heavily foreshadows the doom that awaits the men. The clearing into which the two travellers stumble may resemble Eden, but it is, in fact, a world with dangers lurking at every turn. The rabbits that sit like "gray, sculptured stones" hurry for cover at the sound of footsteps, hinting at the predatory world that will finally destroy Lennie and George's dream. The dead mouse in Lennie's pocket serves as a potent symbol of the end that awaits weak, unsuspecting creatures. After all, despite Lennie's great physical size and strength, his childlike mental capabilities render him as helpless as a mouse.

Steinbeck's repeated comparisons between Lennie and animals (bears, horses, terriers) reinforce the impending sense of doom. Animals in the story, from field mice to Candy's dog to Lennie's puppy, all die untimely deaths. The book's tragic course of action seems even more inevitable when one considers Lennie's troublesome behaviour that got George and Lennie chased out of Weed, and George's anticipatory insistence that they designate a meeting place should any problems arise.

## CHAPTER 2 ANALYSIS

Once George and Lennie arrive at the bunkhouse, the difficulties of the lives they lead become starkly apparent. There are few comforts in their quarters; the men sleep on rough burlap mattresses and do not own anything that cannot fit into an apple box. George's fear that lice and roaches infest his bunk furthers the image of the struggles of such a life. This section also immediately and painfully establishes the cruel, predatory nature of the world. Carlson's belief that Candy should replace his old dog with a healthy newborn puppy signals a world in which the lives of the weak and debilitated are considered unworthy of protection or preservation. The ranch-hands' world has limited resources, and only the strongest will survive. As Slim, who voluntarily drowns four of his dog's nine puppies, makes clear, there is little room or tolerance for the weak, especially when resources are limited. Throughout the course of the work, nearly all of the characters will confront this grim reality. Not only does the ranch represent a society that does not consider the welfare of its weaker members, but it also stands as one in which those who hold power wield it irresponsibly.

Though the boss seems fair-minded, treating his men to whiskey at Christmas and giving Lennie and George the benefit of the doubt, he is an unimportant character. Instead, his son Curley embodies authority on the ranch. In the book's vision of the world, Curley represents the vicious and belligerent way in which social power tends to manifest itself. Given Curley's temperament, he serves as a natural foil—a character whose emotions or actions contrast with those of other characters—for both the gentle Lennie and the self-assured Slim. Whereas Curley is plagued by self-doubts that cause him to explode violently, Slim possesses a quiet competence that earns him the respect of everyone on the ranch. Like Curley, Slim stands as an authority figure. The men on the ranch look to him for advice, and, later, even Curley will deliver an uncharacteristic apology after wrongly accusing Slim of fooling around with his wife. Slim's authority comes from his self-possession; he needs neither the approval nor the failure of others to confirm his stature. Curley's strength, on the other hand, depends upon his ability to dominate and defeat those weaker than him.

George and Lennie immediately feel the threat that Curley's presence poses. To avoid getting into trouble with Curley, they promise to stick even closer to each other than usual. Their friendship is rare and impressive. Slim, who wonders why more men don't travel around together and theorizes that maybe it's because everyone is scared of everyone else, appreciates the closeness of their friendship. In the novella as a whole, Steinbeck celebrates and romanticizes the bonds between men. The men in *Of Mice and Men* dominate the ranch and long, more than anything else, to live peaceful, untroubled lives in the company of other men. The only female character who has an active role in the book is Curley's wife, who, significantly, Steinbeck never names, and identifies only in reference to her husband. Other female characters are mentioned in passing, but with the exception of the maternal Aunt Clara, who cared for Lennie before her death, they are invariably prostitutes or troublemakers.

Even with all of its concern for treating with dignity the lives of the socially disempowered, *Of Mice and Men* derogatorily assigns women only two lowly functions: caretakers of men, and sex objects.

The novel altogether dismisses women from its vision of paradise, regardless of their place in the real world. Female sexuality is described as a trap laid to ensnare and ruin men. George and Lennie imagine themselves alone, without wives or women to complicate their vision of tending the land and raising rabbits. Much like a traditional, conservative Christian interpretation of the myth of man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the novella presents women as a temptation leading to man's fall from perfection.

## CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS

During George's conversation with Slim, Steinbeck establishes the origins of Lennie and George's relationship in a few broad strokes. Theirs is a childhood relationship grown into a rare adult companionship. After years of torturing and taking advantage of his friend, George had a moral awakening, realizing that it is wrong to make a weaker living being suffer for sport. This conviction runs counter to the cruel nature of the world of the ranch-hands, in which the strong hunt down and do away with the weak. In this section, the death of Candy's dog testifies to the pitiless process by which the strong attack and eliminate the weak. Candy's dog—although no longer useful at corralling sheep—is of great importance to the old swamper. Candy's emotional attachment to the dog is clear. Regardless, allowing the animal to live out its days is not an option in this cruel environment. Carlson insists that the animal's infirmity makes it unworthy of such devotion. The most comfort he can offer is to assure Candy that he will kill the dog mercifully and quickly. When Slim, the story's most trusted source of wisdom, agrees, he only confirms that their world is one that offers the weak and disempowered little hope of protection.

*"We'd just go to her," George said. "We wouldn't ask nobody if we could. Jus' say, 'We'll go to her,' an' we would. Jus' milk the cow and sling some grain to the chickens an' go to her."*

Nearly all of the characters in *Of Mice and Men* are disempowered in some way. Whether because of a physical or mental handicap, age, class, race, or gender, almost everyone finds him- or herself outside the structures of social power, and each suffers greatly as a result. Inflexible rules dictate that old men are sent away from the ranch when they are no longer useful and black workers are refused entrance to the bunkhouse. While the world described in the book offers no protection for the suffering, there are small comforts. Lennie and George's story is one such reprieve. The power of their vision of a simple life on an idyllic little farm rests in its ability to soothe the afflicted. In the opening chapter, this vision acts like a salve for Lennie and George after their tumultuous departure from Weed; now, it rouses Candy out of mourning for his dog. As soon as the lonely old man overhears George and Lennie discussing their plans, he seems pitifully eager to join in this paradise. Talking about it again also manages to calm and comfort Lennie after his upsetting run-in with Curley. Despite the fact that with Candy's help the possibility of purchasing the farm grows more real for George and Lennie than ever before, it is clear that tragic events will intervene. George's story will prove to be only a temporary escape from the world's troubles, not a cure.

Steinbeck advances the narrative toward the inevitable tragedy through many instances of foreshadowing in this section. The story of Lennie's behaviour in Weed and his performance in the fight with Curley establish his tendency to exert great strength when confused and frightened. Combined with George's earlier observation that Lennie kept accidentally killing mice while petting them, these events heavily anticipate Lennie's deadly interaction with Curley's wife in the book's climactic scene. Furthermore, the method by which Carlson kills Candy's dog, with a painless shot to the back of the head, sadly mirrors the way George will choose to murder his dearest friend. It is no coincidence that soon after George confides in Slim that he has known Lennie since childhood,

Candy pathetically says that he could never kill his dog, since he has “had him since he was a pup.” Most significant is Candy’s quiet comment to George that he wishes he had shot his old dog himself and not allowed a stranger to do it, a distinct foreshadowing of the decision George will make to kill Lennie himself rather than let him be killed by Curley and the others.

## CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS

This section introduces the character of Crooks, who has previously only made a brief appearance. Like the other men in the novella, Crooks is a lonely figure. Like Candy, a physical disability sets him apart from the other workers, and makes him worry that he will soon wear out his usefulness on the ranch. Crooks’s isolation is compounded by the fact that, as a black man, he is relegated to sleep in a room in the stables; he is not allowed in the white ranch-hands’ quarters and not invited to play cards or visit brothels with them. He feels this isolation keenly and has an understandably bitter reaction to it.

The character of Crooks is an authorial achievement on several levels. First, Crooks broadens the social significance of the story by offering race as another context by which to understand Steinbeck’s central thesis. The reader has already witnessed how the world conspires to crush men who are debilitated by physical or mental infirmities. With Crooks, the same unjust, predatory rules hold true for people based on the colour of their skin. Crooks’s race is the only weapon Curley’s wife needs to render him completely powerless. When she suggests that she could have him lynched, he can mount no defence. The second point to note about Crooks’s character is that he is less of an easily categorized type than the characters that surround him. Lennie might be a bit too innocent and Curley a bit too antagonistic for the reader to believe in them as real, complex human beings.

Crooks, on the other hand, exhibits an ambivalence that makes him one of the more complicated and believably human characters in the novella. He is able to condemn Lennie’s talk of the farm as foolishness, but becomes seduced by it nonetheless. Furthermore, bitter as he is about his exclusion from the other men, Crooks feels grateful for Lennie’s company. When Candy, too, enters Crooks’s room, it is “difficult for Crooks to conceal his pleasure with anger.” Yet, as much as he craves companionship, he cannot help himself from lashing out at Lennie with unkind suggestions that George has been hurt and will not return.

Crooks’s behaviour serves to further the reader’s understanding of the predatory nature of the ranch-hands’ world. Not only will the strong attack the weak but the weak will attack the weaker. In a better world, Crooks, Lennie, and even Curley’s wife might have formed an alliance, wherein the various attributes for which society punishes them—being black, being mentally disabled, and being female, respectively—would bring them together. On the ranch, however, they are pitted against one another. Crooks berates Lennie until Lennie threatens to do him physical harm; Crooks accuses Curley’s wife of being a tramp; and she, in turn, threatens to have him lynched. As she stands in the doorway to Crooks’s room looking over at the men, she draws attention to their weaknesses. Deriding them as “a nigger an’ a dum-dum and a lousy ol’ sheep,” she viciously but accurately lays bare the perceptions by which they are ostracized by society. Like Crooks, Curley’s wife displays a heartbreaking vulnerability in this scene, readily and shamelessly confessing her loneliness and her unhappy marriage. But because she is as pathetic as the men who sit before her, she seeks out the sources of their weakness and attacks them.

## CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS

The scene in the barn begins ominously, with Lennie holding his puppy, now dead, and stroking it in the same way he stroked the dead mouse at the beginning of the work. All sense of optimism for the farm or the freedom the men would have on it dissolves now that Lennie's unwittingly dangerous nature has reasserted itself. When Curley's wife appears and insists on talking with Lennie, the reader senses that something tragic is about to ensue.

Perhaps the most significant development in this chapter is Steinbeck's depiction of Curley's wife. Before this episode, the reader might dismiss her as easily as George does. She shows herself to be a flirt, a conscious temptress, and a manipulator. However, in the final moments before her death, Steinbeck presents his sole female character sympathetically. Her loneliness becomes the focus of this scene, as she admits that she too has an idea of paradise that circumstances have denied her. Her dream of being a movie star is not unlike George's fantasy of the farm; both are desperately held views of the way life should be, which have long persisted despite their conflict with reality.

Curley's wife seems to sense, like Crooks (who notes earlier that Lennie is a good man to talk to), that because Lennie doesn't understand things, a person can say almost anything to him. She confesses her unhappiness in her marriage, her lonely life, and her broken dreams in "a passion of communication." Unfortunately, she fails to see the danger in Lennie, and her attempt to console him for the loss of his puppy by letting him stroke her hair leads to her tragic death. One might take issue with Steinbeck's description of her corpse, for only in her death does he grant her any semblance of virtue. Once she lies lifeless on the hay, Steinbeck writes that all the marks of an unhappy life have disappeared from her face, leaving her looking "pretty and simple . . . sweet and young." The story has spent considerable time maligning women, and much has been made of their troublesome and seductive natures. It is disturbing, then, that Steinbeck seems to subtly imply that the only way for a woman to overcome that nature and restore her lost innocence is through death.

Lennie's flight from the barn shifts the focus of the narrative to George. As George realizes what Lennie has done, the painful mission that he must undertake becomes clear to him. Here, as in the earlier scene with Candy's dog, Slim becomes the voice of reason, pointing out that the best option for Lennie now is for him to be killed. George understands that he has a choice: either he can watch his friend be murdered by Curley's lynch mob or he can do the deed himself. With this realization, the idea of the farm and the good life it represents disappears. Candy clings to that idealized hope, asking George if they can still buy the farm, but George's response is among the most insightful and realistic responses in the novella. There is no room for dreaming in such a difficult and inhospitable world.

## CHAPTER 6 ANALYSIS

Once again, the scene opens on the clearing in the woods, with the riverbed and its surroundings described as beautiful and idyllic toward the end of a day. Many details are repeated from the book's opening passages, such as the quality of the sunlight, the distant mountains, and the water snakes with their heads like "periscopes." This time, however, even the natural beauty is marred by the suffering of innocents. Steinbeck vividly describes a large heron bending to snatch an

unsuspecting snake out of the water, then waiting as another swims in its direction. Death comes quickly, surely, and to the unaware. When Lennie appears, the fate that awaits him is obvious.

The final scene between George and Lennie is suffused with sadness, even though Lennie retains his blissful ignorance until the end. To reassure Lennie, George forces himself through their habitual interaction one last time. He claims that he is angry, then assures him that all is forgiven and recites the story of their farm. For George, this final description of life with Lennie, of the farm and the changes it would have brought about, is a surrender of his dreams. The vision of the farm recedes, and George realizes that all of his talk and plans have amounted to nothing. He is exactly the kind of man he tried to convince himself he was not, just one among a legion of migrant workers who will never be able to afford more than the occasional prostitute and shot of liquor. Without Lennie, George relinquishes his hope for a different life. Lennie was the only thing that distinguished his life from the lives of other men and gave him a special sense of purpose. With Lennie gone, these hopes cannot be sustained. The grim note on which the story closes suggests that dreams have no place in a world filled with such injustice and adversity.

The other men who come on the scene see only the body of a half-wit who killed a woman and deserved to die. Only Slim, the wisest and most content man on the ranch, understands George's profound loss and knows that George needs to be consoled. Carlson and Curley watch Slim lead George away from the riverbank; their complete puzzlement is rooted more in ignorance than in heartlessness. Carlson and Curley represent the harsh conditions of a distinctly real world, a world in which the weak will always be vanquished by the strong and in which the rare, delicate bond between friends is not appropriately mourned because it is not understood.

# THEME ANALYSIS

*A theme is an idea that runs through a text. A text may have one theme or many. Understanding the themes makes the text more than 'just' a text - it becomes something more significant, because we're encouraged to think more deeply about the text, to work out what lies beneath its surface.*

## Idealism vs. Reality

Of Mice and Men tells the story of two simple men who try to escape homelessness, economic poverty, and emotional and psychological corruption. Otherwise, the fate of those who do not abandon the lives they lead as Itinerant workers is bleak and dehumanizing. As George tells Slim, the mule driver "I seen the guys that go around on the ranches alone. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean." George and Lennie dream of owning a farm, but by the end of the novel the dream has failed. Their plan is doomed because human fellowship cannot survive in their world and also because their image of the farm is overly idealized. It is likely that even if they had obtained the farm, their lives would not have been as comfortable as they had imagined; they would not have enjoyed the fraternal harmony that is part of their dream. In fact, their dream of contentment in the modern world is impractical and does not accurately reflect the human condition.

Crooks, the black stable hand, expresses his doubts about the dream. "Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land. It's just in their head. They're all the time talkie' about it, but it's jus' in their head." Crooks is referring not only to literal ownership but to the dream of contentment about which these simple men fantasize. Implicit in the theme is the ironic idea that maturity involves the destruction of one's dreams. George "matures" by killing Lennie, thus destroying the dream that could not survive in modern civilization. George survives because he leaves behind his unrealistic dreams. Dreaming, however, is humanity's only defence against an indifferent world. The title of the novel itself implies that people are at the mercy of external forces beyond their control. Steinbeck writes with sincere compassion for the victims of these chaotic forces.

## Alienation and Loneliness

Loneliness is a recurrent theme in the novel. "Guys like us," George says, "that work on the ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place." Lennie replies: "But not us. And why. Because ... because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why." The alternative to the companionship that George and Lennie share is loneliness. George frequently affirms the fraternity between them. "He's my... cousin," George tells the ranch boss. "I told his old lady I'd take care of him" The boss is suspicious of the bond between George and Lennie, and the other characters in turn also question this friendship: they have simply never seen anything like it. In their world, isolation is the norm Even Slim, who is usually sympathetic and understanding, expresses surprise. "Ain't many guys travel around together. I don't know why. Maybe ever' body in the whole damned world is scared of each other." Distrust is the quality of the modern world in which people live in alienation from one another. Later, the theme of loneliness is further explored in the solitude borne by Crooks and Curley's wife, who dies as a result of seeking

human companionship. Both these characters crave company and, as Curley's wife says, "someone to talk to."

Despite everyone's suspicion, the friendship between George and Lennie remains solid. In fact, Candy becomes part of their dream to buy the little farm, and later Crooks also expresses his desire to become part of the expanding fellowship. This is the high point of optimism in regard to the theme of overcoming loneliness in the modern world, when it seems most likely that alienation and loneliness will be overcome. After this point, however, the dream of fellowship on the farm begins to lose its promise, and at the moment that George and Candy discover the body of Curley's wife, they both realize that the dream is lost; their partnership dissolves. Actually, the dream was doomed from the start, because fraternal living cannot survive in a world ruled by loneliness, homelessness, and poverty.

This outcome also suggests that loneliness is an essential part of humanity's nature. This theme of loneliness has been implied from the beginning of the novel, when the author establishes the setting as "a few miles south of Soledad." Soledad is the name of a town in central California, but it is also the Spanish word for solitude. Yet Steinbeck's emphasis is on the greatness of his characters' attempt to live as brothers. Although the dream is doomed, the characters devote themselves to pursuing human fellowship.

## Race and Racism

Somewhat related to the theme of loneliness is racism, which also results in personal isolation. Crooks, the old black man on the ranch, lives alone, ostracized by the ranch hands because of his race. The barrier of racial prejudice is briefly broken, however, when Crooks becomes an ally in the dream to buy a farm. Crooks has a bitter dignity and honesty that illustrate Steinbeck's own criticism of American society's failures in the Depression era of the 1930s.

## Class Conflict

Although George and Lennie have their dream, they are not in a position to attain it. In addition to their own personal limitations, they are also limited by their position in society. Their idealistic dream is eventually destroyed by an unfeeling, materialistic, modern society. The tensions between the characters are inherent in the nature of American capitalism and its class system. Curley, the son of the ranch owner, is arrogant and always looking for a fight. This is not merely a personality trait. His position in society has encouraged this behaviour; his real strength lies not in his fighting ability but in his power to fire any worker. Similarly, Carlson, the only skilled worker among the ranch hands, is arrogant and lacks compassion. Carlson would be difficult to replace in his job as a mechanic; therefore, he feels secure enough in his status to treat the other workers sadistically. This trait is seen when he orders Candy's dog to be shot and when he picks on Lennie. The other workers go along with Carlson because they are old or afraid of losing their jobs. Lennie's mental retardation also symbolizes the helplessness of people in a capitalistic, commercial, competitive society. In this way, Steinbeck illustrates the confusion and hopelessness of the Depression era. The poor were a class of people who suddenly had captured the imagination of American Writers in the 1930s. This was an example of the shift in attitudes that occurred during the Depression. Previously, American fiction had been concerned with the problems of middleclass people. Steinbeck's novel was a sympathetic portrayal of the lives of the poorest class of working people, while exposing society's injustices and economic inequalities in the hope of improving their situation.

## Mental Disability

Lennie's mental limitations also serve to illustrate another way in which people separate themselves from one another. Because of his handicap, Lennie is rejected by everyone at the ranch except George. The ranch hands are suspicious of Lennie and fear him when they recognize his physical strength and his inability to control himself. For example, when Crooks maliciously teases Lennie that George might decide to abandon his friend and that Lennie would then end up in "the booby hatch," Lennie becomes enraged. Eventually, Crooks backs off in fear of what Lennie could do to hurt him. Despite Lennie's potential for hurting people, however, Steinbeck makes it clear that it is the malice, fear, and anger in other people that are to blame for Lennie's violent actions (Crooks torments Lennie out of his own frustration for being rejected because he is black). When Curly starts to hit Lennie for supposedly laughing at him, Lennie at first retreats and allows his face to become bloodied until George tells him he should fight back; and when Lennie accidentally kills Curley's wife, it is a direct result of her inappropriate advances toward him. Steinbeck's portrayal of Lennie's handicap is therefore completely sympathetic; the other characters have only themselves to blame for provoking Lennie, who is merely a child in a world of selfish adults. That Lennie has to die at the novel's conclusion is a poignant commentary on the inability of the innocent to survive in modern society.

## Loyalty

George is steadfastly loyal throughout the novel, honouring his commitment to take care of the retarded Lennie. After Lennie accidentally kills Curley's wife, Curley forms a posse to lynch Lennie. George then steals a pistol and goes to the spot where he has told Lennie to hide in case there is trouble: the same spot where the novel begins. George then kills Lennie himself before the mob can find him so he can save Lennie from a lynching. Together the two men recite the dream of their farm for the last time. George mercifully kills Lennie with a shot to the head while Lennie is chanting the dream, unaware of what is about to happen to him. George, with all his personal limitations, is a man who has committed himself in a compassionate relationship. The grief he feels over the necessity of killing Lennie is also evidence of George's essential decency. Although the dream perishes, the theme of commitment achieves its strongest point in the novel's conclusion. Unlike Candy, who earlier abandoned responsibility for his old dog and allows Carlson to shoot the animal, George remains his brother's keeper. In his acceptance of complete responsibility for Lennie, George demonstrates the commitment necessary to join the ranks of Steinbeck's heroes.

## Friendship

The one ingredient essential for the fulfilment of George's and Lennie's dream is friendship. And because the dream is so remarkable, that friendship must be special. There are other friendships in the novel: Slim and Carlson, Candy and Crooks, but these are ordinary friendships. The bond between George and Lennie, which goes back many years, is different. Lennie cannot survive on his own, and he needs George to guide and protect him. Without George, Lennie would live in a cave in the hills, as he sometimes threatens to do, or he would be institutionalized. George, for his part, complains regularly about having to take care of Lennie. His tolerance of Lennie also gives him a sense of superiority. At the same time, George feels a genuine affection for Lennie that he will not

openly admit. Most importantly, without this friendship, neither George nor Lennie alone could sustain the dream, much less see it become a reality. The friendship lends hope to the dream, but the reality of their brutal life destroys the dream and the friendship. Although George is a survivor at the end, he is doomed to be alone.

## Loneliness and Dreams

The two main themes in 'Of Mice and Men' - foreshadowed by the reference to Burns' mouse - are loneliness and dreams. They interlock: people who are lonely have most need of dreams to help them through.

Study the table below, showing both the loneliness and the dreams of each of the main characters. You could use a table like this as the basis for an exam answer about themes in Of Mice and Men.

	Loneliness	Dream
<b>George</b>	George is not lonely during the novel, as he has Lennie. He will be lonely afterwards, without his best friend.	George and Lennie share a dream - to own a little patch of land and live on it in freedom. He is so set on the idea that he even knows of some land that he thinks they could buy.
<b>Lennie</b>	Lennie is the only character who is innocent enough not to fear loneliness, but he is angry when Crooks suggests George won't come back to him.	George and Lennie share a dream - to own a little patch of land and live on it in freedom. Lennie's main desire is to tend the soft-haired rabbits they will keep.
<b>Curley's wife</b>	She is married to a man she doesn't love and who doesn't love her. There are no other women on the ranch and she has nothing to do. She tries to befriend the men by hanging round the bunkhouse.	She dreams of being a movie star. Her hopes were raised by a man who claimed he would take her to Hollywood, but when she didn't receive a letter from him, she married Curley.
<b>Candy</b>	When Candy's ancient, ill dog was shot, Candy has nothing left. He delayed killing the dog, even though he knew deep down that it was the best thing, as he dreaded losing his long-time companion.	Candy joins George and Lennie's plan of owning a piece of land. His savings make the dream actually possible to achieve.
<b>Crooks</b>	Crooks lives in enforced solitude, away from the other men. He is bitter about being a back-busted nigger. He is thrilled when Lennie and Candy come into his room and are his companions for a night.	Crooks dreams of being seen as equal to everyone else. He knows his civil rights. He remembers fondly his childhood, when he played with white children who came to his family's chicken ranch, and longs for a similar relationship with white people again.

# KEY QUOTES

## Chapter One

Scene is peaceful, like Eden: 'deep and green' 'warm' 'golden'.

**George and Lennie appear** as anonymous, typical migrant workers: 'both wore' the same thing, but George is 'sharp', and Lennie is 'his opposite' 'huge' 'shapeless' like a 'bear' 'the follower' 'like a horse' 'big paw' 'imitated George exactly'

**George** uses a lot of violent language: "bastard" is repeated frequently and he seems unusually angry about a dead mouse, also violently angry with Lennie as he uses words like "hell" and "trouble". There's an ominous mood: George says "do no bad things like you done in Weed"

**Why do they stick together?** George says 'I could live so easy' without you" and says: "blubberin' like a baby" "a big guy like you". This shows Lennie's helplessness, but also that he's dangerous: 'you always killed em.'" "live so easy" "no trouble. No mess"

But Lennie loves the companionship: 'Lennie's face was drawn with terror' 'anguished' George "I want you to stay with me. Trouble with mice is you always kill 'em"

**The Dream:** "Guys like us that work on ranches are the loneliest guys in the world... We got a future."

Lennie says: "because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you.'

## Chapter Two

**In the Bunkhouse:** Candy: 'no hand.'

When the Boss Enters:

George about Lennie "strong as a bull"

Boss "I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy."

George lies: "He's my cousin" "got kicked in the head by a horse when he was a kid."

**Candy's dog:** 'pale, blind old eyes' 'struggled lamely' and 'moth-eaten' "I had 'im ever since he was a pup"

Candy: says Curley is "picking scraps" "he's worse lately" "got married" "Curley says he's

keepin' that hand soft for his wife"

Candy on Curley's Wife: "she got the eye" "I think Curley's married ... a tart"

**Enter Curley's Wife:** 'the rectangle of sunshine in the doorway was cut off'; 'a girl' 'full, rouged lips' 'wide' eyes 'heavily made up', fingernails 'red', 'red mules' 'red ostrich feathers'. Her voice was 'nasal, brittle'. 'her body' is repeated twice.

George "Jesus, what a tramp." / Lennie "she's purty"

G "Don't you even take a look at that bitch" "poison"

**Slim** says: "Ain't many guys travel around together" "Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other"

## Chapter Three

**Slim:** "seems kinda funny a cuckoo like him and a smart guy like you travellin' together"

**George:** "If I was bright ... I'd have my own little place". On him and Lennie: "Got kinda used to each other" "too dumb to take care of 'imself" made me seem "smart alongside of him"  
Slim and George both say that Lennie: "ain't mean" "There ain't no more harm in than a kid neither, except he's so strong"

Carlson: "that dog stinks", "shoot him" Candy says: "I had 'im too long"

George about Curley's Wife: "She's gonna make a mess ... a bad mess." "Ranch with a bunch of guys on it ain't no place for a girl, specially like her."

**Discussing the dream:** Lennie is childlike, asking "why" and saying "I don't know what for", he also forgets easily. He asks again about their dream to "get that little place an' live on the fatta the lan' - an' rabbits?"

George tells the story again: 'Old Candy turned slowly over. His eyes were wide open.'

George: "When we put in a crop, why, we'd be there to take the crop up. We'd know what come of our planting."

This ends on an ominous note: "you gotta watch out them cats don't get the little rabbits."  
Lennie reacts violently: "I'll break their God damn necks. I'll... I'll smash 'em with a stick"

'When Candy spoke they both jumped as though they had been caught doing something reprehensible.'

Candy: "S'pose I went in with you guys." He has \$350.

'They looked at one another, amazed. The thing they had never really believed in was coming true.'

Candy: "They'll can me purty soon." "When they can me here I wisht somebody'd shot me."

Candy: "I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog."

**The Fight:** Lennie 'looked helplessly at George'; Curley 'slashed' 'smashed' 'slugging him in the face' Lennie: 'cry of terror' 'Blood'

George yelled "I said get him." (he has to say it twice)

Curley's 'fist lost in Lennie's paw' Lennie: "I di'nt mean no harm."

## Chapter Four

This chapter has some of the best quotations on **loneliness, friendship and prejudice.**

'being a stable buck and a cripple, he was more permanent than the other men' 'he had books too' 'tattered dictionary' and 'mauled copy of the California civil code' 'large gold-rimmed spectacles' 'thin, pain-tightened lips'

Lennie smiled 'helplessly' trying to 'make friends' (theme of friendship)

**Crooks** speaks 'sharply' 'You got no right' to come in 'Nobody got any right in here but me' 'right' is repeated semantic field of human rights)

Lennie asks naively: "Why ain't you wanted?"

Crooks "'Cause I'm black."

**Loneliness and cruelty:** "They say I stink. Well, I tell you, you all of you stink to me."

Crooks tells Lennie (cruelly) what would happen if George left him: "They'll take ya to the booby hatch. They'll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog." (this idea is repeated later - it's also an example of animal imagery)

**Crooks:** "A guy needs somebody—to be near him." "A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody." "a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick."

"every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it. Just like heaven. ... Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land."

Crooks: "I never seen a guy really do it." "I seen guys nearly crazy with loneliness for land, but ever' time a whore house or a blackjack game took what it takes."

Curley's Wife Enters (looking for Curley who she knows is at the brothel):

"They left all the weak ones here." She kicks back because the men are always cruel to her.

**Loneliness:** Curley's Wife says: "You're all scared of each other, that's what." "Think I don't like to talk to somebody ever' once in a while?"

**Shattered Dreams:** Curley's Wife says: "I tell ya I could of went with shows." "a guy tol' me he could put me in pitchers . . . ." She complains that all she has to do is stand "talkin' to a bunch of bindle stiffs—a nigger an' a dum-dum and a lousy ol' sheep—an' likin' it because they ain't nobody else."

**Crooks:** "You got no rights comin' in a colored man's room.

Curley's Wife says: "Listen, Nigger ...I could get you strung upon a tree so easy it ain't even funny."

Candy: "That bitch didn't ought to of said that to you."

Crooks: "What she says is true." "Lennie's a nice fella." When the guys start to leave, he calls out: "'Member what I said about hoein' and doin' odd jobs?"

"Yeah," said Candy. "I remember."

"Well, jus' forget it," said Crooks. "I didn't mean it. Jus' foolin'. I wouldn't want to go no place like that."

i.e. her cruelty shatters Crooks' brief hope

## Chapter Five

The scene opens quietly: Lennie has 'a little dead puppy'. Curley's wife enters: "I get awful lonely." She says about the dog "He was jus' a mutt."

"I coulda made somethin' of myself." she said darkly. 'her words tumbled out in a passion of communication' "Hollywood" "I don't like Curley. He ain't a nice fella"

When she's dead: 'the meanness and the plannings and the discontent and the ache for attention were all gone from her face' 'very pretty and simple' 'sweet and young'

Candy: Curly will "get 'im lynched"

George: "I think I knowed from the very start"

"Then it's all off -" Candy asked sulkily.

George: "All the time he done bad things but he never done one of 'em mean"

**Death of the Dream:** Candy "You god damn tramp" 'viciously' "You done it" "You ain't no good now you lousy tart" 'his eyes blinded with tears'

Curley "That big son of a bitch done it"

Slim Curley will want to "shoot 'im" suppose they "put 'im in a cage"

Curley "Don't give 'im no chance. Shoot for his guts."

## Chapter Six

Opening description has similarities to the first chapter: it's set in the same location and repeats many of the ideas from the first chapter, including the 'heron' which 'swallowed the little snake'. This could represent evil being destroyed, prefiguring Lennie's death. At the start of Chapter Six the 'sun had left the valley' and half way through the weather becomes extremely grim: pathetic fallacy to match the mood.

First, Lennie arrives and is talking to himself: "If George don't want me.... I'll go away. I'll go away."

Giant Talking Rabbit: George is "gonna beat hell outta you with a stick, that's what he's gonna do." Lennie argues back: "he ain't never raised his han' to me." "He gonna leave ya" repeated four times.

**George Arrives:** Lennie starts to talk 'happily' and in 'triumph': "We got each other" George talks 'shakily'

**Pathetic fallacy:** shadows are 'bluer' 'darkening slopes': there are 'crashing' noises in the brush...George tries to retell the story: "We gonna..." Lennie "Go on." "Go on." lots of repetition in short, sharp bursts "I get to tend the rabbits" 'giggled with happiness'. There's a very uncomfortable juxtaposition with different moods here. 'Lennie obeyed him. George looked down the gun.' "Ever'body gonna be nice to you. Ain't gonna be no more trouble. Nobody gonna hurt nobody nor steal from 'em."

Lennie begged, 'Le's do it now. Le's get that place now.'

George: "Sure, right now. I gotta. We gotta."

**The Shot:** 'The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again.'

'George shivered and looked at the gun.' then he throws it 'back up on the bank, near the pile of old ashes.'

Slim: "You hadda, George. I swear you hadda."

Carlson: "Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys."



# Of Mice and Men



## BACKGROUND INFO

### AUTHOR BIO

**Full Name:** John Steinbeck

**Date of Birth:** 1902

**Place of Birth:** Salinas, California

**Date of Death:** 1968

**Brief Life Story:** John Steinbeck grew up in and around Salinas, California. Steinbeck's comfortable California upbringing instilled in him a love of nature and the land, but also of the diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups featured throughout his fiction. He attended Stanford University, but never completed his degree. Instead he moved to New York in 1925 to become a freelance writer. He returned to California after that plan failed and earned his first real recognition for *Tortilla Flat* (1935), a collection of stories about peasant workers in Monterrey, California. He published many more novels throughout his lifetime and today is best known for the novella *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962 and died six years later.

### KEY FACTS

**Full Title:** *Of Mice and Men*

**Genre:** Novella (short novel)

**Setting:** Salinas and Soledad, California during the Great Depression in the early 1930s

**Climax:** Lennie accidentally kills Curley's wife

**Protagonist:** Lennie Small and George Milton

**Antagonists:** Curley

**Point of View:** Third person omniscient

### HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

**When Published:** 1937

**Literary Period:** Modernist Novel

**Related Literary Works:** John Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie were perhaps the two most famous chroniclers of the Great Depression. Steinbeck's trilogy of novels portraying the struggle of migrant workers in California is the most enduring literary chronicle of the Great Depression: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). Woody Guthrie (1912–1967), the leading American songwriter of the late 1930s and 1940s, released the *Dust Bowl Ballads* in 1940, an album of songs inspired by the drought-ravaged region of the American West that came to be known as the "Dust Bowl" in the early 1930s.

**Related Historical Events:** When the stock market crashed in 1929, an already awful situation for farmers and farm workers got considerably worse. Following World War I, crop prices plunged, forcing farmers to expand their farms and buy more equipment to make up for the shortfall. This situation was exacerbated when a severe drought crippled much of the American West. So when the market crashed, farmers could not pay back the debts they had built up in buying more land and equipment. As a result, many farmers and farm workers, migrated to California in hopes of finding enough work to live.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Near the Salinas River in California, **George Milton** and **Lennie Small**, two migrant farm workers, walk toward a ranch. George is quick and smart, while Lennie is huge, strong, and mentally disabled. As they make their way to the

ranch, George often whines that his life would be so much easier without Lennie. But when Lennie offers to leave him, George refuses. They bed down for the night, and George describes the farm that he and Lennie one day dream of owning together. George also reminds Lennie of the trouble Lennie got into at their last ranch and tells Lennie that if he gets into trouble again, he should hide at this spot where they're sleeping.

George and Lennie arrive at the ranch the next morning. There they meet **Candy**, an old handyman with only one hand, and the **boss**, who questions George and Lennie about their skills. The boss is skeptical when George answers for Lennie, but gives them work despite his suspicions. The men also meet **Curley**, the boss's ill-tempered and violent son, and, later, Curley's sexy **wife**, who likes to flirt with the ranch hands. Finally, George and Lennie meet **Slim** and **Carlson**. Slim's dog has just given birth, and Carlson wants to replace Candy's old, useless dog with one of the puppies.

After their first day of work, Slim gives a puppy to an overjoyed Lennie, and George tells Slim about what happened to him and Lennie at the ranch in Weed: Lennie touched a woman's dress and the woman accused him of rape. Slim voices his appreciation of the deep and selfless friendship between George and Lennie. Carlson, meanwhile, convinces Candy to let him shoot his dog. Carlson takes the dog outside and shoots it in the back of the head to make sure it doesn't suffer, but Candy still seems upset. When Lennie once again asks George to describe the farm they'll someday own, Candy overhears and asks if he can help them buy it. A few minutes later, Curley enters and the other men tease him about his wife. Curley mistakenly thinks Lennie is also laughing at him, so he punches Lennie. Lennie doesn't fight back until George says it's all right. Then Lennie catches Curley's hand and breaks it.

All of the men except **Crooks**, Lennie, and Candy go to visit a brothel on Saturday night. Though at first Crooks, a black man, refuses to talk to the white men, after a while they all end up talking about Lennie and George's farm. Crooks claims it will never work out. The conversation ends when Curley's wife enters. She mocks the men as weak and says she's so lonely that she's stooped to talking to them. When they tell her to leave, she threatens to have Crooks lynched.

The next afternoon, Lennie sits alone, consoling himself after accidentally killing his puppy. Curley's wife, lonely and desperate, sits beside him. She tells him of her failed dream of being an actress and offers to let Lennie touch her hair. But Lennie strokes it too hard. She tries to push him away. Lennie panics and shakes her, breaking her neck. Lennie flees to the spot by the river.

Candy discovers Curley's wife's body and alerts George. Curley leads a group of men to lynch Lennie, but George directs the men to the wrong place and finds Lennie first. As he once more describes the farm they're going to own and Lennie loses himself in imagination, George shoots Lennie in the back of the head with Carlson's gun. The men come running. George says he killed Lennie in a struggle for Carlson's gun. Slim tells George he did what he had to do.



## CHARACTERS

**George Milton** – George is **Lennie's** friend and protector. Unlike the giant, lumbering Lennie, George is small and wiry with a quick and resourceful mind. In many ways, George is a typical migrant farm worker, a class of poor and lonely men who traveled from ranch to ranch looking for work during the Great Depression. But George differs from these often bitter men because of his friendship with Lennie, which keeps him, in his own words, from getting "mean." Though George sometimes resents Lennie as a burden, he also deeply loves him, and shares with him a dream of owning their own farm.

**Lennie Small** – **George's** companion. Lennie is huge and immensely strong, but a mental disability makes him entirely dependent on George, especially after his **Aunt Clara** dies (before the novella begins). Lennie is the most innocent, gentle, and kind character in the novel, and his sole dream is to tend rabbits

and live off the "fatta the lan" on a farm that he and George will own. In the end, Lennie and his innocent dream fall prey to **Curley's** revenge and George's mercy, two powerful adult emotions beyond Lennie's control or comprehension.

**Candy** – An old handyman who greets **George** and **Lennie** at the ranch. The owner of an old and feeble dog, Candy is himself crippled—he lost his hand in an accident on the ranch. Candy is a man who has been broken by life in general and the Depression in particular, and he is desperate for some hope or dream to believe in. He therefore latches onto George and Lennie's plan to buy a farm, and offers his life savings to help them.

**Curley** – The son of the **boss** of the ranch, Curley is careful to make it clear that he is of a higher class than the other ranch hands by wearing fancy boots. He is also mean-spirited, violent, and insecure. Though the only married man on the ranch, he's extremely jealous and suspicious of his **wife**, and he tends to overcompensate for his lack of height by picking fights with larger men. Curley cares most about looking strong.

**Curley's Wife** – The only female character in the novel, and **Curley's** wife. The men on the ranch call her a "tart" because she flirts with them. They consider her dangerous because her attention might cause them to get fired, or worse. But beneath her sexy exterior, Curley's wife is deeply lonely, and has dashed dreams of her own.

**Slim** – A skilled mule driver with an ageless face, a grave manner, and a calm authority on how to run a ranch, Slim is a revered figure on the ranch. As the most self-assured of the men, he is the only one who never takes a swipe at anyone else in order to make himself feel stronger or better. At the same time, he is also the only one of the ranch hands who truly understands and appreciates the power and purity of the friendship between **George** and **Lennie**.

**Crooks** – The stable manager, and the only black man on the farm. Crook's name comes from his crooked posture, the result of a kick from a horse. Crooks is bitter from a lifetime of lonely segregation. He thinks of himself as a cynic, and immediately sees that **George** and **Lennie's** dream of owning a farm will never come about. Yet at the same time, he can't entirely resist the beauty of the dream, and wants to be a part of it.

**Carlson** – The ranch-hand who shoots **Candy's** dog in the back of the head. Though he isn't cruel, Carlson is without sentimentality, and has no qualms about killing or getting rid of anything that's no longer useful.

**The Boss** – The man who runs the ranch, and **Curley's** father. He is quick to anger and suspicion, but is otherwise fair. Like his son, the boss wears fancy boots to show that he occupies a station above the ranch hands.

**Aunt Clara** – Though not an actual character in the novel, Aunt Clara cared for **Lennie** until her death. She appears to Lennie in a vision near the end of the novel.

**Whit** – A ranch hand.

**Andy Cushman** – A childhood friend of **George** and **Lennie's** who is in prison "on account of a tart."

during which the novel was written and set, coming to terms with dreams broken by out-of-control economic forces became a reality nearly everyone in America faced.

## THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American Dream is written into the *Declaration of Independence*: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." **Lennie** and **George's** dream of owning a farm and living off the "fatta the lan" symbolizes this dream. *Of Mice and Men* shows that for poor migrant workers during the Depression, the American Dream became an illusion and a trap. All the ranch hands in *Of Mice and Men* dream of life, liberty, and happiness, but none ever gets it. As **Crooks** says when he hears of Lennie's dream to own his own farm, "Nobody ever gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land."

At the same time, while the dream may never be realized, *Of Mice and Men* suggests that in order for life to be full and meaningful, it *must* contain dreams. George and Lennie never achieve their dream, but the dream holds their remarkable friendship together. Their dream is real because it's real in their imaginations. The dream keeps Lennie happy and stops George from becoming "mean" and lonely like most ranch hands. The dream gives them life, even if life never allows them to achieve their dreams.

## MALE FRIENDSHIP

*Of Mice and Men* explores the dynamics of male friendship. When **Lennie** asks **George** to tell him why they're not like other ranchers, George explains that they're different because they have each other. Usually ranchers have no family, no friends, and, therefore, no future. George and Lennie's friendship strikes the other ranch workers as odd: their dependence on each other makes the **boss** and **Curley** suspicious; and **Slim** observes that ranch workers rarely travel together because they're scared of each other. Although most of the men in the novel are entirely alone, they all crave true companionship. As **Crooks**, perhaps the novel's most solitary character because of his black skin, puts it, "A guy needs somebody—to be near him."

## THE WEAK AND THE STRONG

Though many characters in *Of Mice and Men* long for friendship and compassion, they live in fear of each other. As **Carlson's** unsentimental shooting of **Candy's** dog makes clear, in the Great Depression the useless, old, or weak were inevitably destroyed as the strong and useful fought for survival. Everyone on the ranch constantly tries to *look* strong, especially if they *feel* weak. The fear of the weak being overrun by the strong explains why **Curley** likes to fight larger men, why **Crooks** tells **Lennie** that **George** is going to abandon him, and why **Curley's wife** threatens to have Crooks lynched. Each character tries to appear strong by asserting power over another. The fear of the strong also explains why most of the other characters in *Of Mice and Men* can't comprehend Lennie and George's friendship. A human relationship devoid of power dynamics simply makes no sense to the other characters, all of whom assume they're in a fight for survival.

## WOMEN

There are two different visions of women in *Of Mice and Men*: the male characters' view of women, and the novel's view of women. The men tend to view women with scorn and fear, dismissing women as dangerous sexual temptresses. Women are often referred to as "tarts," a derogatory word for women that means "tramp." **Lennie** and **George** have a mutual friend in prison "on account of a tart," and their own troubles result twice from the enticing allure of a woman—the woman in Weed, and **Curley's wife**. Yet although Curley's wife plays into her role as sexy temptress, *Of Mice and Men* presents her, at least partly, as a victim. She craves the attention of the men because she's desperately lonely, and flaunts her power over the men because she herself feels weak. Similarly, the novella's portrayal of **Aunt Clara** as a vision of wholesome femininity from a more innocent age contrasts with the male characters' consistently negative view of women.



## THEMES

### BROKEN PLANS

*Of Mice and Men* takes its title from a famous lyric by the Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759 - 1796). Burns's poem "To a Mouse" contains the lines, "The best laid plans of mice and men / Often go awry." Nearly all of the main characters *Of Mice and Men* harbor dreams and plans that never come true. Most notably, **George**, **Lennie**, and **Candy** share a doomed dream of buying their own farm and living off the land. George often laments the life he could have had as a freewheeling bachelor, free of the burden of caring for Lennie. "[I]f I was alone I could live so easy," he says. Lennie has his own private dream of living in a cave with his own rabbits, while **Curley's wife** often regrets her missed chance to become a Hollywood actress. In the end, the novel's main theme is that people must learn to reconcile their dreams with reality, to accept that everyone's best laid plans often perish. These plans "go awry" not because the characters in the novella give up on them, but because forces beyond their control destroy them. In the bleak economic outlook of the Great Depression,



## SYMBOLS

## GEORGE AND LENNIE'S FARM

The farm **George** and **Lennie** hope to own is a symbol of the American Dream. Like a mirage, the farm leads George, Lennie, and other ranchers like **Candy** and **Crooks**, to indulge in the dream of living "off the fatta the lan." George's elaborate description of the farm's abundant plants and animals also makes it seem like a symbol of paradise.

## RABBITS

**Lennie's** dream is to tend the rabbits on the farm that he and **George** hope to one day own. This dream establishes Lennie's complete innocence. But Lennie loves the rabbits because of their soft fur, and his love of touching soft things leads to his doom. The rabbits, then, symbolize not only innocence, but also the downfall of innocence in a harsh world.

## CANDY'S DOG

**Candy's** once powerful sheepdog is now old and useless. **Carlson's** killing of the dog makes it clear that during the Depression only the strong survive. The way in which Carlson kills the dog—with a gunshot to the back of the head—foreshadows Lennie's death and likens Lennie to Candy's dog: they're both powerless, innocent, and doomed.

## LENNIE'S PUPPY

Just as **Lennie** is dependent on **George**, Lennie's puppy is entirely dependent on Lennie. Like Lennie, the puppy symbolizes the fate of the weak in the face of the strong.



## QUOTES

## PART 1 QUOTES

Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again.

Well, we ain't got any,' George exploded. 'Whatever we ain't got, that's what you want. God a'mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble....An' whatta I got,' George went on furiously. 'I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. Jus' keep me shovin' all over the country all the time. An' that ain't the worst. You get in trouble. You do bad things and I got to get you out.

Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place....With us it ain't like that. We got a future.... An' why? Because...because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why.

"Well," said George, "we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof."

## PART 2

"Ain't many guys travel around together," he mused. "I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other."

## PART 3 QUOTES

"Carl's right, Candy. That dog ain't no good to himself. I wisht somebody'd shoot me if I got old an' a cripple."

You seen what they done to my dog tonight? They says he wasn't no good to himself nor nobody else. When they can me here I wisht somebody'd shoot me. But they won't do nothing like that.

"We could live offa the fatta the lan'."

S'pose they was a carnival or a circus come to town, or a ball game, or any damn thing." Old Candy nodded in appreciation of the idea. "We'd just go to her," George said. "We wouldn't ask nobody if we could. Jus' say, 'We'll go to

her,' an' we would. Jus' milk the cow and sling some grain to the chickens an' go to her

I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog.

## PART 4 QUOTES

I seen it over an' over—a guy talkin' to another guy and it don't make no difference if he don't hear or understand. The thing is, they're talkin', or they're settin' still not talkin'. It don't make no difference, no difference....It's just the talking.

A guy sets alone out here at night, maybe readin' books or thinkin' or stuff like that. Sometimes he gets thinkin', an' he got nothing to tell him what's so an' what ain't so. Maybe if he sees somethin', he don't know whether it's right or not. He can't turn to some other guy and ast him if he sees it too. He can't tell. He got nothing to measure by. I seen things out here. I wasn't drunk. I don't know if I was asleep. If some guy was with me, he could tell me I was asleep, an' then it would be all right. But I jus' don't know.

'A guy needs somebody—to be near him.' He whined, 'A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody.'

I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads. . . . every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it. Just like heaven. Ever'body wants a little piece of lan'. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land.

## PART 5 QUOTES

Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely.

He pawed up the hay until it partly covered her.

I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we'd never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would.

## PART 6 QUOTES

A water snake glided smoothly up the pool, twisting its periscope head from side to side; and it swam the length of the pool and came to the legs of a motionless heron that stood in the shallows. A silent head and beak lanced down and plucked it out by the head, and the beak swallowed the little snake while its tail waved frantically.

No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know.

"Never you mind," said Slim. "A guy got to sometimes."



## SUMMARY &amp; ANALYSIS

## PART 1

The novel begins with a detailed description of the lush rural area near the riverbed of the Salinas River a few miles south of Soledad, California.

**George Milton** and **Lennie Small**, two men dressed in denim, are walking along a path on the riverbed. George, the leader, is small and quick. Lennie, huge and awkward, follows behind.

The men stop. **Lennie** drinks huge gulps from a pool of standing water next to the river. **George** warns him not to drink too much or else he'll get sick again.

*George and Lennie's denim clothing show that they're poor ranch hands. Their single-file walking pattern reveals the dynamics of their relationship: George is the leader even though Lennie is larger.*



*Lennie's lack of common sense is the first indication of his mental disability.*



When **George** complains about the bus driver who dropped them off too far from the ranch, **Lennie** asks where they're going. George reminds Lennie about their plans, but stops when he notices a dead mouse in Lennie's pocket. Lennie picked it up because he likes to pet its soft fur, but accidentally killed it.

*George clearly acts as a kind of parent to Lennie. Petting the mouse shows Lennie's innocence and the unintended consequences of his strength.*



**George** throws the mouse away, and tells **Lennie** they're going to a ranch like the one they just left in Weed. George also tells Lennie not to say anything when they meet the **boss** at the new ranch.

*George constantly worries that Lennie's disability will jeopardize their welfare and their future.*



**Lennie** remembers that they were "run out" of Weed, but **George** says they ran away before they could be run out. George then says that his life would be so much easier and more free if Lennie wasn't always following him.

*Given that Lennie keeps getting them fired, George is right: his life would be easier without Lennie. So why does he stay with Lennie?*



**George** decides they should spend the night where they are. **Lennie** goes off to find firewood. While he's gone George thinks of him as a "poor bastard." When Lennie returns without wood, George suspects he's found the dead mouse again. George takes it, making Lennie cry. Lennie mentions how his **Aunt Clara** used to give him mice. George reminds Lennie that he always accidentally killed them.

*Behind George's scolding and frustration are pity and love. Lennie's history with mice shows that he often destroys the things he loves, foreshadowing his fate. Aunt Clara's death shows the lack of family and community in the ranch workers' lives.*



The men have a dinner of canned beans. When **Lennie** complains about the lack of ketchup, **George** again says how much easier his life would be without Lennie. He brings up the event that got them run out of Weed: Lennie touched a woman's dress and refused to let go. She accused him of rape. Lennie liked the dress because it felt soft as a mouse's fur.

*George's bachelor fantasy shows how his feelings of responsibility for Lennie interrupted the plans he had as a youth. Lennie's obsession with soft things extends to women.*



**Lennie** offers to leave **George** alone and go live in a cave. Lennie imagines that he could keep mice in his cave if he wanted to, without George's supervision.

*Lennie understands he's a burden. He also has his own desire for freedom.*



**George** says he wants **Lennie** to stay with him. He comments that ranch workers are always lonely, but he and Lennie are different. They have each other.

*Deep feelings of friendship and loyalty keep George with Lennie.*



At **Lennie's** urging, **George** describes their future. They'll save money until they can buy their own farm. George describes the farm right down to its rabbit hutches. Lennie can't contain his excitement about tending rabbits and living off the "fatta the lan."

*The farm is George and Lennie's American Dream. This dream of a future together is the fullest expression of their friendship.*



As they go to sleep, **George** asks **Lennie** to take a close look at their surroundings. He tells Lennie that if he gets into any trouble at the ranch he should back to this spot and hide in the bushes.

*Yet even at this hopeful moment, George senses that Lennie's mental disability will dash their hopes.*



## PART 2

**George** and **Lennie** arrive at the ranch the next morning. At the bunkhouse, an old man with no right hand and a crippled dog greets them. His name is **Candy**. He says the **boss** was angry when they didn't show up last night.

*The bunkhouse is a place inhabited by single, lonely men. Candy is a man broken by life and the Depression, dependent on the kindness of the Boss.*



The **boss** enters. **George** blames the bus driver for their lateness. When the boss asks about their skills, George speaks for **Lennie**. The boss gets suspicious when Lennie repeats something George says.

*Lennie's mental weakness has already made him forget his promise not to speak, foreshadowing more trouble ahead.*



The **boss** has never seen a man go out of his way for another man like **George** does for **Lennie**, and suspects that George might be taking advantage of Lennie. George lies, and says that Lennie is his cousin. The boss is still suspicious, but lets them stay.

*The boss can't fathom that two men could care for one another. The idea of lasting male friendship is foreign on a ranch where survival is the rule.*



After the **boss** leaves, **Lennie** asks **George** if what he said was true. George says they were just lies, and notices that **Candy** has been listening to their conversation. He tells Candy to mind his own business. Candy assures him he wasn't eavesdropping.

*Lennie can't remember his own past. George's feelings of friendship don't extend beyond Lennie. To other men, he tries to project strength.*



**Curley**, the **boss's** son, enters, looking for his father. Curley, who wears fancy boots, quickly starts picking on **Lennie**, who refuses to speak. After Curley leaves, **Candy** says Curley is a lightweight boxer and has a history of picking fights with men larger than him.

*Curley is careful to mark himself as richer than other men (through his boots) or stronger (by picking fights with larger men).*



**Candy** adds that **Curley** has only gotten worse since his recent marriage to a pretty "tart" who flirts with the ranch hands. Candy also reveals that Curley keeps vaseline in his left glove to keep his fingers soft.

*The mention of Curley's wife shows the men's fear of women and their effects on men.*



When **Candy** leaves, **George** tells **Lennie** to stay away from **Curley**. Fighting with Curley, he warns, will get them fired. Lennie promises. George again tells Lennie to hide and wait for George in the bushes by the river if he ever gets into trouble at the ranch.

*George continues to look out for Lennie, and senses that Curley's macho posturing will wind up a threat to them.*



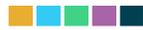
Just then, **Curley's wife** enters. She is very pretty and wears a lot of makeup. While asking where **Curly** is, she moves to ensure that she shows off her body.

*Curley's wife enjoys threatening the men with her good looks.*



**Slim** tells her that **Curley** is back at the main house. When she's gone, **Lennie** calls her "purty." **George** warns him to stay away from her. Lennie, frightened, begs to leave the ranch. George says first they have to make enough money to buy their own land.

*George foresees that Lennie's attraction to feminine softness will again cause trouble, and threaten their dream of a farm.*



**Slim** is a leader and authority among the other ranch hands. After talking to **George** and **Lennie** and seeing their friendship, Slim is impressed. He says it's rare to see two men travel together because most people are scared of each other. George agrees that it's better to travel with a friend.

*Slim's admiration for George and Lennie's friendship shows how extraordinary that friendship is. It also shows Slim's ability to see beyond the harshness of ranch life.*



**Carlson**, another ranch hand, introduces himself to **George** and **Lennie**, then asks **Slim** about his dog. Slim says she gave birth to nine puppies, but that he had to drown four because there wasn't enough food for them all. Carlson proposes shooting **Candy's** crippled dog and replacing it with one of the puppies. Lennie wonders if he can get a puppy of his own.

*On the ranch during the Depression, the men believe killing the weak protects the weak from prolonged suffering. While killing is therefore seen as mercy, it also means that if you want to live it's crucial that you seem strong.*



**Curley** enters again, looking for his wife. When he leaves, **George** says he might end up in a fight with Curley himself. The triangle rings, signalling that it's time for dinner.

*Curley's wariness about his wife makes George uneasy: he foresees trouble.*



## PART 3

**Slim** agrees to give **Lennie** a puppy. When **George** thanks him, Slim says Lennie is the best worker he's ever seen even though he's "cuckoo." George defends Lennie, and Slim again admires George and Lennie's friendship.

*George's pride when Slim praises Lennie's work and his defense of Lennie when Slim calls him "cuckoo" conveys George's heartfelt affection for Lennie.*



**George** explains that he grew up with **Lennie** and took care of him after his **Aunt Clara** died. George admits that at first he took advantage of Lennie's willingness to do whatever he told him, but soon felt ashamed and since then has taken good care of him. He adds that having Lennie as his companion keeps him from getting "mean," as most ranch workers do.

*George describes his own moral development. George once took advantage of Lennie, as all the men on the ranch take advantage of each other. But his friendship with Lennie taught him to avoid such "meanness."*



**George** also tells **Slim** what happened in Weed. **Lennie** touched a woman's dress. She objected. He panicked and wouldn't let go. The woman claimed it was rape, and Lennie and George had to flee a mob.

*Lennie and George's earlier trouble stems from Lennie's innocent love of soft things and a woman's false accusal of rape.*



**Lennie** enters with his puppy under his coat. **George** orders him to return the puppy to its litter. While Lennie is gone, **Candy** and his crippled dog enter the bunkhouse, followed by **Carlson**. Carlson again suggests they put the dog out of its misery. **Slim** agrees and offers Candy one of his puppies.

*Slim and Carlson can't imagine that Candy has an emotional attachment to his dog, so they can't comprehend that killing the dog would pain him.*



**Whit** enters, holding a magazine containing a letter to the editor from a ranch hand they once knew. Meanwhile, **Carlson** persuades **Candy** to let him shoot the dog. He takes the dog outside. As the men play cards, a shot fires. Candy stares at the wall.

*The "mercy" killing of Candy's dog shows how the strong destroy the weak on the ranch. The killing also foreshadows future events.*



**Crooks**, the black stable manager enters with news for **Slim**. Slim leaves with Crooks, and the men discuss **Curley's wife**. They agree with **George** that women don't belong on ranches, and that she'll end up causing trouble. **Whit** invites George to come to a brothel with him the next night. George declines, saying he and **Lennie** are trying to save money.

*George again predicts that Curley's wife will cause trouble. He views all women as temptresses. And he implies that women might interfere with his dream of buying a farm with Lennie.*



**Lennie** and **Carlson** enter the bunkhouse. **Curley** enters soon after, again looking for his wife. He suspects she's with **Slim** in the barn and storms out. The other men follow, hoping for a fight.

*Curley's wife is a threat even to Curley. He thinks she'll humiliate him by cheating on him.*



**George** and **Lennie** stay behind, and soon begin talking about their farm. Having overheard George's description of the farm as a place where they can just "belong," **Candy** offers his life savings of \$350 to help them buy it. Though George is at first suspicious, soon the three men are making plans.

*In losing his dog, Candy lost his community. He's now attracted to George and Lennie's idea of a farm as a new community. He'll give everything he has for fellowship.*



As the other men return, **George** warns **Lennie** and **Candy** to keep the farm a secret. Candy whispers back that he should have shot his dog himself.

*George will later heed Candy's advice.*



**Slim**, **Curley**, **Carlson**, and **Whit** enter. Curley apologizes to Slim for suspecting him, and all the men mock Curley for being so insecure. Curley thinks **Lennie** is also laughing at him, though Lennie was just smiling while thinking of tending rabbits on the farm. Curley starts punching Lennie, bloodying his face. Lennie only fights back when George tells him he may. He then easily breaks Curley's hand.

*Curley's insecurity about his wife leads him to mistake Lennie's heartfelt smile for a taunt, and to try to save face by showing he's stronger than Lennie. This suggests that Lennie and George's dream will lead unintentionally to trouble.*



**Curley** wants to fire **George** and **Lennie**, but **Slim** tells him if he does no one on the ranch will respect him. Curley gives in. Lennie asks George if he can still tend the rabbits on their farm. George says yes.

*This moment may be the most hopeful in the novel. The men have rallied around George and Lennie. Their dream seems achievable.*



## PART 4

**Crooks**, whose nickname stems from his crooked back, sits on his bunk in the stable. **Lennie** stops by Crooks' room, but Crooks demands he leave. Crooks shouts that if he's not allowed in the white men's quarters, then the white men aren't allowed in his. But Lennie's innocent loneliness (all the other men have gone into town to visit a brothel) wins Crooks over.

*Crooks's race makes him even more trapped and alone than the other men. Crooks and Lennie are outcasts. Each is "weak." Each has suffered the unfair consequences of a "disability": retardation and race.*



As they talk, **Lennie** forgets the farm is a secret and mentions it. **Crooks** thinks this just one of Lennie's fantasies.

*Crooks has suffered too much to believe in dreams.*



**Crooks** describes his childhood in California. As a black man he was always lonely. Even on the ranch he's forced to sleep apart from the other men.

*All ranchers are lonely men. Crooks's skin color makes him even lonelier.*



Suddenly angry and bitter, **Crooks** tells **Lennie** that **George** might not return to the ranch. In terrible fear, Lennie nearly attacks Crooks.

*Crooks makes himself feel strong by making Lennie feel weaker.*



**Crooks** says he was just trying to make **Lennie** understand what it's like to be black and, therefore, alone. "A guy needs somebody," Crooks says.

*Crooks's fear is a reminder of how physically powerful Lennie is.*



The conversation turns back to the farm. **Crooks** says all ranch hands dream about owning land, but nobody ever does, just like nobody ever gets to heaven.

*Crooks, who's experienced so much suffering, sees all dreams as shams.*



**Candy** wanders in. When **Crooks** again says they'll never own a farm, Candy replies that they have a spot of land picked out and nearly all the money they need. Crooks wonders if he might be able to go with them.

*Crooks's sudden interest in the plan shows how powerful the dream can be to hope-starved ranchers.*



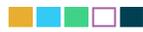
**Curley's wife** walks in and starts mocking the men in the room as the "weak ones" not allowed to go to the brothel.

*Now Curley's wife asserts her power by making the men feel weak*



Despite the men's demands that she leave, **Curley's wife** starts talking about how sad she is. She claims she could have been a movie actress, but instead is so lonely she's in the bunkhouse talking to a bunch of losers. She asks what happened to **Curley's** hand, and gets angry when they deny he hurt it in a fight.

*Curley's wife reveals her own failed dreams. Despite the fact that the men hate Curley, they cover for him, siding with men against women.*



**Candy** tells her to leave. If she fires them, he says, they'll just buy their own farm. **Curley's wife** laughs at him. **Crooks** also demands she leave, but quiets when she curses him and threatens to have him lynched. Candy finally says he hears the men returning. Curley's wife leaves. On the way out, she thanks **Lennie** for beating up her husband.

*Immediately after showing weakness, Curley's wife asserts dominance over all of the men. In doing so, she crushes their dream. She makes it clear that there's no room for such a dream in the reality of the ranch or the Depression.*



The other men return. When **George** discovers **Lennie** was talking about the farm, he gets angry. But **Crooks** says **Curley's wife** was right, and that he's no longer interested in going to their farm.

*Crooks's sudden claim that he doesn't want anything to do with the farm confirms the crushing impact of Curley's wife's verbal assault.*



## PART 5

On Sunday, **Lennie** sits in the barn stroking his **puppy**, which is dead. He fears this means he won't be allowed to tend the rabbits. He throws the puppy away, then retrieves it and starts stroking it again.

*The dead puppy is an ominous sign. Once again, Lennie's innocent strength has created accidental tragedy.*



**Curley's wife** enters. **Lennie** tells her he's not allowed to talk to her, but she says no one will ever know. She notices the dead puppy and consoles him, then explains that she almost became a movie actress, but her plans were thwarted by her mother and a bad talent agent. She says she doesn't even like **Curley**.

*Like the men on the ranch, Curley's wife also suffers from lack of love and attention, and also from having sacrificed her plans and dreams for Curley.*



**Lennie** starts talking about the farm and rabbits, and explains that he likes to pet soft things. She says her hair is soft. He strokes it excitedly, messing it up. Curley's wife gets upset and tells him to let go. Lennie panics and shakes her head, breaking her neck.

*A moment of connection between Lennie and Curley's wife ends in tragedy. Just as he killed his puppy, Lennie kills her, and his dream.*



Aware that he's done "another bad thing," **Lennie** sneaks out of the bunkhouse.

*Lennie is referring to the events in Weed.*



**Candy** enters and finds **Curley's wife's** body. He runs and gets **George**, and the two of them realize that **Curley** will lynch **Lennie**. Candy then asks if the plan to buy the farm is now officially off. George says he never really thought it would happen, but Lennie believed in it so much he had started to as well.

*Lennie stopped George from growing "mean" because his belief in their dream made George believe it too. Now George is doomed to live a lonely rancher's life.*



Fearing **Curley** will think he had something to do with the murder, **George** tells **Candy** to pretend George never saw the body. George leaves. Candy curses at **Curley's wife's** body. He cries, then goes to alert the men.

*Candy cries for the death of the dream that had saved him, for a while, from hopelessness. George, meanwhile, protects himself.*



Slim, Whit, Carlson, Curley, Crooks, and **George** enter the barn. Curley demands that **Lennie** be killed. Carlson says his gun is missing and guesses Lennie stole it. Slim tells George that Lennie has to be killed. George, who knows where Lennie is hiding, sends the lynch mob in the wrong direction.

*Curley's first emotional response to his wife's death is not sorrow, but anger. Note the parallel: earlier it was Carlson's gun that killed Candy's dog, and Slim who agreed the dog had to die.*



## PART 6

Hiding in the brush by the river, **Lennie** has a vision of his **Aunt Clara**, who tells him **George** would have had a much easier life without him. **Lennie** then has a hallucination of a giant rabbit, which tells him **George** will abandon him.

*Lennie understands the destructive consequences of his actions on his friendship and dream. The things he holds most dear condemn him.*



**George** shows up. He is quiet and not angry. **Lennie** begs George to yell at him. George does, but he shows no real anger. Lennie offers to go live in a cave, and George, as usual, tells him not to.

*In this terrible moment, Lennie wants to act as if everything is normal. George plays along.*



**Lennie** then asks **George** to describe their farm. George does, and tells Lennie to take off his hat and to look out over the river and try to imagine the farm. As Lennie happily says they should buy the farm now, George lifts Carlson's gun and shoots Lennie in the back of the head.

*George takes Candy's advice: he makes sure Lennie dies at the hand of someone he loves while imagining the unattainable dream that made his life meaningful.*



The other men hear the gun shot. **George** tells **Carlson** that **Lennie** had his gun and that he shot him after wrestling it away from him. **Slim** leads the distraught **George** away, repeating over and over that George had to do it. **Carlson** and **Curley** can't figure out what's "eatin'" George and Slim.

*Men like Carlson and Curley have no understanding of the friendship that can exist between men. Slim and George do, because of Lennie. That is the legacy of Lennie's dream.*

