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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Of Mice and Men

by John Steinbeck

written by Michelle Ryan

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Of Mice and Men

Introduction

Originally published in 1937, John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* reflects life during the Great Depression in the real agricultural town of Salinas, California. Steinbeck was familiar with this area as it was his birthplace and where his family owned land when he was a small child. Steinbeck patterned his characters after the men and women who were affected by the Great Depression as it contributed to the poverty of all walks of life across America. Men and women across the United States were forced to sell their assets and travel in order to find work. These men and women, as well as the countryside where the story takes place, would have been very familiar to John Steinbeck.

Of Mice and Men follows Lennie and George, two men who represent migrant farm workers who traveled to the West Coast in order to find the American Dream. Lennie and George are poor and lonely, as they have only each other for companionship. Because of the nature of life during the 1930s, George and Lennie were forced to live a lifestyle that forced travel and prohibited them from settling down to start families. Consequently, rootlessness and loneliness became a way of life. The ideal of settling down and restarting a better life becomes the catalyst of the American Dream that George and Lennie strive for throughout the novel.

John Steinbeck is considered one of America's greatest Naturalist writers. The Naturalist literary movement is characterized by literature that employs the following features:

- Naturalist writing is devoid of many poetic features that other authors might use. The prose uses few descriptions that provide images for the reader, and instead, focuses on the explanations and details. While *Of Mice and Men* contains passages of description (specifically the beginnings of chapters one and five), a majority of the text is free from metaphor. Naturalist writing explores sociological conditions in an almost objective manner, rather than focusing on the beauty of the language and story.
- Naturalist writing explores conflicts between social classes, particularly on the exploitation of workers by those in positions of power. For example, in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck examines a microcosm of America by creating George and Lennie, who are trying to survive on a ranch, while at the same time creating a story that reflects the larger societal conflicts at hand: a lack of public policy to aid those afflicted by poverty and homelessness. Steinbeck's examination of both the microcosm and macrocosm describe American politics in the 1930s.
- Similar to the social commentary provided by Naturalist literature, *Of Mice and Men* is also a document of migrant workers in the 1930s. Naturalist writers create stories that tend to focus on one specific occupation or trade in order to document society, gathering specific data about actual life before writing. Also, because the literature focuses on one occupation or trade, the setting is usually contained to one less-than-ideal place, in the case of *Of Mice and Men*, a farm. The setting provides a detailed look at the most brutal aspects of life that accompany self-preservation and basic human need. Steinbeck used his ranching experience, as well as his experience in the Salinas Valley in order to create a novel that is more textbook than literature.
- Naturalist writers create stories in which the narrator or reader is an observer in the story. The characters created in the story, devoid of free will, are inserted into specific plots and observed as they cope with what fate presents. In *Of Mice and Men*, many of the characters strive for the American Dream. Lennie and George want only to make enough money to buy their own land; however, the characters are robbed of their dream by circumstances that seem out of their control.

Through *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck was able to create a novel that depicts and exposes the poverty, homelessness, hunger, and unemployment that characterized those in the 1930s.

Note to Teacher

You should be aware that *Of Mice and Men* is considered one of America's most controversial and challenged books for several reasons that should be carefully considered before beginning the teaching unit. First, the book speaks frankly of sexual intercourse, as the men on the ranch discuss visiting a house of prostitution. Not only do the men on the ranch have frank discussions about sex, but the incentive for the two main characters to join the ranch is because of a sexual accusation against Lennie. Second, the teacher should also note that Lennie would be considered "mentally challenged" by today's standards; some students may need the proper language in order to discuss Lennie's intellectual difficulties. Third, the novel also deals with gender and racial prejudice, and there are several occasions where profanity is used within dialogue in the text. The teacher should be prepared to discuss these instances with the students, as the conversations concerning sexual intercourse and the conversations dealing with the obvious prejudices during the Great Depression could make some students uncomfortable. Finally, the very nature of the central conflict and moral issue in the novel challenges society's notion of murder and justice. As the students confront George's decision to kill Lennie, the teacher should be prepared to discuss all moral aspects of whether Lennie's murder was justifiable.

Of Mice and Men is a novel that is best understood with some preliminary background about the Great Depression and migrant workers. Students will have a better understanding of the themes of loneliness and power if they understand the plight of the poverty-stricken migrant worker during the 1930s. Not only would a brief historical discussion be helpful for the students, but the students might also benefit from some background about the Realist and Naturalist literary periods and how the features that constitute those types of literature are influential in this novel.

The teacher might also want to discuss the title of the novel as it relates to a poem by the poet Robert Burns:

The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft agley [often go wrong]
And leave us nought but grief and pain
For promised joy!

Steinbeck's novel has been adapted into different films, which follow the work very closely and may be useful for comparison, as well as discussion. The John Malkovich DVD version is available through Prestwick House.

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Objectives

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

1. explain the significance of the title and its relationship to one of the major themes in the novel.
2. recognize and explain the allusion in the title “Of Mice and Men.”
3. explain the use of figurative language and rhetorical techniques within the text and how they function.
4. characterize the main characters within the novel, and explain their purpose in the story.
5. define the chosen vocabulary words.
6. offer a close reading of the novel and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text.
7. demonstrate their literal, personal, interpretive, and critical understanding of the text.
8. explain the central conflicts in the play, and explain the nature of the internal and external conflicts with which various characters cope.
9. identify and discuss the following themes in the play
 - A. the impossibility of the American dream
 - B. loneliness and isolation during the Depression
 - C. friendship and camaraderie
 - D. nature
 - E. violence
10. trace and discuss images: animals, Candy’s dog, Lennie’s pup.
11. define the term “microcosm” and point out how the ranch in this novel is a microcosm of American society.
12. understand how the Depression influenced the lives of American men and women.
13. explain how each of the main characters in the novel dealt with the concept of loneliness.
14. understand how the Naturalist literary movement is reflected in the novel.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. This is a story about people, their friendships, plans, and dreams. Describe George and Lennie's dream. How is their dream representative of the dreams of the migrant worker in the 1930s?
2. Steinbeck uses foreshadowing to build suspense and make later actions more credible. Identify and discuss three incidents of foreshadowing in this novel and explain the effect that the foreshadowing has on the reader's interpretation of events.
3. Identify and explain how characteristics of Naturalism are portrayed in the novel.
4. Examine the relationship between Lennie and George. Be sure to focus on both the negative and positive aspects of the relationship.
5. Choose one of the minor characters in the novel (Crooks, Curley's wife, Curley, etc.) and explain the purpose he or she serves in the story. How would the story change if he or she was not included in the story?
6. Steinbeck's novel explores the morality of a mercy killing. Explain how you feel the novel portrays mercy killings, using specific evidence from the text to support your answer. Then, explain whether or not you believe that Lennie's death was justified, again using specific evidence from the text to support your answer.
7. Read the poem "To a Mouse" by Robert Burns. Throughout the novel, John Steinbeck argues that "the best-laid plans of mice and men" often go wrong. Explain how he attempts to show this in the novel.
8. Using any pairing of characters in the novel, explain how Steinbeck explores a person's responsibility to another person.
9. Explain the use of animal imagery as it is used to describe the emotional states of the characters within the novel.
10. Using specific examples from the novel, explain whether or not the reader should feel sympathetic to both George and Lennie.
11. Compare and contrast the instance where Carlson takes Candy's dog away to kill it, and George shoots Lennie. What does each of the instances add to the novel's theme of people's responsibility to one another and the importance of friendship?

12. Analyze Curley's wife as a character in the novel. Explain her purpose in the story. What comment does Steinbeck make about the role of women in the 1930s through her inclusion in the novel?
13. "Soledad" means loneliness. Using specific references from the novel, explain how this concept is related throughout the novel.
14. Explain how hopes and dreams are important in the novel.
15. Explain how the theme of power is explored throughout the novel.
16. This novel begins and ends in the same place. Why is this important? Explain any other cyclical instances in the novel.
17. Steinbeck's work has an enduring popularity. How is this short novel able to transcend time?

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Test

Multiple Choice

- The night before they go to the ranch, George tells Lennie to remember the spot where they have eaten dinner in case there is trouble. This warning is an example of
 - allusion.
 - metaphor.
 - foreshadowing.
 - flashback.
 - irony.
- For George, the ranch in their dream represents
 - a lot of hard work.
 - independence and security.
 - valuable new friendships.
 - wealth.
 - an opportunity to get revenge on the ranch owner.
- Candy wants to get involved in George and Lennie's dream. For Candy, the dream represents
 - an opportunity to tell Curley off.
 - a secure place for himself as he gets older.
 - a chance to spite Crooks.
 - an opportunity to keep his old sheepdog.
 - an opportunity to make up for missed opportunities in Weed.
- Crooks is the loneliest of the men because he
 - is black, and the others discriminate against him.
 - has a sour outlook on life.
 - criticizes the dreams of others.
 - likes to read.
 - is a stable hand.
- Curley is always looking for his wife because
 - he has just married her.
 - the other men on the ranch cannot be trusted.
 - he is a jealous, possessive person.
 - he does not want her to run away.
 - he loves her very much.

6. Lennie becomes upset with Crooks because Crooks
 - A. tries to take away Lennie's pup.
 - B. tries to convince Lennie that George will not come back for him.
 - C. calls him a stupid oaf.
 - D. steals George's rope.
 - E. beats the horse with a stick.

7. The novel is cyclical in that
 - A. the story begins and ends on the same day.
 - B. George and Lennie begin the novel at the same pond they return to at the end of the story.
 - C. it does not illustrate a solution to the problem of rootlessness in America; therefore, the story begins and ends with the poverty of the main characters.
 - D. Lennie finally gets the justice he deserves
 - E. George and Lennie leave work in Weed for the same season they leave their work at the ranch.

8. Carlson's Luger is
 - A. taken by Lennie.
 - B. taken by George.
 - C. misplaced by Carlson himself.
 - D. stolen by Curley.
 - E. found in the purse belonging to Curley's wife.

9. George looks after Lennie because
 - A. they are brothers.
 - B. George had promised Lennie's mother he would.
 - C. he can trick Lennie into giving him his money.
 - D. Lennie, with all his limitations, provides George with companionship.
 - E. he can make Lennie complete all of the hard tasks on the ranch.

10. How does Lennie injure Curley?
 - A. Lennie shoots Curley with Carlson's gun.
 - B. Lennie refuses to work, and therefore Curley loses valuable resources on the ranch.
 - C. Lennie crushes Curley's hand after Curley attacks him.
 - D. Lennie accidentally cuts off Curley's hand in the threshing machine.
 - E. Lennie does not properly secure the saddle on Curley's horse, and Curley is thrown off the horse.

11. George explains Lennie's problem to people by saying Lennie
 - A. never received any schooling.
 - B. was kicked in the head by a horse.
 - C. was severely beaten as an infant by his drunken father.
 - D. was born prematurely.
 - E. suffered brain damage due to a lack of oxygen when he almost drowned.

12. In his first meeting with George and Lennie, the boss suspects that
 - A. Lennie is a dangerous person who does not know his own strength.
 - B. George and Lennie are brothers.
 - C. George takes advantage of Lennie by grabbing his pay.
 - D. Lennie is wanted by the police.
 - E. George and Lennie travel together out of fear.

13. Candy describes Curley's wife as
 - A. a beautiful vision.
 - B. an actress.
 - C. a lonely, lost girl.
 - D. a tart.
 - E. a refined lady.

14. Carlson is best described as a
 - A. happy-go-lucky guy.
 - B. quiet and sensitive person.
 - C. rough and insensitive person.
 - D. diamond in the rough.
 - E. good worker and a compassionate friend.

15. The story of the problem that happened in Weed is included in order to
 - A. demonstrate Lennie's simple desires.
 - B. create sympathy for George, who must care for Lennie.
 - C. prepare the reader for what happens to Curley's wife.
 - D. show the bond between Lennie and nature.
 - E. illustrate Lennie's violent, uncontrollable nature.

16. Why is Candy upset about Carlson's suggestion to put his dog out of its misery?
 - A. Candy has had the dog since it was a pup.
 - B. Candy's dog is still able to keep the bunkhouse free of rodents.
 - C. Candy knows that the only reason Carlson wants to shoot his dog is that Carlson is allergic to dogs.
 - D. Candy uses the animal as a watchdog.
 - E. Candy has promised to give the dog to Lennie.

17. Why did Lennie get in trouble with the woman in Weed?
 - A. Lennie would have like to have a girlfriend, but he did not know how to approach her properly.
 - B. Lennie is looking for a woman to help tend to the rabbits on the dream ranch, and the women do not want to go with him.
 - C. The woman flirted with Lennie, and Lennie misinterpreted her actions.
 - D. Lennie wanted her money.
 - E. Lennie likes to touch soft and pretty things, and she believes his attempts to do this are sexual.

18. Which of the following men understands the bond between Lennie and George?
- A. Crooks
 - B. Curley
 - C. The Boss
 - D. Carlson
 - E. Slim
19. While Lennie is waiting for George in the clearing after Lennie kills Curley's wife, Lennie imagines seeing
- A. the sheriff from Weed and the Boss from the ranch.
 - B. a gigantic rabbit and Aunt Clara.
 - C. George and Slim.
 - D. Candy's dog and Crooks.
 - E. Aunt Clara and George.

20. The following quote illustrates which of the following themes?

"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. Hundreds of them. They come, an' they quit an' go on; and 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." (Pg. 74)

- A. The elusive American Dream
- B. Loneliness
- C. Friendship and camaraderie
- D. The struggle for power in an unfair world
- E. Hopelessness

Identify the character

21. _____ He shoots Candy's dog. A. Curley
22. _____ He is a muleskinner and crew chief. B. Slim
23. _____ He reads a great deal. C. Crooks
24. _____ His hand is badly injured. D. Carlson
25. _____ He is worried about losing his job when he can no longer do any work. E. Candy

Essays (Choose any two)

1. Explain how the ranch can be viewed as a microcosm of America during the Depression.
2. Aside from the two main themes (loneliness/rootlessness and the American Dream), there are other themes that are apparent throughout (loyalty, friendship, violence, nature). Choose one theme besides the two main themes, and using specific examples from the novel, describe how the theme is incorporated throughout the novel.
3. John Steinbeck was inspired by a line of the Robert Burns poem:

“The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men, [often go awry].”

Using specific examples from the novel, explain the quote and its relationship to the novel.

4. Curley’s wife is a prominent character in this novel whose characteristics are described and whose dreams are made known. Why do you suppose she is never given a name? Use examples from the novel, as well as any information from the time period to explain your answer fully.
5. Which character in the novel creates the most sympathy in the reader? Using specific examples from the novel, explain your choice.

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Test

Answer Key

1. C	7. B	13. D	19. B
2. B	8. B	14. C	20. A
3. B	9. D	15. C	21. D
4. A	10. C	16. A	22. B
5. C	11. B	17. E	23. C
6. B	12. C	18. E	24. A
			25. E

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Study Guide Teacher's Copy

Chapter 1

Vocabulary

bundle – a pack

brusquely – gruffly

contemplated – thought about

debris – leftovers, garbage

dejectedly – sadly

imperiously – like a dictator, arrogantly

junctures – joints

lumbered – moved heavily

morosely – glumly, gloomily

mottled – spotted

quivered – shook, trembled

recumbent – reclining, drooping

resignedly – in a surrendering manner

skittering – moving rapidly; skipping

1. The beginning of the novel begins with a rich description of the physical setting. Cite examples of three uses of descriptive language. Explain the effect on the mood of the novel by beginning the narrative with this description. What is Steinbeck trying to suggest about the area by the Salinas River?

Answers will vary. Examples:

- *“The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight before reaching the narrow pool.” (Pg.1)*
- *“On the sandy bank under the trees the leaves lie deep and so crisp that a lizard makes a great skittering if he runs among them.” (Pg. 1)*
- *“There is a path through the willows and among the sycamores, a path beaten hard by boys coming down from the ranches to swim in the deep pool, and beaten hard by tramps who come wearily down from the highway in the evening to jungle-up near water.” (Pgs. 1-2)*

The imagery at the beginning of the book suggests that the area is a place of peace and rest. The specific colors, foliage, and animals that are mentioned create a respite, even for those boys and men who beat paths to find solace under the giant sycamores. The idea that men and boys seek this place for comfort suggests that the Salinas River is a sanctuary.

2. “Jungle-up” is an idiom used in the following sentence: “...and beaten hard by tramps who come wearily down from the highway in the evening to jungle-up near water.” (Pg. 2) Explain the meaning of the idiom.

Of Mice and Men is set during the Great Depression; During the this era, hobos traveled across the United States, and in the evening, the hobos would settle in camps that were referred to as “Hobo Jungles.” To “jungle-up” is to camp in an area that other men had used or are using for the evening.

3. Compare and contrast the two men who come into the clearing by the river. Why do you think Steinbeck introduces the men by describing their physical features, highlighting the fact that one is small and one is huge? What can the reader infer about the two men based on their descriptions?

The two men who come into the clearing are similar in the way in which they are dressed and what they carry with them. For example, the two men are “dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons.” (Pg. 2) They also both carry blanket rolls with them. Physically, the men are very different. One man is “small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features.” (Pg. 2) The other man is huge and fair-skinned.

Answers will vary. By using the descriptions provided in the chapter, the reader is able to infer who the leader is between the two men and who is the follower. Steinbeck begins the description by stating that the men are dressed the same, going in the same direction, and yet, they are two very different men. The smaller man is the leader. Because he is described as “small and quick” with “restless eyes,” the reader can infer that the man is determined and the one navigating their way through the area. The reader can also infer that the other man is more absent-minded and slow because he “nearly ran over” the other man when he stopped in the path, dragged his feet and flung himself on the ground when they stopped. (Pg. 3)

4. Steinbeck uses animal imagery to describe Lennie, the larger man. Cite two examples of this type of image that is used in the first few pages of the chapter.

Answers may vary. Examples: “dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws” (Pg. 2); “drank with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse” (Pg. 3)

5. Why does George tell Lennie not to drink the water? Why might this seem like an unusual instruction to give a man who has spent part of his adult life traveling the country?

George tells Lennie not to drink the water because it looks “kinda scummy.” (Pg. 3) The reader learns that Lennie was sick the night before from drinking water. George tells Lennie that unless the water is moving, it probably is not healthy water to drink. We can assume that if the two men are traveling across part of the United States, they have spent much of their time living off the land. A more aware person would know not to drink from certain bodies of water.

6. George gives Lennie instructions about the water, and when he explains about the type of water that is safe to drink, he does so “hopelessly.” (Pg. 3) What can we infer about why George might feel hopeless when he is talking to Lennie?

George feels hopeless because he has probably given the same instructions many times. If we can assume that Lennie and George have traveled a lot together, we can also assume that there have been several occasions where George has had to talk to Lennie about the water. George repeats the instructions “hopelessly” because he knows that eventually he will have to give them again.

7. When Lennie and George sit by the river to rest, what do they talk about? What can we learn about Lennie from their conversation? What can we learn about George?

George explains where they are going to Lennie. Lennie has forgotten about “watchin’ the blackboard.” (Pg. 5) The reader can infer from their conversation that Lennie is a very simple person. He may be a large man, but he cannot remember things as simple as where he is going. George is obviously Lennie’s protector; George even keeps track of Lennie’s work card.

8. Read the following line from the novel and explain the allusion, “watchin’ that blackboard.”

“You remember settin’ in that gutter on Howard street and watchin’ that blackboard?” (Pg. 5)

The allusion conjures up the Depression era when employers would post jobs in front of their offices. Those men who were seeking work would check the blackboards to find any new jobs.

9. What does Lennie have in his pocket? Why does he want to keep it?

Lennie has a dead mouse in his pocket. He wants to keep it because it is soft and he can touch it as they are walking.

10. Describe George’s plan for getting the job at the ranch. What do we learn about Lennie from this plan?

George tells Lennie that he does not want Lennie to speak. George is going to give the boss their work tickets, while Lennie stands in the background. George wants Lennie to be quiet because he is afraid that the boss will not hire them if he knows that Lennie is “a crazy bastard.” (Pg. 6) The reader can infer that Lennie is a hard worker (perhaps because of his size), but he is more likely to say the wrong thing when speaking to people.

11. As George and Lennie are waiting to go to the camp, George states, “God, you’re a lot of trouble. I could get along so easy and so nice if I didn’t have you on my tail. I could live so easy and maybe have a girl.” (Pg. 7) Explain what this statement illustrates about George’s feelings toward Lennie? What does the reader learn about George and his dreams?

George is frustrated with Lennie because the large man requires so much care, so it is understandable that Lennie’s handicap sometimes interferes with their friendship. George’s attitude is ironic, however, considering that most men in their situation are lonely and long for a companion or a friend. We learn that George is the same as most people; he dreams about settling down and getting married, something that most transients are unable to do.

12. How does Lennie’s desire for a touching sensation get him in trouble in Weed?

Lennie touches a girl’s dress while in Weed; she, misunderstanding his intention, starts to scream. Lennie and George flee from the town just ahead of an angry mob.

13. Even though Lennie’s mentality keeps him from fully understanding the world around him, he is very sensitive to George’s feelings. Describe an incident that shows Lennie’s compassion for George.

Answers may vary. Example: While baking beans over the fire, Lennie says how he would like to have ketchup with his supper. This statement provokes George, and he erupts with anger, wishing he could be alone, without having to watch over Lennie. Following the episode, Lennie makes his way closer to George and says, “I was only foolin’, George. I don’t want no ketchup. I wouldn’t eat no ketchup if it was right here beside me...I wouldn’t eat none, George. I’d leave it all for you. You could cover your beans with it and I wouldn’t touch none of it.” (Pg. 12)

14. After George erupts in anger about the responsibility of taking care of Lennie, Lennie offers to run away and leave George alone. Why do you think George does not take Lennie up on his offer?

Answers will vary. Example: George seems to regret the way he talks to Lennie. He even asks Lennie if he has been mean to him. Because George has taken care of Lennie for so long, George feels a great responsibility for Lennie’s well-being. George is worried that Lennie would not survive if he were not with him.

15. Why does Lennie like George to tell the story of the ranch, even though he already knows it by heart? Why does George so readily agree to tell the story, even though he has just gotten angry with Lennie a few minutes before?

Lennie, having the mentality of a child, is reassured by George’s retelling. George does not mind telling the story because the story reinforces the dreams that the men have and the fact that they have a solid relationship. Lennie likes feeling the reassurance that they will look after each other.

16. Explain the idiom, “live off the fatta the lan’.” (Pg. 14)

To live off of the fat of the land implies that the land will offer people whatever they need to survive. Lennie and George discuss this because they are hopeful that eventually they will be prosperous and will not have to travel and work various, temporary jobs in order to survive.

17. Why does George tell Lennie to remember the spot where they are camping? What might this conversation foreshadow?

George tells Lennie to remember where they are in case something happens at the ranch. George specifically suggests that Lennie may get in trouble as he did at a previous job site. This conversation might foreshadow that something bad is going to happen.

18. What literary term does Steinbeck use in the last sentence of the chapter?

It is personification; “The leaves whispered.” (Pg. 16)

19. By the end of Chapter 1 there are two themes or motifs that are easily identified. Using specific examples, describe these themes.

Examples may vary, but the themes should be specifically recognized. Friendship is a motif that is very prominent throughout the novel. In this first chapter, as George tells Lennie of their future together, George tells how they are different from other men. Lennie, having heard the story so many times, breaks in and excitedly states, “...I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you...” (Pg. 14) Loneliness is also a main idea, and it is alluded to when George states, “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place.” (Pg.13) Finally, both men have dreams that they want to achieve. The men dream that someday they will be able to live prosperously.

Chapter 2

Vocabulary

abruptly – suddenly
apprehensive – anxious, uneasy, fearful
archly – mischievously, slyly
bridled – drew back scornfully or angrily; took offense
complacently – in a self-satisfied way, contentedly
contorted – twisted
derogatory – deliberately offensive, negative
dousing – soaking
flounced – moved impatiently
gravity – seriousness
grizzled – streaked with gray
intently – firmly, focused
laden – burdened
liniment – soothing balm
mollified – soothed
ominously – threateningly, in a way that bodes evil
plaintively – mournfully, pleadingly
precede – go before
pugnacious – warlike, inclined to fight, combative
scoff – to mock
scowled – frowned angrily
scrappy – quarrelsome
skeptically – doubtfully
slough – to cast off
vials – bottles

1. In this new chapter of the novel, Steinbeck again begins with a description of the setting. Explain how the description that begins this chapter is different than the description at the beginning of the first chapter. What does this description tell us about George and Lennie's life?

In the first section of the novella, Steinbeck begins with a favorable description of the lush area along the Salinas River. The reader is introduced to the book through a calming setting. At the beginning of this chapter, the reader sees the living quarters that Lennie and George will share. The description awakens the reader to the realities of George and Lennie's life, and the dreams that Lennie and George have about becoming prosperous are understandable. Now, however, they are living in lice-infested quarters. Everything shows human habitation, and flies and other insects are abundant.

2. When George and Lennie are shown their quarters, the old man tells them that the boss is angry at them. Why?

The boss is angry because he was expecting George and Lennie to arrive the night before.

3. The old man tells George and Lennie about a blacksmith who used to work at the ranch and suddenly quit. Quote what the old man says was the reason for his departure. What does the old man's story seem to suggest about the men who work on these ranches?

Candy says, "Why...he...just quit, the way a guy will.... Just wanted to move." (Pg. 19) These men have no ties, so they come and go on a whim; they are without roots.

4. How does the old man describe the boss?

The old man uses the words, "a nice fella."(Pg. 20) He tells Lennie and George that the boss gives them whiskey for a Christmas present, which surprises George.

5. When the boss is talking to George about their work, George speaks for himself and Lennie. What does his boss suspect is going on between George and Lennie? What is George's response?

The boss suspects that George is trying to take advantage of Lennie. He thinks that George is trying to steal Lennie's pay. George explains to the boss that Lennie is his cousin, who was injured as a child so he is not very smart. He also explains that Lennie is a strong worker, which makes up for his lack of intelligence.

6. Why does George not let Lennie speak to the boss?

Lennie's handicap is apparent the moment he begins to speak. George knows there is little tolerance for a man who is "slow" like Lennie. Lennie's handicap is the reason some of the men are mean to him: they think he is different from everyone else.

7. Explain the irony in Lennie's last name.

Lennie's last name is Small. Lennie's name is ironic because he is a very large man, not small as his name suggests; however, Lennie is "small" in the way he thinks. Lennie's thinking resembles the thinking of a small child.

8. Who is Curley, and what does it mean when Candy says he is "handy"?

Curley, is the boss's son. He is called "handy" because he likes to fight with people.

9. What kind of person does Curley seem to be? Use specific references to the text to justify your response.

Curley is an abusive, cruel person who, because he is the boss's son, seems to throw his weight around. The old man describes him as someone who picks fights with both big men and small ones, but, whether he wins or loses, always comes out on top. The swamper says, "Never did seem right to me. S'pose Curley jumps a big guy an' licks him. Ever'body says what a game guy Curley is. And s'pose he does the same thing and gets licked. Then ever'body says that the big guy oughtta pick somebody his own size, and maybe they gang up on the big guy. Never did seem right to me. Seems like Curley ain't givin' nobody a chance." (Pgs. 26-27)

10. Describe the interaction between George, Curley, and Lennie. Why do you think Curley acts the way he does? How does George feel about Curley?

Curley is upset because Lennie does not respond to him when he asks a question. George defends Lennie, but Curley still suspects that the men are being disrespectful. Curley might act the way he does because he is embarrassed about his size and jealous of men who are stronger and bigger than he is. George does not like Curley and warns the old man that Curley should not mess with Lennie. George states, "I don't like mean little guys." (Pg. 27)

11. Why would the old man feel safe that he has "drawn a derogatory statement from George"? (Pg. 27)

The old man might feel that if all the men working for Curley say disrespectful remarks, they will all be on the same playing field. The old man might not want George and Lennie to have the upper hand at the camp. If George had not made any negative statements about Curley, George might be able to blackmail the old man or tell Curley what the old man has said. In addition the old man wants to tell George about Curley's wife, just to gossip.

12. What does the reader learn about Curley's wife? Why might this be important to the story?

The reader learns that Curley's wife (according to the old man) has a wandering eye, which means that she is looking at other men even though she has only been married for two weeks. This information, and the reaction that Curley and George have with one another, might foreshadow some later tension and conflict in the novel.

13. What does George warn Lennie about? Why? Where does he tell him to go?

George warns Lennie to stay away from Curley. George is worried that Curley will try to pick a fight with Lennie, and then the two men will lose their jobs at the ranch. George tells Lennie to return to the area by the Salinas River where they stayed the first night.

14. After Curley's wife comes to the barn looking for Curley, why does George get angry at Lennie?

George is angry at Lennie because Lennie keeps talking about how pretty Curley's wife is. George does not want Lennie thinking about her, especially when Curley is already apprehensive about Lennie.

15. Explain the foreshadowing in the following lines from the novel:

Lennie cries out suddenly—"I don't like this place, George. This ain't no good place. I wanna get outa here." (Pg. 32)

Lennie and George come to the ranch to improve their chances of wealth. They have not even been at the ranch a whole day, and they are already in trouble with the boss for being late and because the boss's son has already taken a dislike to Lennie. Curley's wife seems to be a catalyst for trouble. Lennie can already sense this trouble.

16. Describe Slim by using specific references from the novel. What do the descriptions of Slim indicate about his character?

Slim is the muleskinner and crew chief, who comes across as a tough, fair, and likable person.

- "...long, black, damp hair...."
- "...wore blue jeans and a short denim jacket."
- "...moved with a majesty only achieved by royalty and master craftsmen."
- "...the prince of the ranch..."
- "...capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touching the mule."
- "...gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke."
- "His hatchet face was ageless."
- "...slow speech...."
- "His hands, large and lean, were as delicate in their action as those of a temple dancer." (Pgs. 33-34)

Many of the words and images associated with Slim describe him as a man who was like royalty, or a person who is god-like. He embodies qualities that are elevated from the other men on the ranch, and the other men respect him as someone who knows a lot.

17. What happens to Slim's dog and her puppies? What does this tell us about survival as a migrant worker?

Slim's dog bears nine puppies. Instead of keeping all of the puppies, Slim drowns four of them, keeping the healthiest and biggest five. These actions illustrate the competitive nature of survival during the Depression. Only the strong will survive, and the weak will be pushed aside.

18. Throughout the chapter, Lennie and George are questioned three times about traveling together. Describe the three different encounters and what we learn about the characters through their responses to George's answer.

The first time that George and Lennie are asked about traveling together, the boss of the ranch is skeptical that the two men are traveling together simply because they want to. The boss believes that George is using Lennie for his money. His response suggests that he cares only about the men in terms of the financial benefits they can offer him. The boss is concerned with the amount of work the two men can provide and how much money they will cost him. The boss does not want to be swindled and cares only about George and Lennie's arrangement if it will hurt his bottom line and cost him money.

Curley is the second person to question George and Lennie about why they are traveling together. His response, "Oh, so it's that way." (Pg. 25) suggests that Curley believes the two men have a homosexual relationship. His response demonstrates his vile nature and cruelty.

The final man to ask George and Lennie about their travel is Slim. When Slim asks the question, his response to the answer echoes the sentiments of all the migrant men who must travel alone. Slim demonstrates that he is friendly and understanding.

19. Throughout the chapter, the reader is introduced to the majority of the characters who will play a role in *Of Mice and Men*. How are the characters connected to one another? What can we learn about migrant workers during the Great Depression through the narration of this chapter?

Answers will vary. Example: This chapter connects characters in various ways. First and most obviously, George and Lennie are connected because they travel together. They are unusual during this era because the life of a migrant worker is lonely. Men who work on the ranches come and go quickly. However, in this chapter George is also connected to Slim because of the similarities in being leaders for people. George is a leader for Lennie; Slim seems to be the leader of the entire group. Curley and his wife are connected, and not just in the sense that they are married. They both are menacing to George and Lennie. Curley is a menace because of his violent and cruel nature; Curley's wife is a menace because of her predatory manner. Candy and Crooks are connected by their separation from the whole group. Candy is an elderly man, who is alone, and Crooks is a black man, also alone, trying to fit in at the ranch. One of the most important connections at this point in the novel is the connection between George and Candy. Both men are responsible for people or animals who are incapable of taking care of themselves. George is responsible for Lennie, and Candy is responsible for his old dog.

20. What type of man is Carlson? How is he different than Slim?

Carlson is a man who is insensitive to the needs of those he lives with. He has no sensitivity to beings that need to be cared for. For example, he wants to shoot Candy's dog because it is getting old.

Chapter 3

Vocabulary

bemused – preoccupied, slightly dazed, deep in thought

derision – scorn, disapproval

hoosegow – jail

raptly – intently

reprehensible – blameworthy

reverently – worshipfully

scuttled – moved very quickly

subdued – dominated, forced down

subsided – slowed, then stopped

wryly – dryly, ironically

1. Why did George at one time play jokes on Lennie? Why did he stop? What do we learn about the interdependence of George and Lennie?

For George, it is easy to pick on Lennie because he is so gullible, “Why he’d do any damn thing I tol’ him. If I tol’ him to walk over a cliff, over he’d go.” (Pg. 40) This torment went on for some time, until one day, by the Sacramento River, George told Lennie to jump in. Lennie, unable to swim, nearly drowned. George pulled Lennie to safety, and Lennie was grateful: “...he was so damn nice to me for pullin’ him out. Clean forgot I told him to jump in.” (Pg. 40) George realized then that he was not treating Lennie like a person, and he never tormented Lennie again. George and Lennie depend on each other for different reasons. Lennie is dependent on George because he needs him to survive. George, however, depends on Lennie because Lennie gives him a purpose. George is in charge of Lennie, as demonstrated through the stories he tells Slim at the beginning of the chapter.

2. How does Slim compare Lennie to other men?

Slim describes Lennie as a “nice fella.” He mentions that people who are usually less intelligent than others are nice, but people who are smart are usually mean.

3. Why does George reveal to Slim what happened to them in Weed? What is Slim’s response?

George tells him about what happens because he finds it easy to talk to Slim. He also slips and mentions weed because Slim is talking about what a nice person Lennie is. When Slim hears the story, he again recognizes that Lennie is not a mean person. Slim states, “He ain’t mean. I can tell a mean guy a mile off.” (Pg. 42)

4. What do George and Lennie talk about when Lennie comes into the house? How are Lennie's actions similar to the events that happened earlier when Lennie and George were coming to camp?

George and Lennie are discussing a puppy that Lennie gets to have. Lennie tries to hide the puppy in his jacket when he comes in. When George asks him about the puppy, Lennie tries to conceal the fact that he has it, just as he tried to do with the dead mouse in his pocket earlier in the book.

5. Why do you think the author spends so much of the narration talking about what a kind person Lennie is?

Answers will vary. The author spends time developing Lennie's kind character because there may be some sort of misunderstanding later in the story. The reader may not know the type of conflict that is going to occur, but a reasonable guess would be that the conflict will center on someone's misinterpreting Lennie's actions, similar to what happened to Lennie and George in Weed.

6. Why does Carlson want to shoot Candy's dog?

Initially, Carlson wants to shoot Candy's dog because it is old, and its smell is offensive: "God awmighty, that dog stinks. Get him outa here, Candy! I don't know nothing that stinks as bad as an old dog." (Pg. 44) Carlson also tells Candy that the dog is not good for him any more, so it should be put out of its misery.

7. What are Candy's reasons for not wanting to shoot the dog? How does that seem, given the conditions of migrant camps at this time?

Candy does not want to shoot the dog because he has had the dog for a long time. He describes how he began working with the dog. He also does not want to shoot because it might hurt the dog. For some readers, Candy's relationship with his dog might seem unusual because most men in the migrant camps cannot take care of themselves, let alone an animal. For example, George complains about being responsible for Lennie, and a dog is certainly much easier to take care of. However, for some students, Candy's dependence on the dog represents the companionship that most men who work these camps do not have.

8. What do Slim and Whit discover in a pulp magazine? How is this important for the group of men?

Slim and Whit discover a letter that a man who used to work the camp had written to a magazine. The letter is important because it represents a dream for something that one of them was able to achieve. Getting a letter published in a magazine may not seem important to some, but it was something that William Tenner, the man who wrote the letter, had looked forward to while he was working.

9. On pages 48 and 49, Steinbeck uses several images of silence. The following passage is just one small example:

“His voice trailed off. It was silent outside. Carlson’s footsteps died away. The silence came into the room. And the silence lasted.” (Pg. 48)

Why does the image of silence play an important role at this point in the novel? Who is literally being silenced? Who is metaphorically being silenced, and what role does each man play in the silence?

Answers will vary. Steinbeck focuses on silence to highlight the mood at this point in the novel. Literally, Candy’s dog is being silenced by Carlson. The silence heightens the sense of anticipation and dread that Candy must feel while he is waiting to hear the sound of the gun. Metaphorically, the men at the ranch are being silenced. Just as the dog is an example of a weak character being destroyed by a stronger character, the men on the ranch are powerless as well. Each man, whether it is because of age, race, the depression, or intelligence, is silenced in a world where he is forced to travel and work. Lennie is silenced because he thinks like a child. George does not let him speak to people who have more power than they do. Crooks, the black stable hand, is silenced because he is not even able to come inside the bunk house. All the men are silenced by Curley because he is in charge of the ranch.

10. Explain George and Lennie’s work ethic. What information in the text is used to illustrate their work ethic? Explain the idiom “gonna roll up a stake.” (Pg. 50)

George and Lennie work hard. Throughout the novel the reader learns that one of Lennie’s positive characteristics is that he is a hard worker. In this section, we find out that Lennie and George are willing to work hard because they came to the ranch before the weekend, ensuring that they would have to do work before they were given a meal and a break for the weekend. The idiom “roll up a stake” means that Lennie and George are going to try to save money.

11. Explain the following passage and its function in the story:

“She’s gonna make a mess. They’s gonna be a bad mess about her. She’s a jail bait all set on the trigger. That Curley got his work cut out for him. Ranch with a bunch of guys on it ain’t no place for a girl, specially like her.” (Pg. 51)

The passage describes Curley’s wife and how she likes to hang around the men too much. George is asserting that the ranch is no place for a girl, at least a ranch where there are so many men. This passage serves as foreshadowing because it hints that later in the novel there will be some sort of conflict between Curley’s wife and the men. Because George and Lennie have already had a problem with Curley, the reader can assume that the conflict will involve Lennie and Curley as well.

12. Where does Whit invite George and Lennie to go? What type of establishment is it? What is George’s response?

Whit invites the men to go to Susy’s place, a local bar and whorehouse. George is interested in going, but only for a drink. His primary concern is saving money for his dream.

13. When Curley comes into the bunkhouse, for whom is he looking? When he discovers that Slim is not there, what does he assume? What do we learn about Curley’s relationship with his wife, based on this event?

Curley comes in the bunkhouse to find his wife, and he assumes that his wife and Slim are together. The reader learns that Curley and his wife do not have a trusting relationship.

14. Describe the conversation George and Lennie have after the men go in search of a fight between Curley and Slim.

George asks Lennie what he was doing in the barn. Lennie tells him that he was petting his new puppy. George is concerned that Slim and Curley’s wife might be in the barn together. Lennie insists that he did not see Curley’s wife in the barn. George reminds Lennie that if there is fighting at the ranch, Lennie is supposed to stay out of it. The conversation between George and Lennie foreshadows what is to come in the novel. First, the conversation between the men focuses on the woman, then a possible fight, and then how a woman can send a man to jail.

15. What do you suppose Lennie's statement might suggest, allegorically, when he says, "... live on the fatta the lan'... an' rabbits," especially in light of the way George goes on to describe it? (Pgs. 57, 58)

The way George describes living "...on the fatta the lan..." for Lennie, is that their dream ranch is lush and abundant in food, providing work, money, and food for the men, as well as stability and safety. As an allegory, the dream ranch seems to represent both men's personal Garden of Eden.

16. Lennie, sensitive by nature, shows a violent streak while George tells the story of their future ranch. What does Lennie say, specifically, that shows this violence? How does his statement add to the violent nature of the novel?

While describing their future, George tells Lennie that they will own a dog and a couple of cats, but Lennie will have to make sure that the cats don't get hold of the rabbits. In response to this, Lennie states, "You jus' let 'em try to get the rabbits. I'll break their God damn necks. I'll...I'll smash 'em with a stick." (Pg. 58) This statement shows how irrational Lennie can be, which justifies how he is unable to survive on his own. Also, Lennie's statement shows how prevalent violence is during this time. Lennie does not see any other way to keep the cats from his rabbits, other than hurting them, or killing them, just as Carlson can see no other alternative but to shoot Candy's dog.

17. What does talking about the dream do for Lennie and George? Why is Candy interested in the story about George and Lennie's dream?

Talking about the dream gives Lennie and George a reason to hope that life after the ranch will be better than life on it. Lennie and George have something to look forward to, and they have a reason to work. When they talk about the dream, especially after the drama that occurred with Curley, his wife, and Slim, it provides a way for the men to calm down. Candy is interested in the dream because he wants a reason to go on as well. He tells George that he, Candy, would be a good person to take care of the chickens and the garden.

18. How are the theme of survival and the power struggle between the weak and the strong highlighted on page 60?

When Candy is talking about sharing the dream with Lennie and George, he mentions that he was hurt a few years ago on the farm. He believes that he will be let go because he can no longer do any work. This emphasizes the idea that people who are weak are destroyed, or they are removed from those who are stronger. Candy believes that Lennie and George would still allow him to work, even if he were not as strong as he used to be. Perhaps he thinks this way because of how George takes care of Lennie.

19. After George, Lennie, and Candy make a pact not to tell anyone about their dream, Candy makes the following statement: "I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog." (Pg. 61) Explain the parallelism between the relationship Candy had with his dog and the one George has with Lennie. How might this statement be an example of foreshadowing?

Candy and his dog, and George and Lennie, have similar relationships. Both started in childhood. Candy had his dog since it was a pup, and George knew Lennie from childhood. Both men (George and Candy) also are in positions to take care of their partners. Candy must take care of his dog because the dog is no longer capable of taking care of itself. According to Carlson, the dog is not worth the time and effort required to take care of it. George must take of Lennie because Lennie is too simple-minded to take care of himself. The interesting foreshadowing is that Candy wishes that he would have taken care of his dog rather than allowed someone else to shoot it; later in the novel, George will shoot Lennie because he does not want a stranger to do it.

20. Describe the nature of the argument between Curley and Slim.

Slim is angry because Curley keeps asking him if he is involved with Curley's wife. Slim said, "Well, you been askin' me too often. I'm getting' God damn sick of it. If you can't look after your own God damn wife, what you expect me to do about it?" (Pg. 62)

21. How do the other men get involved in the argument? Why does Curley react the way he does?

After Slim yells at Curley for picking on him, Carlson joins in by talking about how frightened Curley is. Then, Candy joins the argument by making fun of Curley's glove. Curley gets angry, and tells the men that they can step outside to fight. Curley is demonstrating his power over the men; he knows that they will not fight him because he is their boss.

22. Why does Curley pick on Lennie?

Curley has to back down in an argument with Slim and Carlson. Feeling embarrassed, Curley attempts to boost his own ego by picking on Lennie, who is the easiest target. The reader should remember that earlier in the story, Curley is described as a person who picks on people who are unfairly matched with him.

23. Why do you think George encourages Lennie to fight back when Curley hits him?

One reason George encourages Lennie to fight back might be that George does not like Curley. From their first encounter, George and Curley have had animosity for each another. Another reason George encourages Lennie to fight back might be that he wants Lennie to take care of himself. Lennie literally does what George asks, and previously in the novel, George told Lennie that in fights, he should back off. George wants Lennie to protect himself, so he needs to tell him what to do.

24. Throughout the fight there are many animal references referring to either Lennie or Curley. Find several examples in the text, and then explain how the animal references connect to what the reader already knows about the characters. How do the descriptions of Curley change throughout the fight?

Answers will vary. Examples:

- *“Curley stepped over to Lennie like a terrier.” (Pg. 62)*
- *“Lennie covered his face with his huge paws and bleated with terror.” (Pg. 63)*
- *Slim about Curley – “The dirty little rat.” (Pg. 63)*
- *“Curley was flopping like a fish on a line.” (Pg. 63)*
- *“He stood crying, his fist lost in Lennie’s paw.” (Pg. 64)*
- *“Slim turned to the whimpering Lennie.” (Pg. 64)*

The image of Curley changes throughout the fight from one of an attack dog to one of a coward who has been injured by something bigger and stronger. The animal images applied to each man emphasize the power-hungry nature of Curley and the timid and childlike nature of Lennie. Lennie’s images are associated with animals that cry (i.e., bleat), indicating that Lennie is emotionally the weaker of the two men.

25. What happens as a result of Lennie’s taking care of himself? How does Lennie respond? Why?

Lennie crushes Curley’s hand but he does not let go immediately. George has to make Lennie let go. Lennie is upset by what he has done, but he tells George “you tol’ me to.” (Pg. 64) It seems that Lennie does not understand what has happened.

26. Why will Curley keep quiet about what Lennie did to him and not try to get George and Lennie fired?

Lennie, unjustly provoked, crushes Curley’s hand, breaking nearly every bone. As the men prepare to take Curley to the doctor, George wonders if he and Lennie will be fired. Slim, who witnessed the entire event, knows Curley is in the wrong and assures George that the secret is safe from the boss. Slim tells Curley, “I think you got your han’ caught in a machine. . . .But you jus’ tell an’ try to get this guy canned and we’ll tell ever’body, an’ then will you get the laugh.” (Pg. 64) To avoid becoming a laughing-stock, Curley agrees not to tell the truth.

Chapter 4

Vocabulary

aloof – distant

averted – turned away

crestfallen – depressed, dejected

disarming – endearing

fawning – flattering, dotting, attempting to please

indignation – anger at something unjust

mauled – roughly handled

sullenly – morosely, gloomily

wisps – small bunches

1. At this point in the novel, the reader has been introduced to the main characters in the plot. How would you describe the characters?

Answers will vary. Example:

Slim: wise, regal, almost God-like, the leader in the camp

George: decent, hard-working, caring

Lennie: innocent, child-like, quick to anger

Carlson: rough, insensitive, uncaring

Crooks: downtrodden, excluded

Candy: elderly, somewhat disabled, will be cast aside by society when he is used up

The Boss: not a bad guy, somewhat self-absorbed, a typical employer

Curley: mean-spirited troublemaker, jealous

Curley's wife: simple girl who marries the wrong person, some readers may feel she has loose morals; in fact, characters call her a "tart."

2. Some of the character names are nicknames, given to describe a characteristic, such as Slim (thin) and Crooks (crooked spine). Other names, however, seem to symbolize deeper meanings. Why do you think Steinbeck chose the following names for his characters? Use examples from the novel to articulate your opinion.

Curley: Obviously, this name is given to describe his curly hair; Steinbeck, however, consciously, or subconsciously, could have chosen this name because “cur” is a word for a coward.

Whit: This name could come directly from the Old English word, meaning “from the white field,” or it could be a play on words. Whit shows how observant he is in Chapter 3 when he points out the letter in the magazine, having been written by a man who worked for the ranch three months prior. Whit could be a play on “wit” which means “keenness” or “quickness.”

Candy: This name describes Candy’s sweetness to his old dog. This name does, however, suggest a woman’s name. This could be symbolic because Candy is old, nearly to the age of retirement, and has become disposable to society; just as women, during the time period, were also disposable members of society.

3. Why is Curley’s wife nameless?

Answers will vary. Thus far in the novel, the reader understands that it is a comment on men and life in the Depression. For the reader to have a vested interest in the lives of the men in the novel, Steinbeck needs to leave the only woman (of substantial action) in it nameless, just like the other women. Notice that, throughout the novel, the women serve only as objects to the men. These women are simply objects of desire. The men only think about Curley’s wife as “Curley’s wife.” She serves no major purpose for the men. To them, she is just a source of trouble, a “tart,” a “tramp.”

It is also important for Steinbeck to maintain sympathy for Lennie throughout the novel. If Steinbeck were to give Curley’s wife a name, the reader might sympathize with her more than Lennie. The action and the climax in the novel revolve around Lennie.

Other possibilities exist for her lack of a name:

- *She is not a fully developed person.*
- *her entire life revolves around and is controlled by Curly*
- *Lennie’s love of soft things like rabbits, mice, and puppies, which are unnamed, extends to Candy’s wife.*
- *She is objectified and treated as a non-entity by the men.*

4. Steinbeck spends a great deal of time describing Crooks' living quarters at the beginning of this section. What does the reader gain through this description? What do we learn about Crooks?

The reader learns two things: Crooks, because he is black, is forced to live outside of the bunkhouse. In fact, he has his own space in which he can do whatever he wants. Crooks is almost a permanent fixture of the ranch. He has many more possessions than a typical person would have because he does not need to worry about transporting them. The reader also learns that Crooks takes pride in his space, but enjoys living alone. He does not need to worry about picking up after himself.

5. What is Crooks doing to his back during this chapter?

Crooks is sitting in his bunk rubbing his "crooked spine" with liniment. (Pg. 67)

6. What initially brings Lennie to Crooks' room? How does Crooks react to the visitor?

Lennie wants to see the newborn puppies that are being kept in the stable; when he gets there he notices Crooks' light is on and decides to pay him a visit. Crooks is unhappy about Lennie's visit because he likes to be left alone. He reasons that since he is not allowed in the regular bunkhouse, no one should be allowed in his space.

7. At first Crooks is unfriendly to Lennie, but then he invites Lennie to sit. Why does he change?

Crooks has grown accustomed to being a mistreated minority, forced to defend himself in any situation. Lennie's innocence and simple-minded manner assure Crooks: "A guy can talk to [Lennie] an' be sure [he] won't go blabbin'." (Pg. 70)

8. Crooks is also very lonely, but how is his loneliness different from the others'?

Crooks tells about his childhood, about how "The white kids come to play at our place..." and how his "...ol' man didn't like that" (Pg. 70). For a long time Crooks did not understand his father; now, as an adult, he does: "There wasn't another colored family for miles around. And now there ain't a colored man on this ranch. If I say something, why it's just a nigger sayin' it." (Pg. 70) Crooks has been isolated because of his race; therefore, his loneliness extends further than the loneliness of the other men, simply because of his race.

9. Why does Lennie become upset with Crooks?

Crooks begins by asking Lennie, "S'pose George don't come back no more... What'll you do then?" (Pg. 71) Lennie, at first, is confident George will always return, but Crooks continues to provoke Lennie. Lennie then begins to doubt his once-confident feeling about his good friend and companion. These thoughts infuriate Lennie, making him angry with Crooks.

10. Why does Crooks make Lennie believe that George will not come back for him?

Even though Crooks is marginalized like the rest of the men on the ranch, he is segregated even further because of his color. Crooks tries to even the score by not letting people into his room, but he lets Lennie into his room, so he needs some other way to have an edge over Lennie. When Lennie begins to talk about George's dream, Crooks uses George as a way to gain an advantage over Lennie; Crooks make Lennie feel as bad as he does.

11. How does Crooks explain to Lennie why he upset him?

Crooks explains to Lennie that he wants him to understand what it is like to have no one—Crooks has no one. "A guy needs somebody—to be near him.... A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you." (Pg. 72)

12. How does Crooks respond to Lennie when Lennie describes George's dream about the rabbits? Why do you think he responds in this way?

Crooks does not believe that Lennie and George will achieve their dream of having their own land with rabbits. Crooks feels this way because his life has been dictated by poverty. He is a poor man and has lost his hope. Even though they are also poor, George and Lennie deal with their poverty by believing in a dream. Crooks deals with his poverty by protecting what he already has, making other people feel the loneliness he feels, and by refusing to believe that life can get any better.

13. Who comes to visit Lennie, Candy, and Crooks? What is the real reason behind the visit?

Curley's wife is looking for her husband and stops at Crooks' bunk to find out if Crooks has seen him. She states that she is looking for Curley, but she admits that she already knows where he is. The real reason behind her visit is that she is as lonely as the other 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?" (Pg. 77) Later, Crooks tries to chase Curley's wife out of his room, but she knows her trump card. She is a white woman and the wife of a violent man in a violent world. Her status would suffer severely if she were caught in a black man's room. She knows this and lets Crooks know he could be lynched at a moment's notice. Ultimately, on this ranch he has no power and could be killed because of the lie of a vengeful woman. This is why Crooks folds into himself, loses his ego, his "self," so that there is nothing that anyone can do to hurt him.

14. Characterize Curley's wife as she is presented in the novel. How is the reader supposed to feel about her?

The reader's first impression of Curley's wife seems to be that she is a mean-spirited person, not very intelligent, and a flirt, who wears too much makeup and dresses provocatively. However, when Curley's wife is given the opportunity to speak in the novel, the reader learns that her anger is motivated by her loneliness, similar to the way Crooks' loneliness motivates his anger. She is embarrassed that her loneliness has made her resort to talking to Crooks, Lennie, and Candy. "Ever'body out doin' som'pin'. Ever'body! An' what am I doin'? Standin' here 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." (Pg. 78)

15. How is the idea of power and powerlessness developed at the beginning and in the final section of this chapter?

At the beginning of the chapter, Crooks tries to exert his power over Lennie, and then Candy, as they try to come to his bunk to talk to him. Even though Crooks is powerless most of the time, he takes control of his space and has the power to let people in or keep them out. At the end of the chapter, Curley's wife exerts her power as a white woman over Crooks. She knows that she can say or do anything and that Crooks would be unable to retaliate. Curley's wife may be powerless in her relationship with her husband, but she has power over certain ranch hands.

16. Cite the visual image of Crooks that Steinbeck creates as Crooks is mentally and emotionally defeated by Curley's wife.

"Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall." (Pg. 81) "Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego—nothing to arouse either like or dislike." (Pg. 81)

17. How does this chapter end? Explain the circular nature of the chapter and what it implies about Crooks.

The chapter begins and ends with Crooks rubbing liniment on his back. Crooks was, for a short time, drawn into the dream ranch and the company of others, but after Curley's wife berated him, he is back to his previous isolation. The chapter's ending emphasizes that the loneliness felt by the men is destined to continue, as Curley's wife continues on her own, and Crooks is left in his bunk to fend for himself.

Chapter 5

Vocabulary

consoled – comforted

contorted – twisted, misshapen

mules – slippers without a heel

sniveled – whimpered

writhed – squirmed, twisted

1. Despite the descriptive setting of the barn and the quiet Sunday afternoon, the next chapter begins with an accident. Explain what happened and why Lennie is so worried.

Lennie kills the pup that Slim gave him. According to the text, Lennie was playing too roughly with the puppy: “Why do you got to get killed? You ain’t so little as mice. I didn’t bounce you hard.” (Pg. 85) Lennie is worried that George will not let him tend to the rabbits on the farm because he has killed the puppy.

2. Describe Lennie’s irrational anger when he does not understand about the puppy’s death.

Upon realizing that he has killed one of the puppies, Lennie knows George will be upset with him, but, “...Maybe George won’t care... This here God damn little son-of-a-bitch wasn’t nothing to George.” (Pg. 86) The choice of language here seems uncharacteristic of Lennie. He becomes angry and throws the puppy away from him.

3. Who joins Lennie in the barn? Why? How does Lennie react?

Curley’s wife comes into the barn and finds Lennie. She tries to talk to Lennie because she is lonely, and the rest of the men are playing horseshoes, but Lennie refuses to talk to her.

4. How is the conversation between Lennie and Curley’s wife like the conversation between Lennie and Crooks?

In both instances, the conversation is one-sided. Lennie’s child-like mentality hinders the discussion from progressing. Lennie’s primary concern is with what will happen if Lennie does not follow George’s rules.

5. How does Curley’s wife show that she is not as contemptible as she seems?

Curley’s wife tries to console Lennie after she discovers that he is upset about his puppy.

6. When Curley's wife is trying to console Lennie, she states: "You can get another one easy. The whole country is fulla mutts." (Pg. 87) How might that statement be applied to more than just animals?

Throughout the novel, Steinbeck highlights the idea that America is filled with people who are lonely and desperate. Many appear to have no real family, just as a mutt has no truly distinguishing feature or pedigree or home. The image of homeless "mutts" across the country could also refer to the number of homeless men who are traveling from coast to coast to find work.

7. Why does Curley's wife become angry at Lennie?

Curley's wife becomes angry because Lennie will not talk to her. When she is trying to soothe him, he tells her that he cannot talk because George will be upset. Curley's wife is angry because she is lonely and feels as if she does not have the right to talk to anyone. The men on the ranch have taken her rights away.

8. Throughout the book, the reader learns about Lennie and George's dream. What does the reader learn about Curley's wife's dream? How does her dream influence her life?

Curley's wife dreams about being in motion pictures. When she was young, she had an opportunity to meet a man who was going to put her in motion pictures, but he never sent her a letter. As a result, she married Curley.

9. How does Curley's wife feel about him?

She does not like Curley. She says "He ain't a nice Fella." (Pg. 89) This wording should refer students to other descriptions:

- *a former ranch hand was a "nice fella." (Pg. 18)*
- *Crooks is a "nice fella." (Pg. 20)*
- *The boss is a "nice fella." (Pg. 24)*
- *Slim is a "nice fella." (Pg. 28)*
- *Lennie is a "nice fella." (Pgs. 34, 40, 82)*
- *George is a "nice fella" (Pg. 101)*
- *Even after Lennie killed Curley's wife, Candy says, "He's such a nice fella." (Pg. 95)*

10. How does the reader know that Curley's wife does not understand Lennie's mental challenges?

Curley's wife is very angry at Lennie because she has shared with him her dreams and how she feels about her husband. In response, Lennie only wants to talk about the rabbits that George is going to let him farm. If she understood Lennie's mentality, she would treat him as Crooks did, understanding that Lennie is slow and cannot reveal any secrets.

11. What is Lennie's explanation for why he likes rabbits? How does Curley's wife respond?

Lennie explains, "I like to pet nice things. Once at a fair I seen some of them long-hair rabbits. An' they was nice, you bet. Sometimes I've even pet mice, but not when I could get nothing better." (Pg. 90) At first, Curley's wife is worried by Lennie's explanation, but soon she realizes that Lennie is the same as other people who like nice things.

12. Why does Lennie panic, and what happens as a result of his panic? How is this similar to an event earlier in the story?

Curley's wife invites Lennie to touch her hair because it is soft. When he does, he begins to rub her hair more harshly than she would like. Lennie panics after Curley's wife screams because Lennie has a tight grip on her hair. Covering her mouth to stop her screaming, Lennie accidentally kills her. Because Lennie panics, he does not know how to let go of what is causing the panic, just as he did not let go of Curley's hand when Curley was hitting him, and just as he held on to the woman's dress in weed.

13. What similarity can be found in the death of the puppy, in the beginning of the chapter, and in the death of Curley's wife?

Lennie, once he realizes he has killed a puppy, tries to cover it with hay. He does the same thing after he realizes that he has killed Curley's wife.

14. Explain the following image from the book: "And the meanness and the plannings and the discontent and the ache for attention were all gone from her face. She was very pretty and simple, and her face was sweet and young." (Pg. 92-93)

The image describes Curley's wife and her contented appearance after her death. Steinbeck seems to imply that her only escape from powerlessness is death. The readers might infer that the way Steinbeck describes her earlier is intended to show her worst qualities, but in death, her true simplicity, youth, and sweetness is revealed.

15. How do Curley's wife and Lennie's dreams both seem to die with the accidental death?

Curley's wife's dream dies with her. She will never have the opportunity to be in motion pictures. Lennie's dream will die because he believes that George will not let him tend the rabbits after he finds out that Lennie has killed Curley's wife.

16. When Steinbeck describes the moments after Curley's wife's death, he uses personification. Cite an example of personification and explain the impact of its use in this section of the novel.

Answers will vary. Example: "Then gradually time awakened again and moved sluggishly on." (Pg. 93) The image suggests that time does not stand still, even though a person has died. The dreams may have died for both Lennie and Curley's wife, but life will continue. The idea of "sluggishly" suggests that without the dreams to inspire Lennie, life will be painfully slow because hope has been extinguished.

17. Who discovers Curley's wife's body? What is the reaction?

Candy discovers the body; at first he believes that she is sleeping in the barn. George then walks in and sees her.

18. What decision does George make about the girl's death? What does Candy want to do and why?

George decides they must tell Curley about his wife. George is concerned that if he lets Lennie go, Lennie will not know how to fend for himself. On the other hand, Candy wants to let Lennie get away. He is worried that Curley will kill Lennie when he finds out.

19. More than the girl's death and Lennie's possible arrest, what does Candy worry about? What is George's reaction?

Candy asks George about the farm and if they are still going to be able to go. George seems defeated and he replies that he believed that the farm was an impossible dream.

20. How does Candy address the body of the girl after he talks to George and learns that their dream of the farm is no longer a reality? Why do you think he reacts this way?

When Candy speaks to Curley's wife's dead body he says, "You God damn tramp... You done it, di'n't you? I s'pose you're glad. Ever'body knowed you'd mess things up. You wasn't no good." (Pg. 95) Candy's statement shows his disappointment that his chance of leaving the ranch is over. He blames Curley's wife, not Lennie.

21. How does George keep the men from finding Lennie right away? How do we know that this is not where Lennie would have gone?

George tells the men that Lennie would have gone south because they came from the north. The reader should remember that at the beginning of the story, before they even came to the ranch, George told Lennie that if anything happened, he should go to the clearing where they stayed the night before they went to the ranch.

22. What do the men suppose happened to Carlson's gun? Why is this hard to believe?

The men think that Lennie took Carlson's gun, but this is out of character for Lennie, who most likely would not know how to operate it if he had it.

Chapter 6

Vocabulary

belligerently – aggressively, angrily

haunches – back legs

lanced – pierced

mottled – spotted; speckled

scudded – driven swiftly by the wind

1. How is the beginning of this scene similar to the beginning of the novel? Why would Steinbeck begin this chapter in the same way that he began the first?

The comfort and beauty of nature is a major theme throughout the book, beginning on the first page. Nature is delightful and peaceful, but ultimately, men and their inhumane, violent actions threaten nature. Lennie seems to find solace in nature; he wants to escape when he thinks about how angry George is going to be. Steinbeck seems to imply that nature will continue to support the stronger being.

2. Explain the image of the heron awaiting its prey and its connection to Lennie and his circumstances.

The images Steinbeck presents at the beginning of the chapter suggest that nature is peaceful and calming. However, in the midst of this natural beauty, the image of a large bird trying to catch its dinner looms over the serenity. The image of the heron suggests that despite the idyllic surroundings, for any weaker creature, death can come in a second, as death came to the mouse, Candy's dog, the pup, Curley's wife, and, soon, to Lennie.

3. As Lennie is waiting for George, he remembers a "little fat old woman. She wore thick bull's-eye glasses and she wore a huge gingham apron with pockets, and she was starched and clean." (Pg. 100-101) Who is the woman?

The woman is Aunt Clara, who used to try to help Lennie. He remembers being scolded and reminded that he was keeping George from accomplishing his dreams.

4. How can we explain the hallucinations that Lennie has as he is waiting for George?

Lennie seems to be suffering from delusions as he waits because he feels guilty for what he has done. But Lennie is also worried that George will not want to take care of him any more. Lennie's reaction to Aunt Clara and the imaginary rabbit is similar to the reaction that he had to Crooks when Crooks told him that George would not return for him.

5. How does George know where to find Lennie?

Earlier in the novel, George tells Lennie where to hide if there is any trouble.

6. Why does George go through the motions of pretending to be angry at Lennie?

George wants to reassure Lennie that everything will be all right. George repeats that words that Lennie knows by heart and tells him the story of the farm one more time.

7. Explain whether you believe Lennie realizes that he has done something wrong.

Answers will vary. Lennie does not seem to realize that he has done something as serious as killing a human being. He treats Curley's wife's death the same as the puppy's death.

8. Explain the symbolism in George's final telling of the farm story.

As George tells the story of the farm, he is basically giving up on his dream. He realizes that his dream of owning a farm is never going to come true, and he is going to be the same kind of man he bunks with at the ranch.

9. Why is George calm, almost without emotion, when he talks with Lennie?

George understands that being angry with Lennie is useless. George knows what must be done in order to save Lennie from the wrath of the other men.

10. During George's retelling of the ranch story, the point is made that on the ranch they will have each other to look after. Why is this point mentioned so often?

A significant theme in the book concerns the loneliness of men on the road during the depression. By assuring asserting that they will be together on the farm, George and Lennie are ensuring that they will never be lonely. Another hope is that Lennie can die peacefully, with the dream still fresh in his mind.

11. Earlier in the novel, what foreshadows the final events between Lennie and George?

Earlier in the novel, Candy tells George that he would have rather been the one to shoot his old dog. Candy feels bad because he let Carlson kill his dog, especially since he had the dog since it was a pup. George is in the same position. He knows that the men are going to kill Lennie, but he cannot let someone else hurt Lennie because he has been taking care of Lennie for most of their lives.

12. Why do you think George shoots Lennie?

George sees shooting Lennie as the only alternative, since the other men will probably shoot or lynch Lennie. The best thing that could happen to Lennie is that he might spend the rest of his life in an institution. It is better for Lennie to be killed mercifully by a friend, than be hunted down, and able to feel the hatred others have for him, as well as his own fear.

13. Why do you think George lies to the men about the events that led up to Lennie's death?

George lies to the men because he does not want them to see his actions as an act of sympathy for Lennie. Because the men were willing to hunt Lennie down, it will be better for George if they believe that George killed Lennie as an act of justice.

14. Who realizes what really happened between Lennie and George?

Slim recognizes George's behavior and knows the story behind how George and Lennie ended up together. He takes George to the highway to find a place to get a drink.

15. Explain the significance of the final statement in the novel.

Carlson says, "Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys?" (Pg. 107) Carlson, represents an uncaring member of society who does not feel any compassion over the death of the two innocents, Curley's wife and Lennie. Slim is the only person on the ranch who seemed to understand the nature of the relationship between Lennie and George. The final comment highlights the nature of men in the Depression, as well as the theme of loneliness and lack of camaraderie that exists between men.

Of Mice and Men

Study Guide Student Copy

Chapter 1

Vocabulary

bundle – a pack

brusquely – gruffly

contemplated – thought about

debris – leftovers, garbage

dejectedly – sadly

imperiously – like a dictator, arrogantly

junctures – joints

lumbered – moved heavily

morosely – glumly, gloomily

mottled – spotted

quivered – shook, trembled

recumbent – reclining, drooping

resignedly – in a surrendering manner

skittering – moving rapidly; skipping

1. The beginning of the novel begins with a rich description of the physical setting. Cite examples of three uses of descriptive language. Explain the effect on the mood of the novel by beginning the narrative with this description. What is Steinbeck trying to suggest about the area by the Salinas River?

2. “Jungle-up” is an idiom used in the following sentence: “...and beaten hard by tramps who come wearily down from the highway in the evening to jungle-up near water.” (Pg. 2) Explain the meaning of the idiom.

3. Compare and contrast the two men who come into the clearing by the river. Why do you think Steinbeck introduces the men by describing their physical features, highlighting the fact that one is small and one is huge? What can the reader infer about the two men based on their descriptions?

4. Steinbeck uses animal imagery to describe Lennie, the larger man. Cite two examples of this type of image that is used in the first few pages of the chapter.

5. Why does George tell Lennie not to drink the water? Why might this seem like an unusual instruction to give a man who has spent part of his adult life traveling the country?

6. George gives Lennie instructions about the water, and when he explains about the type of water that is safe to drink, he does so “hopelessly.” (Pg. 3) What can we infer about why George might feel hopeless when he is talking to Lennie?

7. When Lennie and George sit by the river to rest, what do they talk about? What can we learn about Lennie from their conversation? What can we learn about George?

8. Read the following line from the novel and explain the allusion, “watchin’ that blackboard.”

“You remember settin’ in that gutter on Howard street and watchin’ that blackboard?” (Pg. 5)

9. What does Lennie have in his pocket? Why does he want to keep it?
10. Describe George’s plan for getting the job at the ranch. What do we learn about Lennie from this plan?
11. As George and Lennie are waiting to go the camp, George states, “God, you’re a lot of trouble. I could get along so easy and so nice if I didn’t have you on my tail. I could live so easy and maybe have a girl.” (Pg. 7) Explain what this statement illustrates about George’s feelings toward Lennie? What does the reader learn about George and his dreams?
12. How does Lennie’s desire for a touching sensation get him in trouble in Weed?
13. Even though Lennie’s mentality keeps him from fully understanding the world around him, he is very sensitive to George’s feelings. Describe an incident that shows Lennie’s compassion for George.

14. After George erupts in anger about the responsibility of taking care of Lennie, Lennie offers to run away and leave George alone. Why do you think George does not take Lennie up on his offer?

15. Why does Lennie like George to tell the story of the ranch, even though he already knows it by heart? Why does George so readily agree to tell the story, even though he has just gotten angry with Lennie a few minutes before?

16. Explain the idiom, “live off the fatta the lan’.” (Pg. 14)

17. Why does George tell Lennie to remember the spot where they are camping? What might this conversation foreshadow?

18. What literary term does Steinbeck use in the last sentence of the chapter?

19. By the end of Chapter 1 there are two themes or motifs that are easily identified. Using specific examples, describe these themes.

Chapter 2

Vocabulary

abruptly – suddenly
apprehensive – anxious, uneasy, fearful
archly – mischievously, slyly
bridled – drew back scornfully or angrily; took offense
complacently – in a self-satisfied way, contentedly
contorted – twisted
derogatory – deliberately offensive, negative
dousing – soaking
flounced – moved impatiently
gravity – seriousness
grizzled – streaked with gray
intently – firmly, focused
laden – burdened
liniment – soothing balm
mollified – soothed
ominously – threateningly, in a way that bodes evil
plaintively – mournfully, pleadingly
precede – go before
pugnacious – warlike, inclined to fight, combative
scoff – to mock
scowled – frowned angrily
scrappy – quarrelsome
skeptically – doubtfully
slough – to cast off
vials – bottles

1. In this new chapter of the novel, Steinbeck again begins with a description of the setting. Explain how the description that begins this chapter is different than the description at the beginning of the first chapter. What does this description tell us about George and Lennie's life?

2. When George and Lennie are shown their quarters, the old man tells them that the boss is angry at them. Why?

3. The old man tells George and Lennie about a blacksmith who used to work at the ranch and suddenly quit. Quote what the old man says was the reason for his departure. What does the old man's story seem to suggest about the men who work on these ranches?

4. How does the old man describe the boss?

5. When the boss is talking to George about their work, George speaks for himself and Lennie. What does his boss suspect is going on between George and Lennie? What is George's response?

6. Why does George not let Lennie speak to the boss?

7. Explain the irony in Lennie's last name.

8. Who is Curley, and what does it mean when Candy says he is "handy"?

9. What kind of person does Curley seem to be? Use specific references to the text to justify your response.

10. Describe the interaction between George, Curley, and Lennie. Why do you think Curley acts the way he does? How does George feel about Curley?

11. Why would the old man feel safe that he has “drawn a derogatory statement from George”? (Pg. 27)

12. What does the reader learn about Curley’s wife? Why might this be important to the story?

13. What does George warn Lennie about? Why? Where does he tell him to go?

14. After Curley’s wife comes to the barn looking for Curley, why does George get angry at Lennie?

15. Explain the foreshadowing in the following lines from the novel:

Lennie cries out suddenly—“I don’t like this place, George. This ain’t no good place. I wanna get outa here.” (Pg. 32)

Chapter 3

Vocabulary

bemused – preoccupied, slightly dazed, deep in thought

derision – scorn, disapproval

hoosegow – jail

raptly – intently

reprehensible – blameworthy

reverently – worshipfully

scuttled – moved very quickly

subdued – dominated, forced down

subsided – slowed, then stopped

wryly – dryly, ironically

1. Why did George at one time play jokes on Lennie? Why did he stop? What do we learn about the interdependence of George and Lennie?
2. How does Slim compare Lennie to other men?
3. Why does George reveal to Slim what happened to them in Weed? What is Slim's response?
4. What do George and Lennie talk about when Lennie comes into the house? How are Lennie's actions similar to the events that happened earlier when Lennie and George were coming to camp?
5. Why do you think the author spends so much of the narration talking about what a kind person Lennie is?
6. Why does Carlson want to shoot Candy's dog?

7. What are Candy's reasons for not wanting to shoot the dog? How does that seem, given the conditions of migrant camps at this time?

8. What do Slim and Whit discover in a pulp magazine? How is this important for the group of men?

9. On pages 48 and 49, Steinbeck uses several images of silence. The following passage is just one small example:

“His voice trailed off. It was silent outside. Carlson's footsteps died away. The silence came into the room. And the silence lasted.” (Pg. 48)

Why does the image of silence play an important role at this point in the novel? Who is literally being silenced? Who is metaphorically being silenced, and what role does each man play in the silence?

10. Explain George and Lennie's work ethic. What information in the text is used to illustrate their work ethic? Explain the idiom “gonna roll up a stake.” (Pg. 50)

11. Explain the following passage and its function in the story:

“She's gonna make a mess. They's gonna be a bad mess about her. She's a jail bait all set on the trigger. That Curley got his work cut out for him. Ranch with a bunch of guys on it ain't no place for a girl, specially like her.” (Pg. 51)

12. Where does Whit invite George and Lennie to go? What type of establishment is it? What is George's response?

13. When Curley comes into the bunkhouse, for whom is he looking? When he discovers that Slim is not there, what does he assume? What do we learn about Curley's relationship with his wife, based on this event?
14. Describe the conversation George and Lennie have after the men go in search of a fight between Curley and Slim.
15. What do you suppose Lennie's statement might suggest, allegorically, when he says, "... live on the fatta the lan'... an' rabbits," especially in light of the way George goes on to describe it? (Pgs. 57, 58)
16. Lennie, sensitive by nature, shows a violent streak while George tells the story of their future ranch. What does Lennie say, specifically, that shows this violence? How does his statement add to the violent nature of the novel?
17. What does talking about the dream do for Lennie and George? Why is Candy interested in the story about George and Lennie's dream?
18. How are the theme of survival and the power struggle between the weak and the strong highlighted on page 60?
19. After George, Lennie, and Candy make a pact not to tell anyone about their dream, Candy makes the following statement: "I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog." (Pg. 61) Explain the parallelism between the relationship Candy had with his dog and the one George has with Lennie. How might this statement be an example of foreshadowing?

20. Describe the nature of the argument between Curley and Slim.

21. How do the other men get involved in the argument? Why does Curley react the way he does?

22. Why does Curley pick on Lennie?

23. Why do you think George encourages Lennie to fight back when Curley hits him?

24. Throughout the fight there are many animal references referring to either Lennie or Curley. Find several examples in the text, and then explain how the animal references connect to what the reader already knows about the characters. How do the descriptions of Curley change throughout the fight?

25. What happens as a result of Lennie's taking care of himself? How does Lennie respond? Why?

26. Why will Curley keep quiet about what Lennie did to him and not try to get George and Lennie fired?

Chapter 4

Vocabulary

aloof – distant

averted – turned away

crestfallen – depressed, dejected

disarming – endearing

fawning – flattering, dotting, attempting to please

indignation – anger at something unjust

mauled – roughly handled

sullenly – morosely, gloomily

wisps – small bunches

1. At this point in the novel, the reader has been introduced to the main characters in the plot. How would you describe the characters?

Slim:

George:

Lennie:

Carlson:

Crooks:

Candy:

The Boss:

Curley:

Curley's wife:

2. Some of the character names are nicknames, given to describe a characteristic, such as Slim (thin) and Crooks (crooked spine). Other names, however, seem to symbolize deeper meanings. Why do you think Steinbeck chose the following names for his characters? Use examples from the novel to articulate your opinion.

Curley:

Whit:

Candy:

3. Why is Curley's wife nameless?
4. Steinbeck spends a great deal of time describing Crooks' living quarters at the beginning of this section. What does the reader gain through this description? What do we learn about Crooks?
5. What is Crooks doing to his back during this chapter?

12. How does Crooks respond to Lennie when Lennie describes George's dream about the rabbits? Why do you think he responds in this way?

13. Who comes to visit Lennie, Candy, and Crooks? What is the real reason behind the visit?

14. Characterize Curley's wife as she is presented in the novel. How is the reader supposed to feel about her?

15. How is the idea of power and powerlessness developed at the beginning and in the final section of this chapter?

16. Cite the visual image of Crooks that Steinbeck creates as Crooks is mentally and emotionally defeated by Curley's wife.

17. How does this chapter end? Explain the circular nature of the chapter and what it implies about Crooks.

Chapter 5

Vocabulary

consoled – comforted

contorted – twisted, misshapen

mules – slippers without a heel

sniveled – whimpered

writhed – squirmed, twisted

1. Despite the descriptive setting of the barn and the quiet Sunday afternoon, the next chapter begins with an accident. Explain what happened and why Lennie is so worried.
2. Describe Lennie's irrational anger when he does not understand about the puppy's death.
3. Who joins Lennie in the barn? Why? How does Lennie react?
4. How is the conversation between Lennie and Curley's wife like the conversation between Lennie and Crooks?
5. How does Curley's wife show that she is not as contemptible as she seems?
6. When Curley's wife is trying to console Lennie, she states: "You can get another one easy. The whole country is fulla mutts." (Pg. 87) How might that statement be applied to more than just animals?

7. Why does Curley's wife become angry at Lennie?

8. Throughout the book, the reader learns about Lennie and George's dream. What does the reader learn about Curley's wife's dream? How does her dream influence her life?

9. How does Curley's wife feel about him?

10. How does the reader know that Curley's wife does not understand Lennie's mental challenges?

11. What is Lennie's explanation for why he likes rabbits? How does Curley's wife respond?

12. Why does Lennie panic, and what happens as a result of his panic? How is this similar to an event earlier in the story?

13. What similarity can be found in the death of the puppy, in the beginning of the chapter, and in the death of Curley's wife?

14. Explain the following image from the book: "And the meanness and the plannings and the discontent and the ache for attention were all gone from her face. She was very pretty and simple, and her face was sweet and young." (Pg. 92-93)

15. How do Curley's wife and Lennie's dreams both seem to die with the accidental death?

16. When Steinbeck describes the moments after Curley's wife's death, he uses personification. Cite an example of personification and explain the impact of its use in this section of the novel.

17. Who discovers Curley's wife's body? What is the reaction?

18. What decision does George make about the girl's death? What does Candy want to do and why?

19. More than the girl's death and Lennie's possible arrest, what does Candy worry about? What is George's reaction?

20. How does Candy address the body of the girl after he talks to George and learns that their dream of the farm is no longer a reality? Why do you think he reacts this way?

21. How does George keep the men from finding Lennie right away? How do we know that this is not where Lennie would have gone?

22. What do the men suppose happened to Carlson's gun? Why is this hard to believe?

Chapter 6

Vocabulary

belligerently – aggressively, angrily

haunches – back legs

lanced – pierced

mottled – spotted; speckled

scudded – driven swiftly by the wind

1. How is the beginning of this scene similar to the beginning of the novel? Why would Steinbeck begin this chapter in the same way that he began the first?
2. Explain the image of the heron awaiting its prey and its connection to Lennie and his circumstances.
3. As Lennie is waiting for George, he remembers a “little fat old woman. She wore thick bull’s-eye glasses and she wore a huge gingham apron with pockets, and she was starched and clean.” (Pg. 100-101) Who is the woman?
4. How can we explain the hallucinations that Lennie has as he is waiting for George?
5. How does George know where to find Lennie?
6. Why does George go through the motions of pretending to be angry at Lennie?

7. Explain whether you believe Lennie realizes that he has done something wrong.
8. Explain the symbolism in George's final telling of the farm story.
9. Why is George calm, almost without emotion, when he talks with Lennie?
10. During George's retelling of the ranch story, the point is made that on the ranch they will have each other to look after. Why is this point mentioned so often?
11. Earlier in the novel, what foreshadows the final events between Lennie and George?
12. Why do you think George shoots Lennie?
13. Why do you think George lies to the men about the events that led up to Lennie's death?
14. Who realizes what really happened between Lennie and George?
15. Explain the significance of the final statement in the novel.

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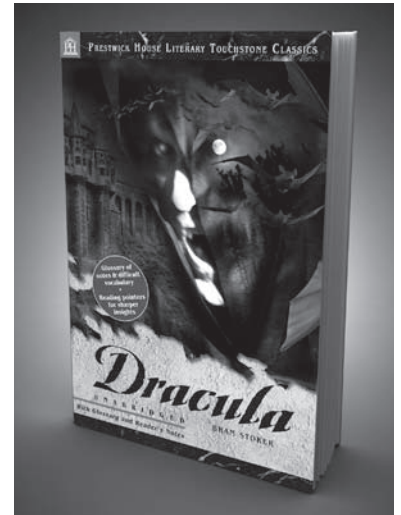
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