

Of **MOICE** *and* **MIEN**



Revision Pack

Name:

Plot and Structure

Section 1

- Peaceful scene by river
- George and Lennie are introduced
- George makes Lennie give up the dead mouse
- George tells Lennie how to behave at the new ranch
- George complains about life with Lennie
- They eat supper
- Dream of owning land
- George tells Lennie to come back to this place if he get into trouble

Section 2

- Description of Bunk house
- Candy shows George and Lennie where they sleep
- George and Lennie meet the Boss Curley
- George warns Lennie to stay away from Curley
- Curley's wife – George warns Lennie against her
- George and Lennie meet Slim and Carlson
- Candy has an old dog, Slim's dog has puppies

Section 3

- George confides in Slim
- Lennie is given a pup – delighted
- Carlson persuades Candy to shoot his dog
- George, Lennie and Candy plan to buy land.
- Curley picks up a fight with Lennie and gets his hand crushed

Section 4

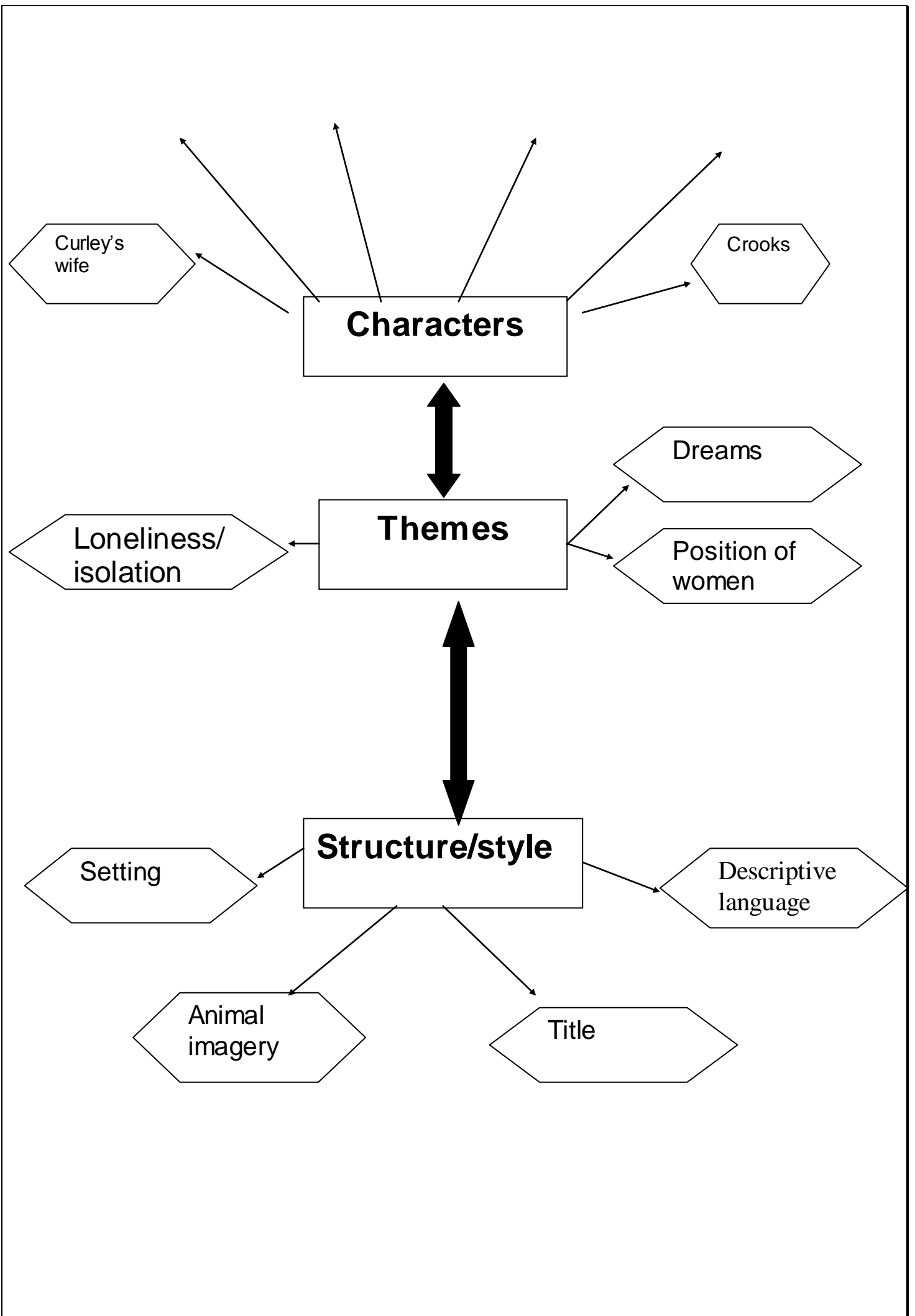
- Description of Crook's room
- Lennie visits Crooks in his room
- Crooks makes Lennie think that George might leave him.
- Candy joins Lennie and Crooks in dreaming about their own farm.
- Curley's wife comes in. Crooks tries to make her leave and she threatens him.

Section 5

- Description of barn
- Lennie kills his puppy
- Curley's wife tells Lennie her life story
- Lennie unintentionally kills Curley's wife
- Lennie goes to the pool by the river
- Curley's wife body is found
- The men set off hunt for Lennie

Section 6

- The quiet scene at the pool by the river is described.
- Lennie imagines being told off
- George tells Lennie about the dream farm for one last time
- George shoots Lennie



Characters

Lennie Small

- Simple character with a powerful impact -- He is a big man, in contrast to his name.
- "Behind him(George)walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely."
- He loves to pet soft things, is blindly devoted to George and their vision of the farm, and possesses incredible physical strength.
- He earns the reader's sympathy because of his utter helplessness in the face of the events that unfold. Lennie is totally defenseless. He cannot avoid the dangers presented by Curley, Curley's wife, or the world at large,
- Doomed from the beginning.
- His innocence raises him to a standard of pure goodness that is more poetic a character whose innocence only seems to ensure his inevitable destruction.
- He is often described as a child or an animal - he drinks from the pool like a horse and his huge hands are described as paws.

George Milton

- He is a **small man**, but has brains and a **quick wit**.
- He is **short-tempered** but a loving and **devoted friend**, whose frequent protests against life with Lennie never weaken his commitment to protecting his friend. George's first words, a stern warning to Lennie not to drink so much lest he get sick, set the tone of their relationship. George may be terse and impatient at times, but he never strays from his primary purpose of protecting Lennie.
- He has been a good friend to Lennie, ever since he promised Lennie's Aunt Clara that he would care for him. He **looks after all Lennie's affairs**, such as carrying his work card, and tries to steer him out of potential trouble.
- **He needs Lennie as a friend**, not only **because Lennie's strength helps to get them both jobs, but so** as not to be lonely. His threats to leave Lennie are not really serious. He is genuinely proud of Lennie.
- He **shares a dream with Lennie** to own a piece of land and is prepared to work hard to build up the money needed to buy it.
- "...with us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don't have to sit in no bar room blowin' in our jack 'jus because we got no place else to go. If them other guys gets in jail they can rot for all anybody gives a damn. But not us."

Crooks

- Crooks' room shows how **Crooks is different from the other ranch hands**. Much of the room is filled with boxes, bottles, harnesses, leather tools, and other accoutrements of his job. It is a room for one man alone. But scattered about on the floor are his personal possessions, accumulated because, unlike the other workers, he stays in this job. He has gold-rimmed spectacles to read (reading, after all, is a solitary experience – “Sure you could play horseshoes till it got dark, but then you got to read books. Books ain't no good. 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 I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick”
- **Physical disability sets him apart from the other workers** (*makes him worry that he will soon wear out his usefulness on the ranch*)-- his isolation is compounded by the fact that he is a black man. —“S'pose you didn't have nobody. S'pose you couldn't go into the bunk house and play rummy 'cause you were black...A guy needs somebody-to be near him....I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick.”
- Curley's wife uses race against Crooks to render him completely powerless. When she suggests that she could have him lynched, he is unable to mount any defence. -“
- **Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny.”**
- He is bitter about his exclusion from the other men, Crooks feels grateful for Lennie's company. Yet, as much as he craves companionship, he cannot help himself from lashing out at Lennie with unkind suggestions that George will leave Lennie.-- Crooks's behavior exemplifies the predatory nature of the ranch-hands' world. **The strong attack the weak but the weak will attack the weaker.**
- Crooks exhibits an insight that other characters lack. He is openly sceptical of Lennie's claim that he will soon own a piece of land, telling him that such dreams never come to fruition - “Just like heaven. Ever'body wants a little piece of lan'. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land. It's just in their head. They're all the time talkin' about it, but it's jus' in their head.”
- Crooks acts brusque not because of any dislike for others; rather, he uses it as a defence mechanism.

Curley's wife

- Steinbeck describes Curley's wife in terms of her appearance and the reactions of the ranch hands toward her. She has been alternately a "tart," "jailbait," and various other derogatory terms, used often by George. In the end she is seen as another victim of loneliness.
- Although her purpose is rather simple in the novel's opening pages—she is the "tramp," "tart," and "bitch" that threatens to destroy male happiness and longevity—her appearances later in the novel become more complex. When she confronts Lennie, Candy, and Crooks in the stable, she admits to feeling a kind of shameless dissatisfaction with her life.
- Her vulnerability at this moment and later—when she admits to Lennie her dream of becoming a movie star—makes her utterly human and much more interesting than the stereotypical vixen in fancy red shoes. However, it also reinforces the novel's grim worldview. In her moment of greatest vulnerability, Curley's wife seeks out even greater weaknesses in others, preying upon Lennie's mental handicap, Candy's debilitating age, and the color of Crooks's skin in order to steel herself against harm.
- Sympathetic treatment of Curley's wife prior to her death – once she lies lifeless on the hay, Steinbeck writes that all the marks of an unhappy life have disappeared from her face, leaving her looking "pretty and simple . . . sweet and young." After maligning women about their flirtatious natures; it is disturbing, then, that Steinbeck seems to subtly imply that the only way for a woman to redeem that nature and restore her lost innocence (?) is through death.

"Coulda been in the movies, an' had nice clothes - all of them nice clothes like they wear. An' I coulda sat in them hotels, an' had pitchers took of me... Because this guy says I was a natural."



Candy

- The **old handyman, aging** and left with only one hand as the result of an accident, worries that the boss will soon declare him useless and demand that he leave the ranch
- Life on the ranch—especially **Candy's dog**, once an impressive sheep herder but now toothless, foul-smelling, and brittle with age—supports Candy's fears. Past accomplishments and current emotional ties matter little, as Carson makes clear when he insists that Candy let him put the dog out of its misery. In such a world, Candy's dog serves as a harsh reminder of the fate that awaits anyone **who outlives his usefulness**.
- For a brief time, however, the **dream of living out his days with George and Lennie on their dream farm** distracts Candy from this harsh reality. He deems the few acres of land they describe worthy of his hard-earned life's savings, which testifies to his desperate need to believe in a world kinder than the one in which he lives.
- Like George, Candy **clings to the idea of having the freedom** to take up or set aside work as he chooses. So strong is his devotion to this idea that, even after he discovers that Lennie has killed Curley's wife, he pleads for himself and George to go ahead and buy the farm as planned.



"You an' me can get that little place, can't we George? You an' me can go there an' live nice, can't we, George? Can't we?"

"You God damn tramp. You done it, di'nt you? I s'pose you're glad. Ever'body knowed you'd mess things up."

Themes

Loneliness/Dreams

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

Dreams

Show how in **Of Mice and Men** dreams are one of the ways in which the characters combat the loneliness and hopelessness of their existence.

- **Title**, which is an allusion to a line of Robert Burns, a Scottish poet: "**The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft aglay.**" Translated into modern English, the verse reads: "**The best laid schemes of mice and men often go awry.**" This cynicism is at the heart of the novel's action and foreshadows of all that is to come.
- In essence, *Of Mice and Men* is as much a story about the nature of human dreams and aspirations and the forces that work against them as it is the story of two men. Humans give meaning to their lives—and to their futures—by creating dreams. Without dreams and goals, life is an endless stream of days that have little connection or meaning. George and Lennie's dream—to own a little farm of their own—is so central to *Of Mice and Men* that it appears in some form in five of the six chapters. In fact, the telling of the story, which George has done so often, becomes a ritual between the two men: George provides the narrative, and Lennie, who has difficulty remembering even simple instructions, picks up the refrain by finishing George's sentences.
- The only outlet for the characters in this book to rise above their troubles is a shared dream of a better place. From the beginning of the story Lennie and George ride high on the thought of someday owning a farm. When this dream is shared with others, it becomes contagious. Candy and Crooks sign on to this fantasy, which helps them also to transcend their circumstances. Without dreams these characters would have nothing.
- To George, this dream of having their own place means independence, security, being their own boss, and, most importantly, being "**somebody.**" To Lennie, the dream is like the soft animals he pets: It means security, the responsibility of tending to the rabbits, and a sanctuary where he won't have to be afraid. To Candy, who sees the farm as a place where he can assert a responsibility he didn't take when he let Carlson kill his dog, it offers security for old age and a home where he will fit in. For Crooks, the little farm will be a place where he can have self-respect, acceptance, and security. For each man—George, Lennie, Candy, and Crooks—human dignity is an integral part of the dream.

- All the characters wish to change their lives in some fashion, but none are capable of doing so; they all have dreams, and it is only the dream that varies from person to person. Curley's wife has already had her dream of being an actress pass her by and now must live a life of empty hope. Crooks' situation hints at a much deeper oppression than that of the white worker in America—the oppression of the black people. Through Crooks, Steinbeck exposes the bitterness, the anger, and the helplessness of the black American who struggles to be recognized as a human being, let alone have a place of his own. Crooks' hopelessness underlies that of George's and Lennie's and Candy's and Curley's wife's. But all share the despair of wanting to change the way they live and attain something better. Even Slim, despite his Zen-like wisdom and confidence, has nothing to call his own and will, by every indication, remain a migrant worker until his death. Slim differs from the others in the fact that he does not seem to want something outside of what he has, he is not beaten by a dream, he has not laid any schemes. Slim seems to have somehow reached the sad conclusion indicated by the novel's title, that to dream leads to despair.
- This is a novel of defeated hope and the harsh reality of the American Dream. George and Lennie are poor homeless migrant workers, doomed to a life of wandering and toil in which they are never able to reap the fruits of their labour. Their desires may not seem so unfamiliar to any other American: a place of their own, the opportunity to work for themselves and harvest what they sow with no one to take anything from them or give them orders. George and Lennie desperately cling to the notion that they are different from other workers who drift from ranch to ranch because, unlike the others, they have a future and each other. But characters like Crooks and Curley's wife serve as reminders that George and Lennie are no different from anyone who wants something of his or her own.
- Circumstances have robbed most of the characters of these wishes. Curley's wife, for instance, has resigned herself to an unfulfilling marriage. What makes all of these dreams typically American is that the dreamers wish for untarnished happiness, for the freedom to follow their own desires. George and Lennie's dream of owning a farm, which would enable them to sustain themselves, and, most important, offer them protection from an inhospitable world, represents a prototypically American ideal. Their journey, which awakens George to the impossibility of this dream, sadly proves that the bitter Crooks is right: such paradises of freedom, contentment, and safety are not to be found in this world.

- Another key element is the companionship between George and Lennie. The two men are not unique for wanting a place and a life of their own, but they are unique in that they have each other. Their companionship contrasts the loneliness that surrounds them—the loneliness of the homeless ranch worker, the loneliness of the outcast black man, the loneliness of the subjected woman, the loneliness of the old, helpless cripple—and it arouses curiosity in the characters that they encounter, Slim included.
- The tragedy is that George, in the end, is forced to shoot both his companion, who made him different from the other lonely workers, as well as his own dream and admit that it has gone hopelessly awry. His new burden is now hopelessness and loneliness, the life of the homeless ranch worker. Slim's comfort at the end ("You hadda George" (118)) indicates the sad truth that one has to surrender one's dreams in order to survive, not the easiest thing to do in America, the Land of Promise.
- *Of Mice and Men* is a parable that tries to explain what it means to be human. Essentially, man is a very small part of a very large universe; in the greater scheme of things, individuals come and go and leave very little, lasting mark. Yet deep inside all people is a longing for a place in nature—the desire for the land, roots, and a place to call "home." The struggle for such a place is universal, and its success is uncertain. In sharing his vision of what it means to be human, Steinbeck touches on several themes: the nature of dreams, the nature of loneliness, man's propensity for cruelty, powerlessness and economic injustices, and the uncertainty of the future.



Position of women

- The portrayal of women in *Of Mice and Men* is **limited and unflattering**. We learn early on that Lennie and George are on the run from the previous ranch where they worked, due to encountering trouble there with a woman.
- Misunderstanding Lennie's love of soft things, a woman accused him of rape for touching her dress. George berates Lennie for his behaviour, but is convinced that **women are always the cause of such trouble**. Their **enticing sexuality**, he believes, tempts men to behave in ways they would otherwise not.
- 🗺️🗺️ A visit to the "flop house" (a cheap hotel, or brothel) is enough of women for George, and he has no desire for a female companion or wife.
- Curley's wife, the only woman to appear in *Of Mice and Men*, seems initially to support George's view of marriage. Dissatisfied with her marriage to a brutish man and bored with life on the ranch, she is constantly looking for excitement or trouble.
- In one of her more revealing moments, she threatens to have the black stable-hand lynched if he complains about her to the boss. Her insistence on flirting with Lennie seals her unfortunate fate.
- Although Steinbeck does, finally, offer a sympathetic view of Curley's wife by allowing her to voice her unhappiness and her own dream for a better life, women have no place in the author's idealized vision of a world structured around the brotherly bonds of men.

Structure and setting

Setting

- Steinbeck's description of natural world is often poetic and lyrical – although he reveals that nature can be cruel and savage.
- Peace and harmony of the natural world contrast to the violent behaviour of the people in the story.
- Importance of setting – **the idyllic setting turns predatory** in the last chapter

Some comments on how the story ends ...

- Importance of setting – **the idyllic setting turns predatory** – instead of a place of sanctuary, the pool is now a place of death. Instead of the rabbits playing in the brush, the heron is swallowing the little snake whole. Instead of green leaves and a gentle breeze, there are brown, dying leaves and a gush of wind. Instead of safety for Lennie, there is death. Instead of companionship for George, there is a future of loneliness.
- Poignancy of the last scene – Lennie dies in blissful ignorance in the place -- for George, this final description of life with Lennie, of the farm and the changes it would have brought about, is a **surrender of his dreams**.
- Relinquishment of George's hope for a different life. Lennie was the only thing that distinguished his life from the lives of other men and gave him a special sense of purpose. Without Lennie these hopes cannot be sustained. **Dreams are fragile – they have no place in a harsh and predatory world filled with such injustice and adversity.**
- Carlson and Curley represent the harsh realities of the real world, a world in which the **weak will always be vanquished by the strong**; a world in which the rare, **delicate and beautiful bond between friends** is not appropriately mourned because it is **not understood**.
- Parallelism between Lennie's death and putting Candy's dog to silence – reaction of other people.

Examination language

Useful phrases:

The writer shows that...

The writer demonstrates...

We can see from ...

The description of the setting sets the tone for...

His choice of language indicates ...

Steinbeck establishes that...

A sample introduction

The clearing into which Lennie and George wander evokes Eden in its serenity and beauty. Steinbeck wisely opens the novel with this idyllic scene, for it creates a background for the idealized friendship between the men and introduces the romanticized dream of farm life that they share. The opening pages establish a sense of purity and perfection that the world which will prove to be cruel and predatory, cannot sustain.

A sample conclusion:

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