1. Background to the book

'Of Mice and Men' is a story about George and Lennie, and what happens to them when they join some other men to work on a ranch. It is also about people's lives at a certain point in time, and how the times they live in has an effect on their dreams, hopes and attitudes.

In 1921, at the age of 19, John Steinbeck worked on a ranch, so he knew about the conditions that people had to work in. He also knew about the millions of people in America, at the time that he wrote this book in 1936, who could not find work, and who were constantly on the move with their families and possessions trying to find work and stay alive. After the 'boom-time' of the 1920's, the 1930's brought unemployment and poverty.

What Steinbeck saw for himself, and read about in the papers, made a deep impression on him, and he felt it was part of a writer's responsibility to write about these conditions in his stories.

'Of Mice and Men' is not directly about these social conditions, but all the characters in the story are typical of many people at that time.

The men on the ranch are lucky to have work and wages, but they will have to move on when the job is finished. Even when they find work, it is hard to complain if the pay is too low or the conditions bad, because there are dozens, maybe hundreds, of men just like them waiting to take the job if they do not want it. In the story there are a number of examples of how careful George and Lennie have to be, as they can be sacked ['canned'] at a moment's notice. The most obvious example is when Lennie crushes Curley's hand.

Unemployment brought with it poverty, hunger and homelessness. This period, lasting roughly from 1930 to the beginning of World War II in 1939, is known as the Depression. Firms and banks went bust and people's savings disappeared when the banks closed. It was hard to buy food and pay the rent.

In parts of the country, things were almost worse than they were in the cities. Farmers were being driven off their land. There had been a series of droughts which had ruined the crops and dried up the soil, and farmers could not afford to repay the bank loans which had helped them buy their farms. When the banks took the land back, whole families had to move. They headed west to California where the soil was good and there was supposed to be plenty of room.

Steinbeck does not mention these farmers directly in 'Of Mice and Men'. Instead, he makes George and Lennie dream of a little piece of land. The two men, and the others on the ranch who come to share their dream, represent in a simple way the hunger for land of many millions of people, and their dream of being able to settle down.

In America during this time, few travelling men could form lasting friendships, because they had to keep moving on, but a man on his own was more vulnerable to being attacked, imprisoned or just being very lonely. Notice how Whit feels about the letter he reads in a magazine. Why do you think it is so important to him? George and Lennie's friendship is a very unusual one, travelling together as they do, looking after each other.

(The book - cont.)
In the Depression black people suffered as badly as white people, and often a great deal worse. They often moved north hoping to find better conditions or treatment than they were used to in the south, but they found that racism was just as common there as it was in the south. They could not live in white areas. There was no law against it. It just wasn’t allowed. There is only one black man in 'Of Mice and Men', but through that one man Steinbeck shows what relationships between black and white were like in America as a whole.

In November 1785, the Scottish poet, Robert Burns, wrote a poem called 'To a Mouse'. He was a farmer, as well as a poet, and he was ploughing a field in late autumn when he ploughed over the nest of a field mouse. The mouse would have survived the winter in this nest, but now it was going to die from the cold of winter, because there was neither the time nor the materials to make a new nest. Burns wrote the poem afterwards as an apologie to the mouse.

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**TO A MOUSE**

**ON TURNING HER UP IN HER NEST WITH THE PLOUGH**

Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim’rous beastie,
O, what a panic’s in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awee sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle.
I wad be laith to rin an’ chase thee,
Wi’ murd’ring pattle!

I’m truly sorry man’s dominion,
Has broken nature’s social union,
An’ justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee starlie.
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An’ fellow-mortall.

I doubt na, whiles, but thou may thee:
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A dairm’st icker in a thrave;
'S a sma’ saught.
I’ll get a blessing wi’ the lave,
An’ never miss it!

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

---

1 plough stick
2 an odd ear of wheat in a shock of grain
3 the leavings 4 build 5 moss
6 sharp and bitter
7 without house or home
8 endure
9 hoar-frost
8 not the only one

Like so many writers, Burns got the title, and the idea, for his book from a poem. Make sure you understand the connection.

There has been some discussion as to what to call this book, but this is fairly unimportant. Probably the best term for such a short novel is a novella.

In its original form, 'Of Mice and Men' Steinbeck did not arrange his story in chapters as we see in the Heinemann New Windmill edition, but without interruption, divided only into sections. This can be found in some editions today. One reason could be that Steinbeck wished to create a fast moving story. To break it up into chapters would interrupt its fluency, and destroy the build-up of atmosphere. Putting a book down at the end of a chapter tends to break into the concentration of the reader. There is also a feeling of inevitability about the story, and to divide it into chapters might reduce this feeling.

Because of this original organisation, these notes refer to six sections rather than chapters.

1. The narrative

- We meet George and Lennie by the river one evening
- They are on their way to work on a ranch in the Salinas valley in California
- They will sleep the night there before starting work the next morning
- Lennie has a dead mouse in his pocket, but George makes him throw it away
- They light a fire, and George heats beans for their supper
- They talk, then settle down to sleep by the fire

2. Descriptions

This section opens with two paragraphs of description which set the atmosphere for the opening of the book. Steinbeck creates a quiet scene with audio-visual details carefully chosen.

- Study the description carefully to decide for yourself which details make it so effective.

- Notice too, the smoothly flowing sentences which create a relaxed mood. As we read on we might well look back to this moment and wish that George and Lennie could have stayed here safe from the harsh realities which confront them as the story unfolds. What does George say about the place and his reason for spending the night here?

- After the introduction, more description follows, into which the two main characters are introduced skillfully. They are very much a part of the scene. What makes them so?

- On p. 7 there is a further short description which at first sight may seem just as peaceful. However, this time a sense of unease is introduced. How is this done?

- As the section moves on, we are reminded of the scene from time to time: to confirm the mood, and also, perhaps, because Steinbeck is revelling in the natural scene himself.

- The section closes sleepily, in tune with the two men settling for the night. Sufficient detail is given to us to increase the sense of regret for the moment of tranquility that is the last that the two friends will enjoy together.

[Section 1 cont.]
3. Structure of the book

- Section 1 is very dense. We are told a great deal that we need to know. Some is obvious [surface detail]; some is implied [sub-text to explore]

- What clues are we given in Section 1 about what will happen in the rest of the book? [The mouse and Lennie’s strength? The girl in Weed? And?]
  [What do you feel about these ‘warnings’? Do they add to your enjoyment?]

- At what point does it become clear, during a first reading, that the men are bound for disaster?

- Where does the title of Steinbeck’s book come from? What is the connection between Burn’s mice and the two men? To what extent are each up against forces over which they have no control? At what point do we begin to suspect that this is so?

- Why does the story begin and end [in section 6] in the same place [by the river]?

4. Animals in the book

- How many animals are mentioned on p.1? in Section 1 [p.1 - p.17]? in the whole book?

- What are they there for?

  Think about: Steinbeck’s love of nature and animals
  the creation of atmosphere - pure descriptive detail
  figurative use - eg: metaphor / simile = Lennie
  symbolic use - eg: Candy’s dog

5. Figurative language

Start collecting effective examples of:
- similes [like / as]
- metaphors [something/one is something/body else]

Be prepared to explain why you find them particularly effective. To do this, you will need to work out any appropriate association of ideas which they give rise to.
6. Characters

George

- Set up pages for
- Lennie

Include:
- physical descriptions
- character / personality
  
  * As you focus on Lennie's childlike nature / his mental handicap, remember that how you express your ideas on this will reveal your sympathy, or lack of it.

- their relationship: assess this from the point of view of the character whose page you are working on [Who needs who? Why?]

- what George says he wants - what you think he really wants

7. George and Lennie's dream

In this section, Lennie asks George to tell him the story of their plans for the future. Set up a separate page for this, and note any references to it as you go through the book.

8. The past

What are we told about what has happened before the story starts?

- in Lennie's childhood
- in Weed

9. Days for a diary

It is possible to assign events to specific days. On the accompanying chart, include brief details to clarify this in your own mind.

10. Dialogue

This is used to create character. It also sets them in a particular time and place. It often gives clues to their mood. Be constantly aware that the way they speak and what they say, tells us something about them, at any given moment? Everything a writer does is for a purpose!

Notice:
- any particular vocabulary which is typical
- punctuation, especially the way the apostrophe is used for omission [useful when quoting]
1. The rest of the characters - at the ranch

Make notes on each of the characters as they appear in this section

- the boss
- his son, Curley
- Curley's wife: What do the men call her; say about her? Is that all she is like? or is there another side to her?
- the ranch hands: Candy, the lonely swamper and his dog Crooks, the negro stable buck Slim, the jerkline skinner Carlson, powerful and superficial

[pp. 21 - 24] [pp. 26 - 27 / 27 - 28] [pp. 29 / 32 - 33] [pp. 19 - 22 / 25 - 30] [p. 21] [pp. 24 / 29 / 34 - 37] [pp. 36 - 37]

2. Theatrical style of Steinbeck's writing

It is almost as if, as he writes his novel, Steinbeck is already preparing for a stage adaptation. Some people might say that by using this technique, the book seems to gain in dramatic effect. What do you think?

Notice how Steinbeck sets the scene - in the bunk-house -

- by describing all the details of the place: the layout of the furniture, the windows, the door; the belongings of the occupants, a stage manager would be able to create a stage set exactly as the writer has visualised it.

- by including lighting effects:
  - 10 am. sun across the room
  - square of sun on the floor
  - Curley's wife: backlit for entrance
  - thin line under window - midafternoon

[see also: beginning of section 3 / p. 40]
section 5 / p. 89]
section 6 / p. 105]

[electric light is used in later sections when sun has set]
(check this out as you come to them)

- by including sound effects: Rather than moving the action to another place as writers usually do, he stays with the same scene. He obviously doesn't want to bring the mules / wagons into the bunkhouse! so this activity can be heard outside:

  - men returning / harness jingling / wheels turning / men calling to one another
  - dinner-time

[pp. 30]
[pp. 31]
[pp. 37 / 38]

[Look out for more examples of this technique at other moments in the book.] (Section 2 cont.)
3. The narrative moves forward to create a build-up of tension

- George and Lennie arrive at the ranch, later than expected
- They meet Candy, and the boss,
- We meet Candy’s dog [p. 25]
- And Curley
  Curley means trouble / he’s a boxer / “hates big guys” /
  “don’t give a damn” etc. [p. 25 / 26]
  “...is gonna get hurt if he messes around with Lennie” [p. 27]. Jealous of his wife.
- George: “Lennie’s strong and quick and Lennie don’t know no rules”. [p. 28]
- Lennie: “If I get in any trouble,... I go ... an’ hide in the brush.” [p.31]

[There are plenty of warnings of the trouble that Curley may cause. Be sure to recognise them when you see them]
- Curley’s wife appears
  She is ‘jail-bait’ - “She got the eye” “a tart” [p. 29]. George warns Lennie: “You leave her be” [p. 33]. [He repeats this idea several times. Don’t miss them!]
- We are reminded briefly of George and Lennie’s dream. [p. 31] “I hoped we was going to get a little stake together - maybe a hundred dollars.” Will their dream become reality?
- Neither Lennie nor George like ‘the place’ [p. 34]
- Carlson suggests shooting Candy’s dog [p.37].
- Lennie asks for one of Slim’s pups. [p. 38]

[Learn to spot any moments which are included to create suspense as the story moves on. We are constantly being prodded, to keep the interest alive and to tighten the tension.]

4. We are reminded about George and Lennie’s relationship

What do the following incidents tell us about it? Or them?
- George tells Lennie off for speaking [p. 24]
- He warns him about Curley [p. 30]
- He reminds him about going to the river if he gets into trouble [p. 31]
- He tells him not to look at Curley’s wife [p. 33]

[Can you find any more?]

5. We learn something of the attitudes of the migrant workers

- “guys just move on” [p. 20]
- guys don’t travel together / look after each other / the boss is suspicious of George’s motives [p. 23]
- guys mind their own business [p. 25]
- Slim says: “Ain’t many guys travel around together.” [p. 36]
  “Maybe ever’body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.”
- Attitudes to black people - they have no worries about calling Crooks a nigger. It is fun to tease him, even to bait him. [p. 21]
- And their attitudes to women? We only see women through the eyes of the men. Curley’s wife cannot escape the image the men have of her. She even uses it to get their attention.

We begin to get an impression of a lot of lonely people, isolated from each other by suspicion, from habit, through an inability to relate long term, through prejudice. George and Lennie’s friendship is unusual and therefore suspect. Are we being invited to be glad that they have something that no-one else seems to have got, or to wonder whether it can’t last? After all the other ‘warnings’ are we being asked to predict that their friendship will end in tragedy?

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
This section contains the first major climax of the novel. The final climax is also foreshadowed. The major theme is loneliness.

1. The narrative

- Lennie gets his pup
  He keeps going to the barn
  [p. 45]
- Carlson wants to shoot Candy's dog
  Carlson's luger
  This foreshadows Lennie's death
  [p. 50]
- Candy's dog is shot
  [p. 52]
- Lennie in the barn
  He goes again in section 5
  [p. 53]
- Curley's wife - "She's gonna make a mess."
  [p. 64]
- George sees where Carlson puts his luger
  He steals it in section 5
  [p. 57]
- Trouble is brewing with Curley. Carlson and Whit think there may be a fight between him and Slim. They go to the stable to watch.
  [p. 57]
- The dream
  Candy comes in with George and Lennie and the dream becomes a plan
  [pp. 59-62]
  [pp. 62-65]
- Curley and Slim etc. come back
  and with them - reality
  [p. 65]
- Curley picks on Lennie and attacks him
  the real world is cruel
  [p. 66]
- Lennie crushes Curley's hand
  [p. 67]
- Slim persuades Curley to keep quiet
  but Curley will want revenge:
  "I'll kill the son-of-a-bitch myself."
  [p. 68]
  [p. 102]

Curley is now even more of a threat to the realisation of their dream. Slim saves the situation temporarily, but we fear the worst. What can George and Lennie expect from Curley?

2. We learn more of George and Lennie's past as George confides in Slim

- George's jokes on Lennie
  [p. 42]
- George feels superior. He tells how he used to show off his power over Lennie
  [p. 42]
- Weed
  [pp. 43/44]

Add to your character notes on the two men
Notice the links to how long Candy has had his dog
  [p. 47]

3. The dream

This becomes a plan and then is threatened when Curley attacks Lennie
- "Will we get canned now? We need the stake."
  [pp. 59-65]
  [p. 68]

[Section 3 cont.]
4. Theatrical style again

- Sound effects
  clangs of horseshoe game
  voices

  During build-up of tension as Carlson takes Candy's dog outside to shoot him

  Slim talks loudly - silence
  Carlson's footsteps die away - silence
  snapping noise of cards - silence
  little gnawing sound: rat - silence
  shot in distance - silence
  George shuffles cards noisily - conversation
  Carlson cleans gun - ejector snaps -
  Candy turns away - we can imagine the quiet rustling of the straw in his mattress

- lighting
  evening sun / brightness outside the window
  inside - dusk
  tin-shaded electric light over the table
  this leaves the "corners of the bunk-house still in dusk" [p. 40]
  Slim moves out of the light so George will confide
  Whit/Slim/George play cards "under the light" [p. 51]
  while Candy is in the gloom on his bunk [p. 50 - 56]

5. More animal imagery

- the parallel / symbolism of Candy's dog being put out of its misery

- Curley = a terrier [p. 66]
  = a fish [p. 67]

- Lennie = a huge animal = a baited bear? : he has a paw [p. 67]

6. Characters

- Candy focus on his pathetic loneliness and
  his eagerness to join George and Lennie
  says he will hand over his money to them
  promises to will his share of the farm to them when he dies

The dream sounds possible to realise because of Candy's involvement and the hard cash he offers. This later deepens the tragedy of the moment when their dream is shattered.

- Lennie his childlike nature is in marked contrast with his strength [Section 3 cont.]
• Slim  We get to know and like him better, to respect him. What we see emphasises what we have already learnt about him. Is he almost too perfect? But maybe Steinbeck just wants to say clearly that not all ranch hands are like Carlson.

  is sympathetic to Lennie, & understands the loneliness of migrant workers  [p. 41]
  "Don't need sense to be a nice fella"  [p. 42]
  "Smart guys aren't often "nice"  [p. 43]
  Lonely guys get "mean"  [p. 43]

  invites confidences  [p. 41]
  has "calm, godlike eyes"  [p. 42]

  is sensitive to Candy's feelings  [p. 48]
  "I wish somebody'd shoot me if I get old and a cripple."
  "Take a shovel"

  shows responsibility towards the mules & treats Crooks courteously  [p. 51]
  but gets irritated justifiably when Curley accuses him once too often of being with his wife.

  Whit says: "Nobody knows what Slim can do"  
  He's a dark horse? Still waters run deep?

  consoles Lennie: "It ain't your fault."

  exerts his authority - persuades Curley to keep quiet  [p. 65]
  a strong man himself, he is awed by Lennie's strength
  "Christ awmighty, I hate to have you mad at me."
  "God awmighty, I never seen such a strong guy."

We should be aware how skilfully Steinbeck offers us all these details, making them seem part of the story. In doing so, he creates a very clear picture of this heroic figure: someone against whom we can measure all the other characters.

• Carlson is insensitive and crude  [p. 46-48 / 50]

  doesn't like to lose to Crooks - because he is a "nigger"?  [p. 46]

  is possibly taking out his ill-temper on Candy and his dog  [p. 46]

  is the owner of the luger  
  calls Curley "yella"

  threatens to kick his "god-damn head off"

  takes Curley to the doctor,  [p. 68]
  but we don't imagine he will get much sympathy.

• Whit  seems a simple sort of guy, uncomplicated and friendly  [p. 48/49]

  the magazine is his - the ranch-hands dream too  [p. 51]

  plays cards to cover up his unease and play down the tension

  teases George about coming to the ranch to work

  gives his views on Curley's wife

  gossips about Curley: ants in his pants  [p. 54]

  tells George about Susy's place

  invites him to join them there on Saturday night

  obviously thinks a fight will liven their evening up  [p. 57]

We get a clear insight into the male world of the brothel, but steinbeck does not make it obscene or coarse, but rather a natural / normal part of a man's life; strangely healthy in a way.

III / III / III

10
1. The narrative

- Lennie visits Crooks in his room - harness room off the stable  
- Lennie reveals plan to buy the farm  
- Candy arrives and talks about the farm  
- Crooks gets sucked into the dream, and offers to work for the others for nothing  
- Curley's wife appears  
- She asks how Curley came by his crushed hand, but gets no satisfactory answer  
- She talks about her loneliness  
- Candy tells her to get out  
- Crooks is prepared to stand up to her and does for a moment, but she threatens to accuse him of rape, so typically he reduces himself to nothing  
- She leaves  
- George comes looking for Lennie  
- The white men leave  
- Curley's wife's treatment of Crooks makes him withdraw his request to join the white men on the farm  
- He has been reminded of the reality of his position in a white man's world

Despite the conflict between the various characters, this scene contains a moment of peace before the major climaxes of the last 2 sections

2. Characters

Candy, Crooks and Lennie are rejects from 'normal society': Curley's wife sums them up [p. 83] as "a nigger an' a dum-dum and a lousy ol' sheep"

Crooks
- description of him  
- his room  
- his possessions

- His main function is to prepare us for the collapse of George and Lennie's dream.
- He is cynical. He has seen it all before. [p. 78] He is a realist. He is 'scornful' about their "little piece of land". "Nobody," he says, "never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land." [p. 78] Even so, he is almost convinced by Candy's enthusiasm, so much so that he hesitantly asks to join them.
- He has his own dreams - not just of owning a little piece of land but of having someone to talk to - the warmth of human company.
- He is much more realistic than the others, however. He quickly realises that the realities of life forbid anyone to step outside the place they have been designated.
- This is a reminder to us that George and Lennie, 2 migrant workers, can never join the fortunate land-owning ones. Fate has cast them in a role they will never escape from.

- He also serves to illustrate Steinbeck's theme of loneliness.
- He is lonely for 2 reasons - he is a cripple [symbolic?]  
- he is a negro [see below]

Steinbeck may well, here, be protesting at the injustice of racial discrimination. [p.72]: Crooks' father disapproved of him playing with white children. He learnt why only as he grew up; [p. 74]; Candy [p. 79]; Curley's wife [p. 85]

Crooks is probably shown to be the most intelligent. He reads books, wears glasses [symbolic? How many characters in fiction do you know whose intelligence is symbolised by the wearing of spectacles?] - but, like any human being, he needs the warmth of companionship. [p. 78] His only experience of this was in his childhood. [p. 77] He may enjoy reading, but his books are a poor substitute for people.
Crooks is searching for some sort of dignity. He has his rights - his room [pp. 72/84/86] - to be alone [even if he doesn't want to be!]

He has his self-respect - he tries to exert superiority over Lennie and Candy.
- his bullying tactics of Lennie [p.75], and of Candy [p. 79], may seem unkind, but are understandable. He tries to tell Curley's wife she has no business in his room. [p. 84]

By the end of this section, despite this invasion of his world, which gives him a few moments of pleasure, nothing has changed for him. We leave him [p. 88] rubbing liniment into his painful crippled back. His life is going nowhere. So this section ends as it began.

Curley's wife Description when she appears [p. 81]
Make-up. 'Breathing strongly'. Little feminine actions.

- The men react differently
  Lennie is fascinated [p. 81]; her admiration for him as 'the machine' [p. 84] bodes ill.
  Crooks wants her to leave. "We don't want no trouble." [p. 81]
  Both Candy and Crooks are ill at ease in her presence. [p. 81 - 84]

They both know that she can cause problems, and remind us of this.

- She is lonely [pp. 82/83]
- She too has a dream
  of travelling shows [p. 82]
  of being in the "pitchers". [p. 83]
  [See also section 5 - p.94 - to Lennie in the barn]

- When the men reject her [p. 84] she fights back
  at Crooks - Rape is a hanging offence [pp. 84/85]
  at Candy - "Nobody'd listen to you"
  - but he is able to fight back [pp. 84/85-86]

- She gives her opinion of Curley [p. 82]
- She leaves, with nothing achieved and nothing changed in her life. [p. 86]

This is a good moment to pause and assess Steinbeck's portrayal of his characters.

Which characters do we know more about because they express their views about other people / life / loneliness / companionship, etc?
Which characters do we only know through their relationship: physical / verbal with other people [ie. their interaction with other people.]
Is it possible to divide them into 2 categories? Is there any reason for Steinbeck to do this?
1. The narrative

- Sunday afternoon - the men are relaxing pitching horseshoes [tournament]
- Lennie is in the barn looking at his dead pup
- Curley’s wife comes in - she talks about her life
  - Lennie talks about their dream
- The conversation moves to soft things - then to Curley’s wife’s hair
- Lennie feels it and enjoys its softness
- She panics; Lennie panics; he holds on too tight, muffling her screams, shaking her, he breaks her neck
- Lennie escapes - heading for the river and the brush
- Candy comes in and sees Curley’s wife - fetches George
- George goes back to the bunk-house to avoid implication
- He leaves Candy to raise the alarm and cover for him

We might wonder at what moment George decides to take Carlson’s luger.
- When Curley sees his dead wife, his reaction is predictably violent
- Whit is sent into Soledad for the deputy sheriff: Al Wilts
- The men set out to hunt Lennie down. Curley wants to keep George where he can see him
- Candy is left to watch over the dead body until the deputy sheriff arrives

Certainly, at this moment, we should be wondering what options there are for George and Lennie.

2. Climax

This is the point that the story has been moving towards: the tragedy we have been waiting for from the start. [Try creating a flow-chart of some of the most notable ‘warnings’ leading to this moment.]

- It is inevitable - and the narrative moves quickly to p. 96
- After the first scene setting description [p. 89], the style is edgy: short sentences and phrases in both the story-telling and the dialogue
- This is hardly a conversation - just 2 people talking and neither listening - until they find a common interest: soft things
- Then there is no escape
- The killing of Curley’s wife comes on us quickly, [in 3 swift paragraphs] and is over quickly [described in one simple sentence] [p. 97] [In all, the telling takes half a page]
- Like disasters in real life: one moment all is well, then tragedy has struck
- We are expecting something like this, and yet it comes out of the blue

[Section 5 cont.]
3. Irony

- Lennie and Curley's wife are so similar
  She is as much a reject from 'normal' society as he is. Remember how she wrote him off? But the male world has written her off, too
  Both are lonely
  Both have dreams
  Both are very simple people
  Both will soon be dead

It is worth considering any further possible ways that as rejects from a 'normal' world they are both vulnerable and, in Steinbeck's view, are both bound to meet a tragic end. It is perhaps most ironic that, while they could have been good company for each other, they combine to bring about the death of the other.

- Carlson's luger
  George takes it. Why? To protect Lennie? If George has it, it cannot be used against Lennie. What plans do we think George may have made for the future, in the heat of the moment, for himself and Lennie? He realises that the men are in pursuit of Lennie, hunting him down, possibly to lynch him. It is certain that at least Carlson will need little encouragement from Curley.

The irony here is that, by taking the luger, George makes Lennie's death inevitable. [The best laid plans, again?] The men think that Lennie has the gun and is therefore dangerous. Curley can use this as an excuse, if he needs one. They must kill Lennie to protect themselves. The killing of Lennie can be justified as self-defence, while Curley will get his revenge, not only for the murder of his wife, but as much for the fact that Lennie made him look foolish in front of the men.

Of course, we also have to consider at what point George decides he must use the gun himself on Lennie in order to protect him from the violent and cruel Curley? Possibly this idea only occurs to him later when he realises that any other solution for Lennie would be unworkable. If, on the other hand, he thinks about this, as he goes to fetch the luger, it is equally ironic that in order to protect Lennie he has to kill him.

4. Description

There are 2 main descriptive passages in this section that are worth studying in detail:

- The first 3 paragraphs that open the section [p. 89], setting the scene for the climactic moment of tragedy

  Once again notice:
  - Steinbeck's observation of nature: horses, flies, sunshine
  - his use of sound effects
  - his use of lighting

All the details add up to a peaceful Sunday afternoon, so that we might be fooled into thinking that the narrative will fall in with the mood that has been created, so that when the moment of violent tragedy arrives it is all the more terrible in contrast to the peaceful scene which opens this section.

[Section 5 cont.]
the 5 paragraphs which follow the death of Curley's wife, and Lennie's escape

It starts on p. 97 with the words: 'The sunstreaks were high on the wall by now, and the light was growing soft in the barn.' It finishes on p.98 with: 'Outside, the men's voices became louder and clearer.'

- Notice how the first 2 paragraphs are realistic: with the inclusion again of animal life: the pigeon, the unease of the shepherd bitch in the presence of death.

- Paragraph 3, in contrast, may seem perhaps an over-romanticised image of the dead woman. You need to decide to what extent you find this effective. Has death wiped away all the problems and pain of life? Has Curley's wife returned in death to the innocence of youth? Or has Steinbeck indulged in a descriptive passage which is to an extent out of keeping with the tough realities of life on the ranch? Is this a beautiful description, during which Steinbeck relents in his attitude to the woman he has created with no name, a person of little importance in this male world? Does it fit? Is it a gentle pause in the cruel reality of life? Or an exaggerated description which romanticises the dead woman who after all was everything she has been described as? Perhaps your view will depend on your sympathy, or lack of it, for Curley's wife.

- Paragraph 4 is short, but is a very poetic moment, like a pause [a freeze-frame] in the prosaic life of the characters, when all action stops. Do you find it over-ornate? or effective? capturing as it does the silence and stillness after the tragic climax, before reality creeps in again. Perhaps it gives the reader a moment to mourn the death of Curley's wife, if she deserves it? Perhaps in this moment Steinbeck takes an opportunity to express his own compassion for her? Or it gives us a moment to ponder the consequences of Lennie's actions?

- Finally, in the 5th. paragraph, reality creeps in again, the life of animals and men moves on again, and the reader too must move on towards the final denouement of the tragedy which from now on becomes Lennie's and George's.

It is certainly worth noticing throughout the novel that there may well be other descriptive passages that are equally worthy of our attention, and about which you may need to be able to comment in detail.

5. Characters

- Curley
  Make a note of all the brutal, aggressive things he says [pp. 102 -104], which are in keeping with this least likeable character in the book.

- Candy
  As he finds Curley's wife and sees his dream shattered, notice how he blames her, and not Lennie [p. 101]

  It is he who is left to mind the body. Why?

  His final comment in this section [in the book] seems a sympathetic epitaph for that other vulnerable character - Lennie: "Poor bastard". We have liked him from the start? His despair here adds to the whole tragedy?
1. The narrative

- Lennie comes back to the brush at the edge of the Salinas River
- His Aunt Clara appears to him and he talks to her
- She is replaced by an imaginary rabbit
- Lennie cries out desperately for George
- He appears
- At Lennie’s request he ‘gives him hell’, but without conviction
- George gets Lennie to look across the river
- He tells him for the last time “how it’s gonna be”
- As the hunting party draws near, George shoots Lennie in the back of the head
- He lets the men think that he has shot Lennie in self-defence
- but Slim knows, and understands
- He takes George away for a drink, while the others wonder “what the hell” is eating them

2. Descriptive passages

These are very beautiful and calm: describing a scene of beauty and peace, which is very much like that at the opening of the book, only this time there is an invasive detail, breaking the harmony: a heron stabs down to destroy the watersnake. This seems a symbolic comment on the way life has struck at many of the characters in the story, and is about to destroy Lennie.

Notice for the last time, how Steinbeck creates the mood of tranquillity he needs, as he describes the sounds and sights of the natural world that Lennie is so much a part of, in his near-animal simplicity:

- the deep green pool of the Salinas River
- the Gabilans mountains
- the late afternoon sun [pp. 105/106]
- the snake and the heron / the little bird
- the wind and trees [pp.105 / 110]
- Lennie drinking like a bear - anxious at small sounds
- the sun on the ridges / blue shadows in the valley [p. 109]
- the sounds of the men and their voices [p. 109 110]

There is beauty and peace in the sights, sounds and movements of nature, but threat in the sounds of the men approaching. At the beginning of the story George and Lennie hardly disturbed the tranquil scene, but these men are different.

All these descriptive details punctuate the action, providing: relief? pause? contrast to the action?
3. Lennie’s conversation with Aunt Clara and the rabbit

- Helps us to understand Lennie’s confusion, his fear that George will abandon him
- but it does seem somewhat incredible that a man who is so inarticulate, suddenly thinks in such a complex way
- On the other hand, his thoughts are sparked off by:
  George’s actions and words in the past
  his own threats to go away and leave George
  his fears about not being able to tend the rabbits
  Crooks’ words only the evening before

All these are familiar thoughts and words: fixations, typical of someone of limited reasoning powers like Lennie. It is just that they are expressed in a way that is too complex for Lennie.

4. The tension builds from George’s arrival to Lennie’s death  [p.108 - 112]

- George appears, using the same soft tone as the rabbit - “What the hell you yelling about?”
- but his heart is not in his ‘bawling-out’ of Lennie
  he speaks ‘woodenly’, his ‘voice... monotonous’ ‘no emphasis’
  he is just going through the motions
  Lennie has to prompt him
  George keeps stopping / speaks shortly
  and all these betray the fact that his heart and mind are set on what he is going to do
- Little evening sounds and light break in  [p. 109 / 110 / 111]
- The sound of the hunters is getting nearer  [p. 109 / 110 / 111 / 112 / 112]
  These take over before the end
- There is an irony in the words: “We got each other” - They won’t have soon
- Attention focuses on George’s shaky voice  [p. 110], the gun  [p. 111], the target  [p. 111]
  again on George’s shaky voice  [p. 111], his violently shaking hand  [p. 112], George
  shivering  [p. 112] after he has pulled the trigger
- but all the way through these devastating moments, George’s gentle compassion is uppermost.
  He gives Lennie heaven
- There is a final grand moment of sound and slow motion as Lennie is killed
- Afterwards George sits ‘stiffly’  [p. 113] in a dramatic moment of contrast

There has been no escape - no alternative - even if we can speculate on: prison? hanging? mental
asylum? escape with George? Be sure you know what you think George means when he says:”I
gotta.” [p. 112], which is echoed by Slim’s words:”You hadda, George. I swear you hadda.”
5. The final unwinding

- Slim is confirmed in his character. He has been needed for this moment. He tells the reader that George has taken the only option, so that we do not condemn his action.
  His essential sympathy and understanding are once again confirmed [p. 113]
  "Never you mind. A guy got to sometimes."
  "You hadda, George. I swear you hadda."
  He sits down beside George - 'very close to him'. [p. 113]
  He takes him for the drink he knows he needs
  "Me an' you'll go in an' get a drink'. He doesn't talk about what has happened.
  He helps George up - giving him strength with his warm, supportive presence.

- In contrast, the men lack any sort of understanding
  It is perhaps surprising that Curley has so little to say
  Maybe, at the last moment, in the presence of the dead Lennie, even he is a bit overawed
  Even so, there is a quiet satisfaction in his final words:"Got him, by God".

- Carlson, insensitive to the last, wants the grisly details:"How'd you do it?" "Did he have my gun?" "An' you got it away from him and you took it an' you killed him?"
  And finally:"Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys"
  Lennie's death means as little to him as that of Candy's old dog.
  Carlson epitomises the lack of feeling / understanding / sympathy / caring / of the migrant workers' world, which is the cause of all their loneliness.

So the tragedy has been played out. The dream was impossible. Dreams of this sort, which are created to relieve the harshness of real life rarely come to anything. Certainly, this time, it was not to be for George / Lennie / Candy / Crooks. All the survivors are left as they were. Nothing has changed for any of them. Or has it? What about George? What do you think the future holds for him? Is his the real tragedy, because he has to live with the debris of their dream? Will it destroy him, too? Or has he the resilience to carry on without Lennie. He said at the start that if he was 'alone' he 'could live so easy'........
‘Of Mice and Men’ The Characters

George Milton

1. **Looks after Lennie as if he is a child.**
   * In Ch 1 tells him off for drinking so much water without cleaning the surface.
   * In Ch 2 tells him to throw away the dead mouse.
   * In Ch 3 tells him to put the puppy back with its mother.

2. **Protective**
   * In Ch 1 tells Lennie where to hide in case he gets in trouble
   * Looks after their work cards
   * In Ch 2 tries to protect him from Curley’s questions
   * Tells him to stay away from Curley’s wife.

3. **Sometimes loses patience with Lennie**
   * he has a speech (p11) in which he wishes he didn’t have the responsibility of Lennie so that he could be free, like other migrant workers, to do what he wanted, blow his money on booze and women.
   * feels the burden of Lennie who loses them jobs and with incidents like weed causes them trouble.

4. **Feels guilty about Lennie**
   * In Ch 1 when he shouts at Lennie he sees the pain and upset on Lennie’s face and “looked ashamedly at the flames”. He says to Lennie “I been mean, ain’t I?”
   * In Ch 2 (p42/43) he confesses to Slim that in the early days he used to take advantage of Lennie to make himself look good, like the time he told him to jump in the river.
   * In Ch 5 when he finds the body of Curley’s wife he says “I should of knew... I guess maybe way back in my head I did” - he feels that he should have known Lennie could have killed somebody, and if he had acted earlier he would have prevented it. This is one of the reasons he decides to kill Lennie.

5. **Proud of Lennie**
   * In Ch 3 (p41) when Slim praises Lennie’s capability as a worker George is proud: George spoke proudly ‘Just tell Lennie what to do and he’ll do if it don’t take no figurin.’

6. **Values his friendship with Lennie**
   * Tells Slim (p36) “It’s a lot nicer to go around with a guy you know”
   * “I seen the guys that go round on the ranches alone. That ain’t no good. They don’t have no fun. After a long time they get mean” P43.
   * George realises that his friendship with Lennie marks them out as different. He says to Lennie p14 “We got someone to talk to that gives a damn about us”
After the death of Curley’s wife George will not get the farm without Lennie. Although the dream offered self-respect and independence it would not be the same without Lennie.

7. **The Dream**

- In Ch 1 we see that George uses the dream to make Lennie happy but there are places where we see that George himself gets comfort and hope from it. e.g. p60 ‘His voice was growing warmer. An we could have a few pigs... p61 ‘An we’d keep a few pigeons to go flyin around the win-mill like they done when I was a kid’
- George never really believed they would do it. Note his shock when Candy’s offer of money means they can get the place p63 “George said reverently. ‘Jesus Christ’ I bet we could swing her.” His eyes were full of wonder. Later he says to Candy after the death of Curley’s wife ‘I think I knewed from the very first. I think I knewed we’d never do her. He ustalike to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would”

8. **Decision to kill Lennie**

- He knows Lennie would not survive by himself e.g. the fight with Curley: Lennie cannot even defend himself when attacked.
- He realises that Lennie, though not mean, is dangerous. The Weed incident and the killing of Curley’s wife have shown him this.
- Slim points out to him that putting Lennie in an asylum, chained down, would be no solution. Lennie would suffer terribly.
- George knows that if the men captured Lennie they would lynch him. George could not let Lennie suffer.
- George feels guilty about the death of Curley’s wife. See point 4 - he knows that Lennie might one day kill somebody.
- He has to kill Lennie himself. Candy had told him (p65) that he should have shot the dog not let a stranger do it. George knows that it is his responsibility and he makes sure Lennie dies happily and knowing that George is not angry at him “I never been mad, an I ain’t now. That’s a thing I want ya to know” p112.
Lennie Small

1. Childish
   - his love of pets
   - he likes to pet soft things like velvet
   - he gets frightened when the senses trouble e.g. p34 "I don't like this place, George. This ain't no good place. I wanna get outa here"
   - Asks for ketchup with his beans in Ch 1 when they are in the brush eating at a campfire.

2. Looks up to George
   - he copies George's actions e.g. p7 when George lies back to relax: "Lennie imitated him, raising his head to see whether he were doing it right"
   - he copies George's way of speaking e.g. p60 when talking about looking after the rabbits: "Damn right, I could," said Lennie "You god-damn right I could"

3. Innocent
   - p58 when looking at the playing cards: "Both ends the same," he said. "George, why is it both end's the same?"
   - Doesn't understand the racial prejudice against Crooks when Crooks points out that he is not wanted in the bunkhouse and he doesn't want Lennie in his room Lennie says (p72) "Why ain't you wanted?"

4. Simple
   - Can't remember Weed incident until he is reminded p7
   - Couldn't look after his work card p6.

5. Physically strong
   - Note Slim's comments p41 "I never seen such a worker. He damn near killed his partner buckin barley"
   - the damage he does to Curley's hand in the fight.

6. Dangerous
   - It is when he gets frightened that he loses control and is potentially a killer e.g. Weed incident: the fight with Curley: the scene with Crooks.

7. The Dream
   - the dream is a comfort to Lennie. Note that in Ch 1 Lennie is upset as George has shouted at him and asks George to tell him about their farm to comfort him. Again in Ch 3 Lennie is worried that there will be a fight and he asks George to tell him about the farm.
   - Lennie likes the part about them being there for each other (p14) and of course that he will have the responsibility to look after the rabbits. The dream offers him security and a safe place to be with George and the rabbits.

8. Dependent on George
   - George finds work for them, keeps all the important documents and even speaks for
Lennie when they meet the boss.
the fight with Curley shows us that Lennie is helpless without George to guide him
and tell him what to do, even when it means defending himself in a fight

Curley's Wife

1. **A Victim of Prejudice**
   - Note that she is given no name. She is always referred to as Curley's wife. The men don't see her as a person in her own right - she is simply Curley's wife, as if a possession or property.
   - The men speak of her in a very derogatory way. Candy p.29 'Well I think Curley's married... a tart'
   - George p.33 'Jesus what a tramp'... 'Don't you even take a look at that bitch'... 'I never seen no piece of jail bait worse than her.'
   - Whit p.54 'She got the eye goin all the time on everybody. I bet she even gives the stable buck the eye'
   - Nobody can appreciate that she might want company. that she is lonely.
   - Because she is married the men think she should stay at home. e.g. Carlson p.65
   - 'Why'n't you tell her to stay the hell home where she belongs'
   - Candy p.82 'You gotta husban. You got no call foolin around with other guys. causin trouble'

2. **Lonely**
   - p.82 to Crooks. Curley: Lennie "think I don't like to talk to somebody ever once in a while?"
   - p.83 "Sat'day night. Ever'body out doin somepin Ever'body! An what am I doin? Standin here talkin to a bunch of bindle stiffis... an likin it because they ain't nobody else"
   - p.93 to Lennie "Ain't I got a right to talk to nobody?"

3. **Loneliness has made her mean and vicious**
   - When Crooks tries to put her out of his room she threatens to get him lynched. She uses her power over him as a white woman and the daughter-in-law of the boss to crush him.
   - She calls them bindle stiffis: Lennie a dum-dum and Curley a lousy ol' sheep.

4. **She has a dream**
   - In Ch.5 she tries to explain to Lennie how she could have been an actress but for her mother who hid the letter inviting her to Hollywood. She talks about the glamour, fame and life of luxury she could have had. Obviously she is discontented with her life and this dream of what could have been gives her comfort and self-respect.

5. **Only achieves contentment when she is dead**
   - The author's description of her dead body on p.98 is sad: all the meanness and discontent has disappeared from her face and we see her as pretty and simple, sweet and young. It is as if this was her true nature: what we see in the book is a result of the prejudice she suffers and the loneliness.
Crooks

1. A victim of prejudice
   * He is isolated from the others. The only time he was allowed in the bunk house was for a Christmas drink and even then the men used him for entertainment by organising a fight between him and one of the white hands.
   * Candy points out (p21) that the boss gives him hell when he's mad.
   * The men speak of him in a very derogatory way e.g. p30 'Where the hell's that goddam nigger?'
   * Nobody treats what he says with respect. As Crooks says to Lennie p74 'If I say something, why it's just a nigger sayin it'
   * He has to treat white people with respect e.g. 'Mr Slim' p53 and to Curley's wife (p85) 'Yes, ma'am'
   * His room is in the barn with horse manure outside the window. It is interesting that on his shelf he has his own medicine and the horses' medicine. It is as if he has no identity outside of his job. He lives in the barn where he works.

2. He has learnt not to trust white people
   * When talking to Lennie about his happy childhood he points out that his father didn't like him playing with white children "I never knew till long later why he didn't like that. But I know now"
   The incident with Curley's wife when she threatens him with lynching reminds him of the dangers of being with white people. When Candy tries to comfort him Crooks says 'You guys comin' in an' settin' made me forget. What she says is true.' He means he had forgotten about his place in this society and it is safer for him to remain on his own, away from white people.

3. Lonely
   * 'Books ain't no good. A guy needs somebody to be near him'. "I tell ya," he cried, "I tell ya a guy gets too lonely, an' he gets sick" Crooks is trying to explain to Lennie (which in itself shows how desperate he is to take advantage of the chance to talk to someone) how loneliness effects people. Of course, he speaks from bitter experience.
   * When Candy joins Lennie in his room (p79) Crooks cannot hide his pleasure "It was difficult for Crooks to conceal his pleasure with anger".

4. Loneliness has made him mean
   * Crooks tries to explain to Lennie what loneliness is like. It seems as if he is jealous that Lennie, obviously stupid and half-witted, should have companionship. To demonstrate what it is like to be lonely he tries to get Lennie to see what it would be like without George. He upsets Lennie but enjoys it "Crooks' face lighted with pleasure in his torture" p75.

5. The Dream
   * At first Crooks is cynical and dismisses their talk of the farm. He has seen the same thing with hundreds of other ranch hands "Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody get no land"
   * Later when he thinks they can get the farm he asks if he can join them. The fact that Crooks who is cynical and does not trust white people asks to join them shows the power of the dream and his need for companionship.
Later, of course, after Curley’s wife has humiliated him he reverts back to his isolation and mistrust.

**Candy**

1. **Lonely**
   * It is significant that his dog not any of the men is his closest companion.
   * Note how much he likes to talk: When George and Lennie arrive he gives them information about the boss. Curley and his wife, the stable book and Slim.

2. **The Killing of his dog**
   * Note how he is bullied into allowing the dog to be killed. He is old and handi capped, the cleaner on the ranch and he has no status.
   * Later he feels guilty that he did not do it himself, but let a stranger do it. p63.

3. **Insecure**
   * Candy knows that his days are numbered and that as soon as he can no longer work he will be put ‘on the County’. He would prefer to be shot. p63.

4. **The Dream**
   * Candy is prepared to put all his money into the farm and to leave everything to George and Lennie in a will. This shows how desperate he is for the farm.
   * The farm offers him security ‘somethin’ he could live on and there couldn’t nobody throw him off it’
   * The chance to gain from his work “I planted crops for damn near ever’body in this state but they wasn’t my crops, and when I harvested ‘em, it wasn’t none of my harvest.’
   * Self-respect. When Curley’s wife calls them bundle-stiffs Candy reacts angrily pointing out that if she gets them canned they won’t look for another two bit job because they have their own place.

5. **Reaction to the death of Curley’s wife**
   * Candy’s ‘greatest fear’ is that they will not be able to get the farm. His words to the dead body show his grief at not achieving the dream.
     “Ever’body knewed you’d mess things up. You wasn’t no good. You ain’t no good now, you lousy tart”

**Curley**

1. **Aggressive**
   * he is the son of the boss and abuses his position. Candy says (p28) ‘He just don’t give a damn. Wont ever get canned ‘cos his old man’s the boss’
   * Note what he says to Lennie “Well nex’ time you answer when you’re spoke to”
   * he seems to have a grudge against everybody, particularly big guys, and tries to prove himself.
When he picks on Lennie, it is because Slim, Carlson and even Candy have been laughing at him.

### Relationship with his wife
- She complains that all he ever talks about is the fights he has had (p.82).
- After only two weeks of marriage he goes out on the Saturday night to the brothel with the rest of the men on the ranch.
- When he sees her dead body he does not grieve but seems more interested in getting revenge on Lennie. We suspect that it is the fight with Lennie that is also in his mind.

**Slim**

1. **Status on the farm**
   - the author calls him 'the prince of the ranch' p.34/35.
   - "His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love." The men look up to Slim so much that they take his advice on everything. Note that Candy looks to Slim for help when Carlson is bullying him to have his dog put down.

2. **Shows compassion and understanding**
   - He talks to George and, importantly, listens to him. His conversation with George (Ch3) is in complete contrast to the conversations between Lennie and Crooks and Lennie and Curley's wife.
   - In Ch3 Slim, puzzled at George and Lennie's friendship, invites him to talk. He understands what George means about loneliness making people mean. Slim adds that it makes them withdrawn not wanting to talk.
   - When Lennie tries to sneak the pup into the barn and has to be told off by George. Slim understands how childish Lennie is. "Jesus," he said "He is jes like a kid aint he?"
   - Though he does not save Candy's dog, he does show compassion by telling Carlson to bury the dog.
   - After the fight between Curley and Lennie, Slim comforts Lennie and ensures that they won't get the sack.
   - When the men come into the barn to see Curley's wife's dead body, Slim shows compassion and understanding. He points out to George that it would be no good for Lennie if he was strapped down in an asylum, even if they could stop Curley killing him. Slim even tries to get Curley to stay with his wife.
   - Later when the posse finds George with Lennie's body, Slim heads straight to George to comfort him "A guy got to sometimes". He takes George away at the end comforting him and reassuring him he has done the right thing. He is the only one who understands what has happened.

**Carlson**

1. **The killing of Candy's dog**
   - Carlson tries to get Slim to get Candy to put the dog down in Ch 2.
   - In Ch 3 he bullies Candy into letting him shoot the dog. He is heartless and persistent. He shows little understanding of what the dog means to Candy - he
thinks the offer of a pup will make up for the loss of the dog.

We get the impression that Carlson wants the dog killed as much for his own comfort as for the dog’s comfort.

Carlson is heartless: he has to be told to bury the dog and when he returns he says nothing to Candy and callously cleans his gun in front of Candy.

2. His reaction to Lennie’s death

“Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin’ them two guys?”

Carlson’s inability to appreciate George’s pain suggests that he has never been close to anyone and that he does not understand such feelings or relationships.

Of course, Carlson does not understand that it was a mercy killing.

This closes the book on a rather sad note: we are left with a depressing view of humanity. We are reminded of George and Slim’s conversation about ranch hands in Ch 2 when Slim said that ranch hands “never seem to give a damn about nobody.”
'Of Mice and Men' Themes

1. We see several examples of characters in the book who dwell on dreams of what might be or what used to be. These dreams serve as a comfort to the characters in view of the harsh, unpleasant lives they live. e.g.

Curley's Wife. She dreams of being an actress in the movies. She would be famous, wealthy and have status and respect.

p82/83 "Whatta ya think I am a kid? I tell you I couldn't of went with stars". She says this to Candy, Crooks and Lennie in an attempt to show them she is something.

Crooks. He dwells on his childhood when he had friends and the company of his brothers. He tells Lennie: "Had two brothers. They was always near me, always there." p77.

The ranch hands. In Ch2 the author describes the contents of the men's shelves. He points out the western magazines, which would have heroic stories of cowboys. The author points out that the men secretly believe these stories, presumably as they offer excitement and relief from their humdrum, lonely existence.

2. The main dream in the book is George and Lennie's dream of a place of their own. Candy is drawn into it and even Crooks considers it worthwhile asking to join them. The following points highlight what the men hope to get from having a ranch of their own. These things are obviously missing from their lives.

COMPANIONSHIP: "Guys like us that work on ranches are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family" George P14.

"An' if a friend come along why we'd have an extra bunk'. George p61.

COMFORT: "We could live off the fatta the lan'" Lennie p60.
"It ain't enough land so we'd have to work too hard. Maybe six, seven hours a day" George p61.

SECURITY: "we'd have our own place where we belonged" George P61.

"But I'll be on our own place, an' I'll be let to work on our own place" Candy p61.

INDEPENDENCE: "An' it'd be our own, an' nobody could can us" George p61.
"Suppose they was a carnival or a circus come to town... we'd just go to her. We wouldn't ask anybody if we could" George p64.
thinks the offer of a pup will make up for the loss of the dog.

* We get the impression that Carlson wants the dog killed as much for his own comfort as for the dog's comfort.

* Carlson is heartless: he has to be told to bury the dog and when he returns he says nothing to Candy and callously cleans his gun in front of Candy.

2. His reaction to Lennie's death

* "Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys?"

Carlson's inability to appreciate George's pain suggests that he is incapable of being close to anyone and that he does not understand such feelings or relationships. Of course, Carlson, does not understand that it was a mercy killing.

* This closes the book on a rather sad note: we are left with a depressing view of humanity. We are reminded of George and Slim's conversation about ranch hands in Ch 2 when Slim said that ranch hands "never seem to give a damn about nobody".
HOMELY ATMOSPHERE: "An' we'd keep a few pigeons to go flyin' round the win' mill like when I was a kid" George p61.
"We'd have a setter dog and a couple stripe cats"

DIGNITY: "S'pose you get us canned... You think we'll hit the highway an' look for another lousy two-bit job like this. You don't know that we got our own ranch to go to... Candy p83

GET THE REWARDS OF THEIR WORK: "I planted crops for damn near ever'body in his state but they wasn't my crops and when I harvested 'em it wasn't none of my harvest" Candy p80.

"An when we put in a crops, why, we'd be there to take the crop up. We'd know what come of our planning' George p61.

Prejudice/Injustice

The book presents a rather depressing picture of humanity. One of the depressing aspects is the prejudice that is displayed in the book. In the main we see racial prejudice, sexism and prejudice against the workers who have poor working conditions and are treated with disdain by their employers.

1. RACISM
   * p21 Candy explains to George that the boss 'gives him hell' when he's mad. It suggests that the boss uses Crooks as a scapegoat to blame when things go wrong.
   * p30 When Lennie and George arrive on the ranch they hear one of the workers looking for Crooks: 'Where the hell's that goddam nigger'. Throughout the book we see the men use this offensive, insensitive term for Crooks.
   * p53 Crooks addresses Slim as 'Mr Slim' a tone of respect he has to use as a black man talking to a white man.
   * p85 When Curley's wife threatens to have Crooks lynched he knows she could do it and retreats into himself. He speaks to her with respect "Yes, ma'am" he answers.
   * Crooks is isolated, not allowed into the bunkhouse because he is black. The only home he was allowed in on Christmas. The men used his as a figure of fun by arranging a fight between him and one of the ranch hands.
   * Crooks is treated with scorn by the white people. Nobody listens to what he says. p74 "If I say something, why it's just a nigger saying' it"
Crooks has learned not to trust white people. His father didn’t like him playing with white children when he was young. Crooks explains to Lennie - p74.

"I never knew till long later why he didn’t like that. But I know now". Later when Candy sympathises with Crooks about what Curley's wife said to him Crooks reveals his distrust of white people. "You guys comin' in an' settin' made me forget. What she says is true". He has forgotten that it is safer to accept the situation. keep away from white people even if it means being isolated.

2. SEXISM

* Curley's wife is the only woman in the book. Significantly she doesn't have a name: she is always referred to as Curley's wife, as if she is his property and has no individuality.

* although we know she is lonely and wants company and human contact the men see her as a tart, jailbait who is obviously loose and promiscuous if she talks to any of them.

* "Why don’t you tell her to stay the hell home where she belongs?" Carlson-p65. This suggests that the men see her place as in the home and that she shouldn't have a life outside the home: It also suggests that Curley is the boss and should tell her what to do.

* It is obvious that Curley's wife is frightened of Curley. In Ch 2 when she is at the bunk-house door 'looking for Curley' Slim tells her that Curley has just gone in the house. 'She was suddenly apprehensive. "Bye, boys," she called into the bunkhouse, and she hurried away." p33.

* "George sighed. 'You give me a good whore-house every time,' he said 'A guy can go in an' get drunk, and get ever'thing outa his system all at once, an' no messes. And he knows just how much its gonna set him back'. p59.

George's comments reveal the ranch hands' attitude to women. There is no sense of a relationship, just a sexual encounter. There is a suggestion that women can be dangerous and that at least by going to a brothel the cost is known in advance in money terms rather than the unknown risks/costs of mixing with women.

3. INJUSTICE TO THE RANCH-HANDS

* Note that the boss and Curley wear boots with spurs, a sort of status symbol to show that they are not ordinary labourers.

* When the boss meets them he is curt and addresses Lennie by his surname 'Listen, Small, what can you do?' p23.

* Candy explains to George that Curley can do anything as he won't get the sack because he is the son of the boss. p28.
One of the constant worries of the men is that they will be sacked. On their own farm they make constant references to the security they will have. That no-one could 'can' them. After the fight between Lennie and Curley, George is worried that they will be sacked even though everyone knows that Curley started the fight.

Candy is desperate to join George and Lennie on the farm because he knows that although he lost his hand in an accident on the farm as soon as he can no longer work he will be sacked and put on the County. Crooks similarly has been injured on the farm and receives ill-treatment and poor accommodation on the farm. It is as if he is part of the farm not a human being.

Curley's wife calls Crooks, Lennie and Candy 'bindle-stiffs'. Their status on the farm is low: she points out that if they tried to speak against her and say she framed Crooks nobody would believe them. Candy has to admit that she is right.

The Effects of Loneliness

"I seen the guys that go round on the ranches alone. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean. They get wantin' to fight all the time" p43.

George is talking to Slim about his friendship with Lennie. This is what separates them from the usual migrant workers. As Lennie says p14 "I got you to look after me and you got me to look after you".

The book contains many examples of what George is talking about, that loneliness makes people inhuman.

* Carlson's lack of feeling in forcing Candy to have his dog killed.

* Crooks' cruelty when he frightens Lennie by making him think what would happen if George didn't come back.

* The cruelty shown by Curley's wife when she threatens to have Crooks lynched.

* Crooks points out the dangers of loneliness to Lennie p77 "I tell ya," he cried. "I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick".

* It is only a small point, but note how Whit would not let go of his magazine when George asked to have a look at it. It is as if he doesn't trust George to return it.

* Note that when Candy has offered his money and the farm is a possibility George tells the others to keep it secret "don't tell nobody about it. Just us three an' nobody else. The lil'be to can us so we can't make no stake" p64.

George expects people to be mean and petty and sack them to prevent them from being happy.
Of Mice & Men: Key Quotes

p14 'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place'.

Part of George's comforting speech to Lennie: it stresses the loneliness and lack of security of the migrant workers. George goes on to explain that George and Lennie are different as they have each other to care.

p36 'Ain't many guys travel around together', he mused. 'I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other'.

Slim is surprised at George & Lennie's friendship and the way they look out for each other (just like the Boss was earlier). This is a major theme in the book, that these migrant workers have no companionship, are selfish and isolated. It is almost as if they are frightened of human contact (a point Curley's wife makes later).

p43 'I seen the guys that go round on the ranes alone. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean. They get wantin' to fight all the time'.

George is confiding in Slim about his friendship with Lennie. In the book we see many examples of people acting mean because of loneliness (eg Crooks with Lennie in Ch4: Curley's wife with the three workers in Ch4). This stresses the need for human contact and friendship.

p59 "You give me a good whore house every time." he said "A guy can go in an' get drunk and get ever'thing outa his system all at once. an' no messes. And he knows just how much it's gonna set him back".

George is talking to Lennie about women. This shows the sexist attitudes of the migrant workers but it is also sad as George sees relationships with women as purely sexual and always costing the man
At least with a prostitute George claims the cost is clear cut and known. Again there seems danger in relationships.

p64 'Don't tell nobody about it. Jus' us three an' nobody else. They liable to can us so we can't make no stake'.

George warns Lennie and Candy to keep quiet about their plans. Note the fear and suspicion of the other workers. George expects people to be mean and try to stop them achieving their dream.

p72 'I ain't wanted in the bunkhouse, and you ain't wanted in my room'

Crooks tries to get rid of Lennie from his room. Notice that his cruelty is borne out of the treatment he has received from others.

p75 'George can tell you screwy things and it don't matter. It's just the talking. It is just bein' with another guy. That's all'

Crooks can see the advantage of friendship. Even if the talk is not meaningful, the human contact is valuable. Crooks and Lennie later go on to talk, not really listening to each other but Crooks takes value from the human contact (rather like Curley's wife did with Lennie in Ch5).

p78 'Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land'

Crooks is very cynical about Lennie's talk of getting land and independence. He has a very bleak view of life. It is significant that in spite of this cynicism he still wants to be part of their dream when he suspects they have a place.
'You're all scared of each other, that' what. Ever' one of you's scared the rest is going to get something on you'.

Curley's wife is frustrated that no-one will speak to her. She stresses that every man is frightened that others will know something about them. Again, this stresses the fear of human contact and the danger it causes.

'And the meanness and the plantings and the discontent and the ache for attention were all gone from her face. She was pretty and simple, and her face was sweet and young'.

In death Curley's wife has lost the harsh, mean appearance caused by the wretchedness of her life. We see that, sadly, it is only in death that she has gained peace and contentment. This stresses the effect of loneliness on her while she was alive.

'I should of knw', George said hopelessly. 'I guess maybe way back in my head I did'.

George is talking to Candy after they have found Curley's wife's body. This shows us that he feels guilty about the death, responsible as he knew deep down that Lennie was dangerous. Obviously this helps him to come to the decision to kill Lennie, coupled with his wish to save Lennie from suffering.

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

The last words in the book spoken by Carlson about George and Slim. Carlson was unconcerned about Lennie's death and had simply wanted to know how George did it. He cannot understand why George and Slim should be upset about the incident. The book finishes with Carlson's amazing lack of compassion and understanding and stresses the lack of humanity in the migrant workers.