

***Of Mice and Men* Fact Sheet**

John Steinbeck (1902 – 1968) was born in Salinas, California in 1902. His most famous books were written in the 1930s and 1940s, and are set in California. They deal with the lives and problems of working people. Many of the characters in his books are immigrants from Mexico or from other parts of the United States who went to California looking for work or a better life.

The Setting of *Of Mice and Men*

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is set in the farmland of the Salinas valley, where John Steinbeck was born and which he knew all his life. Steinbeck's father owned land in the area, and as a young man Steinbeck had worked as a farm hand. The ranch in the story is near Soledad, which is south-east of Salinas on the Salinas river. Weed is nearby. The countryside described at the beginning of the book, and the ranch itself, would have been very familiar to John Steinbeck.

Migrant Farm Workers

By the time that *Of Mice and Men* was published almost half of America's grain was harvested by huge combine harvesters. Five men could do what would have taken 350 men a few years earlier. George and Lennie are some of the last of the migrant farm workers. Huge numbers of men travelled the countryside between the 1880s and the early 1930s harvesting wheat. They earned \$2.50 or \$3.00 a day, plus food and very basic accommodation. During the 1930s, when there was very bad unemployment in the United States, agencies were set up under the New Deal to send farmworkers to where they were needed. George and Lennie got their work cards from Murray and Ready's, one of these agencies.

The American Dream

From the 17th Century, when the first settlers arrived, immigrants dreamed of a better life in America. People went there to escape from persecution or poverty, and to make a new life for themselves or their families. They dreamed of making their fortunes in the goldfields. For many the dream became a nightmare. The horrors of slavery, of the American Civil War, the growth of towns with slums as bad as those in Europe, and the corruption of the American political system led to many shattered hopes. For the American society as a whole the dream ended with the Wall Street crash of 1929. This was the start of the Great Depression that would affect the whole world during the 1930s. However the dream survived for individuals. Thousands made their way west to California to escape from their farmlands in the mid-West. George and Lennie dreamt of their 'little house and a couple of acres'. The growing popularity of cinema was the last American Dream for many, Curley's wife was one: 'Coulda been in the movies, an' had nice clothes.'

Why *Of Mice and Men*?

The title of the novel comes from a poem by the Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759 - 96):

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

Of Mice and Men Study Guide Questions

Name _____
Ms. Patterson and Mrs. St. John

Writing Focus/English 11
Chapter One (pages 1—16)

1. Identify the following items. Give as much information as possible for each response.
 - George
 - Lennie
 - Setting
2. What is the mood of the opening of the first chapter? Identify a passage that supports your response.
3. From the first chapter, identify at least two conflicts in the novel. Provide evidence from the text.
4. Describe the relationship between George and Lennie. What do they provide for each other?
5. What is George feeling when he explodes at Lennie on page 11, and how does he feel when his anger passes?
6. What plan does George develop for Lennie in case he gets into trouble? What does this tell you about Lennie's previous behavior?

7. What do George and Lennie dream of?

8. Choose what you think is the most significant two sentences from the chapter and copy them below. Include page number. In detail, explain why you chose this particular passage. Identify any literary elements in the passage.

9. One liners to remember:

Vocabulary

Define each term.

juncture, skitter, pantomime, imperiously, morosely

Idioms

blow their stake: Lose and/or spend all their money

blowin' in our jack: losing, spending, or gambling away all our money

bustin' a gut: Your gut is your stomach area. To bust a gut is to engage in very hard physical labor -- so hard that you ache all over -- even in your gut.

in hot water: to be in hot water is to be in trouble.

jungle-up: During the Great Depression, many wanderers (hoboes and tramps) would settle for the night in groups. These areas would be known as hobo jungles. To jungle-up is to camp out for the evening in the company of other like companions of the road.

live off the fatta the lan': Live off the fat of the land. The fat of the land is an expression that refers to having the best of everything. In the case of Lennie and George and their dream for a place of their own, it also means that they believe they will be able to survive and prosper by simply relying on what they can grow and raise -- that the land is so "fat" they will need nothing else to be happy.

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Writing Focus/English 11
Chapter Two (pages 17-37)

1. Identify each of the following characters. Give as much information as possible.
 - Curley

 - Curley's wife

 - Slim

 - Candy

2. Why does the boss become suspicious of George? How does this reflect the atmosphere of the time?

3. What does Curley imply when he states, "Oh, so it's that way?"

4. Curley poses problems for Lennie and George in several different ways. Explain why Lennie must be careful. (Literary Term: Conflict)

5. What is Curley's wife's name? What is the significance?

6. What does Carlson suggest about Candy's dog? Why do you think Candy would resist this idea? (Literary Terms: symbolism, metaphor)
7. Choose one passage from the chapter that you feel is important. Copy the passage below (including page number) and defend your choice. Consider the literary term: foreshadowing

Vocabulary

Define each term.

graybacks, swamper, pugnacious, brittle, skinner, douse, grizzled

Idioms

bum steer: bum, in this instance, means false or erroneous. A bum steer is false information or directions.

flapper: mouth

game: courageous

got the eye: Candy is referring to the fact that, instead of being faithful to her husband, Curley's wife tends to look around at other men.

jail bait: a girl below the legal age of consent for sex; an underage girl who tempts a man to sexual intimacy which is punishable by imprisonment

licked: beat; loses the fight

old lady: mother, or, in this case, Lennie's Aunt Clara.

pants is full of ants: To have "ants in one's pants" is to be nervous and restless.

pants rabbits: any type of parasites, such as lice; especially those that might affect the genital area

picking scraps: A scrap is a fight or argument. To pick a scrap is to provoke fights or quarrels.

poke: A poke is a wallet or purse. Poke also refers to money; especially all the money one has.

poop: energy; desire

rassel: lift, carry, and handle; especially something heavy and awkward

rattrap: a rattrap is a hopeless situation; one that no good can come from. George is warning Lennie to stay away from Curley's wife because getting involved with her would only result in a bad situation.

two bits: a quarter; twenty-five cents

what stake you got in this guy: In this case, a stake is an interest (financial, personal, etc.) in a person or thing. The boss is asking George what interest he has in Lennie.

what the hell's he got on his shoulder: This refers to the expression "to have a chip on one's shoulder," which is used to describe someone who is bad tempered, easily angered, or always ready for a fight. George is wondering why Curley seems so bad tempered.

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Writing Focus/English 11
Chapter Three (pages 38-65)

1. Describe the relationship between George, Lennie and Slim.
What does Slim provide for each of them?

2. Why does George no longer play jokes on Lennie?

3. Why does Carlson want to shoot Candy's dog? Why doesn't Candy agree with his reasons? Why do you think Candy finally relents? (Literary Terms: theme, symbolism)

4. Why is Candy so anxious to join George and Lennie in their plans for the future?

5. What does Candy tell George he should have done for his dog? What is his regret? Use at least one direct quote from the novel in your response.

6. Why are Curley and Slim in conflict? How does Lennie get involved? Why does Lennie finally release Curley? (Literary Terms: foreshadowing, conflict)

7. How does Slim prevent Curley from getting Lennie fired?

8. Choose one passage from the chapter that you feel is important. Copy the passage below (including page number) and defend your choice. Identify any literary terms in the passage.

Vocabulary

Define each term. subdue, gnawing, hoosegow, reprehensible

Idioms

crack: A crack refers to an attempt or a try. In this instance, a crack means one session of sexual intercourse with a prostitute.

flat bust: completely broke; without any money

flop: sexual intercourse with a prostitute

goo-goos: silly young men; idiots; perhaps those who are a little lovestruck

hoosegow: jail

looloo: a sexy woman

on the county: on welfare; on public relief

punk: an insignificant person; someone of no importance

rabbits in: jumps in

roll up a stake: save up some money

scram: leave, usually in a hurry

set on the trigger: Someone set on the trigger is on the verge of causing (just about to cause) trouble.

start a party out to lynch: To lynch is to murder someone, usually by hanging, without following a legal procedure. A lynch party is a mob of people who take the law in their own hands and are determined to illegally kill someone. According to George, some men in the town of Weed wanted to capture Lennie and kill him.

throw a litter: give birth. A litter is the young of an animal that were born at the same time.

wing-ding: a terrific person; someone to be admired

yella: yellow; a coward

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Writing Focus/English 11
Chapter Four (pages 66-83)

Use a **concrete detail (specific evidence)** from the chapter to answer each question. Give as much information as possible.

1. Provide a physical description of Crooks. Describe Crooks' room. What does this setting tell the reader about Crooks? (Literary Term: theme)
2. What is Crooks' immediate reaction to Lennie's presence in his room? Why is he then comfortable talking to Lennie?
3. How and why does Crooks torment Lennie? Why does he end the torture?
4. According to Crooks, what happens to a guy if he is alone too much?
5. What service does Crooks offer in exchange for a place on the farm? Why does he later tell Candy to forget about it?
6. Analyze the meaning of the following line: "Crooks had retired into the terrible protective dignity of the negro."
7. Curley's wife is at the bottom of the social ladder at the ranch. How does she exert the little power she *does* have?

8. What do the events in this chapter reveal about dreams?
Consider opportunities, obstacles and "dreams deferred".
9. For each of the following characters, choose a line or two from the chapter to show that he/she is lonely or isolated.
- Crooks
 - Lennie
 - Curley's wife
 - Candy

Vocabulary

Define: fawning

Idioms

booby hatch: insane asylum; a place designed to house people who are mentally unstable

corn: whiskey made from corn

cover 'im up: protect him; make excuses for him; cover up for him

doped out: figured out

put me in pitchers: put me in pictures; gotten me a job as an actress in the movies (motion pictures)

take you out in a box: in this case, the box is a coffin. Crooks is telling Candy that the old man will remain where he is until he dies.

took a powder: left

went with shows: been an entertainer on the stage.

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Writing Focus/English 11
Chapter Five (pages 83-98)

Use a **concrete detail (specific evidence)** from the chapter to answer each question. Give as much information as possible.

1. At the opening of the chapter, why is Lennie so distressed?
2. What information does Curley's wife share with Lennie? Where is Lennie's attention focused?
3. After Lennie silences Curley's wife, how is it sadly ironic that he is still concerned with hiding the puppy?
4. What do George and Candy realize about their plan? What does George say he has always known?
5. What plan do Candy and George develop to "tell the guys"? Why does George feel this is necessary? Why is this a significant turning point in the relationship between George and Lennie?
6. At the bottom of page 95, Candy is expressing his anger. Who is he angry with? Is this justified?

7. Who is most upset by Curley's wife's death?
8. What is discovered missing from the bunkhouse?
9. Choose one passage from the chapter that you feel is important. Copy the passage below (including page number) and defend your choice. Identify any literary terms in the passage.

Vocabulary

Define this term: bewilder

Idioms

we'd never do her: "her," in this case, refers to their plan to own a farm. George is saying that he thinks they all knew they would never really accomplish their dream of living on their own place.

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Writing Focus/English 11
Chapter Six (pages 99-107)

Use a **concrete detail (specific evidence)** from the chapter to answer each question. Give as much information as possible.

1. How is the opening of this chapter similar to the opening of the first chapter of the novel? (literary term: mood)
2. How does Lennie's past come back to visit him?
3. How does Lennie's greatest dream come to taunt him?
4. Why does George take the time to tell Lennie "how it's gonna be" one more time?
5. Are George's actions justified? Why or why not?

6. How do the men behave when they arrive at the scene? What does Slim say?
7. Now that you have completed the novel, what examples of foreshadowing do you see?
8. Reflect on the novel as a whole. What attitudes (or biases) seem ordinary at the time this novel is set that are not acceptable in our society today? Provide textual evidence.
9. Choose just **one line** that you think is significant. Justify your choice.

