

Resource title

KS4> Prose > *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck > A comprehensive pack

- How it works** Exactly as it says on the tin ... 18 pages of questions and tasks, each based on a different section of the novel.
- Try this!** You *could* run off 30 copies and dish them out to the class at the start of the year, getting students to do the questions at the end of each section of the novel ... but you don't want to do that ...
- Or this!** My class seem to have an inability to attend anything more than sporadically – so having a few copies of each page in a file means that, when they do come in, I can just give them the relevant sheets and (hopefully) they'll catch up with those of us who've been there all the time. Alternatively, they'd make good homework sheets to concentrate the mind.
- Or this!** I think that some sections of this resource would be great for individuals to work on as part of whole class teaching, whilst others would work as a group task to be shared with the class as a whole. Try this:
- pages 1–3 for the whole class to do
 - pages 4–7 look at characters – give each one to a different group and ask them to present their findings to the class
 - pages 8–13 for the whole class
 - page 14 is about atmosphere – try it out in groups
 - pages 15 and 16 for the whole class
 - pages 17 and 18 for groups to consider and share.
- Or this!** Page 9 is based on an essay-style exam question – you could also ask students to create a tension graph for the section about the shooting of Candy's dog. Later on, they could look at the final section of the novel and repeat the exercise.
- Or this!** Want to link it with exam skills? Try the extension work on page 12, and make a connection with teaching persuasive writing. If you really want to challenge them, try them out with the language of power (Language variation, The language of power and the power of language).
- Or this!** There are plenty of other resources on the site for teaching the novel. Personal favourites are **Animals and other creatures in *Of Mice and Men*** and **Steinbeck's use of dark and light** [[Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck](#)] and I'll certainly be making use of both of these too – I might have to talk school into buying a colour copier or maybe simply whizz the former so that we can do the colouring bit on the IWB.

Alison Smith

Extract study: Section 1 (a)

Overview:

We are introduced to the main characters of George and Lennie.
'Everything of a hot day ... Jesus Christ you're a crazy bastard.'

1. Read the first paragraph in the extract. How does Steinbeck strike an immediate contrast between the two characters? In particular, find words within each description that are direct 'opposites' to each other.
2. George and Lennie take very different approaches to drinking the water. What does each man's approach say about his character?
3. What do George's first words to Lennie tell us about the relationship between the two men?
4. There are three places in the extract where Lennie is compared to an animal. Find them, explaining how this gives us a stronger idea of Lennie's physical presence in the novel.
5. What other examples of **imagery** (metaphors and similes) can you find in the extract? How do they give us a clearer picture of the two men and their environment?

Extension

Compare the ways in which the two characters talk. How does Lennie's grammar and sentence construction differ from George's? What is particularly characteristic of George's speech, especially when he 'gets mad'?

Extract study: Section 1 (b)

Overview:

Lennie asks George to tell about the Dream Farm.
'Lennie spoke ... one of them to Lennie.'

1. Steinbeck indicates that this conversation has happened many times before. Find **three** quotations from the extracts that show this. What is the significance of this?
2. George's mood changes through the extract. Show **how** Steinbeck presents this, and suggest why it is so. (Clue: Steinbeck's use of **adverbs** may help you see this).
3. What do Lennie's contributions and interruptions tell us about his character?
4. George often uses the specific colloquial language of the itinerant worker. Copy down these examples from the extract and explain *in your own words* what they mean:

'work up a stake'
'get the jack'

'blow their stake'
'poundin' their tail'

5. How does the extract tie in with what you know about 'The American Dream'? Do you think George and Lennie's plans are realistic or romantic? How does Steinbeck give us a clue about this?

Extension

Some critics have accused Steinbeck of portraying the relationship between George and Lennie in an overly sentimental way. Find some examples in the extract that these critics might have been thinking of, and try to explain their viewpoint. What do you think about this issue?

Extract study: Section 2 (a)

Overview:

The description of the bunk-house.
'The bunk-house ... rushing stars.'

1. The bunk-house is a strange mixture of the homely and the bare. List the good and bad things about the location that emerge through the description.
2. Steinbeck lists many personal items that the men use. What is the effect of this? Pick any three of these, and state how each might be a comment on the lives of the men that sleep there.
3. Some of the items in this description become more relevant later in the chapter or the novel. If you have read ahead, list two or three of these. If you haven't, guess how they might become more important later on.

Extension

Many of Steinbeck's technical skills as a writer can be seen in this passage. What can you say about his variety of syntax (sentence construction) in terms of length, openings and punctuation? What can you say about his use of adverbial phrases to heighten the description?

Extract study: Section 2 (b)

Overview:

Introduction to Candy.
'The wooden latch raised ... out the door.'

1. Later in the novel, Candy is one of a group of characters referred to as 'the weak ones'. Find **three** ways in which Steinbeck presents him as physically weak and / or old, and comment on your choice of quotations.
2. '... hell of a nice fella ...' Candy goes to a lot of trouble to point out how clean the previous occupant of George's bunk was. What does this tell us about Candy, and what is George's reaction? Does Candy defend anyone else in the extract, and why?
3. List **two** ways in which Steinbeck implies that Candy has been at the ranch for a longer time than most of the men who have worked there.
4. Candy refers to Crooks, the black 'stable buck' a number of times in the extract. Although he also calls him a 'pretty nice fellow', how do his later comments reveal the treatment of black people at that time?
5. How does Candy come across throughout this extract? What are the general characteristics of his speech and mannerisms throughout, and how do they give away his personality?

Extension

Through Candy, more of a general sense of the lives of itinerant workers emerges. How does Steinbeck achieve this, and why does he choose to do it through a character like Candy? Use quotations from the extract to back up your ideas.

Creative response

Read through the next section where George and Lennie meet the boss. Imagine that the boss has a conversation about George and Lennie with Candy after having met them.

Write a script of this conversation, trying to get the characters of Candy and the boss across as Steinbeck originally intended them to be.

Extract study: Section 2 (c)

Overview:

The introduction of the character of Curley
'At that moment ... "There's plenty done that."'

1. Although Lennie says very little during this episode, Steinbeck makes references to his behaviour. Comment on this, explaining how it might **foreshadow** future events in the novel.
2. Curley is described in very physical terms. Which techniques and word types does Steinbeck use to convey his character to the reader? Find **three** examples, and comment on each.
3. What is George's attitude towards Curley while he is in the bunkhouse? Find **three** examples to illustrate your points.
4. Comment on how Candy behaves during this extract. Why do you think he is 'reassured' that he has 'drawn a derogatory statement from George' when mentioning the 'glove fulla Vaseline'?
5. There are plenty of moments in the extract where Steinbeck hints at the trouble to come in the rest of the novel. Identify two or three areas where you think this is the case and comment on how he deals with them. Why do you think he does this?

Extension

How do you respond to Curley? Why is he the way he is and what role does he have in the novel? Where might he fit in within Steinbeck's view of the flipside of the 'American Dream'?

Extract study: Section 2 (d)

Overview:

Curley's wife
'Both men glanced up ... "patent medicine houses"'

1. Remind yourself of how Candy talks about Curley's wife earlier in the chapter. To what extent does Steinbeck's introductory description reinforce or contradict what he has said?
2. Look carefully at the passage describing Curley's wife. Pick **four** separate aspects of the description, and try to explain the impression Steinbeck is trying to create. What might be there despite the obvious 'tartiness' that he is trying to convey?
3. Compare how George and Lennie respond to Curley's wife. Use quotations to show their reactions, and try to explain them in your own words.
4. George says of her 'Curley's got his work ahead of him'. What does he mean by this, and by calling her a 'rat-trap'? Explain his sudden anger towards Lennie.
5. Many critics have picked up on the fact that we never learn her name, even though she is a very important character and the only female one in the novel. Why do you think she is never named by Steinbeck? (This may be easier to answer later in the novel!)

Extract study: Section 2 (e)

Overview:

Slim

'Both men glanced up ... "patent medicine houses"'

1. Steinbeck calls Slim the 'prince of the ranch'. Find **three** physical descriptions of Slim that back this up.
2. How does Slim behave towards George and Lennie, and how does George in particular respond to this treatment.
3. In many ways, Slim is the antithesis (opposite) to Curley. Looking back to the extract featuring Curley, find **three** contrasting sets of quotations.
4. Many readers find Slim the least believable character in the novel. From what you have read so far, would you agree? Why would people say this, and what reason might Steinbeck have for including an idealistic, inspirational character such as this?

Extract study: Section 3 (a)

Overview:

WEED

“What’d he do in Weed?” ... “He’s jes’ like a kid ain’t he?”

1. What do we already know about ‘Weed’? Find and summarise earlier references from what you have read of the novel so far.
2. Re-read George’s description of what happened between Lennie and the girl in the red dress. Comment on the significance of this moment.
3. What link can you make between the ‘red’ dress and someone else in the previous chapter? Explain this link.
4. Slim says very little about the incident George describes. How does this, and the way he listens during George’s monologue, confirm his character to us?
5. This conversation is immediately followed by Lennie entering with the pup. Try to think about the way Steinbeck has structured these events, and why he might have done so. The following phrases from the extract may help:
 - *You want to kill him ...?*
 - *I didn’t mean no harm ...*
 - *He’s jus’ like a kid ain’t he?*
6. Link the moment with the pup to an earlier event right at the start of the novel involving a mouse. What can we get out of linking the two?

Extract study: Section 3 (b)

Overview:

Carlson shoots Candy's dog
'I don't see no reason ... and lay silent.'

Below is a question similar to the type that you will be expected to answer in the exam. Consider:

Re-read the episode where Carlson shoots Candy's dog. What is the importance of this incident in the novel as a whole? Write about:

- *How the different characters respond to the incident*
- *How Steinbeck creates tension in this episode*
- *Ideas in the passage that are important to the novel as a whole*

Answer these questions to prepare yourself for this essay:

1. Copy and complete the following table, which will help you respond to the first bullet point:

Characters →	Candy	Carlson	Slim	George	Whit
Response ↓					
Actions					
Speech					

2. Try to find FIVE different ways in which Steinbeck suspends the tension of the moment. Give examples of each and comment on them. Use the prompts to help you:

- Stalling the narrative
- Use of pauses and silence
- Descriptions of sights and sounds
- Symbolism – e.g. darkness
- Use of verbs and adverbs

3. Finally, try to think of as many other episodes in the novel that relate or link to this one in some way. Look for things that are said in the passage by other characters that relate to this.

Extract study: Section 3 (c)

Overview:

The Dream Farm: a reality?
From 'Lennie said, "Tell me about that place, George ..."' to
"... when this lovely thing should come about."

1. Remind yourself of what George has previously told Lennie about 'how it's gonna be' on their farm (first chapter, before they arrive at the ranch). List ways in which Steinbeck indicates that this telling is different to the previous one, from George's point of view.
2. Look at Candy's behaviour in this discussion. How does Steinbeck present him slowly becoming involved? Why do you think it happens at this particular point?
3. Comment on Lennie's responses within this section. You might want to consider the following quotations from his speech in particular:
'We could live off the fatta the lan' (clue: link to Question 13 below)
'They'd nibble an' they'd nibble ... the way they do'
'you jus' let 'em try to get the rabbits. I'll break their goddam necks'
4. Read carefully the images of the dream farm that George evokes. What are the qualities of the description that are so appealing? In what ways do the descriptions tie in with the overall theme of Nature?
5. How does Steinbeck create a feeling of genuine excitement among the three men about their plans becoming a reality?

Extension

Consider the research you have done on the American Dream. How does George's vision of the Dream Farm correspond to this? You might like to think about whether you find this an uplifting or depressing episode, and what Steinbeck's motives were in including this section.

Further thoughts

There are many references to characters' hopes and dreams within the novel. As you go through the rest of the novel, make a note of when the theme of 'Dreams' becomes significant – and how it links back to this moment in the book.

Extract study: Section 3 (a)

Overview:

Curley confronts Lennie
From 'Curley stopped over ...' to '... Curley's lips.'

1. Read the whole of the extract and consider the behaviour of various characters during this episode. Do you think they behave in or out of character? Write about the following individuals, using the text to support your ideas:
 - George
 - Lennie
 - Slim
2. Because this episode features a lot of physical action, Steinbeck uses many descriptions of movement and strong emotional responses. Find **three** examples of this violence, stating why you find each one effective.
3. George responds ambiguously to Lennie's reactions towards Curley. Consider these two statements as an example:

'Get 'im Lennie!'
'Leggo his hand, Lennie.'

Looking at the extract, as well as taking material from earlier in the novel, find reasons George might have for both supporting and opposing Lennie's behaviour here. Write your answers in two separate columns, and use quotations to support your points of view.
4. Why do you think Curley agrees he 'won't tell' at the end of this episode? What has he got to lose, and how does this fit into Steinbeck's characterisation throughout the novel in general?

Further thoughts

If you have done some work on Steinbeck using animal imagery to describe his characters, you might like to find a reference to Curley from the extract and add it to your list.

Extract study: Section 4 (a)

Overview:

Crooks

From 'Crooks, the negro stable buck' To ... "that you, Slim?"

1. Steinbeck uses the description of the harness room to reflect the character of Crooks, the 'negro stable-buck'. In the form of a table, list eight to ten objects from the two opening paragraphs, and write what you think each one of them says about Crooks. An example is given below:

<i>... a long bunk filled with straw</i>	<i>Crooks' bed is like an animal's, showing that, as a black man, he is treated little better than a beast</i>
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2. Both physically, and in terms of status and situation, Crooks has a lot in common with Candy. Use quotations from previous sections alongside this extract to demonstrate this, and comment on the comparisons. Do you think Steinbeck has deliberately done this? If so, why?
3. Shortly after he enters, Lennie states that George has gone 'into town' with the others. How does Crooks pick up on this later in the extract? What do you think the significance is of George doing this at this point in the novel (think of recent events)?
4. Crooks's taunting of Lennie seems cruel in this section. Why does he behave in this way? What is significant about the way in which Lennie responds?
5. Through the character of Crooks, Steinbeck finds plenty to say about the nature of dreams and the Dream Farm. Find **five** quotations that you feel are significant, and explain each. What is significant about the way in which Crooks also buys into the idea by the end of the conversation?

Extension

Use the internet to research the plight of black unskilled workers during the Great Depression at this time.

As a further thought, you might want to read the speech of Martin Luther King, almost thirty years on, to see how Black Civil Rights fared over the coming decades:

<http://www.usconstitution.net/dream.html>

Extract study: Section 4 (b)

Overview:

The Dream Farm

From "Candy stood in the doorway" to the end of the chapter.

1. Candy is described as 'embarrassed' as he enters Crooks's room. Later in the extract, Crooks says to Curley's wife: 'You got no rights, comin' into a coloured man's room.' Find other references to others coming into Crooks's room in the extract, and explain what they tell us about the 'rights' of black men at this time.
2. Re-read Candy's speech to Crooks, beginning, 'Sure they all want it ...' How does Steinbeck's use of language in this speech help reflect Candy's mood? Think about:
 - repetition
 - blunt sentence
 - the use of names.
3. What does Curley's wife mean when she says, 'They left all the weak ones here'?
4. Find and copy down the quotations which show how Crooks reacts to the threats of Curley's wife. What exactly *is* she threatening, and why does Crooks react in the way he does?
5. What is Candy referring to when he says that Curley's wife 'can move quiet'?
6. 'I wouldn't want to go to no place like that.' Why does Crooks pull out of the idea of being involved on the farm by the end of the chapter? How do you feel about this at this point in the book?
7. There are some descriptions in this extract which suggest disturbance. These create a mood for the final events in the novel. Find these, and comment on them.

Extension

How does Curley's wife come across to you in this extract? Compare how she has been portrayed before to how she is now. If you have already read the final two chapters, consider how this episode affects how we feel about what happens to her near the end of the novel.

Extract study: Section 5 (a)

Overview:

The Barn

From the beginning of the chapter to the entrance of Curley's wife.

1. Re-read the description in the first four paragraphs of the chapter. Make a list of the different signs of life Steinbeck depicts, and words he uses to describe them. Set your findings out in a table like this:

Signs of life	Words to describe them
Horses	Resting, nibbled, rattled

2. Use your table to describe the opening atmosphere. Why do you think Steinbeck describes things in this way, considering what happens later in the chapter?
3. Looking back, how have previous events built up to Lennie killing the pup? List the previous events that you would connect to this one.
4. What two emotional states does Lennie go through as he reacts to killing the pup? Explain why he feels the way he does for each, and how Steinbeck's use of language reflects this.

Extension

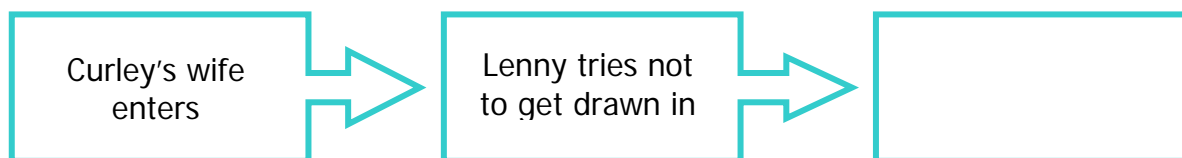
There are some key references to nature in this extract. Link them to similar references elsewhere in the book. How does Steinbeck use images of nature to reflect the events and issues of his novel?

Extract study: Section 5 (b)

Overview:

The death of Curley's wife
From the entrance of Curley's wife to "the men's voices became louder and louder."

- List all the events you can think of that link into or lead up to the death of Curley's wife, *before* chapter 5. Here are some clues:
 - Weed
 - George's warnings
 - Ripples
 - Curley's hand
 - Mouse
- In the form of a flow diagram, list events in the order they happen within this extract. Here is the start:



- What do we find out about Curley's wife in this extract? What does Steinbeck want us to feel about her, and why choose this point in the novel to do this?
- Comment on the way in which Steinbeck describes the actual act of Lennie killing Curley's wife. What kind of language is used? Does this make us think of any other incidents in the novel?
- In the form of a table, compare Steinbeck's use of language in two sections of this extract. Consider use of verbs, adverbs and adjectives; use of imagery; sentence length and structure.

The description of Lennie killing Curley's wife	The atmosphere after she has been killed

- How do the images of the pigeon and the shepherd bitch contribute to the atmosphere in the barn?
- Re-read the final description of Curley's wife. This section of the novel has often been commented on in terms of its original style. In what way might Steinbeck have been influenced by film as he wrote this?

Extension

After reading this episode, what is your over-riding emotion? How do you feel towards Curley's wife and Lennie? Has Steinbeck's presentation of the characters influenced this in any way?

Extract study: Section 5 (c)

Overview:

Curley's wife: the aftermath
From 'then gradually, time awakened again' to the end of the chapter.

1. When George first sees the body of Curley's wife he says: 'I should of knew ... I guess maybe way back in my head I did.' What does he mean by this, and can you find any evidence earlier in the novel of him seeing that something like this might happen?
2. Re-read the conversation between George and Candy from 'George watched Candy's lips'. What are their concerns, and why do they make the decision to help Lennie get away?
3. Explain Candy's reaction to Curley's wife once George has left. Do you feel the same way towards her as a reader? You could discuss this with the people sitting either side of you and see if they share your views.
4. Describe the differing reactions of the other characters as they enter the barn. Copy and complete this table to help you. Consider, for example, Curley's feelings towards his wife at this point.

Character	Description of reaction	Comments on what this reveals
Slim		
Curley		
Carlson		

Extension

Focus on the reactions of Candy to this event. List the main things he says and does. How do they tie in with the theme of dreams and Steinbeck's portrayal of itinerant workers at this time? How do we feel at the end of this chapter? You could set out your ideas as a brainstorm diagram.

Extract study: Section 6 (a)

Overview:

Lennie hides in the Brush

From the start of the chapter to 'George came quietly out of the brush ...'

1. What do you think is the significance of the book closing as it opens: with Lennie at the pool, having run from an incident? Are there any key images which tie in with this?
2. The first six paragraphs contain many images of nature. Copy and fill in the table below, showing what you think Steinbeck's purpose is with each image:

The image	Significance
'A watersnake glided smoothly ... the beak swallowed the little snake ...'	Nature is presented as cruel at times – sometimes it is unavoidable that there are victims (Candy's dog, drowned pups etc.)

3. Many readers find the technique of presenting Lennie with the two visions very strange in such a realistic book. Explain what you think the significance of each is, and why Steinbeck decided to present each in this way. Does it work?
4. What do Lennie's 'conversations' with Aunt Clara and the rabbit reveal about his state of mind at this point in the novel?
5. Comment on Steinbeck's use of **adverbs** when describing how Lennie speaks. What do they reveal about him?

Extension

Look carefully at the 'speech' of Aunt Clara and the rabbit. In what ways are previous areas of the novel explored in these? How does the vocabulary and syntax echo other parts, and what is the significance of this?

Extract study: Section 6 (b)

Overview:

The ending

From 'George came quietly out of the brush ...' to the end of the novel

1. 'Ain't you gonna give me hell?' Why do you think Lennie *wants* George to do this at this point in the novel? How does Steinbeck present George when he finally agrees to do this?
2. 'The wind waves flowed up the green pool'. Comment on Steinbeck's choice of image here, as the men get nearer to George and Lennie.
3. Why do you think George talks about the farm as he shoots Lennie? How does this conclude the theme of 'dreams'?
4. Comment on Slim's reaction to what George has done. How is this consistent with his character throughout? Link this to the shooting of Candy's dog.
5. The last lines of the novel are famous. Think of as many reasons as you can for why Steinbeck chooses to end the novel in this way, and why the ending might fit in so well.
6. How do you feel about George's decision? Was it the right thing to do? You might like to share ideas with a partner, leading to a class discussion or debate. Filling in a table like this might help:

Reasons for shooting Lennie	Possible reasons for not shooting Lennie

Extension – Reflections at the end of the book

- What is Steinbeck's overall message?
- Are any characters representative of a wider issue?
- Ultimately, is there anything redeeming or uplifting about the ending?
- Do you find the book realistic, pessimistic or both?
- What did you enjoy about reading *Of Mice and Men*?