

Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12

Of Mice and Men

John Steinbeck

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OF MICE AND MEN

by
John Steinbeck

Teacher Guide

Written by
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Note

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Please note: Parts of this novel deal with sensitive, mature issues. Please assess the appropriateness of this novel for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Analyzing, inference, research,
opinions, prediction

Comprehension

Plot development,
compare/contrast, cause/effect

Literary Elements

Foreshadowing, symbolism,
conflict, foils, static/dynamic
characters, theme

Vocabulary

Definitions, application,
synonyms/antonyms

Writing

Essay, poetry, review, journal,
letter, synopsis, eulogy

Across the Curriculum

Literature—book review, author
interview, John Steinbeck’s short
stories; History—The Great
Depression, migrant workers;
Art—cover art, photography,
painting, collage; Drama—plays,
films

to stop Curley. He's too terrified even to defend himself. When George finally shouts, "Get 'im, Lennie... I said get him" [p. 63], Lennie reaches up and grabs Curley's hand, crushing the bones. He doesn't let go until George slaps him in the face and screams at him to stop. Lennie is devastated, saying "You tol' me to, George" and "I didn't wanta hurt him" [p. 64]. Answers will vary, but students should note that Lennie was well-bloodied before he fought back and may have never touched Curley if it weren't for George's urgings. Lennie is a "gentle giant" who is capable of doing much damage but prefers to live peacefully.)

11. What "deal" does Slim make with Curley? How do you suppose Slim so easily convinces Curley to lie about the incident? (To protect Lennie and George, Slim convinces Curley to tell anyone who asks that he hurt his hand on a machine on the ranch. Just as Slim expected, Curley agrees to do so. Answers will vary. Slim knows that Curley fears shame and humiliation, and if anyone knew that Lennie easily crushed his hand, Curley would be devastated. Curley is known around the ranch for being a fighter and his disdain for larger men is evident. Slim plays off of Curley's insecurities in order to convince him to lie.)
12. **Prediction:** How might Curley get revenge on Lennie?

Supplemental Activities

1. Use magazine clippings to create a collage of one of the following scenes from this section: the men waiting uncomfortably in the bunkhouse with Candy, George telling Lennie and Candy about the dream farm, Lennie tending to the puppies in the barn.
2. Complete the Cause/Effect Chart on page 22 of this guide.
3. Complete the Thought Bubble activity on page 23 of this guide.

Pages 66–107

Lennie visits Crooks, the black stable hand. Crooks initially wants Lennie to leave his room, but he soon realizes that Lennie is simple-minded and trustworthy. Crooks poses the idea that George might not come back from town and that Lennie will be left alone. Lennie becomes both angry and frightened, insisting that George will always come back for him. Lennie tells Crooks about the dream farm, but Crooks isn't convinced it's real until Candy arrives and they discuss it more. Crooks is interested and acts pleasant until Curley's wife comes into the barn. Crooks once again becomes agitated and insists that everyone leave. The next day, Lennie is playing with his puppy in the barn when he accidentally kills it. Angry and frightened, he hastily covers the puppy with hay just as Curley's wife enters the barn. She sits and talks to Lennie, eventually convincing him to stroke her hair. Lennie musses her hair, and she gets angry and demands that he let go. Lennie covers her mouth so no one will hear her yelling at him. As she tries to silence her, he shakes her so hard that he breaks her neck. Terrified, Lennie flees the barn. Candy finds Curley's wife's body first and tells only George. When the other men (including Curley) discover the body, they form a search party to find Lennie. George slips away unnoticed and finds Lennie in their hiding place. As George calms Lennie by talking about the dream farm, he shoots Lennie in the back of the head. The other men arrive, and only Slim knows the truth about what George did and why he did it.

Vocabulary	
accumulated	
liniment	
disarming	
apprehension	
scornful	
crestfallen	
sniveled	
skittered	
retorted	
belligerently	
monotonous	

Discussion Questions

- How does Crooks feel about Lennie's intrusion? Do you believe he is justified in feeling this way? (*Crooks is frustrated by Lennie's appearance in his room. Crooks tells Lennie that he has "no right to come in [his] room" [p. 68]. He tries to explain the dynamics of the ranch by telling Lennie, "I ain't wanted in the bunkhouse, and you ain't wanted in my room" [p. 68]. Crooks is an ill-treated outcast among the other workers, and he feels that Lennie is invading his privacy. However, Crooks is also astounded at Lennie's casual and uncomplicated responses to Crooks' comments. Crooks realizes that Lennie is harmless and did not intrude on him purposely. Lennie's curiosity and ignorance show that he isn't prejudiced and doesn't understand the concept of racism. Answers will vary, but most students will agree that Crooks is justified because he is treated poorly at the ranch. He prefers to be left alone.*)
- Analyze Crooks's conversation with Lennie regarding George being in town with the other workers. Why do you suppose Crooks behaves this way? (*Crooks presents a hypothetical about George not returning from town. Lennie grows increasingly frightened and agitated as Crooks continues to suggest that George may never return. Crooks seems to delight in upsetting Lennie and making him feel uncertain about George's loyalty to him: Crooks "pressed forward some kind of private victory" and his face "glowed with pleasure in his torture" [p. 71]. Answers will vary. Crooks has most likely never had an opportunity to feel superior to anyone during his lifetime. When he realizes that Lennie is slow-witted, he takes advantage of this weakness. Crooks urges Lennie to imagine a life of loneliness and despair, possibly to feel as though [Crooks] isn't alone in his hopelessness. Students could discuss whether Crooks is perhaps slightly insane, as indicated by his statements about being lonely to the point of madness and his admission that he has hallucinations.*)
- What does Crooks think about Lennie's dream farm? How does Candy's involvement with the farm affect this? (*Crooks thinks Lennie is wishing for something that will never happen. He claims men have to fight through the ranch with the same dream but says, "... nobody gets no land. It's just in their head" [p. 74]. When Candy adds that he has a plan for making money on the rabbits, Crooks admonishes him for taking part in Lennie's foolish dream. Candy insists that the dream is close to fruition, telling Crooks that they'll have the stacking money soon. Upon hearing this, Crooks allows himself to hope that he might join the men on the farm, offering to work for room and board. For a brief moment, Crooks is optimistic about escaping his lonely life, but the appearance of Curley's wife shatters Crooks's reverie.*)
- What effect does Curley's wife have on Candy, Lennie, and Crooks when she enters the barn? What is her response to each of them? What is your opinion of Curley's wife? (*Candy is upset that Curley's wife has interrupted their talk about the dream farm. He is angry that she is always coming around and stirring up trouble for the workers. Candy admonishes Curley's wife for trying to entice the men and assures her that he is wise to her schemes. Crooks sits quietly at first, but he soon threatens Curley's wife so she will leave. Lennie just stands and stares at Curley's wife, not sure how to react to her entrance, her make-up appearance, or the other men's treatment of her. Curley's wife scoffs at Candy's scolding, ultimately ignoring him to focus on Lennie. She responds to Crooks with racial slurs and threats of having him hung if he says anything to anyone. Answers will vary. Some students may feel that Curley's wife is a shameless flirt who delights in making the men uncomfortable and possibly even getting them into trouble by making Curley jealous. Other students may feel that Curley's wife is miserable and lonely at the ranch and is simply looking for companionship, albeit with the wrong people and using the wrong approach.*)

10. What does Lennie “discuss” with his aunt and the giant rabbit? What might this reveal about Lennie? *(Lennie starts assuring himself that he didn’t forget where George told him to hide. He hears his aunt’s voice scolding him for getting into trouble again and reminding him that he is a burden on George, who would do anything for him. Lennie also envisions a giant rabbit taunting him, “You ain’t fit to lick the boots of no rabbit” [p. 102], essentially saying Lennie isn’t good enough to tend the rabbits at the dream farm. The rabbit also says George will either abandon him or beat him. Answers will vary. Both Lennie’s Aunt Clara and the giant rabbit represent his subconscious. Lennie may actually realize how much George has sacrificed for him over the years, and he feels guilty for this. He doesn’t feel as if he deserves George’s friendship, even though he craves it. He also fears that he is too clumsy and ignorant to do anything useful, believing instead that he should be punished for his bad behavior.)*
11. What do Lennie and George discuss in their hiding place? Why do you think Lennie insists that George scold him or punish him to a cave for killing Curley’s wife? *(Lennie asks George to remind him how easy life would be without Lennie. George does so, in a somber monotone. Lennie also asks George to repeat the story about their dream farm, and George once again obliges. Answers will vary, but students should note that Lennie is terrified and wants to feel a sense of normalcy. By reenacting familiar conversations with George, Lennie can forget about what he’s done and pretend that everything is alright. Lennie finds comfort in George’s words, and he knows that any change in George’s demeanor is a sign of trouble.)*
12. Why does George do to Lennie as he recites the story about their dream farm? Why do you think he does this, and how do you feel about his decision? *(As Lennie fades and becomes lost in the story of the farm, George shoots Lennie in the back of the head with Curley’s gun. Answers will vary. Discussion should focus on George’s love for Lennie, his insistence that Lennie never be mistreated, his feelings of responsibility for Lennie’s well-being, and his determination that Curley and the other workers not find and harm Lennie. While killing Lennie is technically murder, students should discuss George’s motivations. Teachers should monitor for this discussion closely as opposing beliefs and values are likely to surface among students.)*
13. Analyze Slim’s attempts at comforting George after the men come upon Lennie’s body. “Never you mind...A guy goes to some mes...You hadda. George. Now you hadda” (p. 107). *(Answers will vary. Students should note that Slim knows exactly what George has done, as well as his reasons for doing so.)*

Supplementary Activities

1. Write a eulogy for Lennie.
2. Complete the Qualities of a Hero activity on page 24 of this guide.

Cause/Effect Chart

Directions: In the boxes below, explain the effects of George discussing the dream farm in front of Candy.

