

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Of Mice and Men

by John Steinbeck

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SECTION 1

1. As you read Steinbeck's opening description of the river water forming a dark pool with "recumbent limbs" of sycamore trees arching over it, what feeling do you get? Tell or draw the image that you have in your mind that produces this feeling.
2. Re-read this introductory scene, paying particular attention to the details of Lennie's facial expressions, body movements, and actions. How do they contrast to George's? Write a letter giving your opinion of each man.
3. After listening to the dialogue between the two men, what is your opinion of their relationship?
4. When evaluating George's reaction to or treatment of Lennie, some readers might consider George too harsh. Others might think George is too protective; some might feel George is too unrealistic. What is your opinion? What advice would you give George or Lennie?
5. Can you relate to a time that you were, or felt you were obligated to care for an individual who was extremely frustrating? Perhaps you were babysitting, dealing with a brother, sister, grandparent, neighbor, etc. Include the details of the situation, some dialogue, and people's reactions.

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6. George is angry because he believes the bus driver had him get off the bus too soon. Can you remember a time you felt powerless or when someone took advantage of you?

7. At one point George says, “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place....They ain’t got nothing to look ahead to.” Do you think George is right, or is he just feeling sorry for himself? What advice would you give George?

8. Although the two of them are migrants, George believes he and Lennie are different because they have each other, and they have the dream of combining their paychecks and buying their own little farm. In this dream their problems are solved, and Lennie would be safe. By raising rabbits, Lennie would have plenty of soft things to pet; if he killed some, that would become profit because they could eat rabbit meat and sell the fur. In a sense, this dream of George’s can be considered a representation of the dreams of all people since it satisfies the common desire for companionship, independence, and comfort. What is your dream? How do you imagine you will achieve independence and find comfort and companionship?

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9. In their present reality, however, Lennie causes problems for George. There are repeated mentions of lost jobs, Lennie getting in trouble, and Lennie's compulsion to touch soft things. George seems to expect Lennie to get in trouble again because he tells Lennie if there is trouble to "hide in the brush 'till I come for you." If you were George, would you continue to protect Lennie?

10. Can you describe a pattern of troubled behavior that you have experienced yourself, or observed in others? Why do you suppose it's so hard for Lennie to change this pattern?

Section 2

11. How would you feel about living in the bunkhouse and working on the ranch with Candy, Carlson, Curley, and the rest of the characters in *Of Mice and Men*? Can you think of good and bad points, or only one or the other?

12. A person's reactions to situations in life often reveal his or her attitudes, concerns, and personality traits. In this section of *Of Mice and Men*, when George and Lennie arrive at the ranch, the reader is presented with three contrasting reactions to the unusual occurrence of two men travelling together. First, when George answers for Lennie, the boss responds with suspicion and accuses George of taking Lennie's pay. Next, Curley reveals his hostile personality by becoming threatening and insisting that Lennie speak. Finally, Slim, who is confident and friendly, approves of George and Lennie's friendship. If you were a worker on the ranch, how do you suppose you would have responded to George and Lennie? Does your choice say anything about you?

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13. In this section, Steinbeck gives the reader a portrait of Slim. Some students refer to Slim as the “Marlboro Man.” He is presented to the reader as “the prince of the ranch.” We are told that “there was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke.” Give a portrait of a person that you consider exceptional. Follow Steinbeck’s example by starting with physical characteristics, then describe the person’s manner and the way he or she affects others.
14. Consider Steinbeck’s description of Curley. Notice how Curley’s “body language” conveys his feelings.

His eyes passed over the new men and he stopped.
He glanced coldly at George and then at Lennie.
His arms gradually bent at the elbows and his
hands closed into fists. He stiffened and went into
a slight crouch.

Take time to observe some people and find moments when some of their expressions and movements communicate feelings. Describe one of your observations. How often do you think people are aware of their own body language or actually conscious of the body language of others?

15. Candy explains Curley’s behavior to George by saying, “Curley’s like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He’s all the time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he’s mad at ‘em because he ain’t a big guy.” What is your opinion of Slim’s theory? From life or fiction describe why some “little guys” seem eager to pick fights.

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16. “Lennie cried out suddenly—I don’ like this place, George. This ain’t no good place. I wanna get outta here.” What do you suppose he finds fearful about this situation?

17. Candy explains the general gossip about Curley’s wife. Then, the reader is given a description of her behavior when she comes to the bunkhouse door. Finally, George concludes that she is a tramp. However, a reader who understands the treatment of women might conclude that Curley’s wife may be the victim of gender bias. For instance, she has no name or identity; she is simply her husband’s possession. Even worse, the males see her only as a sexual object. Her attempts to talk to people are interpreted by the men as “giving the eye” and dangerous, because Curley would beat them up for showing an interest in his property. What is your view of Curley’s wife and her situation?

18. The issue of mercy killing is raised in this section. What is your perspective on Slim’s drowning of the four pups because the mother would not be able to feed them? What do you think of Carlson trying to get Candy to shoot his dog just because it is old?