

Answer the following questions, using the attached texts.

N.B. the numbers of the questions and the numbers of the texts do not necessarily match up – you have to read everything to find the answers!

1. a. List 5 physical characteristics of Curley's wife.

b. What do these characteristics suggest about her?
2. What is seemingly unique about George and Lennie and their dream?
3. What are the 5 main themes of the novel?
4. What is Curley's wife's name?
5. What is the American Dream and how does it feature in Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*?
6. What does the verse from Robert Burns' poem mean? Why do you think Steinbeck chose to use part of it as the title of his novel?
7. What caused the Great Depression? How might this have affected the characters in the novel?
8. What is a 'migrant farmer'?
9. Where is the novel set and why do you think Steinbeck chose this setting?

10. Does Steinbeck have an appropriate background to be able to write a novel such *Of Mice and Men*? Explain your answer.

11. How are the two men, George and Lennie, shown in contrast during the opening of the novel?

12. What can you identify in terms of symbolism from the extract taken from chapter 1, compared to the extract from chapter 6, the end of the novel?

13. What animals are used in reference to Lennie at various points throughout the novel? Why might Steinbeck have used these animals, considering their characteristics?

14. What forms of prejudice would have been commonplace in 1930s America? Give examples.

15. What is the significance of names in the novel?

Lennie Small

George Milton

Slim

The Boss

Candy

Crooks

Curley

Curley's wife

Soledad

1. Curley's Wife

Both men glanced up, for the rectangle of sunshine in the doorway was cut off. A girl was standing there looking in. She had full, rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made up. Her fingernails were red. Her hair hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages. She wore a cotton house dress and red mules, on the insteps of which were little bouquets of red ostrich feathers. "I'm lookin' for Curley," she said. Her voice had a nasal, brittle quality.

George looked away from her and then back. "He was in here a minute ago, but he went."

"Oh!" She put her hands behind her back and leaned against the door frame so that her body was thrown forward. "You're the new fellers that just come, ain't ya?"

2. George and Lennie's Dream

George's voice became deeper. He repeated his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before. "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 come to a ranch an' work up a stake and then they go inta town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they're poundin' their tail on some other ranch. They ain't got nothing to look ahead to.

...

With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don't have to sit in no bar room blowin' in our jack jus' because we got no place else to go.

...

Someday – we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and

... An' live off the fatta the lan'.

The central aspect of the novel is the seemingly invincible friendship between George and Lennie.

Isolation and loneliness is a key factor in the mood of the novel.



Nature and animals play a large part in the novel, often acting as symbolism, foreshadowing of future events.

Each character in *Of Mice and Men* has a dream of sorts, but are they based on reality or fiction?

This is a novel of defeated hope and the harsh reality of the American Dream.

From Robert Burns' poem "To A Mouse":

*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!*



3.

Written in 1936, in the height of the **Great Depression**, *Of Mice and Men* is a novel that portrays the way in which, despite being systematically crushed as a consequence of depressed circumstances, human spirit still survives. The novel contains both optimistic and pessimistic features - the author, John Steinbeck, illustrates how people, with the help of companionships and dreams, can prevail in the face of all forms of adversity, be it unemployment, isolation, or even death.

The plot of the story is derived from an ideal - the **American Dream**. This is the dream of a land with limitless opportunities which are the same for everyone, regardless of class or wealth, stemmed from the 1776 Declaration of Independence, whereby “all men are created equal” and endowed with “unalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” This sense of community and united society began to diminish from the early 20th Century, as a lack of equality and opportunity cut a hole through the major principles of the Dream. American society had become polarised, and the old ideals had degenerated into something unattainable.



Of Mice and Men is set in this time, where the **American Dream** had ceased to exist for a nation, but was found within individuals like Lennie and George, who kept the belief that they were 'gonna have a little house' and 'live off the fatta the lan'. Their goal is to own their own piece of land and be able to support themselves without outside intervention. The novel is full of **itinerant workers** all doing seasonal work on very low wages, and this fact that work is temporary and hard to come by is a sign that the **American Dream** has lost direction. The

whole novel demonstrates how dreams of characters like George and Lennie are just flimsy, whimsical fantasies that will never be attainable - they are doomed to fail.

Being **nomadic workers** with no real job security, the characters are part of a harsh America portrayed by Steinbeck during the **Depression** - they are lonely workers with failed dreams and failed relationships. This reality is acknowledged by the characters, 'Guys like us are the loneliest guys in the world'. This isolation is one of the most pessimistic aspects of the novel - the underpaid workers are secluded on a remote ranch in Middle-America, living the monotonous and dreary life of short-term employment.

4. The Depression

On October 29 1929, millions of dollars were wiped out in an event that became known as the Wall Street Crash.* It led to the Depression in America which crippled the country from 1930 - 1936. People lost their life savings when firms and banks went bust, and 12 - 15 million men and women - one third of America's population - were unemployed.

There was then no dole to fall back on, so food was short and the unemployed in cities couldn't pay their rent. Some ended up in settlements called 'Hoovervilles' (after the US president of the time, Herbert C Hoover), in shanties made from old packing cases and corrugated iron.

***Wall Street Crash**

When the Wall Street stock market crashed in October 1929, the world economy was plunged into the Great Depression. By the winter of 1932, America was in the depths of the greatest economic depression in its history.

The number of unemployed people reached upwards of 13 million. Many people lived in primitive conditions close to famine. One New York family moved into a cave in Central Park. In St Louis, more than 1,000 people lived in shacks made from scrap metal and boxes. There were many similar Hoovervilles all over America. Between 1 and 2 million people travelled the country desperately looking for work. Signs saying 'No Men Wanted' were displayed all over the country.

By the time of the election in November 1932, Hoover's popularity had reached rock bottom. It was not even safe for him to go onto the streets to campaign. After his heavy defeat, Hoover told his friends, "we are at the end of our string... there is nothing more we can do". The American economy did not fully recover until the USA entered the Second World War in December 1941.

5. John Steinbeck



John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California in 1902. Although his family was wealthy, he was interested in the lives of the farm labourers and spent time working with them. He used his experiences as material for his writing.

He wrote a number of novels about poor people who worked on the land and dreamed of a better life, including *The Grapes of Wrath*, which is the heart-rending story of a family's struggle to escape the dust bowl of the West to reach California. Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, six years before his death in 1968.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/prosemicemen/0prose_mice_men_contrev1.shtml

6. Migrant farmers

Added to the man-made financial problems were natural ones. A series of droughts in southern mid-western states like Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas led to failed harvests and dried-up land. Farmers were forced to move off their land: they couldn't repay the bank-loans which had helped buy the farms and had to sell what they owned to pay their debts.

Many economic migrants headed west to 'Golden' California, thinking there would be land going spare, but the Californians turned many back, fearing they would be over-run. The refugees had nowhere to go back to, so they set up home in huge camps in the California valleys - living in shacks of cardboard and old metal - and sought work as casual farmhands.



Migrant farmworkers. © New Deal Network

Ranch hands

Against this background, ranch hands like George and Lennie were lucky to have work. Ranch hands were grateful for at least a bunk-house to live in and to have food provided, even though the pay was low.

7. George and Lennie are migrant workers.

The term foreign worker is generally used in the United States to refer to someone fitting the international (UN) definition of a migrant worker while the term *migrant worker* is considered someone who regularly works away from home, if they have a home at all.

In the United States, **migrant worker** is commonly used to describe low-wage workers performing manual labour in the agriculture field.

The term **migrant worker** sometimes may be used to describe any worker who moves from one seasonal job to another. This use is generally confined to lower-wage fields, perhaps because the term has been indelibly linked with low-wage farm workers and illegal immigrants.

8. *(Taken from the opening of the novel)*

They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the open one stayed behind the other. Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders. The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely.

9. Chapter 1:

A stilted heron labored up into the air and pounded down the river.

...

A water snake slipped along on the pool, its head help up like a little periscope. The reeds jerked slightly in the current.

...

A big carp rose to the surface of the pool, gulped air and then sank mysteriously into the dark water again, leaving widening rings on the water.

Chapter 6:

A water snake glided smoothly up the pool, twisting its periscope head from side to side; and it swam the length of the pool and came to the legs of a motionless heron that stood in the shallows. A silent head and beak lanced down and plucked it out by the head, and the beak swallowed the little snake while its tail waved frantically.

10. What's in a name?

Lennie Small

Lenny Small, the last name appearing to be an outright joke about his frame. Leonard is a Germanic name meaning, "lion brave." Lenny Small, as we see, is anything but "lion brave" and constantly demands direction and drive from George.

George Milton

The name "George" dates back to the times of the Greeks and is derived from the Greek word, "Georges", meaning "earth worker."

George and Lennie find themselves a "few miles south of **Soledad**". This is a real place in California and its name – which is Spanish – means loneliness or a lonely place. George describes himself and Lennie as the sort of people who "are the loneliest guys in the world". Although the boss of the ranch thinks George exploits Lennie all the ranch-hands come to see that the reason for their relationship is mutual loneliness.

He walked heavily,
dragging his feet a little,
the way a bear drags his
paws.

(Lennie)
drank with
long gulps,
snorting into
the water like
a horse.

He (Lennie)
pawed up
the hay until
it partly
covered her.



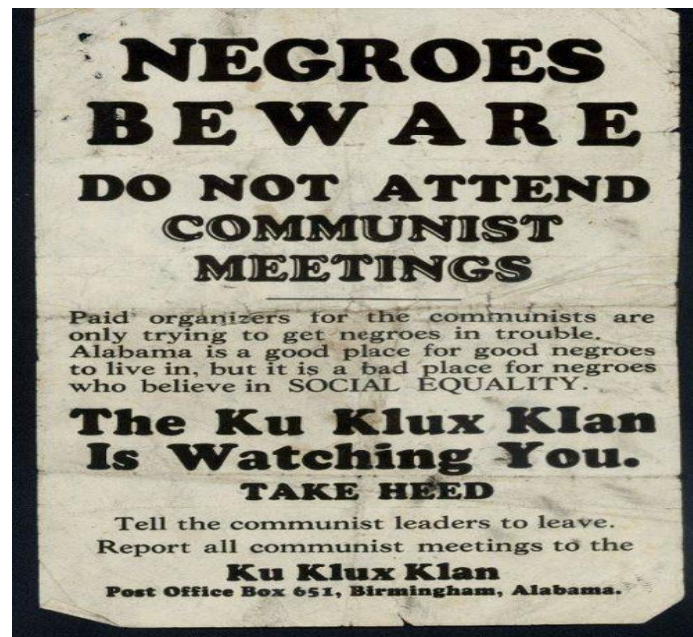
Lennie
covered his
face with
huge paws
and bleated
with terror.

Lennie dabbled his
big paw in the water
and wiggled his
fingers so the water
arose in little
splashes.

Slowly, like a
terrier who
doesn't want to
bring a ball to its
master, Lennie
approached,
drew back,
approached
again.

11. Racism in 1930s America:

1930s life for black people was difficult due to racism. Racial discrimination was not illegal in 1930s America, therefore racism was still rampant at the time. Whites and blacks were segregated in 1930s America and blacks were considered as 2nd class citizens. Black people were paid less than their white counterparts and they had to work harder than everyone else, often given the more 'dirty work'. The lynching (hanging) of black people was common in 1930s America and The Ku Klux Klan still had a lot of power. Black people wanted to change the way they were treated but it was very difficult for them to do this as a result of the Jim Crow Laws, these were a number of laws in America enforced between 1876 and 1965 that provided a legal basis for segregating and discriminating against African-Americans.



12. Women in The Great Depression

The Great Depression affected women and men in quite different ways. The economy of the period relied heavily on so-called "sex-typed" work, or work that employers typically assigned to one sex or the other. And the work most directly associated with males, especially manufacturing in heavy industries like steel production, faced the deepest levels of lay-offs during the Great Depression. Women primarily worked in service industries, and these jobs tended to continue during the 1930s. Clerical workers, teachers, nurses, telephone operators, and domestics largely found work. In many instances, employers

lowered pay scales for women workers, or even, in the case of teachers, failed to pay their workers on time. But women's wages remained a necessary component in family survival. In many Great Depression families, women were the only breadwinners.

An important corrective to a male-centered vision of the Great Depression is to note that while men's employment rates declined during the period, women's employment rates actually rose. In 1930, approximately 10.5 million women worked outside the home. By 1940, approximately 13 million women worked for wages outside the home. Even so, women's work continued to be less than well regarded by American society. Critics, overlooking the sex-typing of most work opportunities for women, lambasted laboring women for robbing men of much-needed jobs. Even women's colleges formally charged women not to pursue careers after graduation so that their places could be filled by men.

Federal law stood consistently with this conservative position regarding women workers. Laws in effect between 1932 and 1937 made it illegal for more than one person per family to find employment within the federal civil service. Despite the protestations of Eleanor Roosevelt, the New Deal program the Civilian Conservation Corps, developed in 1933, had a formal policy against hiring women. Many New Deal job programs cast women in traditional housekeeping roles. Camps operated by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) specifically for young women taught household skills. FERA work relief projects employed women in producing such goods as canned foods, clothes, and mattresses for distribution to needy families. Women were employed as housekeeping aides to families in need of household help. The housekeeping aides project kept to traditional racial stereotypes as well as gendered ones, as most of its employees were African-American women. Other federal agencies paid women much less than men or gave preferences to male job seekers over female ones.

Women of minority groups faced particular difficulties. Employers preferred white men, and then white women, over black or Hispanic women in most instances. Relegated to domestic work and farm work through centuries of racism and misogyny in the job market, most African-American women found themselves left out of new laws passed to ensure worker safety. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, with its minimum wage and maximum hour provisions, did not apply to domestic or farm workers. Given the pressures of the economy, many women—white and black—were willing to work in domestic positions, but fewer households had the extra income to hire help. Many cities developed specific locations where prospective domestic workers would stand outside and wait for wealthier women to hire them for a day's work. Given that those seeking employment were most often black and given the low wages one would earn in such arrangements, the process and the area of town associated with it became known colloquially as a "slave market." The casual nature of the oral contract between employer and employee in this hiring system meant that many women were inadequately paid for their labors.

Women in professional careers lost gains made in earlier, more stable periods. Fewer women found positions in business in the Great Depression than in the 1920s. Losing ground in the traditional male sphere, some men also entered into jobs heretofore relegated to women. This trend occurred even in the very female bastion of teaching. The teaching profession grew slightly less female during the Great Depression; women had constituted 85 percent of teachers in 1920, but by 1940 they constituted only 78 percent.

WIFE'S CHART

George W. Crane, Ph. D., M. D.

(Copyright 1939)

In computing the score, check the various items under DEMERITS which fit the wife, and add the total. Each item counts one point unless specifically weighted as in the parentheses. Then check the items under MERITS which apply; now subtract the DEMERIT score from the MERIT score. The result is the wife's raw score. Interpret it according to this table:

RAW SCORES	INTERPRETATION
0 — 24.....	Very Poor (failures)
25 — 41.....	Poor
42 — 58.....	Average
59 — 75.....	Superior
76 and up.....	Very Superior

DEMERITS	MERITS
1. Slow in coming to bed — delays till husband is almost asleep.	1. A good hostess—even to unexpected guests.
2. Doesn't like children. (5)	2. Has meals on time.
3. Fails to sew on buttons or darn socks regularly.	3. Can carry on an interesting conversation.
4. Wears soiled or ragged dresses and aprons around the house.	4. Can play a musical instrument, as piano, violin, etc.
5. Wears red nail polish.	5. Dresses for breakfast.
6. Often late for appointments. (5)	6. Neat housekeeper — tidy and clean.
7. Seams in hose often crooked.	7. Personally puts children to bed.
8. Goes to bed with curlers on her hair or much face cream.	8. Never goes to bed angry, always makes up first. (5)
9. Puts her cold feet on husband at night to warm them.	9. Asks husband's opinions regarding important decisions and purchases.
10. Is a back seat driver.	10. Good sense of humor—jolly and gay.
11. Flirts with other men at parties or in restaurants. (5)	11. Religious — sends children to church or Sunday school and goes herself. (10)
12. Is suspicious and jealous. (5)	12. Lets husband sleep late on Sunday and holidays.