

AQA GCSE English Literature

Activities and Exam Practice

Of Mice and Men

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Illustrated by Patrick Insole



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Pre-reading

About John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California on 27 February 1902. In 1920 he enrolled at Stanford University and attended intermittently until 1925, when he left Stanford without a degree. Then Steinbeck visited New York and began working for a newspaper called *The American*.

Steinbeck's first novel, *The Pastures of Heaven*, was published in 1932 and he continued writing throughout his life. In 1937 *Of Mice and Men* was published as a novel and a play. As you read the novel you might notice that the action is packed tightly together and the story is told almost entirely through dialogue, as Steinbeck intended for it to be performed as well as read. The stage version won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

In 1937 *Of Mice and Men* received the best reception of all Steinbeck's writing up to that time. Steinbeck's reputation soared as *Of Mice*

and *Men* was selected for the Book-of-the-Month-Club, which meant that it immediately sold 10,000 extra copies. In 1937 Steinbeck was also selected as one of the Ten Most Outstanding Young Men of the Year.

In 1939 Steinbeck won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath* and more success followed when a film version of *Of Mice and Men* was released in 1940. In 1962 Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died in New York on 20 December 1968, aged 66.

Steinbeck's writing has often been classed as 'Naturalism' – a type of writing which supports the idea that people have no free will and are controlled by social and economic circumstances. Writers of Naturalism try not to make moral judgments about their characters but they lean towards determinism (the belief that everything is pre-determined) and pessimism.

Activity A.2: Determinism

In pairs, discuss these ideas with a partner:

- To what extent do you think we have control over what happens to us in our lives?
- Do you believe in pure chance?
- What sort of things do we have control over?
- Can you think of times when you or others were affected by a chance event?
- What sort of things can we change?
- What sort of things can't we change?

Fact: 'The dog ate my homework ...'

- Steinbeck had to rewrite *Of Mice and Men* after a dog had chewed up the first draft.

The Dust Bowl and California Dreaming

Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico had already suffered seven years of drought. Their once arable land was parched and dust storms destroyed what crops there were. It had become a dust bowl. The banks needed to collect their debts, but many farmers lost their land – their only source of income and food – because they could not afford to repay them. Whole families were forced to move to find food and employment.

Many victims of the Dust Bowl chose to go to California (see map below) where the soil was

rich and fertile and where they believed there was room for everyone to have their own piece of land.

However, Steinbeck observed when reporting from the migratory labour camps:

There is the scurrying on the highways and the families in open cars to the ready crops, and hurrying to be the first at work ... For it has been the habit of the Grower's Association of the State to provide by importation twice as much labour as was necessary so that the wages might remain low. They move frantically, with starvation just behind them.



Activity A.1: Migrant labour

Parallels can be drawn between the employers of 1930s America and those of present-day Britain who profit from the desperate plight of asylum seekers and immigrants trying to scrape together enough money to make a living.

Page 6 below shows a newspaper article taken from the *Guardian*, 7 February 2004, revealing details of the Chinese cockle pickers drowned in Morecambe Bay, and a list of statements. Match up the *italic* extracts in the article to support the statements in the list.

The underbelly of globalisation

The Chinese workers who died were victims of cowboy capitalism

Tony Woodley

Saturday 7 February 2004

Morecambe Bay's famously ferocious tide may be a force of nature, but *human beings bear the responsibility for yesterday's deaths of 19 Chinese workers picking cockles*. 'Drowning' will be the word on their death certificate, but it is cowboy capitalism that has caused this dreadful human tragedy.

The cockle pickers involved form part of the *growing army of workers employed in a twilight world propping up profit levels across the British economy*. The rightwing response can be predicted. They will ask why these workers were in the country, not why they were working – almost certainly for very little – in such *dangerous circumstances*, and for whom.

This is not a migration issue. It is an exploitation issue. As the local Labour MP in Morecambe said yesterday: *'The cockles are worth a great deal of money, but those poor people who lost their lives were making very little of that.'*

The sordid underbelly of free-market globalisation is on display at that sandbank in Morecambe Bay. *Working people are being uprooted from their communities across the world by the unchecked movement of capital and brought to Britain in order to provide cheap labour*.

They often put their lives at risk even getting here – remember the 58 Chinese people who died in the back of a lorry crossing the Channel in 2000? *On arrival, they face intolerable and unsafe living and working conditions right under our noses*, providing services and goods we take for granted. *Nobody gains but reckless employers*.

There are respectable providers of labour for seasonal work in agriculture, but *pay and conditions are undermined by rogue employers*, 'gangmasters' in the appropriately Victorian parlance, who find even the very limited protections afforded by British employment law too burdensome.

The poor Chinese cockle pickers are *the tip of an enormous iceberg of migrant labour working in many sectors of the economy*, in all parts of the country. In Norfolk, *gang workers were paid just £3 to cut 1,000 daffodils*. In Cambridgeshire, *workers were forced to live in partitioned containers with no water supply – and were deducted up to £80 a week rent from their meagre earnings for the privilege*. In a fish processing plant in Scotland, *gang workers were found working 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, for less than the minimum wage*.

It is a system that preys on the vulnerable. *In the Midlands, a gang worker was charged £600 by a gangmaster for documentation that was never provided*. Such employers also cheat the taxpayer, of course. During 2002–3, the Inland Revenue recouped more than £4 million in unpaid tax and National Insurance contributions from gangmasters in the Thames Valley area.

List of statements

N.B. There may be more than one *italic* extract relevant to a particular statement and some extracts maybe relevant to more than one statement.

1. Workers are dispensable as there are so many migrants needing work and they are therefore easily replaced.
2. Workers are exploited.
 - Bosses can take advantage of the fact that illegal immigrants are not officially allowed to work in Britain and pay them very low wages.
 - Bosses make more money out of migrant labour than they would out of national citizens.
 - Workers have fewer employment rights.
3. Poor working conditions. No training is provided and workers are put at risk through a lack of specialised knowledge or skills.
4. Poor living conditions.
5. Workers are away from their families and homes in an unfamiliar environment.

Chapter 1

George and his huge, child-like friend Lennie arrive a few miles south of Soledad hoping for work, bucking wheat on a nearby ranch in California's Salinas Valley.

The two men are very different from each other. George is described as 'small and quick' and Lennie as 'his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face'. He is likened to an animal on more than

one occasion: 'the way a bear drags his paws' and 'snorting into the water like a horse'.

Despite their differences George and Lennie are friends. However, their behaviour and attitude and the way that they speak to each other sometimes suggests a relationship more like that of parent and child.

Activity 1.1: George and Lennie

Explain how the following quotations from the first chapter support the notion that George and Lennie's relationship is more like that of a father and son than a regular friendship.

Quotation	Interpretation
<i>They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the open one stayed behind the other.</i>	It was Lennie who chose to stay behind George, suggesting that a less confident Lennie preferred the security of going second and allowing George to be first to experience something new and uncertain. This image is similar to a shy child hiding behind a parent.
<i>'Lennie, for God's sake don't drink so much.'</i>	
<i>'You never oughta drink water when it ain't running, Lennie.'</i>	
<i>Lennie, who had been watching, imitated George exactly.</i>	
<i>'Now, look – I'll give him the work tickets, but you ain't gonna say a word. You jus' stand there and don't say nothing.'</i>	
<i>'Good boy. That's swell' You say that over two, three times so you sure won't forget it.'</i>	
<i>'I could get along so easy and so nice if I didn't have you on my tail. I could live so easy and maybe have a girl.'</i>	
<i>Lennie said, 'I like beans with ketchup.'</i>	
<i>'Your Aunt Clara give you a rubber mouse and you wouldn't have nothing to do with it.'</i>	

Activity 1.2: Lennie meets the boss

George and Lennie set up camp in the brush ready for work the next day. George reminds Lennie to let him do all the talking when they meet the boss. He also tells Lennie that, if there is any trouble (as there was in Weed), then Lennie is to come back and hide here in the brush.

Imagine Lennie meeting the boss. Write a script for their meeting. Decide whether George is present at the meeting and consider the following points.

- What might the boss's first impressions of Lennie be?
- Lennie is under strict instructions from George not to speak to the boss. How might the boss react to Lennie's silence?
- Lennie is unlikely to remain silent throughout. At what point do you think he would speak?
- How might the boss interpret Lennie's behaviour?
- What concerns might the boss have?
- Bearing in mind what you know of employers during the 1930s Depression, how do you think the boss is likely to respond? For example, might he be suspicious, frightening or understanding?
- As an employer the boss may well ask about previous employment. How much do you think Lennie remembers or understands about the incident in Weed and how much of that might he convey to the boss? How do you think the boss would respond?
- How might the language that Lennie uses compare with the boss's language?
- When Lennie isn't talking, what is he doing? Does he look directly at the boss or at the floor? Does he fidget?

Activity 1.3: the American Dream

Lennie persuades George to tell him their dream, though Lennie knows it word for word anyway, suggesting that this is a well-rehearsed speech. Consider the importance of the dream and what bearing on their lives a belief that they will some day have their own piece of land might have.

The idea of the American Dream came about when the first white settlers arrived. These were people from all parts of the World hoping to make a better life for themselves and believing that anything was possible for anyone in America.

- What are your dreams?
- What chance do you have of ever making them come true?
- Is it helpful, or even necessary, to have dreams?
- What is the function of dreams?

Chapter 2

After meeting the main characters, George and Lennie, in Chapter 1, Steinbeck now introduces most of the other major characters of the novel in Chapter 2. George and Lennie arrive in Soledad to work on the ranch. Candy, the old

swamper, shows them around the sparse, rough 'bunkhouse' where they will live. Candy shows he likes to gossip, giving George and Lennie snippets of information about others on the ranch, such as Curley, Curley's wife and the boss.

Activity 2.1: Curley's wife and Slim

Read the following extracts, in which Steinbeck introduces first Curley's wife, then Slim.

Extract A

Both men [George and Lennie] 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 finger nails 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 looking 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 fellas that just come, ain't ya?'

'Yeah.'

Lennie's eyes moved down over her body, and although she did not seem to be looking at Lennie, she bridled a little. She looked down at her finger-nails.

'Sometimes Curley's in here,' she explained.

George said brusquely, 'Well, he ain't now.'

'If he ain't, I guess I better look someplace else,' she said playfully.

Lennie watched her, fascinated. George said, 'If I see him, I'll pass word you was looking for him.' She smiled archly and twitched her body.

Extract B

A tall man stood in the doorway. He held a crushed Stetson hat under his arm while he combed his long, black, damp hair straight back. Like the others, he wore blue jeans and a short denim jacket. When he had finished combing his hair he moved into the room, and he moved with a majesty only achieved by royalty and master craftsmen. He was a jerkline skinner, the prince of the ranch, capable of driving ten, sixteen, even twenty mules with a single line to the leaders. He was capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touching the mule. There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love. This was Slim, the jerkline skinner. His hatchet face was ageless. He might have been thirty-five or fifty. His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought. His hands, large and lean, were as delicate in their action as those of a temple dancer.

He smoothed out his crushed hat, creased it in the middle and put it on. He looked kindly at the two in the bunk-house. 'It's brighter'n a bitch outside,' he said gently.

- 1 In the novel, Candy has already described Curley's wife as a 'tart'. Look at Extract A. What do you notice about how Steinbeck uses colour to describe her? What does this suggest about her? What do you associate with the colour red?
- 2 In these extracts Steinbeck describes the body movements of both characters. How does he describe:
 - (a) How Curley's wife moves in reaction to George and Lennie in Extract A?
 - (b) How Slim moves in Extract B? What does this tell us about Slim?
- 3 Pay particular attention to how Steinbeck describes Slim's hands, near the end of Extract B. It suggests that Slim has a mystical, knowing quality. What other phrases suggest this?
- 4 Read both extracts again. Which words does Steinbeck use to describe the voices of Curley's wife and Slim? How do the description of how they speak fit in with what we've learned about these characters?
- 5 Steinbeck uses very different adjectives and adverbs to create an impression of these two very different characters. Complete the chart below, listing the different words Steinbeck uses to describe Curley's wife and Slim.

Curley's wife	Slim
full, rouged (lips)	master
heavily made-up (eyes)	great

- 6 Look at the lists you have created. Judging by these descriptions, what image do you think Steinbeck wants to create for each of these characters? How are we, the readers, meant to respond to them? Are we meant to like Curley's wife?
- 7 Can you think of a TV or film character who is similar to Slim or Curley's wife? List reasons stating why they are similar.

Key points

- In Chapter 2 George and Lennie meet Candy, the boss, Curley's wife, Slim, and Carlson, a ranch hand.
- Curley's wife makes an impact on Lennie, who thinks she's pretty, but George senses that she might be trouble and he warns Lennie to stay away from her.
- We learn that George and Lennie are just going to stay on the ranch until they can work up a 'stake' – enough money to put down as a deposit on the farm of their dreams.

Activity 2.2: Dear Diary – George's viewpoint

After reading Chapter 2, imagine you are George and you are writing a diary entry after arriving at the ranch. You will need to include these things in your entry:

- The bus driver misleading you and Lennie, and you having to spend the night out in the open near the river.
- Your first impressions of Candy, the boss and the bunkhouse.
- What you think of Slim.
- Your worries about Lennie and the troubles that could be brewing with Curley or Curley's wife.
- The way that Lennie always wants to hear about the dream of the farm and keeping rabbits.
- How Lennie wants one of Slim's pups and how he's fascinated by petting soft things, like mice.

To make this diary entry sound authentic, you will need to adopt George's style of language. You might like to use phrases like these, taken from the novel:

- 'I ain't got nothing'
- 'They ain't oughta' (They shouldn't have)
- 'The hell with...'
- 'I'll tell ya'
- 'You ain't gonna do no bad things'
- 'That's swell' (That's good)
- 'Awright'
- 'Blubberin' like a baby' (Crying like a baby)
- 'Gi' me' (Give it to me)
- 'You ain't puttin' nothing over' (You're not going to fool me)
- 'The fatta the lan' (The fat of the land – what nature provides)
- 'Poundin' their tail' (Working hard)
- 'Blow our jack' (Waste, or spend, our money)
- 'Whatta ya want?'
- 'Leave your big flapper shut' (Shut up)
- 'Pretty handy' (Good at fighting)
- 'Purty' (Pretty)
- 'Buck barley' (Lifting barley bales onto carts)
- 'The brush' (The bushes)
- 'She slang her pups' (She's had her pups – Slim's bitch)

Activity 2.3: Power

- 1 Add names to the boxes below to arrange the characters in order, putting the one with the most power and authority at the top and the one with the least at the bottom.
- 2 Write at least one sentence for each character to explain the order you chose.

Most power

↓

↓

↓

↓

↓

↓

↓

Least power



CURLEY



LENNIE



CANDY



SLIM



CROOKS



CURLEY'S WIFE



GEORGE



THE BOSS



CARLSON

Chapter 3

The dog must die

In this chapter, some of the men in the bunkhouse complain to Candy, the old swamper, that his dog is old and smelly. In the passages leading up to Carlson shooting the dog, the silence in the room is so powerful that it becomes like an extra character in the novel as the following extracts show (p. 49):

'The silence came into the room. And the silence lasted.'

'The silence fell on the room again. It came out of the night and invaded the room.'

The atmosphere in the room is very strong and few words are spoken by the characters.

Activity 3.1: A speech for Candy

Re-read pages 45–50 of the novel, covering events leading up to Candy's dog being shot. There is a strong sense that Candy feels powerless and is very reluctant to lose his dog. Write a speech for him in which he honestly says how he feels and tries to persuade others that his dog should live.

You might like to include:

- How unfair it is to kill a dog just because it is old and smelly.
- How Candy identifies with the dog because he is old too.
- How he has had the dog since it was a pup and how much the dog means to him.
- That they cannot really know whether the dog is suffering. He might be feeling fine.
- That shooting a dog is a painful (though quick) way for him to die.
- That replacing him with one of Slim's pups just isn't the same.

Remember ...

You are writing to persuade others. This is similar to writing an argument but you will play more on the reader's emotions. You can be one-sided and you don't need to make a counter-argument.

Persuasive texts are often structured like this:

- 1 A general description of the situation.
- 2 An explanation of why your point of view is the right way to look at things.
- 3 Background details, the history of the situation.
- 4 Practical details about what others can do to help.
- 5 A final emotional plea for support.

The fight

In Chapter 3 a fight occurs between Curley and Lennie. Curley is looking for his wife in the barn and he implies that something has been happening between his wife and Slim. When Slim tells Curley to 'lay off', Curley tries to pick a fight with Carlson. However Carlson stands his ground and then Curley notices Lennie, who is still smiling at the thought that he and George will soon buy their own little farm.

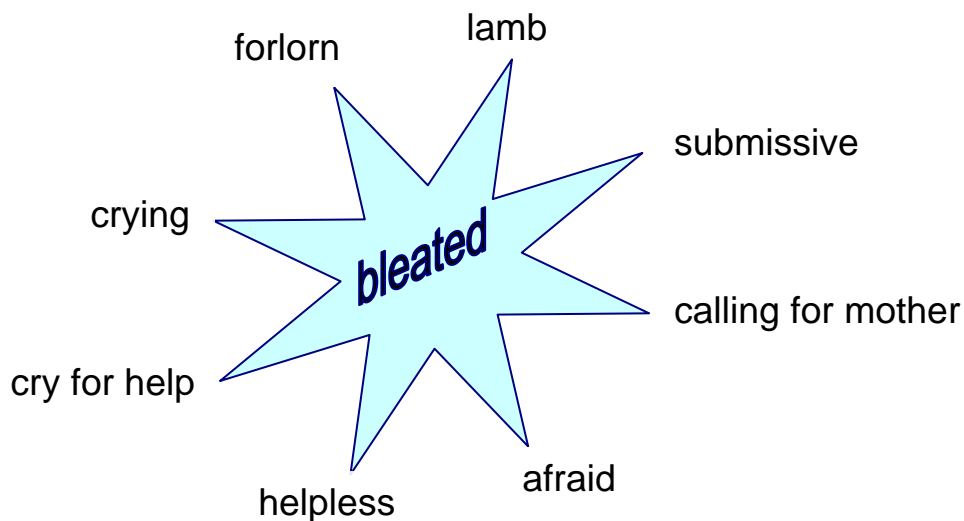
Curley starts punching the bewildered Lennie. Then, after George tells Lennie to 'Get him', Lennie grabs Curley's hand in mid-air and crushes it. When George finally makes Lennie release Curley's hand, George worries that they'll get 'canned' (sacked). Slim takes charge of the situation, telling Curley that if he gets George and Lennie canned they'll embarrass him by telling everyone what happened.

Activity 3.2: Curley and Lennie as animals

Throughout the fight there are many animal references referring to either Lennie or Curley:

- A. 'Curley stepped over to Lennie like a **terrier**'.
- B. 'Lennie covered his face with his huge **paws** and **bleated** with terror'.
- C. Slim about Curley – 'The dirty little **rat**'.
- D. 'Curley was flopping like a **fish** on a line'.
- E. 'Slim turned to the **whimpering Lennie**'.

For each of the **bold** words associated with animals, create a diagram or map like the one below listing all the things that you associate with that word or animal.



For each of the short extracts above (A–E), write down how the animal reference links to what we already know about that character.

Compare the animal descriptions of Curley at the start of the fight and at the end of the fight. How do they show a change has happened to Curley's character?

Activity 3.3: Hot-seating – perspectives on the fight

Read through the fight near the end of Chapter 3 again. Imagine you are either George, Slim, Curley or Carlson. Using the hot-seating technique, you will be questioned by other members of your class about your side of the story during the fight. Think of 3–5 questions that you might want to ask the other characters. For example, here are some questions that you could ask:

What did you feel when you saw Curley starting a fight with Lennie?

To George

Did your view of Lennie change after the fight?

To Slim

To Carlson

What made you hit Lennie?

To Curley

Did you think that Curley deserved to get his hand crushed?

Chapter 4

This chapter is set in the harness room, 'a little shed that leaned off the wall of the barn', home to Crooks, 'the negro stable buck'. There is a detailed description of his room and its contents.

George and the rest of the men have gone into town, leaving Lennie and Crooks behind. Lennie discovers Crooks's room and, unaware of the different social rules that applied to black and white people at that time, invites himself in.

Later on Candy joins them. Finally Curley's wife enters the room and says, 'An' what am I doin'? Standin' here talkin' to a bunch of bindle stiffs –

a nigger an' a dum-dum and a lousy ol' sheep – an' likin' it because they ain't nobody else.' Her description is offensive. A 'bindle stiff' is a rough migrant worker (whose possessions are rolled in a bundle). Her term for Crooks reflects the racism common in the USA at this time. The 'dum-dum' is Lennie; the 'sheep' is Candy.

Steinbeck uses individual characters to explore issues surrounding whole groups of people. Curley's wife and the three characters to whom she is referring represent minority groups shunned and excluded because of their race, gender, age and physical or mental ability.

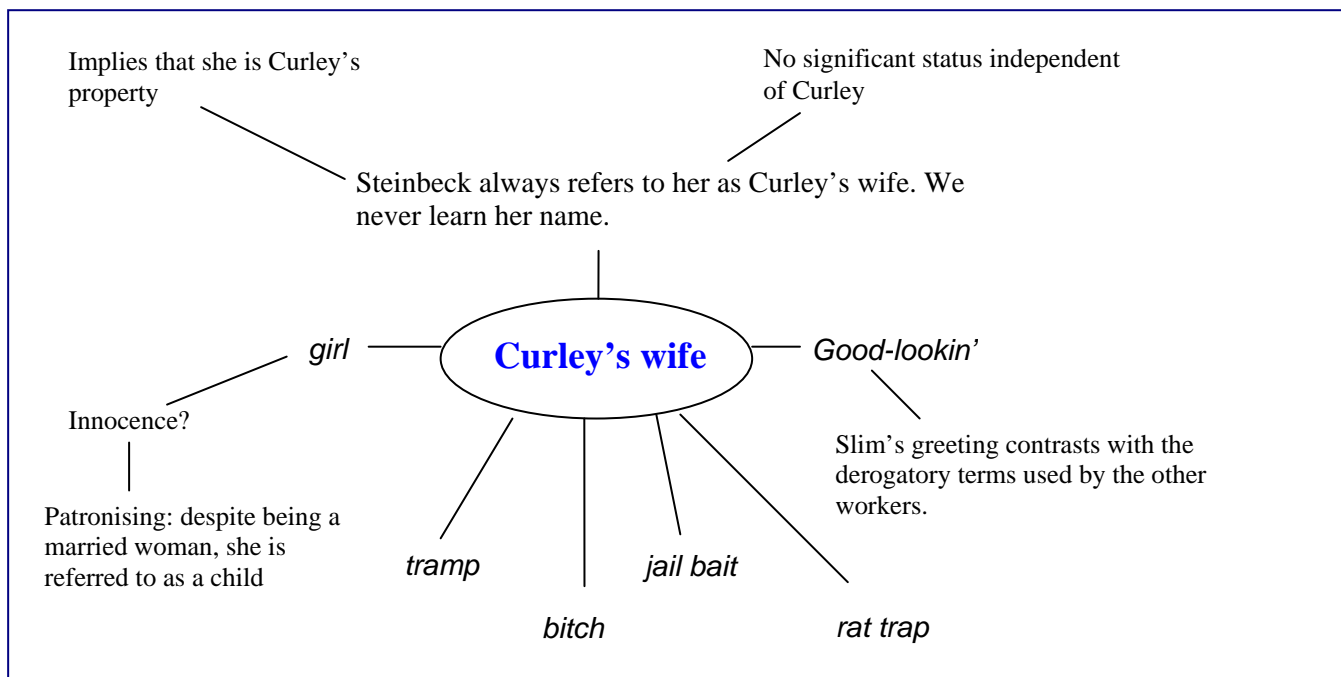
Activity 4.1: What's in Crooks's room?

Write a contents list for Crooks's room and say what each item suggests about him. One is started for you below.

Item	Interpretation
<i>Long box filled with straw, on which his blankets were flung</i>	Because he is black, Crooks is not allowed to sleep in the bunkhouse with the white workers. He is placed in the harness room, which was not intended for human habitation.
<i>Pegs on which hung broken harness in process of being mended</i>	No separation from his work
<i>A little bench for leather-working tools</i>	Not really suitable for living quarters

Activity 4.2: Interpreting references to characters

- 1 Identify the different ways in which Steinbeck has referred to Curley's wife, Crooks, Lennie and Candy so far in the text. Consider what these names and references suggest about the character and attitudes towards the character. Look at the spider diagram on page 16 exploring some of the names given to Curley's wife in Chapter 2. Complete the diagram, giving your own comments on the names that she is called. Find other references to her from Chapter 4 and include your own comments.
- 2 Produce diagrams for Candy, Crooks and Lennie, using terms from Chapter 4.
- 3 In the activities for Chapter 2 you were asked to sort the characters into a hierarchical structure. Organise Crooks, Lennie, Candy and Curley's wife into a hierarchy with the most important or powerful at the top. Give your reasons for the positions you have given them. Has the order changed since Chapter 2?



Crooks

Crooks represents the black population of America's South in the 1930s and Steinbeck uses him to demonstrate the racism and prejudice of the time.

Activity 4.3: Racism in the Deep South

Below are the lyrics of the Billie Holiday song 'Strange Fruits' (written by Lewis Allen). She likens the fertile land and good harvests to the growing racism and violence in the South.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
 Blood on the leaves and blood on the root
 Black bodies swingin' in the southern breeze
 Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant South
 The bulging eye and the twisting mouth
 Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh
 Then the sudden smell of burning flesh

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
 For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
 For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop
 Here is a strange and bitter crop.

- 1 Find phrases in the song that (a) support a peaceful and picturesque idea of the Deep South and (b) reveal its racism and brutality.
- 2 Consider all the connotations of the word *strange*.
- 3 Discuss the effectiveness of the analogy between trees laden with fruit and trees used for lynching.

Chapter 5

This chapter opens with Lennie alone in the great barn. There is a description of the barn before Lennie is described sitting in the hay with a little dead puppy lying in front of him.

Activity 5.1: From page to stage

Imagine that you are producing *Of Mice and Men* for the theatre. How would you direct this scene from the beginning of the chapter to when the clang of horseshoes is first heard outside?

Consider the following points.

- You need to guide the audience's attention. What do they see first of all? How do you arrange this?
- What atmosphere do you want to create and how would you do this?
- After setting the scene, how would you direct the audience's attention towards Lennie? Would he have been there from the beginning? Would he have been facing the audience or have his back to them?
- The disclosure of the dead puppy comes as a shock after the tranquil scene setting. How would you achieve maximum effect when the puppy is revealed to be dead?
- Would you have any music in this scene? What kind? Would it change or stop at a particular point? How would it add to the atmosphere you are trying to create?
- How might silence be used to create a particular effect?
- Think about the various emotions that Lennie feels in this scene. How might you convey them in the volume and pitch of his voice? What notes might you give the actor playing him?
- How do you want the audience to feel during this scene? How do you want them to react to seeing the dead puppy for the first time? What do you want them to feel towards Lennie? Sympathy? Pity? Anger?

Rewrite the passage as a script with stage directions.

Activity 5.2: Accidental death

Re-read the section where Lennie kills Curley's wife, from 'Lennie was in a panic. His face was contorted' to the end of the third paragraph, ' "I done a bad thing. I done another bad thing." '

- Highlight all the words and phrases in the passage that indicate that this was an accident.
- Highlight all the words and phrases that show Lennie's fear and confusion.
- Now rewrite the passage to suggest that it was not an accident and that Lennie had intended to kill Curley's wife.

The death of Curley's wife

There are mixed emotion reactions to the death of Curley's wife. Candy's initial response is one of resentment. He feels that she somehow brought it on herself and that it has destroyed any chance of the dream coming true for him and George and Lennie. Curley is more concerned with finding Lennie and getting his revenge than he is about having lost his wife.

When Slim suggests that he should stay with his wife and let the others find Lennie, Curley reveals the venomous feelings he has towards Lennie and how he is intent on finding him and shooting him himself. Slim is the only one to touch Curley's wife. He checks whether or not she is dead and how it could have happened. He touches her gently and carefully.

Activity 5.3: Post-mortem inquiry

Imagine a discussion between two characters about the incident after the death of Curley's wife. In pairs, produce a dialogue between two of the following characters; Candy, Slim, Carlson and Curley.

Consider the following points.

- What might each character think actually happened?
- Why do they think Lennie did it? Does it change their feelings towards Lennie? Are they now frightened of Lennie? Does it put previous incidents into a different light?
- What part do they suspect Curley's wife played in her own death?
- What were their attitudes towards her before and after her death?
- What do their comments reveal about themselves? For example, Candy's sentiments may reveal a degree of selfishness.
- Remember that what they say may vary depending on who they are talking to. For example, if Curley is one of the chosen characters then the other person would need to be careful about what he said about his late wife and would not want to offend Curley.

You may find it helpful to refer back to Chapter 2 as well.

Key question

- Is Curley's wife a 'slut' who deserves what she gets for playing with Lennie's feelings? Or is she an unfortunate victim of sexism and circumstance? What would you write for her obituary?

Chapter 6

At the beginning of this chapter we revisit the pool where we first met George and Lennie at the start of the book. After killing Curley's wife, Lennie arrives at the pool, remembering that this is where he is supposed to meet George if

anything goes wrong. In his confusion and distress Lennie talks to imaginary characters (first Aunt Clara and then a giant rabbit) who are reprimanding him for what he has done.

Activity 6.1: Back to the pool

Re-read from the start of Chapter 1 to 'then two men emerged from the path and came into the opening by the green pool.' Then re-read the start of Chapter 6 to 'the little snake slid in among the reeds at the pool side'. After reading the extracts:

- 1 Why do you think Steinbeck uses a lengthy description of the pool at the beginning of Chapter 1 and then returns to another lengthy description of the same place at the start of Chapter 6?
- 2 Look at these descriptions of the pool at the start of Chapter 1: 'The water is warm', 'it [the water] has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands', 'golden foothill slopes curve up', 'willows fresh and green', 'the leaves lie deep and so crisp', 'Rabbits come out of the brush to sit on the sand in the evening'. What kind of mood or atmosphere do you think Steinbeck is trying to create?
- 3 Look again at the description of the animals and surroundings in the first paragraph of Chapter 1. Notice the use of colour. How does this add to the image Steinbeck is trying to create?
- 4 Look at the following descriptions of the pool from the start of Chapter 6:

'A far rush of wind sounded', 'Already the sun had left the valley', 'a gust drove through the tops of the trees', 'the wind died'. What sort of mood or atmosphere is Steinbeck trying to create here? How is it different from the atmosphere created by the description of the pool at the start of Chapter 1?

- 5 Compare the following extracts:

Chapter 1 – 'A stilted heron labored up into the air and pounded down river'.... 'A water snake slipped along the pool, its head held up like a little periscope.'

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.'

What do you think Steinbeck is trying to demonstrate by having the heron kill the snake at the end of the novel? How does it reflect other events in the novel?

George's arrival

George arrives and finds a distressed Lennie by the pool. Lennie expects George to 'give him hell' but George tells Lennie off in a half-hearted way, knowing that there is no running away from this situation.

Activity 6.2: Filming the ending

Re-read the passage in which George arrives to find Lennie by the pool. Read from 'George said quietly, "What the hell you yellin' about?"' to the end of the book. Imagine that you are a film director and that you are going to film the final scenes of your film version of, *Of Mice and Men*. How would you depict these last few pages to achieve the maximum dramatic effect for the climax of your film?

Remember: films cannot portray every word or thought included in a novel. You will need to select the parts of the story and the dialogue which you think are the most important.

Once you have re-read the ending, you might find that it is easiest to make brief notes and then separate the last few pages into different film 'scenes'. Remember that you can cut from one scene to another and back again. For instance, you might want to show George quietly standing behind Lennie with a gun and then cut to the men furiously crashing through the brush, trying to find them.

Once you have written up your notes for the filming of these final scenes of *Of Mice and Men*, you might want to suggest which actors you would choose to play the characters in your film.

Camera shots and angles

- **Close-up** usually of the head, to show facial expression or focusing on an object.
- **Medium shot** showing the actor's whole body or half of the body of the actor/s.
- **Long shot** showing the scenery or characters in a background.
- **Low-angle shot** when the camera is down low and looking up at the actors or scene. This makes the characters look big and imposing.
- **High-angle shot** when the camera is up high looking down on the actors or scene – this makes the characters look small and possibly frightened, confused or lonely.
- **Panning shot** when the camera moves slowly across a scene, usually in a semi-circle; for instance, when filming a background to set the scene.

The end

The novel ends with the dramatic shooting of Lennie by his close friend George. This is followed by the irony of Carlson's comment to Curley: 'Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys?'. This comment shows that, unlike Slim, Carlson and Curley have little understanding of how painful it was for George to kill Lennie, or of the complexities of their relationship.

Activity 6.3: An alternative ending

Is it a good ending? Write an alternative ending. Be sure to consider the following:

- After Lennie had killed Curley's wife, how would he have been treated if he had been caught by the men from the ranch?
- The attitudes of all the characters involved in finding Lennie after he fled from the ranch.
- What George could have done differently.
- Why George didn't just run away again with Lennie.
- What you think would have happened if Lennie had run away on his own.

Post-reading round-up

Of Mice and Men takes its name from a Robert Burns poem. The eighteenth-century Scottish poet wrote the following apology when he accidentally destroyed the nest of a field mouse whilst ploughing a field. He had also destroyed the mouse's chances of surviving the winter:

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane [you are not alone]
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best-laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft agley, [often go wrong]
And lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy.

Activity B.1: What's in a name?

- 1 *Of Mice and Men* was initially going to be called *Something that Happened*. With your knowledge of the novel as a whole, brainstorm both titles. What do you think is suggested in each case? Which do you think is more appropriate and why?
- 2 The six chapters of the novel are untitled. Think of appropriate titles for each chapter that summarise the action and provide a clue to the content.

Activity B.2: The 'framed' novel

The idea that the novel is 'framed' is first suggested in Activity 6.1. The heron and snake are introduced in Chapter 1 and the heron eats the snake in Chapter 6. There is a sense of symmetry and much of the language is repeated. The beginning and ending are set in the same place, giving the novel a feeling of coming full circle. Plays often use this device of ending where they began, creating a frame for the action.

The death of the snake is the final death in *Of Mice and Men*, but there are a number of deaths that occur throughout the novel, building up to Lennie's death.

Identify all the deaths that occur throughout the novel. Put them in chronological order and ensure that you include animal as well as human deaths. Notice that the deaths build up and as the story progresses so the deaths are more serious.

- At what point did you think a human death had to occur?
- At what point did you think that Lennie had to die?

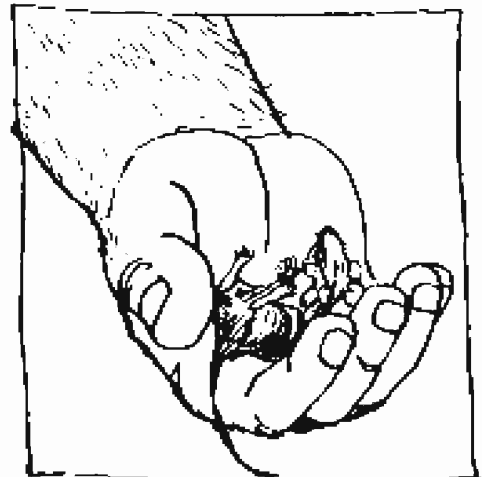
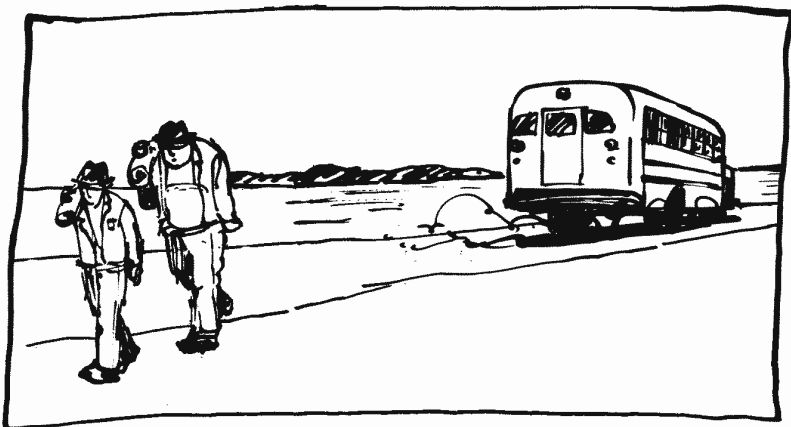
Activity B.3: Making a picture map

A good way to revise the main events in a novel is to make a visual aid. You don't have to be good at drawing to do this. You could just use symbols which make sense to you and are easily remembered. You can make your picture map any shape you like, although flow charts work well. Make it as detailed as you like.

Choose a chapter and draw at least six pictures or symbols to represent its main events. Don't forget you can include abstract concepts, such as inevitability, death, dreams or loneliness. The pictures or symbols should tell the story. However, you could add a caption to each one if you think it is necessary.

After your group has finished, you could share your picture map with the rest of the class.








This page shows examples of some pictures to represent the start of Chapter 1.



Activity B.4: Character relationships

In a novel of lonely characters the relationship between George and Lennie stands out as the closest and deepest (even though there is a married couple in the novel). Though George is often exasperated by Lennie's behaviour, their relationship has benefits for both of them: Lennie has someone to take care of him and George has another person to travel around with and someone with whom he can share the dream of a better life. This relationship prevents both George and Lennie from feeling as though nobody cares. By being together, they avoid becoming lonely and hopeless.

Look at the chart below, some boxes have already been completed for you. Fill in the rest of the boxes with your own notes about the relationships between the characters.

	 CANDY	 LENNIE	 SLIM	 CURLEY
 GEORGE		They take care of each other. George looks out for Lennie in an almost fatherly way. Close friends.		
 CURLEY'S WIFE				Not a close marriage. They never appear together until she's dead – then he's more concerned about finding Lennie than about her death.
 CROOKS				

Answering AQA exam questions

Foundation Tier

Looking at questions

Look at the following question.

'We kinda look after each other.' This is how George describes his relationship with Lennie. Explain the nature of their relationship.

Consider:

- their physical differences
- other characters' reactions to their friendship
- the advantages and disadvantages of the relationship for each of them
- clues about their past
- the shooting of Lennie.

When you first see an examination question, the first thing to do is to decide what sort of question it is. In this instance the question is a 'character' question about George and Lennie and more particularly how they relate to each other. What this question really asks is: What is the friendship between George and Lennie like?

After deciding what the question is about, you should carefully examine the bullet points. The examiner will expect you to write about each of these points. Check that you could write something relevant about each of the bullet points. For example, you may feel confident in your knowledge of George and Lennie but this question also asks you to consider how other characters react to their friendship, so you will need to think about what you could write for that bullet point too.

Writing an essay plan

Writing a plan is an essential part of essay writing. It helps you to:

- organize your ideas
- stay on track instead of wandering off the point
- ensure that you are always writing something that is relevant to the question.

Writing an essay plan is also helpful because it allows you to check whether you have enough ideas and information to answer a particular question in an examination.

Our sample essay question has bullet points to assist you. The advantage of this type of question is that it already gives you a good basic structure for the main part of your essay. Each bullet point can form one or two paragraphs in your essay. However, it is crucial that you jot down ideas which you will use for each bullet point. Look at the following example, which addresses the first bullet point in the essay question:

- start of novel, George and Lennie introduced – opposites
- George is smaller but he's in charge; Lennie is child-like
- Lennie is compared to a bear.

Your plan should not be too long. You don't need to write out your ideas in full. You can just write a few notes to remind yourself of the ideas you will use in your essay.

Activity C.1: Writing an essay plan

Make a short plan for each of the other bullet points. Remember that you don't need to write out your ideas in full and you can also jot down any quotes you think you might use.

Writing an introduction

An essay introduction should refer to the question in some way. You don't need to repeat the question but you do need to show the examiner that you have understood it. For example, to answer the question on page 24 above, you might start with:

The relationship between Lennie and George seems an unlikely one, but both men benefit from it.

Your introduction does not need to be very long but you need to let the examiner know where you are going with your argument. You can use the ideas in your plan to do this.

Activity C.2: Introduction

Write an introduction to our sample essay question.

Using quotations

You can either use quotations which are **separate** from your writing and start a new line, or you can use **embedded** quotations. Here is an example of a longer separate quotation:

An advantage of the relationship for both men is that they have someone who cares for them:

'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world ... With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us.'

This type of longer, separate quotation is usually used to emphasise a point that the writer is making. However, you must be careful that your quotation is not too long. You don't get extra marks for copying out long sections of the novel.

The other type – the embedded quotation – is usually just a few words from the novel inserted into a sentence. Here is an example:

We know that George has known Lennie for a long time: 'Him and me was both born in Auburn.'

An embedded quotation can be a sophisticated way of using quotations in your essay. It is a good way of showing the examiner that you have good overall knowledge of the novel. Another advantage of using embedded quotations is that they don't interrupt the flow of your writing, as a separate quotation might. However, the most important thing when using either type of quotation is that the quotation is relevant and helps you explain your point in some way.

Remember: even though using quotations is important when you are answering your essay question, making close references to the text can also be very effective. Look at this example:

Rather than let Lennie face an angry mob, George chooses to shoot him in the most compassionate way he can think of, by asking Lennie to remember the dream they shared and shooting him from behind.

This extract shows knowledge of the novel and offers a personal interpretation of the text. The writer not only demonstrates a knowledge of what happens at this point in the novel, but does so without simply retelling the story.

Activity C.3: Finding quotes

Find quotations in Chapter 1 to support the following points:

- Steinbeck creates an idyllic setting at the start of the novel
- George is convinced that the bus driver deliberately dropped them off at the wrong place
- George doesn't trust Lennie to remember things
- George can be short-tempered with Lennie.

Once you've found your quotations, experiment with using separate and embedded quotations. Write a few sentences about each bullet point.

Linking paragraphs

We have already discussed how each bullet point in the sample question can be used to make one or two paragraphs. However, some candidates find it difficult to link their paragraphs together so that their essay flows, rather than jumping from one subject to another. When you write your essay plan you may notice that the ideas you have for one bullet point are connected to other ideas you want to use for other bullet points. If this is the case you can use these ideas to help your essay flow easily from one paragraph to another. Look at this example (in bold) of a phrase that links a following paragraph with the previous paragraph:

George is described as *small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features*. Lennie is described as the opposite to George: we are told that he is *a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders*.

As well as looking very different, it soon becomes clear that George and Lennie play very different roles in their relationship ...

Many candidates overuse the word 'but' to link their ideas. Instead you could use:

- However
- Yet
- On the other hand
- In contrast to this
- Another example is
- A different example is

Practise using these expressions in your essays to help your writing to become more fluent.

Activity C.4: Link words

What other words or expressions could you add to the list above which would help your writing to flow?

Writing a conclusion

The purpose of a conclusion is to sum up your ideas and show that you have come to a considered point of view after discussing the ideas in the question. Sometimes an essay question will ask you if you agree or disagree with a particular statement. You might have stated both sides of the argument in your essay. If this is the case then you will need to say which side of the argument you agree with more in your conclusion.

You can include some of your own personal ideas about the question in your conclusion. This can be helpful because it shows the examiner that you have your own independent ideas about the novel.

However, the most important thing about a conclusion is that you refer back to the question. This shows the examiner that you haven't lost sight of your original purpose in writing the essay. The tone of your conclusion should show that you have an 'overview' of your whole essay. You could use phrases like;

'after examining several aspects of this question, it seems to me that ...'

Or *'after discussing both sides of the argument, it has become clear that ...'*

Statements like this show the examiner that you have weighed up the points that you have made in your essay and arrived at a final decision about the question which was asked.

Improving a sample essay (Grade D)

Look at this essay question and its sample answer and as you read through, try to think of ways in which you could improve this essay.

Question

Remind yourself of the description of Lennie's fight with Curley. Write about the different ways in which this passage is important in *Of Mice and Men*.

Write about:

- the different aspects of Lennie shown in the passage
- what it reveals about the relationship between George and Lennie, and about Curley
- how this passage links to other parts of the novel
- the importance of the passage in the novel as a whole.

Essay

When Lennie fights Curley it all starts because of a misunderstanding. Lennie is still smiling because he's been talking to George and Candy about getting a farm and Curley comes in looking for a fight and he thinks Lennie is taking the mickey out of him.

First Curley had a go at Slim but Slim wasn't having any of it. Then Curley tried to fight Carlson but he had to back down because Carlson said, 'I'll kick his head in.' Then Curley sees Lennie sitting there and smiling, so he starts a fight with him.

I think that Lennie is really confused and he doesn't understand what is going on. He calls out to George to find out what to do and Slim wants to stop the fight but George says 'no' and tells Slim to wait for a minute. Because Lennie is confused he doesn't know what to do, so he doesn't fight back. I think that in a way Curley is a coward because he knows that everyone on the ranch knows that his dad is the boss, so if anyone fights him then they might get the sack.

Then George shouts out 'Get him' and there's a big change in Lennie. Suddenly he grabs Curley's fist in mid-air and he crushes it in his huge hand. Then Lennie goes from being like a scared child to being powerful and scary himself. This bit shows that Curley is a wimp because when Lennie grabs his hand, he isn't that strong, he just flops about like a fish.

At the end of the fight, they manage to get Lennie to let go of Curley's hand and Slim says to Curley that he has to say that he got his hand caught in a machine, so that George and Lennie won't get the sack.

I think that this passage is important because it shows you just how strong and powerful Lennie is and that he can be dangerous.

Improving the essay

This essay makes some valid points about the fight between Lennie and Curley, but there is plenty of room for improvement. To make it into a 'C' grade answer, you would need to improve on these things:

- Although the essay has a fairly good structure, it doesn't have an introduction or conclusion.
- The language is too informal. Phrases like, 'had a go' and 'taking the mickey' are slang expressions and need to be replaced with something more suitable.
- There is only one accurate short quote in the essay; the other quote is inaccurate.
- There is too much emphasis on retelling the story of the fight between Lennie and Curley, instead of making valid points about what is asked for in the bullet points.
- The third bullet point (how the passage links to other parts of the novel) isn't answered at all.

Activity C.5: Improving the essay

Using the suggestions above, make improvements to the essay.

Sample essay (Grade C)

Lennie, George and Slim all have a part to play in the fight against Curley. Discuss the roles they play in the lead-up to the fight. Write about:

- What we have learned about Curley so far
- Lennie, George and Slim's attitude towards Curley
- Curley's attitude towards each of them
- How important Slim and George's support was in encouraging Lennie to fight back

Curley is the boss's son. He doesn't do much manual labour and he knows that he's never going to get sacked. He has got a wife. We never learn her name, but in the beginning George is disgusted to learn that Curley wears a glove full of vaseline to keep one hand smooth for his new wife. He doesn't seem to care for her very much because he's hardly ever with her and she's always looking to talk with the other guys. He visits whorehouses, so that would say something about the state of their marriage.

He is a bully. He's always picking on guys bigger than himself to prove his strength and he sees in Lennie the perfect opportunity to assert himself. Unfortunately, despite Lennie's size he's anything but a fighter. Lennie is all brawn and no brain, but as Slim said, 'I can see Lennie ain't a bit mean.'

Just before the fight we see the closest thing to Slim losing his cool. He gets fed up with Curley asking him where his wife is. 'Well you been askin' me too often. I'm getting God damn sick of it.' Curley backs off and doesn't want to pick a fight with Slim, but Carlson and Candy join in and Curley is wound up and feeling threatened. I think Slim's initial irritation contributed to Curley being wound up and looking for someone to vent it on. I think Curley had always been looking for an excuse to fight Lennie so when he saw Lennie smiling at the memory of the ranch he jumped at the chance to interpret that as smiling at everyone getting at him and thought that was justification for challenging him to a fight.

George had identified Curley early on as trouble. 'This guy Curley sounds like a son-of-a-bitch to me. I don't like mean little guys.' George realised that he might use Lennie to prove himself. George had given Lennie strict instructions on how to avoid any set-to with Curley: 'He figures he's got you scared and he's gonna take a sock at you the first chance he gets.' Lennie is frightened and ironically wants George to protect him. Although Lennie is physically strong, he doesn't have the brains to avoid trouble.

George tells Lennie to keep away from Curley, but he knows that Curley may still find an excuse to attack him. George recognises Curley as a certain type, 'Curley don't take no chances. He always wins,' and George knows that Lennie could change this. Even though George wants to avoid trouble he would also enjoy Lennie giving him his just desserts and teaching him a lesson. 'Don't let him pull you in – but if the son-of-a-bitch socks you – let him have it.' It is noticeable that George and Lennie don't say anything to Curley before the fight. They stay well out of it.

In the extract, Lennie doesn't fight back. 'He is too frightened to defend himself.' Even though George tells him to fight back he doesn't do so immediately. This shows that Lennie isn't really a fighter.

George knows that Lennie could hurt Curley more than he ever could himself, but Slim is so angry with Curley that he wants to get him himself. He calls him a dirty little rat. Rats are filthy vermin. They carry disease and are disliked by most people. They have to sneak around to avoid getting caught. This makes me think of Curley as being sneaky and playing dirty. He hit Lennie when he wasn't looking.

The fact that Lennie took his hands away from his face and looked about for George after he told him to fight back makes me think that Lennie always obeys George and if George had not been there Lennie would have probably just let Curley beat him up. I don't think Lennie noticed Slim jumping up to get Curley himself, but I reckon Slim would have done it if George hadn't stopped him. It seems that George is the one controlling who fights Curley and when. Lennie just does what he's told.

Activity C.6: Summary

Summarise each paragraph in a sentence. Identify the points made. Keep the question in mind.

Higher Tier

Unpacking a question

Read the extract below taken from Chapter 5 of *Of Mice and Men*. How much sympathy do you feel for Candy at this point, and why?

George turned and went quickly out of the barn. Old Candy watched him go. He looked helplessly back at Curley's wife, and gradually his sorrow and his anger grew into words. 'You God damn tramp,' he said viciously. 'You done it, di'n't you? I s'pose you're glad. Everbody knowed you'd mess things up. You wasn't no good. You ain't no good now, you lousy tart.' He sniveled, and his voice shook. 'I could of hoed in the garden and washed dishes for them guys.' He paused and then went on in a singsong. And he repeated the old words: 'If they was a circus or a baseball game ... we would of went to her ... jus' said 'ta hell with work an' went to her.

Analysis

Some questions provide an extract from the novel and ask you to discuss a particular aspect. These types of questions are useful for a number of reasons: the extract provides you with a lot of information in itself and it can be easily annotated, helping you to plan your essay effectively. An extract can also help you to make links with other relevant passages in the novel. For example, if the extract were about Curley's wife you might also consider it appropriate to mention other times when she has appeared.

An extract can also help to focus your response and provide parameters for your essay. Because of the time pressure you are under in an exam it is sometimes helpful to narrow down the choices and provide you with a starting point rather than having the whole novel to choose from. The question itself is a 'character' question. Questions for *Of Mice and Men* are likely to fall into one or more of the following categories:

- character
- viewpoint
- theme
- plot
- setting and atmosphere.

It is important to ensure that the answer you provide corresponds to the question asked. So, first of all, it is a good idea to make sure that you know what you are being asked.

It is helpful to unpack the question and rewrite it in your own words. Below is a list of possible interpretations of the sample question.

- Do I feel sorry for Candy and why?
- Have I felt more sympathy for Candy at other points in the novel?
- Does Candy's behaviour in this extract change the way that I feel about him?

Activity D.1: Unpacking the question

Read the extract below in which Curley's wife finds Lennie and Candy in Crooks's harness room. A change comes over Crooks in this extract. What do we learn about him here and elsewhere?

Crooks stood up from his bunk and faced her. 'I had enough,' he said coldly. 'You got no rights comin' in a colored man's room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now you jus' get out, and get out quick. If you don't, I'm gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.'

She turned on him in scorn. 'Listen, Nigger,' she said. 'You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?'

Crooks stared hopelessly at her, and then he sat down on his bunk and drew into himself.

She closed on him. 'You know what I could do?'

Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall. 'Yes ma'am.'

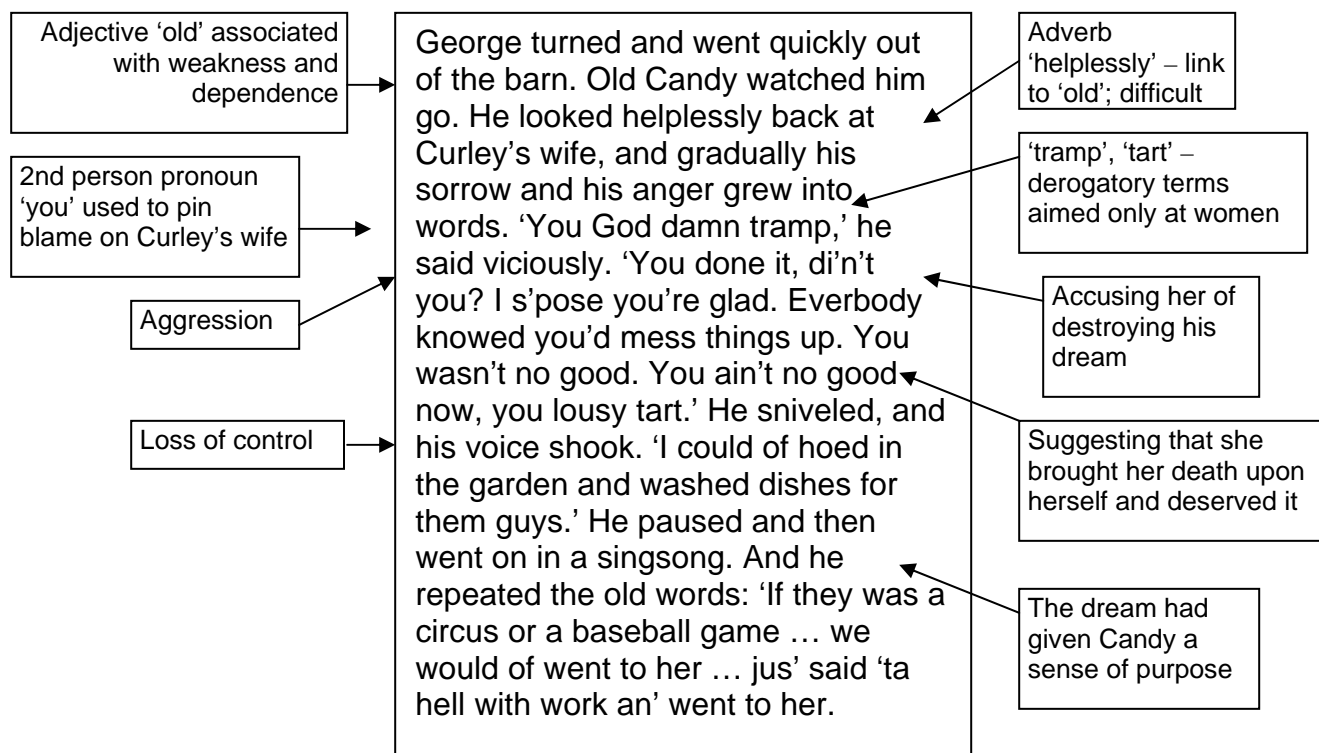
'Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't funny.'

Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego – nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, 'Yes, ma'am,' and his voice was toneless.

Unpack the question: write down other questions that you would need to answer your essay.

Writing an essay plan

A useful starting point is with the extract. Below is an annotated version of the extract from the sample question. Comments that are relevant to the question have been added.



Key points

Annotating the extract raises other relevant points that would need to be explored in the essay:

- What the dream meant to Candy
- What the future now holds for Candy
- Why he blames Curley's wife and whether he is justified in doing so
- Why Candy is more angry with Curley's wife than Lennie
- How Steinbeck wants the reader to feel.

Activity D.2: Annotating for an essay plan

Annotate the following extract and write down points that would need to be covered in your essay **‘A change comes over Crooks in this extract. What do we learn about him here and elsewhere?’**

Crooks stood up from his bunk and faced her. ‘I had enough,’ he said coldly. ‘You got no rights comin’ in a colored man’s room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now you jus. Get out, and get out quick. If you don’t, I’m gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.’

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She closed on him. ‘You know what I could do?’

Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall. ‘Yes ma’am.’

‘Well, you keep your place then, nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain’t funny.’

Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego – nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, ‘Yes, ma’am,’ and his voice was toneless.

With the sample question, there are close links between the selected extract and the scene when Curley’s wife finds Candy and Lennie in Crooks’s harness room. Consider which other parts in the novel are worth referring to when responding to your question.

Writing a detailed plan

Before actually writing the essay, it is often useful to produce a plan. With practice, this should take less than five minutes and as long as you stick to your plan and your plan is thought through and organised, it ensures that your essay is well structured and remains relevant throughout.

From unpacking the question, annotating the passage and making links with other appropriate parts of the novel, you have actually assembled a lot of material for your essay already. This stage is about the organisation of that material.

The main body

In the planning stage you may notice that some points group together naturally. Think of these groupings as the forming of paragraphs. It is a good idea to elaborate on the points made when unpacking the question.

- What the dream meant to Candy
 - Provided him with a sense of purpose (link to extract – ‘I could of hoed in the garden’)
 - Independence
 - Hope

- What the future now holds for Candy
 - Dependent on Curley’s family again
 - Despair and loneliness
 - Shattered illusions – even worse than before
- Why he blames Curley’s wife and whether he is justified in doing so
 - Needs a focus for his anger
 - Candy considers himself morally superior to Curley’s wife
 - Curley’s wife had called him a ‘lousy ol’ sheep’ – presenting him as useless
 - Her death had prevented the possibility of realising the dream
- Why Candy is more angry with Curley’s wife than with Lennie
 - Curley’s wife is a vehicle for attitudes towards women at this time
 - He can’t blame Lennie – part of the dream as well – knows not his fault
- How Steinbeck wants the reader to feel
 - ‘Old’ Candy, ‘helpless’ – words that invoke sympathy
 - misogynist attitude – ‘tart’, ‘tramp’
 - sympathy for Curley’s wife – no forgiveness or release even after her death

Activity D.3: Unpacking

Unpack the points that you made for Activity D.2, page 31.

Writing an introduction

The introduction should make an initial response to the question and show the examiner that you have understood the question. A useful tactic is to begin with a statement that responds directly to the question being asked.

The introduction should also, briefly, provide any relevant background information and context. *Briefly* is the key word here: you will not help yourself by rewriting the novel in your own words.

Writing a conclusion

The introduction and conclusion are a similar structure. They frame the main body and neither should go into too much detail. All elaborations, explorations and discussions should be limited to the main body.

The conclusion signals the end of your essay. There should not be any new information here. It is an opportunity to draw your essay together and, most importantly, make a final and concise response to the question.

A* essay (1) marked using the AQA scheme

Question

Read the extract below taken from *Of Mice and Men*, Chapter 5. How much sympathy do you feel for Candy at this point?

George turned and went quickly out of the barn. Old Candy watched him go. He looked helplessly back at Curley's wife, and gradually his sorrow and his anger grew into words. 'You God damn tramp,' he said viciously. 'You done it, di'n't you? I s'pose you're glad. Everbody knowed you'd mess things up. You wasn't no good. You ain't no good now, you lousy tart.' He sniveled, and his voice shook. 'I could of hoed in the garden and washed dishes for them guys.' He paused and then went on in a singsong. And he repeated the old words: 'If they was a circus or a baseball game...we would of went to her...jus' said 'ta hell with work an' went to her.'

Essay

I feel a certain degree of sympathy for Candy, who had been living a hopeless existence, disabled and demoted to swamper with little chance of achieving very much, saving little bits of money but with no purpose until Lennie and George's arrival. With them came the dream. Candy finally had something to look forward to and something worthwhile that he could invest in. Instead of being lonely and isolated, separated from the other workers because of his inability to equal them with the manual tasks they carried out, he found allies in Lennie and George. Their friendship eventually extended to encompass him. He was part of something, united by the dream, had some purpose, 'I could of hoed in the garden and washed dishes for them guys.'

I sympathise with Candy in his realisation that the dream would not be fulfilled. I think it is worse to have had hopes dashed than to have had no hopes in the first place. He is now conscious of what he stands to lose. Steinbeck describes him as 'Old Candy', conjuring up images of weakness, frailty and dependence. 'He sniveled and his voice shook.' The implication here is that Candy has lost his self-control. He is becoming consumed by 'his anger and his sorrow.' Lennie was an integral part of the dream and George had no interest in pursuing it without him. It is interesting that Candy does not express his bitterness towards Lennie, but instead towards Curley's wife.

Steinbeck uses Curley's wife to reveal a common attitude towards women and expose the hypocrisy that allows Curley to visit whorehouses, but denies his wife the opportunity to just talk to other men. Candy says to her, 'You gotta husban'. You got no call foolin' aroun' with other guys, causin' trouble.' This type of accusation suggests that Candy considers himself on the moral highground and Curley's wife's superior. This scramble to avoid occupying the lowest rung in the social ladder evokes some pity.

Steinbeck uses a number of characters to represent groups of people and Curley's wife is Steinbeck's vehicle to explore men's oppression of women and the way that they are treated as inferior. Curley's wife is the only developed female character. The others, such as the women in the whorehouse, provide a service for men and are presented through their function rather than as people; their identities are irrelevant. Even with Curley's wife Steinbeck has deliberately maintained a degree of anonymity, never revealing her name.

When having a stake in the dream had first become a possibility for Candy, Curley's wife had arrived soon after, cruelly portraying Candy, Lennie and Crooks as they might appear to others, 'a bunch of bindle stiffs – a nigger an' a dum-dum an' a lousy ol' sheep'. Her description of him as a 'lousy ol' sheep' presented Candy as useless and at this point in the novel I felt some sympathy for Candy along with the other two characters under attack.

Clear introduction, well structured. Responds directly to question. Independent discovery and interpretation of significant details.

Close textual evaluation. Independent interpretation of significant details.

Insight into writer's methods and purposes. Convincing interpretation.

Consistent insight. Subtle response to implications of the question.

Evaluative personal response.

Candy went on to boast that getting them sacked would not matter as they had their own farm. She didn't believe him. Then later, in an ironic twist, Curley's wife's death ensures that they do not, in fact, get their own place.

Strong awareness

Candy is in a vulnerable position on the ranch. Because of having only one arm it was difficult for Candy to find work and he was particularly dispensable. After asserting himself and the others and declaring their independence from Curley and his family, I sympathise with Candy finding himself again reliant on Curley's family's charity as a result of Curley's wife's death

Perceptive

However, I find it difficult to wholly sympathise with a character that reveals himself to be such a misogynist. In the extract Candy calls her a 'tramp' and a 'tart', derogatory terms that are only applicable to women. Candy's words are direct and vicious, he repeatedly uses the second person pronoun 'you' making his tone accusing and pinpointing his anger specifically on Curley's wife. The misogyny extends beyond name-calling and perhaps this is representative of the men's general sentiment towards her.

Close textual analysis.
Independent
discovery.

Furthermore, Candy blames Curley's wife for wrecking his dream, expressing his hatred for her ('... he said viciously. "You done it, di'n't you?"'), putting words into the dead body's mouth, like forcing a false confession. I don't believe that Curley's wife can be held responsible for her own death and feel that Steinbeck always presented her as the underdog at the bottom of the hierarchy, not having her own name and simply referring to her as one of Curley's possessions. I feel that it was easier for Candy to blame her for the loss of the dream. He had colluded with George to defer revealing her death and being Lennie's best friend it had made it difficult for Candy to focus his blame on to Lennie. Instead, an ungenerous spirit is revealed as Candy directs his anger and misery at the dead body in front of him. He is unswervingly unforgiving of Curley's wife: ' "You wasn't no good. You ain't no good now." '

Subtle and forceful
response to implications
of the question
Insightful discovery

'He looked helplessly back at Curley's wife, and gradually his sorrow and his anger grew into words.' Candy's mourning for the loss of his dream and the chance of a happier life is pitiful, but his inability to see beyond his own selfish desires and the weakness in his character that prevents him from expressing anything but violent hatred towards Curley's wife make it difficult to feel much more than pity.

Overall assessment

An articulate and well informed essay. It shows consistent insight and good analytical and evaluative skills. The forceful response to the question remains relevant and demonstrates independent discovery and interpretation throughout.

Note that in order to achieve an A* it is vital that you discuss Steinbeck's use of language and his intentions. Go back through the essay and identify the places where these aspects are explored.

Marking an essay to AQA criteria

Below is an essay for you to mark. At the end of the essay there are some guidance notes adapted from the AQA mark scheme to help you.

Essay question

Read the extract below taken from when Curley's wife finds Lennie and Candy in Crooks's harness room. A change comes over Crooks in this extract. What do we learn about Crooks here and elsewhere in the novel?

Crooks stood up from his bunk and faced her. 'I had enough,' he said coldly. 'You got no rights comin' in a colored man's room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now you jus' get out, and get out quick. If you don't, I'm gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.'

She turned on him in scorn. 'Listen, Nigger,' she said. 'You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?'

Crooks stared hopelessly at her, and then he sat down on his bunk and drew into himself.

She closed on him. 'You know what I could do?'

Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall. 'Yes ma'am.'

'Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't funny.'

Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego – nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, 'Yes, ma'am,' and his voice was toneless.

Essay

This extract shows another side to Crooks' character. At the start of the extract, he is defiant then he becomes more obedient because Curley's wife threatens him. In this essay I will examine the change in Crooks' character and consider other things we learn about him in the novel.

We first hear about Crooks near the start of the novel, when George and Lennie arrive at the ranch. Candy tells them that the boss gave Crooks hell when he was mad because George and Lennie were late. I suppose at this point we feel a bit sorry for Crooks because we already know that he is crippled and it's not fair that the boss bullies him. Candy also says that the boss is a nice guy and at Christmas he brought a gallon of whisky to the bunkhouse and said, 'Drink hearty boys, Christmas comes but once a year'. This shows that the boss has a good side too.

Crooks first appears in the novel at the start of Chapter 4. There is a long description of his room to set the scene. There are lots of tools which he needs to tend to the horses in the stables and there are also some personal items which tell us more about him as a person. He's got medicines for his crooked back, several pairs of boots, an alarm clock and a single-barrelled shotgun. He's also got books including, 'a mauled copy of the California civil code for 1905.' This is because Crooks, as the only black person on the ranch, was always checking his rights in the civil code book.

When Lennie enters Crooks's room, Crooks is a bit upset. 'Crooks was a proud, aloof man. He kept his distance and demanded that other people keep theirs.' Lennie is just a bit lonely and he goes to Crooks's room because he can see the glow of his light shining out of his room.

Lennie goes into Crooks's room looking for company and Crooks scowls at him and says, 'You got no right to come into my room. This here's my room. Nobody got any right in here but me.' Crooks says this because he's afraid of Lennie because of his size. Then Lennie says that he just came to look at his puppy and he saw Crooks's light. Then Crooks explains to Lennie that he is not wanted in the bunkhouse and doesn't want anyone in his room.

When Crooks is talking to Lennie, at first he thinks it's funny and amusing that Lennie doesn't understand much and at this point it seems like they are having a nice conversation. Crooks even opens up a bit and tells Lennie a bit about his own past, 'My old man had a chicken ranch, 'bout ten acres.' But even during this conversation,

Crooks is still a bit defensive, 'I ain't a southern negro ... I was born right here in California,' trying to prove that he's not quite at the bottom of the social ladder.

Then the conversation takes a turn for the worse. It's almost as if Crooks enjoys torturing Lennie with the idea that George won't return from town, at this point we lose a bit of sympathy with Crooks. It is one of the few occasions when Crooks has the power to inflict on others what he has inflicted upon him. However, Crooks soon takes it all back when he sees how aggressive and threatening Lennie becomes when he thinks someone has hurt George, 'Suddenly Lennie's eyes centered and grew quiet, and mad. He stood up and walked dangerously towards Crooks. 'Who hurt George?' He demanded.'

A bit later Candy joins them in Crooks's room. Crooks learns about their dream to run a farm and offers to work with them on the farm. Then Curley's wife comes in. She pretends to be looking for Curley, but it is obvious that she just goes in there because she's lonely and wants some company. The men reject her company and Crooks, in particular, wants her to leave his room. This is at the start of the extract in the question. I think that Crooks is a bit overwhelmed because normally he doesn't have any company and having two people and then Curley's wife is a bit too much, so he tries to assert himself and he asks her to leave. Then Crooks half-threatens Curley's wife by saying, 'I'm gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.' At this point she loses her temper. She quickly reminds him that even though she's a woman, he's black and she has more power. She says, 'I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't funny.' This is because she knows that she could say something, like accusing Crooks of assaulting her that would cause a lynch mob to come after him. At that time in America, black people didn't have many rights. There were black people who were strung up on trees by lynch mobs, so this was a real danger for Crooks. At that time there was also the Ku-Klux-Klan, who used to wear white robes and white pointed hoods. They would look for excuses to attack the black population. Then they would come and get them in the middle of the night and either hang them or tie them to a burning cross.

At the end of the extract Crooks has completely backed off from the argument because he knows what Curley's wife can make happen to him. It's almost like he makes himself invisible. This is quite sad because we imagine that he has been treated badly in the past and he's had to learn how to, 'reduce himself to nothing' so that he can keep himself safe.

I think that this extract is interesting because it shows two sides of Crooks' character. He isn't a travelling worker so he belongs on the ranch and he has a room there. He feels protective of his space. Yet he can't be too proud because there are always people like Curley's wife around who will bring him down a peg or two. It's interesting that even though Curley's wife calls Crooks a 'nigger', which is very offensive, even 'Crooks' is unlikely to be his real name, since it is more likely to be a derogatory reference to his crooked back. This shows just how disempowered Crooks is, as a black man at the time the novel is set.

Activity D.4: Evaluating an essay

Positive aspects of this essay are underlined; negative aspects are broken-underlined and highlighted (visible if viewing on screen or in a colour copy). Positive and negative criteria taken from the AQA mark scheme are highlighted below to correspond with the essay.

Match up negative and positive criteria from the mark schemes with the highlighted parts in the text.

Positive points (Underlined)

Understanding the context of the novel
Structured response to the question
Sustained knowledge of the novel
Use of details to support answer
Exploration of the text
Effective use of quotes
Evaluative comments

Negative points (Broken-underlined)

Unnecessary retelling of the story
Going off at a tangent
Not relevant to the question
Unsupported claims

A* essay (2): coursework

‘Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody never gets no land. It’s just in their head.’ To what extent is *Of Mice and Men* a novel about unfulfilled dreams?

There are a number of characters in *Of Mice and Men* who have dreams of a better life. These characters include George, Lennie and Candy, who dream of a farm of their own, and Curley’s wife, who dreams of becoming a glamorous Hollywood actress. In this essay I will discuss their dreams and the effects on the novel’s characters when their dreams are unfulfilled.

The central characters in *Of Mice and Men* are George and Lennie. Their dream is introduced to the reader in the first chapter,

‘OK. 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’,’ Lennie shouted. ‘An’ have rabbits.’

George and Lennie’s dream is to leave behind their lives as travelling workers and have a place of their own where they can settle down. For Lennie the dream of living on their own farm is closely connected to looking after rabbits. Perhaps this is because the only way that Lennie can actually relate to the dream is through the idea of something practical and touchable which relates to his tactile qualities. Clearly, the material aspect of owning his own land means very little to Lennie. At the start of the novel we learn that Lennie likes to pet soft things, like mice and rabbits. It is this trait that eventually leads to Lennie’s downfall when he tries to smooth Curley’s wife’s soft hair.

However, for George the dream of the farm has other benefits. Firstly, George can see the practical, economic advantage of owning their own place.

‘If I was bright, if I was even a little bit smart, I’d have my own little place, an’ I’d be bringin’ in my own crops, ‘stead of doin’ all the work and not getting what comes up outta the ground.’

Yet it is not just the practical benefits of owning a farm that attract George to this dream. We learn that George has no family – *‘I ain’t got no people’*, and it seems as though the dream of a farm also represents the notion of ‘home’ to George.

‘An’ we’d keep a few pigeons to go flyin’ around the win’mill like they done when I was a kid’... ‘We’d jus’ live there. We’d belong there.’

So, for George, the dream of a farm offers a psychological antidote to his rootless, travelling life and gives him a sense of belonging.

Another attraction of the farm dream is that it gives George the promise of some sense of control and autonomy in his life. In his conversation with Candy about owning a farm, George says:

‘S’pose they was a carnival or a circus come to town, or a ball game, or any damn thing.’ Old Candy nodded in appreciation of the idea. ‘We’d just go to her,’ George said. ‘We wouldn’t ask nobody if we could. Jus’ say ‘We’ll go to her’, an’ we would’.

This shows how powerless George feels in his life and how much power employers exercised over their workers at that time. Another example of George and Lennie’s powerlessness is shown after Lennie’s fight with Curley, the boss’s son; when George’s immediate concern is that they will be ‘canned’ or dismissed. However, in this situation, they retain their jobs because Slim steps in and persuades Curley to say he got his hand caught in a machine.

In Chapter 2 when George and Lennie discuss their dream they are overheard by Candy, the old swamper. Candy is immediately swept up with the idea of owning their own farm and offers his savings to them to make the dream come true. At this point in the novel it seems as if the dream could actually become a reality.

They fell into silence. They looked at one another, amazed. This thing they had never really believed in was coming true. George said reverently, 'Jesus Christ! I bet we could swing her.' His eyes were full of wonder.

What is interesting is that at this point in the novel the dream of the farm actually moves from being a pipe dream which will probably never happen, to an achievable goal which is actually within their grasp. It is Candy's involvement that makes this change take place.

Although Candy shares George's reasons for wanting a farm, there is also an extra dimension for Candy wanting to live on their own place. We get the sense that Candy feels redundant, useless and vulnerable because he is old and has lost his hand. Candy feels uneasy about his future: *"They'll can me purty soon. Jus' as soon as I can't swamp out no bunk houses they'll put me on the county."* So for Candy the dream of the farm means independence – *'nobody could can us'*, because in his present situation he is entirely dependent on the boss's tolerance and charity. In the novel, this is partially demonstrated by Carlson shooting Candy's dog earlier that evening. In an echo of Candy's own situation of the ranch, Carlson, without much pity or concern, shoots Candy's dog because he is old and it is inconvenient to keep him because of the smell. It is not hard to imagine that Candy feels there is a parallel between his own situation and his dog's.

Candy's attachment to the dream of their own farm is demonstrated in Chapter 5 when he realises that all hopes of the dream have come crashing down when he discovers Curley's wife's dead body:

'You God damn tramp', he said viciously. 'You done it, di'n't you? I s'pose you're glad. Ever'body knowed you'd mess things up...' If they was a circus or a baseball game ... we would of went to her ... Never ast nobody's say so.'

Candy's reaction reveals how powerful and important the dream was to him and how bitter and angry he feels because he realises that their dream will now not be fulfilled.

In the novel, Curley's wife also experiences an unfulfilled dream. In Chapter 5 she tells Lennie that she dreamed of becoming a Hollywood actress. However, we learn that her dream did not come true because, firstly, her mother wouldn't let her join a travelling show and later, when she met a guy in show business who said he'd write to her, she didn't receive the letter and became convinced that her mother had stolen it. Even though she blames her mother, we get the feeling that these dreams would not have come true anyway. When she talks about meeting the guy in show business she demonstrates an innocent, teenage attitude and her language reveals that it is likely that she was being duped by the guy she met:

'Nother time I met a guy, an' he was in pitchers. Went out to the Riverside Dance Palace with him. He says he was gonna put me in the movies. Says I was a natural. Soon's he got back to Hollywood he was gonna write to me about it'... 'I never got that letter'.

As the conversation progresses Curley's wife explains how she married Curley in a disappointed over-reaction to not being able to fulfil her dream.

'I always thought my ol' lady stole it. Well, I wasn't gonna stay no place where I couldn't get nowhere or make something of myself, an' where they stole your letters. I ast her if she stole it, too, an' she says no. So I married Curley. Met him out to the Riverside Dance Palace that same night.'

This demonstrates Curley's wife's frustration and her unconsidered approach to life. Steinbeck has created Curley's wife, like many other characters in the novel, as a character with an underlying pathos. She admits to Lennie that her marriage to Curley is an unhappy one, *'I don't like Curley. He ain't a nice fella'*. Unfortunately the sadness of not being able to fulfil her dream leads her to marry Curley, which in turn leads to the tragedy of her early death. It is interesting that, unlike George, Lennie and Candy, Curley's wife's dream is based in the past. Yet even though it is over and done with, she still clings to it as an important part of her identity and she still needs to talk about it, even if her only audience is Lennie. By having Curley's wife discuss her broken dreams, Steinbeck creates another side to her character, a side we can feel more sympathy with and a contrast to her harsh or vampish sides.

Of all the people on the ranch who might need a dream to keep them going, Crooks seems the one who might need it the most. When he first learns of George, Lennie and Candy's plan to buy their own farm he is sceptical at first. Then when he realises that it might happen, he too is swept along by the idea:

'If you.. guys would want a hand to work for nothing – just his keep, why I'd come an' lend a hand. I ain't so crippled I can't work like a son-of-a-bitch if I want to.'

Then, with the arrival of Curley's wife and the ensuing argument, Crooks is reminded of his 'position' as a negro in that society at that time: *"Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny."* After this interaction Crooks withdraws into himself: *'Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego – nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, "yes, ma'am", and his voice was toneless.'*

Crooks is presented as such a powerless character because he was a black man in a prejudiced society, with very limited rights. We find that he has been so affected by the way he is treated by others that he finds it hard to even dream of a better way of life. After Curley's wife has left, Crooks realises that he can't be part of the dream, *'You guys comin' in an' settin' made me forget. What she says is true.'* At the end of the chapter, Crooks withdraws his request to join their future dream farm: *"Member what I said about hoein' and doin' odd jobs?... Well, jus' forget it."* By doing this, Crooks demonstrates a cautious attitude towards the dream, keeping it at arm's length, perhaps because past experiences have taught him not to step out of his 'place' and he doesn't want to be hurt by raising his expectations only to see them dashed.

In Crooks, Steinbeck represents what life would have been like for black workers in California at that time. In an already tough set of circumstances, Crooks has a double disadvantage because he is black and alone. In this sense, Crooks is possibly the saddest character that Steinbeck created in the novel because he can barely even dare to dream of a better life.

At the end of the novel, when George shoots Lennie, George asks Lennie to kneel down, look out across the valley and remember their dream. On one level it seems that George wants Lennie to at least be happy in the final moments of his life. Yet on another level, it seems as if George realises that by shooting Lennie, he is also symbolically killing the dream too. Although there is no practical reason why George and Candy still couldn't get the farm on their own, there is a sense that the spell has been broken and things will never be the same again.

From the start of the novel, when George and Lennie first start to talk about the dream of their own farm we learn that they often talk about this subject:

Lennie pleaded, 'Come on, George. Tell me. Please, George. Like you done before.'
... 'You got it by heart. You can do it yourself.'

We learn that Lennie delights in hearing about the farm over and over, so that it seems like a well loved story that a parent would tell a child. The fact that both men revel in repeating the 'story' makes it seem like a dream and they are almost wishing it to come true. The dream does truly seem like a dream when you consider the cosy, almost fairytale language that George uses to describe their farm:

'Sure, we'd have a little house an' a room to ourself. Little fat iron stove, an' in the winter we'd keep a fire goin'.'

The repeated use of the word 'little' creates a very story-like, unreal atmosphere. George also uses the indefinite article to describe the features of the farm ('a' as opposed to 'the') which again takes away any 'concrete' qualities and makes it seem nebulous. Later we learn that, *'George sat entranced with his own picture'*, and we realise that George has created an unreal picture of the farm which we suspect will not come into being because the story-like descriptions make it seem so remote and unobtainable.

As the novel progresses the reader picks up other clues which hint that the dream of the farm will not be fulfilled. When we first learn about what happened in Weed between Lennie and the girl in the red dress, it becomes apparent that Lennie has the potential to get into trouble in a way that George can't always control. Steinbeck also drops hints about Lennie's impending doom. When George and Lennie first meet Curley's wife, they both realise that she could mean trouble:

'You keep away from her, 'cause she's a rattrap if I ever seen one.'
'Le's go, George. Le's get outta here. It's mean here.'

Through the novel we also learn that Lennie likes to pet soft things, which leads to an accusation of rape, the death of a mouse, then the death of a puppy and we suspect that it could be building up to a greater tragedy. Yet perhaps the biggest clue that George and Lennie's dream will not be fulfilled is in Candy and Lennie's conversation with Crooks:

'I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their head. Hundreds of them. They come, an' they quit an' go on; an' every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it.'

From Crook's words it seems that George and Lennie's is a common dream for migrant workers at that time and we suspect that they, like many others, will not get their piece of land.

In this novel Steinbeck has used the plight of migrant workers travelling around California in the Depression as a vehicle to explore the concept of having a 'dream'. This ties in with the idea of the 'American Dream' – the notion that if you work hard enough and try hard enough, then anybody can succeed and get what they want. In *Of Mice and Men* not only does Steinbeck comment on the conditions in 1930s America but he also uses a range of almost representative characters to explore and make observations about how different people formulate dreams and react to the loss of them.

In the end, Steinbeck's message about dreams is set out in the title of the novel. Taken from the Burns poem, the line 'of mice and men' refers to the plight of a mouse who worked hard to build a nest, only to have it destroyed by a farmer. The message in the poem and the message in the novel are the same and it is a message that is very much about broken and unfulfilled dreams. No matter what we plan or how hard we work, some things are inevitable and fate has a plan of its own which we can't avoid.

Activity D.5: From coursework to exam essay

A coursework essay, such as the one above, is usually a lot longer and more detailed than an essay you would write in an examination. However, if the same question did appear on an examination paper, which points from the essay above would you use and why?

Teachers' notes

Introduction

This resource can be printed out and copied in its entirety or in sections. It can also be placed on your school or college network for student or staff access. Part 1 is designed for use while students are reading the text and immediately on finishing it. Part 2 is geared towards exam preparation and is suitable for classroom or independent study.

The text quoted and referred to in this resource is the Penguin paperback edition (2000).

Part 1

Activity A.1. The outcome of this activity could be developed and used for English GCSE coursework (speaking and listening).

Activity 1.2. It might be worth discussing with the class beforehand the impact of George's presence or absence on the imaginary meeting between Lennie and the boss. The outcome of this activity could be used for English GCSE coursework (speaking and listening).

Activity 2.1. For questions 1 and 2 more able pupils could be steered towards the way in which Steinbeck uses language. For example, Curley's wife 'bridles' – like a frisky colt – in reaction to George and Lennie's presence, suggesting her overt sexuality. There is a very different use of language to describe Slim's movements, which reflect a sense of integrity in his character.

Activity 2.2. The outcome of this activity could be used as a piece of GCSE English coursework. More able students could find their own examples of George's language in the novel rather than using the ones provided.

Activity 3.1. The outcome of this activity could be used as a piece of English GCSE coursework (written or speaking and listening).

Activity 3.3. The outcome of this activity could be used as GCSE English coursework (speaking and listening).

Activity 4.2. Note that this refers to Activity 2.3. You could reuse the character picture from Activity 2.3.

Activity 5.1. It would probably be more effective to do this activity before watching this part of the film. A possible extension activity could be to compare the film's version of events in the novel, with how the pupils suggested this extract could be translated into a play, concentrating in particular on similarities and differences in setting and atmosphere. The outcome of this activity could be used as a piece of GCSE English coursework (media).

Activity 5.3. The outcome of this activity could be used for GCSE coursework (speaking and listening).

Activity 6.2. It would probably be more effective to do this activity before watching this part of the film. A possible extension activity is to compare the film's version of these events in the novel with how the pupils have suggested this extract could be translated into film. The outcome of this activity could be used as a piece of GCSE coursework (media).

Activity B.3. This could lead to a class display.

Part 2

Answering AQA exam questions

This whole section is designed to be student-friendly, with very little teacher input required. Although it can be worked through in the classroom, it can equally be given to students to be used at home as a pre-examination revision task. As well as breaking down the process of writing examination essays, this section also asks students to complete different activities as they work through this process.

Improving a sample essay

This section aims to enable pupils to think about the common mistakes made in examinations. The sample essay that pupils have to improve is a D grade essay. If the pupils follow the guidance given in the bullet points they should be able to transform the essay into a C grade. By completing this activity it should raise pupils' awareness of the criteria needed to achieve a C grade at GCSE.

Higher Tier

Some of the relevant points have already been covered under 'Foundation Tier'. Please refer to the Foundation section for use of quotations and linking paragraphs.

Activity D.3. This refers to Activity D.2 (page 31).

Marking an essay to AQA criteria

The exam board's mark scheme has been used to provide guidelines only for the positive and negative criteria for marking an essay. The wording has been adapted in order to make it student-friendly.