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Class Period\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Of Mice and Men* Study Guide**

**Background Information:**

***Author Biography***

John Steinbeck (1902-1968) was born in Salinas, California. He came from a middle class family. His father was the county treasurer, and his mother was a former schoolteacher. She inspired and encouraged his love of books and reading.

He attended Stanford University, but he did not graduate. In his twenties, he traveled to New York City with the dream of supporting himself as a freelance writer. When his efforts failed, he went home to California. He then began to work seriously on novels and short stories.

When Steinbeck was a young adult, he spent his summer vacations working as a hired hand on local ranches. His interactions with the people he met during those summers greatly influenced the characters he created throughout his career. In an interview following the publication of *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck revealed that all the characters in the novel are composites based on real people.

Steinbeck said in his essay “Advice For Beginning Writers” (1963) that he still felt afraid every time he began writing a story, even though he had a long successful writing career behind him. He went on to say that a writer who does not experience this fear may not have an appropriate respect for the art of writing.

***Book Summary***

*Of Mice and Men* was published in 1937. The story epitomizes the themes and ideas that Steinbeck propounded throughout his novels: the plight of the laborers, the perils of isolation, and the hope for a better future. Set in California during the Great Depression, *Of Mice and Men* is an excellent vehicle to learn about the life and times of migrant works in the 1930s. With its beautiful descriptive passages, easily accessible dialogue, and fast-paced timeline, it is very easy to follow along. Readers are drawn in by the memorable characters, that, ironically, represent a segment of society that was largely ignored in its day. Analyzing the balance of power, the importance of friendship, and the role of dreams in our lives allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the text while applying valuable lessons to their own lives.

***Character List***

* **Lennie Small**: a nondescript, hulking creature of a man whose childlike mentality continually gets him into scrapes with men who neither respect nor understand him.
* **George Milton**: a small, lean man, used to fighting for his place in the world. He oversees and protects Lennie.
* **Slim**: a tall skinner (a highly skilled mule-driver) that serves as a counselor to the ranch hands.
* **Candy**: The one-handed ranch worker who has lived past his prime.
* **Curley’s wife**: a woman who is not respected by the men on the ranch.
* **Crooks**: the African-American stable buck is called Crooks because of a spinal injury inflicted by a kicking horse.
* **Curley**: the boss’ son, he possesses a jealous, cruel streak.

**Chapter 1**

1. Identify and give a physical description of Lennie and George using information from the text.

a. George

b. Lennie

1. Examine Lennie's use of language and thinking. At what approximate age level is he functioning?
2. What trouble did George and Lennie have in Weed? Explain the connection between Lennie's mouse and what happened in Weed?
3. What does the dead mouse in Lennie's pocket reveal about him?
4. Why does George urge Lennie to remain quiet when they meet the boss at the ranch where they'll be working?
5. George bursts into a long speech about what he could do if he were alone. What could he do?
6. Why are George and Lennie different from the other "guys like us that work on ranches"?
7. What dream to George and Lennie share?
8. Before they go to sleep, George tells Lennie to hide in the bush near their campsite and wait for him to come if he gets into any trouble. This is an example of foreshadowing. What prediction can readers draw from George's instructions?
9. Why does Steinbeck describe Lennie in animalistic terms? What animals is Lennie compared to in this chapter? Explain why Steinbeck might have made that choice.

**Chapter 2**

1. What does George answer when the boss asks what he is trying to put over?
2. What evidence to we have that suggests that the boss is not a working man?
3. Describe Curley's personality. Why do you think he acts the way he does?
4. The stable buck doesn't live in the bunk house with the other men. Why not?
5. What advice does George give Lennie after Curley and the swamper leave?
6. Why does Carlson suggest shooting Candy's dog? How does Candy respond?
7. How is Candy's connection to his dog similar to George's relationship with Lennie?
8. What does Slim have that Lennie wants?
9. How do George and Lennie react to seeing Curley's wife for the first time? What is her name? Why do you think Steinbeck chose to name her this way?
10. Why do Curley and his wife pose such a threat to George and Lennie? What George worried about?

**Chapter 3**

1. Slim and George have a long conversation in which George tells Slim about the mean-spirited jokes he used to play on Lennie. What happened that made George want to change the way he treated Lennie?
2. How does George explain the incident in Weed? What does he think caused Lennie to do what he did?
3. Does George's analysis of what happened in Weed seem accurate? Do you think Lennie would have done what he was being accused of trying to do?
4. What card game does George play? How might this be symbolic?
5. Who is responsible for Lennie's actions in the novel? Explain your answer.
6. The discussion of Curley's wife leads Whit to invite George to come with the other men "to old Suzy's place." What is "old Suzy's place," and what purpose does it serve in the novel? Why doesn't George invite Lennie to come along?
7. What will Lennie's job be when he and George get their land?
8. In what way is Candy similar to his dog? How does this further explain his reluctance to do what Carlson suggests?
9. What does Candy want when he hears about George's and Lennie's plans? What is he willing to contribute?
10. Why did Curley fight with Lennie? What happened?

**Chapter 4**

1. Curley's wife is lonely because she's the only woman on the ranch. Candy is lonely because of his age. Why is Crooks so lonely?
2. Why does Lennie wander into Crook's room? What is Crooks initial reaction to the intrusion?

1. Lennie tells Crooks about the land. What is his reply at first?
2. What does Crooks want when he believes there might really be land?
3. What is Curley's wife's reaction to the dream of the farm with rabbits?
4. What does Curley's wife threaten to do to Crooks?
5. How does Crook's react to her threats?
6. Why do you think he reacted in this way?
7. Why did Crooks change his mind about the farm after Curley's wife left?

**Chapter 5**

1. What happened to Lennie's puppy? What is his reaction?
2. Why did Curley's wife come to see Lennie? What does she end up telling him about herself?
3. In what ways does Curley's wife tempt Lenny?
4. What ends up happening to her in the barn? Is she personally responsible, in any way, for what happens to her in this chapter? Explain your answer.
5. Is Lenny responsible for what happens to Curley's wife in this chapter? Explain why, or why not?
6. Where do you think Lenny went, when he ran away? Explain your answer.
7. What was George's reaction when he found out about Curley's wife?
8. What makes the men believe that Lenny is armed?
9. Why is Candy so upset at the end of this chapter?
10. What might happen to Lennie if Curley catches him? Do you think he deserves the punishment he might receive? Explain your response.

**Chapter 6**

1. Is Lennie a violent person? Do you think he understands when he does something wrong?
2. What does Lennie fear his punishment will be? What does this reveal about his mental age?
3. How is George and Lennie's conversation, in the river valley, similar to the one they had in chapter one?
4. Why does George struggle with the details of the farm when describing it to Lenny on the river bank?
5. Why does George feel he is responsible for what happened?
6. What options does George have for dealing with Lennie?
7. List some of the possible alternatives George may have considered? What might have been some possible consequences for each alternative?

a.

b.

c.

1. Who is the only one who really understands what George did?
2. Explain the significance of the last few lines in the novel.
3. Does the ending of this novel show the strength of George's love for Lennie, or the weakness of his love for his friend? Explain your response.