

## *Of Mice and Men* Study Questions

### Chapter 1

1. Describe George. Based on his words and actions in this chapter, what is his personality like?
2. Describe Lennie. Based on his words and actions in this chapter, what is his personality like? Why do you think he wants to pet rabbits and mice so badly?
3. Aside from Lennie's limited intelligence, what reasons might there be for his selective memory? What narrative function does it serve at the beginning of the story?
4. What is George and Lennie's relationship like? In general, how does George treat Lennie, and how does Lennie react to George? Why do you think George stays with Lennie? Does he seem to benefit from the relationship in any way?
5. What reasons does George have for waiting until the next morning to go to the ranch where they will work?
6. What potential instances of foreshadowing can you find in Chapter 1?

### Chapter 2

1. What is significant about the description of the bunkhouse at the beginning of the chapter—for example, what does it suggest about the lives of the men who live in it?
2. Describe Slim. What techniques does the narrator use to describe him? Based on this initial description of him and his interactions with George and Lennie, what roles might you guess he will play in the story?
3. Describe Curley based on his words and actions, as well as the other characters' feelings about him. What does his choice of wife and his way of dealing with her show about him? What ideas and messages do you think the narrator wants to convey through his character?

### Chapter 3

1. How has George changed since his and Lennie's early days together? What do you think made him change?
2. How do you think the narrator intends for Carlson to be viewed by the reader? What details of the narration support your interpretation?
3. What ideals are represented by the farm that George tells Lennie they're going to buy? What is the emotional effect of the images George describes? Why is it so important for them to have this dream?
4. Describe Candy based on his words and actions to this point in the story. Why is he so eager to join George and Lennie on their farm? What social commentary is suggested by his desperation? Why do you think he says "I ought to have shot that dog myself"?
5. What factors lead to Curley's attack on Lennie? What is both ironic and tragic about Lennie's fearsome strength?

## Chapter 4

1. Describe Crooks, based on the appearance of his room and his extended conversation with Lennie, Candy, and Curley's wife. What theme is suggested by his speech to Lennie? Why is he perhaps the purest example of the motif of loneliness and isolation? How does he cope with these feelings and with his constant sense of vulnerability? What is ironic about his apparent anger at being disturbed by Lennie and Candy?
2. What can you guess about the origin of Crooks's name? How is his back injury symbolically significant, along with Candy's missing hand and Lennie's retardation? What is suggested by the descriptions of him rubbing liniment on his back at the beginning and end of the chapter?

## Chapter 5

1. Describe Curley's wife based on her words and actions throughout the story. How do you think the reader is meant to feel about her? Support your opinion with details from the story. Why do you think her name is never revealed?
2. Discuss the various factors that lead to the death of Curley's wife. How does the story convey a sense of inevitability about this tragedy? What clues are there that Lennie doesn't understand the true seriousness of his actions? What is the effect of the narrator's description of her dead body lying on the floor of the barn?
3. Why do you think George gives up on the dream of buying the farm after Curley's wife is killed? What is the emotional and thematic significance of the fact that they seem to have come so close to making the dream a reality?

## Chapter 6

1. What is symbolically and thematically significant about the snake's being eaten by the heron at the beginning of the chapter?
2. What do Lennie's visions suggest about his psychological makeup?
3. Why do you think George decides to shoot Lennie? What does he try to communicate to Lennie before shooting him? What event in the novel foreshadows this? What theme does the novel's ending convey?
4. What is significant about the last sentence of the novel?

## Review Questions:

1. What characteristics do most of the main characters in the novel have in common? How does this commonality relate to the thematic meaning of the novel?
2. How are the mouse (at the beginning of the story) and the puppies significant in the story?
3. How is the farm that George and Lennie plan to buy thematically significant in the story? (Refer to Crooks's comments about it in Chapter 4.) How does it reflect the "American Dream"? What symbolic meaning do you think it has? Why is the line that Lennie likes to repeat, "live off the fat of the land," particularly important? What does fat symbolize?

4. What do you think the prostitutes and alcohol mentioned in the story symbolize?
5. What is the main conflict in the story—what underlying problem causes the plot to develop as it does? Think beyond the superficial aspects of the story and consider the universal problem it dramatizes.
6. The title of the novel is a reference to a Scottish poem in which the narrator compares the human condition to the life of a mouse. The most famous line from that poem is traditionally rendered in Standard English as “the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” What connection does this line have to the story?
7. Describe Steinbeck’s narrative style. From what point of view is the story told? Discuss the language of the narration—the diction, sentence structure, dialogue, descriptions, and use of literary devices. How is it an appropriate style for the story?
8. What do you think are the main messages of the book? For example, what theme is suggested by George and Lennie’s relationship?
9. Although *Of Mice and Men* is primarily a story about individual people, what social commentary can be inferred from the story?