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Modern American Novel : Case Study

John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men

Full Summary of the Novel

Two migrant workers, George and Lennie, have been let off a bus miles away from the California farm where they are due to start work. George is a small, dark man with "sharp, strong features." Lennie, his companion, is his opposite, a giant of a man with a "shapeless" face. Overcome with thirst, the two stop in a clearing by a pool and decide to camp for the night. As the two converse, it becomes clear that Lennie has an intellectual disability, and is deeply devoted to George and dependent upon him for protection and guidance. George finds that Lennie, who loves petting soft things but often accidentally kills them, has been carrying and stroking a dead mouse. George angrily throws it away, fearing that Lennie might catch a disease from the dead animal. George complains loudly that his life would be easier without having to care for Lennie, but the reader senses that their friendship and devotion is mutual. He and Lennie share a dream of buying their own piece of land, farming it, and, much to Lennie's delight, keeping rabbits. George ends the night by treating Lennie to the story he often tells him about what life will be like in such an idyllic place.

The next day, the men report to the nearby ranch. George, fearing how the boss will react to Lennie, insists that he'll do all the talking. He lies, explaining that they travel together because they are cousins and that a horse kicked Lennie in the head when he was a child. They are hired. They meet Candy, an old "swamper," or handyman, with a missing hand and an ancient dog, and Curley, the boss's mean-spirited son. Curley is newly married, possessive of his flirtatious wife, and full of jealous suspicion. Once George and Lennie are alone in the bunkhouse, Curley's wife appears and flirts with them. Lennie thinks she is "purty," but George, sensing the trouble that could come from tangling with this woman and her husband, warns Lennie to stay away from her. Soon, the ranch-hands return from the fields for lunch, and

George and Lennie meet Slim, the skilled mule driver who wields great authority on the ranch. Slim comments on the rarity of friendship like that between George and Lennie. Carlson, another ranch-hand, suggests that since Slim's dog has just given birth, they should offer a puppy to Candy and shoot Candy's old, good-for-nothing dog.

The next day, George confides in Slim that he and Lennie are not cousins, but have been friends since childhood. He tells how Lennie has often gotten them into trouble. For instance, they were forced to flee their last job because Lennie tried to touch a woman's dress and was accused of rape. Slim agrees to give Lennie one of his puppies, and Carlson continues to badger Candy to kill his old dog. When Slim agrees with Carlson, saying that death would be a welcome relief to the suffering animal, Candy gives in. Carlson, before leading the dog outside, promises to do the job painlessly.

Slim goes to the barn to do some work, and Curley, who is maniacally searching for his wife, heads to the barn to accost Slim. Candy overhears George and Lennie discussing their plans to buy land, and offers his life's savings if they will let him live there too. The three make a pact to let no one else know of their plan. Slim returns to the bunkhouse, berating Curley for his suspicions. Curley, searching for an easy target for his anger, finds Lennie and picks a fight with him. Lennie crushes Curley's hand in the altercation. Slim warns Curley that if he tries to get George and Lennie fired, he will be the laughingstock of the farm.

The next night, most of the men go to the local brothel. Lennie is left with Crooks, the lonely, Black stable-hand, and Candy. Curley's wife flirts with them, refusing to leave until the other men come home. She notices the cuts on Lennie's face and suspects that he, and not a piece of machinery as Curley claimed, is responsible for hurting her husband. This thought amuses her. The next day, Lennie accidentally kills his puppy in the barn. Curley's wife enters and consoles him. She admits that life with Curley is a disappointment, and wishes that she had followed her dream of becoming a movie star. Lennie tells her that he loves petting soft things, and she offers to let him feel her hair. When he grabs too tightly, she cries out. In his attempt to silence her, he accidentally breaks her neck.

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Lennie flees back to a pool of the Salinas River that George had designated as a meeting place should either of them get into trouble. As the men back at the ranch discover what has happened and gather together a lynch party, George joins Lennie. Much to Lennie's surprise, George is not mad at him for doing "a bad thing." George begins to tell Lennie the story of the farm they will have together. As he describes the rabbits that Lennie will tend, the sound of the approaching lynch party grows louder. George shoots his friend in the back of the head.

When the other men arrive, George lets them believe that Lennie had the gun, and George wrestled it away from him and shot him. Only Slim understands what has really happened, that George has killed his friend out of mercy. Slim consolingly leads him away, and the other men, completely puzzled, watch them leave.

Character List

Lennie

A large, lumbering, childlike migrant worker. Due to his intellectual disability, Lennie completely depends upon George, his friend and traveling companion, for guidance and protection. The two men share a vision of a farm that they will own together, a vision that Lennie believes in wholeheartedly. Gentle and kind, Lennie nevertheless does not understand his own strength. His love of petting soft things, such as small animals, dresses, and people's hair, leads to disaster.

In-depth characterization of Lennie

Although Lennie is among the principal characters in *Of Mice and Men*, he is perhaps the least dynamic. He undergoes no significant changes, development, or growth throughout the story and remains exactly as the reader encounters him in the opening pages. Simply put, he loves to pet soft things, is blindly devoted to George and their vision of the farm, and

possesses incredible physical strength. Nearly every scene in which Lennie appears confirms these and only these characteristics.
Although Steinbeck's insistent repetition of these characteristics makes Lennie a rather flat character, Lennie's simplicity is central to Steinbeck's conception of the novella. *Of Mice and Men* is a very short work that manages to build up an extremely powerful impact. Since the tragedy depends upon the outcome seeming to be inevitable, the reader must know from the start that Lennie is doomed, and must be sympathetic to him. Steinbeck achieves these two feats by creating a protagonist who earns the reader's sympathy because of his utter helplessness in the face of the events that unfold. Lennie is totally defenseless. He cannot avoid the dangers presented by Curley, Curley's wife, or the world at large. His innocence raises him to a standard of pure goodness that is more poetic and literary than realistic. His enthusiasm for the vision of their future farm proves contagious as he convinces George, Candy, Crooks, and the reader that such a paradise might be possible. But he is a character whom Steinbeck sets up for disaster, a character whose innocence only seems to ensure his inevitable destruction.

George

A small, wiry, quick-witted man who travels with, and cares for, Lennie. Although he frequently speaks of how much better his life would be without his caretaking responsibilities, George is obviously devoted to Lennie. George's behavior is motivated by the desire to protect Lennie and, eventually, deliver them both to the farm of their dreams. Though George is the source of the often-told story of life on their future farm, it is Lennie's childlike faith that enables George to actually believe his account of their future.

In-depth characterization of George

Like Lennie, George can be defined by a few distinct characteristics. He is short-tempered but a loving and devoted friend, whose frequent protests against life with Lennie never weaken his commitment to protecting his friend. George's first words, a stern warning to Lennie not to drink so much lest he get sick, set the tone of their relationship. George may be terse and impatient at times, but he never strays from his primary purpose of protecting Lennie.

Unlike Lennie, however, George does change as the story progresses. The reader learns that he is capable of change and growth during his conversation with Slim, during which he admits that he once abused Lennie for his own amusement. From this incident George learned the moral lesson that it is wrong to take advantage of the weak. *Of Mice and Men* follows him toward a difficult realization that the world is designed to prey on the weak. At the start of the novella, George is something of an idealist. Despite his hardened, sometimes gruff exterior, he believes in the story of their future farm that he tells and retells to Lennie. He longs for the day when he can enjoy the freedom to leave work and see a baseball game. More important than a ball game, however, is the thought of living in safety and comfort with Lennie, free from people like Curley and Curley's wife, who seem to exist only to cause trouble for them. Lennie is largely responsible for George's belief in this safe haven, but eventually the predatory nature of the world asserts itself and George can no longer maintain that belief. By shooting Lennie, George spares his friend the merciless death that would be delivered by Curley's lynch mob, but he also puts to rest his own dream of a perfect, fraternal world.

Candy

An aging ranch handyman, Candy lost his hand in an accident and worries about his future on the ranch. Fearing that his age is making him useless, he seizes on George's description of the farm he and Lennie will have, offering his life's savings if he can join George and Lennie in owning the land. The fate of Candy's ancient dog, which Carlson shoots in the back of the head in an alleged act of mercy, foreshadows the manner of Lennie's death.

Curley's wife

The only female character in the story, Curley's wife is never given a name and is only mentioned in reference to her husband. The men on the farm refer to her as a "tramp," a "tart," and a "looloo." Dressed in fancy, feathered red shoes, she represents the temptation of female sexuality in a male-dominated world. Steinbeck depicts Curley's wife not as a villain, but rather as a victim. Like the ranch-hands, she is desperately lonely and has broken dreams of a better life.

Crooks

Crooks, the Black stable-hand, gets his name from his crooked back. Proud, bitter, and caustically funny, he is isolated from the other men because of the color of his skin. Despite himself, Crooks becomes fond of Lennie, and though he derisively claims to have seen countless men following empty dreams of buying their own land, he asks Lennie if he can go with them and hoe in the garden.

Curley

Curley, the boss's son, wears high-heeled boots to distinguish himself from the field hands. Rumored to be a champion prizefighter, he is a confrontational, mean-spirited, and aggressive young man who seeks to compensate for his small stature by picking fights with larger men. Recently married, Curley is plagued with jealous suspicions and is extremely possessive of his flirtatious young wife.

Slim

A highly skilled mule driver and the acknowledged “prince” of the ranch, Slim is the only character who seems to be at peace with himself. The other characters often look to Slim for advice. For instance, only after Slim agrees that Candy should put his decrepit dog out of its misery does the old man agree to let Carlson shoot it. A quiet, insightful man, Slim alone understands the nature of the bond between George and Lennie, and comforts George at the book’s tragic ending.

Carlson

A ranch-hand, Carlson complains bitterly about Candy’s old, smelly dog. He convinces Candy to put the dog out of its misery. When Candy finally agrees, Carlson promises to execute the task without causing the animal any suffering. Later, George uses Carlson’s gun to shoot Lennie.

The Boss

The stocky, well-dressed man in charge of the ranch, and Curley’s father. He is never named and appears only once, but seems to be a fair-minded man. Candy happily reports that the boss once delivered a gallon of whiskey to the ranch-hands on Christmas Day.

Aunt Clara

Lennie's aunt, who cared for him until her death, does not actually appear in the work except at the end, as a vision chastising Lennie for causing trouble for George. By all accounts, she was a kind, patient woman who took good care of Lennie and gave him plenty of mice to pet.

Whit

A ranch-hand.

Themes

The Predatory Nature of Human Existence

Of Mice and Men teaches a grim lesson about the nature of human existence. Nearly all of the characters, including George, Lennie, Candy, Crooks, and Curley's wife, admit, at one time or another, to having a profound sense of loneliness and isolation. Each desires the comfort of a friend, but will settle for the attentive ear of a stranger. Curley's wife admits to Candy, Crooks, and Lennie that she is unhappily married, and Crooks tells Lennie that life is no good without a companion to turn to in times of confusion and need. The characters are rendered helpless by their isolation, and yet, even at their weakest, they seek to destroy those who are even weaker than they. Perhaps the most powerful example of this cruel tendency is when Crooks criticizes Lennie's dream of the farm and his dependence on George. Having just admitted his own vulnerabilities, Crooks zeroes in on Lennie's own weaknesses.

In scenes such as this one, Steinbeck records a profound human truth: oppression does not come only from the hands of the strong or the powerful. Crooks seems at his strongest when he has nearly reduced Lennie to tears for fear that something bad has happened to George, just as Curley's wife feels most powerful when she threatens to have Crooks lynched. The novella suggests that the most visible kind of strength—that used to oppress others—is itself born of weakness.

Fear

Most every character in *Of Mice and Men* lives in fear. As the novella opens, George and Lennie have just fled from an attempted lynching in Weed, and

when they arrive at the ranch Lennie intuits that it “ain’t no good place” and wants to leave. Candy fears suffering the same end as his dog, who was killed after Carlson deemed it too old and weak to last. Crooks fears lynching, a fate that Curley’s wife threatens. Curley fears losing power over the workers, and almost everyone fears Curley. Curley’s wife says that the men are “all scared of each other,” and even Slim, who is the most level-headed of the bunch, thinks “ever’body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.” *Of Mice and Men* suggests that fear is an inextricable part of life for oppressed people, and that this fear extends even to their oppressors. Curley fears losing status so much because he knows his status isn’t earned but instead comes from his position as the boss’s son. Fear is the price he pays for his ownership of the land, and this same fear trickles down to everyone who works the land.

The Impossibility of the American Dream

Most of the characters in *Of Mice and Men* admit, at one point or another, to dreaming of a different life. Before her death, Curley’s wife confesses her desire to be a movie star. Crooks, bitter as he is, allows himself the pleasant fantasy of hoeing a patch of garden on Lennie’s farm one day, and Candy latches on desperately to George’s vision of owning a couple of acres. Before the action of the story begins, circumstances have robbed most of the characters of these wishes. Curley’s wife, for instance, has resigned herself to an unfulfilling marriage. What makes all of these dreams typically American is that the dreamers wish for untarnished happiness, for the freedom to follow their own desires. George and Lennie’s dream of owning a farm, which would enable them to sustain themselves, and, most important, offer them protection from an inhospitable world, represents a prototypically American ideal. Their journey, which awakens George to the impossibility of this dream, sadly proves that the bitter Crooks is right: such paradises of freedom, contentment, and safety are not to be found in this world.

Fraternity and the Idealized Male Friendship

One of the reasons that the tragic end of George and Lennie’s friendship has such a profound impact is that one senses that the friends have, by the end of the novella, lost a dream larger than themselves. The farm on which George and Lennie plan to live—a place that no one ever reaches—has a magnetic quality, as Crooks points out. After hearing a description of only a few

sentences, Candy is completely drawn in by its magic. Crooks has witnessed countless men fall under the same silly spell, and still he cannot help but ask Lennie if he can have a patch of garden to hoe there. The men in *Of Mice and Men* desire to come together in a way that would allow them to be like brothers to one another. That is, they want to live with one another's best interests in mind, to protect each other, and to know that there is someone in the world dedicated to protecting them. Given the harsh, lonely conditions under which these men live, it should come as no surprise that they idealize friendships between men in such a way.

Ultimately, however, the world is too harsh and predatory a place to sustain such relationships. Lennie and George, who come closest to achieving this ideal of brotherhood, are forced to separate tragically. With this, a rare friendship vanishes, but the rest of the world—represented by Curley and Carlson, who watch George stumble away with grief from his friend's dead body—fails to acknowledge or appreciate it.

Symbols

George and Lennie's Farm

The farm that George constantly describes to Lennie—those few acres of land on which they will grow their own food and tend their own livestock—is one of the most powerful symbols in the book. It seduces not only the other characters but also the reader, who, like the men, wants to believe in the possibility of the free, idyllic life it promises. Candy is immediately drawn in by the dream, and even the cynical Crooks hopes that Lennie and George will let him live there too. A paradise for men who want to be masters of their own lives, the farm represents the possibility of freedom, self-reliance, and protection from the cruelties of the world.

Lennie's Puppy

Lennie's puppy is one of several symbols that represent the victory of the strong over the weak. Lennie kills the puppy accidentally, as he has killed many mice before, by virtue of his failure to recognize his own strength. Although no other character can match Lennie's physical strength, the huge Lennie will soon meet a fate similar to that of his small puppy. Like an

innocent animal, Lennie is unaware of the vicious, predatory powers that surround him.

Candy's Dog

In the world *Of Mice and Men* describes, Candy's dog represents the fate awaiting anyone who has outlived his or her purpose. Once a fine sheepdog, useful on the ranch, Candy's mutt is now debilitated by age. Candy's sentimental attachment to the animal—his plea that Carlson let the dog live for no other reason than that Candy raised it from a puppy—means nothing at all on the ranch. Although Carlson promises to kill the dog painlessly, his insistence that the old animal must die supports a cruel natural law that the strong will dispose of the weak. Candy internalizes this lesson, for he fears that he himself is nearing an age when he will no longer be useful at the ranch, and therefore no longer welcome.

Topics

Discuss the relationship between George and Lennie.

The friendship that George and Lennie share forms the core of the novella, and although Steinbeck idealizes and perhaps exaggerates it, he never questions its sincerity. From Lennie's perspective, George is the most important person in his life, his guardian and only friend. Every time he does anything that he knows is wrong, his first thought is of George's disapproval. He doesn't defend himself from Curley because of George's stern instruction for him to stay out of trouble, and when he mistakenly kills his puppy and then Curley's wife, his only thought is how to quell George's anger. He has a childlike faith that George will always be there for him, a faith that seems justified, given their long history together.

George, on the other hand, thinks of Lennie as a constant source of frustration. He has assumed responsibility for Lennie's welfare and has, several times, been forced to run because of trouble Lennie has inadvertently caused. Life with Lennie is not easy. However, despite George's frequent bouts of anger and frustration, and his long speeches

about how much easier life would be without Lennie, George is clearly devoted to his friend. He flees from town to town not to escape the trouble Lennie has caused, but to protect Lennie from its consequences. The men are uncommonly united by their shared dream of a better life on a farm where they can "live off the fatta the lan'," as Lennie puts it. George articulates this vision by repeatedly telling the "story" of the future farm to his companion. Lennie believes unquestioningly in their dream, and his faith enables the hardened, cynical George to imagine the possibility of this dream becoming reality. In fact, George's belief in it depends upon Lennie, for as soon as Lennie dies, George's hope for a brighter future disappears.

Discuss the role of foreshadowing in the work.

Of Mice and Men is an extremely structured work in which each detail anticipates a plot development that follows. Almost every scene points toward the inevitable tragic ending. In the first scene, we learn that Lennie likes to stroke mice and other soft creatures, but has a tendency to kill them accidentally. This foreshadows the death of his puppy and the death of Curley's wife. Furthermore, when George recounts that Lennie once grabbed a woman's dress and would not let go, the reader anticipates that similar trouble will arise at the ranch, especially once Curley's flirtatious wife appears on the scene. Finally, Lennie's panicked but brutal squeezing of Curley's hand anticipates the force with which he grabs Curley's wife by the throat, unintentionally breaking her neck.
The events surrounding Candy's dog, meanwhile, parallel Lennie's fate. Candy is devoted to the animal, just as George is devoted to Lennie, yet the old man must live through the death of his companion, who is shot in the back of the head, just as Lennie is killed at the end of the book. When Candy voices regret that he should have shot his own dog rather than allow Carlson to do it, his words clearly foreshadow the difficult decision that George makes to shoot Lennie rather than leave the deed to Curley's lynch mob. The comparison between the two "gentle animals" is obvious; both are victims of a plot carefully designed for tragedy.

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Why did Steinbeck choose the title *Of Mice and Men*?

Steinbeck chose the title *Of Mice and Men* after reading a poem called "To a Mouse" by Robert Burns, in which the poet regrets accidentally destroying a mouse's nest. The poem resonates with several of *Of Mice and Men*'s central themes: the impermanence of home and the harshness of life for the most vulnerable.

The struggles of the mouse whose home is destroyed parallels with the struggles of George, Lennie, and other migrant workers whose dreams of purchasing land are destroyed by the trials of the Great Depression. Their own fate is not so different from the poem's mouse, or the dead mouse Lennie pulls from his pocket—the characters are destined for destruction beyond their control.

What happened in Weed?

In the town of Weed, Lennie—a lover of soft things—touched a girl's dress, became frightened when she started to "squawk," and was accused of rape after the girl reported Lennie to the authorities. The men of Weed ran George and Lennie out of town, and the two escaped by hiding in an irrigation ditch until nightfall. This anecdote foreshadows the death of Curley's wife, which happens as a result of a nearly identical misunderstanding. Because George observes first-hand the misunderstanding in Weed, he can be sure that Lennie is not guilty of deliberately murdering Curley's wife (and so can the reader).

Why does Carlson shoot Candy's dog?

Carlson shoots Candy's dog because it is old, sick, and no longer able to work as a sheep dog. Carlson says the dog "ain't no good" to Candy, unable to see that the dog still has value as Candy's friend and companion. This assertion reveals how in the world of migrant laborers, companionship is so rare and undervalued that many laborers don't even recognize a loving relationship when they do see it. The shooting of Candy's dog is also framed as a merciful act intended to prevent the

dog's suffering, which foreshadows George's decision to shoot Lennie rather than let him be imprisoned or tortured by Curley.

Why does Curley attack Lennie?

After Slim denies Curley's accusation that he was hanging around Curley's wife, Curley looks to take his anger out on an easier target, and chooses Lennie. Lennie is "smiling with delight" as he dreams about the future farm, ignorant that he has attracted Curley's humiliated anger. By picking on Lennie, Curley demonstrates that he is willing to prey on the most vulnerable in order to maintain his dominance over the workers. *Of Mice and Men* suggests that this is one way that the property-owning classes uphold their power.

Why does George kill Lennie?

George knows that if he doesn't kill Lennie himself, Curley will torture and murder Lennie in a more inhumane way, making Lennie suffer for killing Curley's wife. George must choose between mercifully shooting the friend he loves with his own hands, or allowing Lennie's inevitable lynching by a mob that does not care about Lennie's fate. *Of Mice and Men* argues that on the bottom rung of the American economy, the destitute are left with only stark and terrible choices.

Why does Lennie have a dead mouse in his pocket?

As the story begins, Lennie has a dead mouse in his pocket because he likes to pet soft things but doesn't know his own strength and accidentally killed the mouse when he pet it too hard. When George realizes that Lennie has a dead mouse in his pocket, he asks him what he would "want of a dead mouse, anyways," and Lennie explains that he "could pet it with [his] thumb while [they] walked along." Even after George throws the mouse into the woods, Lennie finds it and tries to hide it once again, saying, "I wasn't doin' nothing bad with it, George. Jus' strokin' it." The dead mouse introduces Lennie's clear obsession with soft things and unintentional destruction of them, foreshadowing future events in the story.

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How is Lennie different from the other men?

From the first pages of the novella, Steinbeck makes it clear that Lennie is different. Despite his large size, he comes across as childlike, and George seems to have to take care of him. For example, George warns Lennie not to drink too much water and has to repeatedly remind him where they are heading, saying, “So you forgot that awready, did you? I gotta tell you again, do I?”

It is not until later in the story when George confides in Slim that readers learn some clues about Lennie’s “differences.” George says, “He ain’t no cuckoo . . . He’s dumb as hell, but he ain’t crazy . . . I knowed his Aunt Clara. She took him in when he was a baby and raised him up.” Even though there is never a specific diagnosis given to Lennie, he seems to have a different intellectual ability than the other adult men just as Slim describes when he says, “He’s jes’ like a kid, ain’t he.

Why do George and Lennie travel together?

George and Lennie travel together because they have known each other since they were children and a natural friendship developed over time. George explains their history when he confides in Slim, saying, “Him and me was both born in Auburn. I knowed his Aunt Clara. She took him in when he was a baby and raised him up. When his Aunt Clara died, Lennie just come along with me out workin’. Got kinda used to each other after a little while.” George explains to Slim that even though Lennie can be a challenge, their friendship and companionship make life better for both of them.

Why does Curley wear a glove on one hand?

Curley wears a “glove fulla Vaseline” on one hand because, according to Candy, “he’s keepin’ that hand soft for his wife.” Since farm work is physical and tough on a person’s hands, the Vaseline will prevent at least one of Curley’s hands from becoming chapped and rough—something he clearly believes his wife would find undesirable. The choice to wear the Vaseline-filled glove reveals a lot about Curley’s

character, such as his need to feel superior in strength but also in sexuality.
Later in the novella, George refers to the glove once again, saying disgustedly, “Glove fulla Vaseline . . . An’ I bet he’s eatin’ raw eggs and writin’ to the patent medicine houses.” During this story’s time period of the 1930s, both of these “remedies” were believed to increase physical and sexual strength in men, so George makes assumptions about Curley due to his wife’s flirty behavior and the glove full of Vaseline.

How does Lennie’s puppy die?

Like many of Lennie’s destructive incidents, his puppy dies because Lennie can’t control his own strength. After sadly staring at the dead puppy for a while, Lennie, sorrowful and confused, asks aloud, “Why do you got to get killed? You ain’t so little as mice. I didn’t bounce you hard.” Later, Lennie attempts to explain how the puppy died to Curley’s wife, saying, “He was so little . . . I was jus’ playin’ with him . . . an’ he made like he’s gonna bite me . . . an’ I made like I was gonna smack him . . . an’ . . . an’ I done it. An’ then he was dead.” Both of Lennie’s explanations make it clear that while he didn’t intend to hurt the puppy, his inability to control his own strength caused the puppy’s death.

Why does Lennie kill Curley’s wife?

Lennie kills Curley’s wife because of his inability to control his own strength and emotions. However, Lennie doesn’t simply kill her—several unfortunate events lead to her death. First, Curley’s wife insists on talking with Lennie even after he warns her that he “ain’t supposed to” because “George’s scared [he’ll] get in trouble.” Then Curley’s wife invites Lennie to pet her soft hair, but when he gets too rough, she “jerked her head sideways, and Lennie’s fingers closed on her hair and hung on.”
Finally, when Curley’s wife yells at Lennie to let go, he panics in fear that George will get mad and not let him tend the rabbits, so he puts his hand over her mouth. The more Curley’s wife struggles and yells, the

angrier and more scared Lennie becomes, leading him to shake her harder until “she was still, for [he] had broken her neck.”

Why is Crooks’s room set apart from the others?

Race is the central reason why Crooks has his own room set apart from the other men at the ranch. When Lennie visits Crooks’s room trying to make friends, Crooks keeps his guard up and explains the situation, saying, “You got no right to come in my room . . . You go on get outta my room. I ain’t wanted in the bunk house, and you ain’t wanted in my room.”

When Lennie persists and asks why Crooks is not allowed in the bunkhouse, Crooks presents the clear racial reasoning when he says, “’Cause I’m black. They play cards in there, but I can’t play because I’m black. They say I stink. Well, I tell you, you all of you stink to me.” This segregation presents the larger topic of racism and social position throughout this story as Crooks is ultimately “put in his place” just as the ranch workers have their place in the lowly bunkhouse.

Why isn’t Curley’s wife’s name ever revealed?

Curley’s wife’s name is never revealed as a way of showing her lack of independence and identity while also displaying the role of women on a ranch in the 1930s. In other words, she is Curley’s possession, confined to a dependent role as “wife.” Curley’s wife’s unhappiness and regret are directly connected to this lack of autonomy. She confides to Lennie, “I ain’t used to livin’ like this. I coulda made somethin’ of myself . . . Maybe I will yet . . . I don’ like Curley. He ain’t a nice fella . . . Coulda been in the movies, an’ had nice clothes[.]” Clearly, Curley’s wife’s discontent is directly linked to the fact that she has lost her identity by marrying Curley.

What does Slim do at the ranch?

Slim’s job at the ranch is a jerkline skinner, the head mule driver, and “the prince of the ranch, capable of driving ten, sixteen, even twenty mules with a single line to the leaders.” Aside from Slim’s specific job at

the ranch, he is looked up to by all, making him a leader in his work and among the men: “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.” Slim holds an unchanging, respected role at the ranch.

Do George and Candy still plan to buy the dream farm after Lennie’s death?

George and Candy give up on the plan to buy the dream farm once they realize that Lennie has killed Curley’s wife and his future is bleak. Without Lennie, the hope of the dream of escaping their difficult life as ranchers is washed away. After desperately trying to hold on to the possibility of still pursuing the dream of owning land, Candy asks, “‘You an’ me can get that little place, can’t we, George? . . . Can’t we?’ Before George answered, Candy dropped his head and looked down at the hay. He knew.” George explains that he only believed they would buy a farm one day because Lennie liked to hear about it so much.