

Of Mice and Men Book Notes

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

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Author/Context

John Steinbeck was born in his parents' bedroom on February 27, 1902, in Salinas, California. Adjacent to the Salinas River, much of the town's commerce centered upon shipping and agriculture, specifically vegetable farming. Early in the century many people were migrating to California, and many were trying to succeed in farming. Steinbeck's grandfather had been a dairy farmer, but his own father avoided this life. John was accepted to Stanford University for the fall of 1919, but before he left for university he would spend the summer working as a laborer. While digging canals Steinbeck was afforded his first opportunity to meet and observe this class of unskilled laborers who would later inhabit much of his work.

Steinbeck spent six years at Stanford, studying literature and writing, leaving in 1925 without having earned a degree. Anxious to head to New York City and become a writer, Steinbeck found work on a freighter and began his trip east. In New York Steinbeck worked a variety of jobs to support himself while working on his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, which was published in 1929. Following this, Steinbeck married for the first time, and he and his wife headed back to California. He would publish two novels during this time, but he did not achieve success until 1935, with the release of *Tortilla Flat*. The novel focuses upon the *paisanos* of the Monterey area, paralleling their lives with those of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Steinbeck would next publish *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), which he would also rewrite as a play, *The Red Pony* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). *Of Mice and Men* brought him national recognition and *The Grapes of Wrath* was considered by many critics to be his masterpiece. His experience as a laborer played an important role in his writing. While discussing *Of Mice and Men* during an interview, Steinbeck said:

"I was a bindlestiff myself for quite a spell. I worked in the same country that the story is laid in. The characters are composites to a certain extent. Lennie was a real person. He's in an insane asylum in California right now. I worked alongside him for many weeks. He didn't kill a girl. He killed a ranch foreman. Got sore because the boss had fired his pal and stuck a pitchfork right through his stomach. I hate to tell you how many times. I saw him do it. We couldn't stop him until it was too late." (Parini 27)

Similarly, before writing *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck spent two years studying the movement of migrant workers into the California valley. This novel was his attempt to bring their problems and suffering to life.

During the 1940s Steinbeck wrote several novels which focused on war. But neither *The Moon is Down* (1942) or *Bombs Away* (1942) brought him critical acclaim. Several stories of modern life follow with *Cannery Row* (1945) and *The Wayward Bus* (1947). In 1952 Steinbeck published *East of Eden*, which he regarded as his highest achievement. The book tells the story of a symbolic family conflict set against the backdrop of war. To Steinbeck's disappointment, the epic did not achieve the acclaim he felt it deserved.

Steinbeck spent five years translating much of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. This work was published after his death in *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1976). Steinbeck would write one more novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), followed by *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962), a record of his cross-country trip with his poodle, Charley.

In 1962 Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize in Literature. He died in New York City four years later.

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Plot Summary

The novel takes place in the California valley along the Salinas River. There are two settings for the action: the banks of the Salinas River and a nearby ranch. George Milton, small and smart, and his friend Lennie Small, a large man with mild retardation, are on their way to jobs at a ranch. They stop by the Salinas River to take a break from their long walk.

Lennie cannot remember where they are going, and George, annoyed, reminds him about their jobs. Lennie looks in his pocket for his work card and finds a dead mouse, which he found by the side of the road. Lennie likes to pet soft animals, like mice and puppies, but he is very strong and often kills his delicate pets. Lennie tries to hide his mouse from George, who demands it from him and throws it across the river.

That evening, Lennie goes to find his mouse, which makes George very angry. He argues with Lennie, but soon feels bad and tries to console him. George tells Lennie how one day soon they will own a farm of their own, where they will grow their own food and have rabbits Lennie can tend.

The next morning Lennie and George arrive at the ranch. The boss is annoyed because they have arrived late. The boss' son, Curley, is a small man who hates big guys like Lennie. He and George have a small confrontation. Soon after Curley leaves his wife enters. Her provocative dress and pose make George anxious. He warns Lennie to keep away from both Curley and his wife.

Two more workers, Slim and Carlson, come into the bunkhouse. Slim's dog just had puppies, and Lennie is anxious to have something soft to pet. Carlson suggests that Candy, an old man and fellow worker, kill his old smelly sheepdog and take one of Slim's pups.

Slim gives Lennie a pup, and he spends much of the evening out in the barn petting it. George tells Slim what happened at their last job. They were run out of town after Lennie unintentionally assaulted a woman. The woman went to the police and Lennie and George had to leave town.

Candy comes in with his dog and Carlson starts pressuring him to let him kill it. The dog is old and arthritic, but Candy has had him for years. Since he is the only one who wants to keep the dog, Candy reluctantly gives in and lets Carlson shoot his old friend.

George and Lennie start talking again about the farm they hope to get, and Candy overhears and asks if he could come too. He has some money saved up, so George decides he can come. Curley comes into the bunkhouse, and when he sees a smile on Lennie's face he imagines that Lennie is laughing at him. He attacks Lennie, who doesn't want to fight. In defense, Lennie grabs Curley's hand and badly breaks it without knowing what he has done.



That evening, everyone goes into town, except for Crooks, the crippled Negro stable buck, and Candy, Lennie, and Curley's wife. Crooks lives alone in the barn because he's black. Lennie comes in looking for his puppy. He and Crooks start talking, and Crooks expresses his feelings of loneliness. Lennie tells Crooks about their farm, but Crooks is doubtful. After listening to Candy for a few minutes, Crooks changes his mind and asks if there might be a place for him on the farm.

Curley's wife comes into the barn, making all the men uncomfortable. Candy tells her to leave. She gets mad and criticizes them and their dream, making Crooks angry. She harshly reminds him he is just a worker, and a black worker at that. Crooks silently hangs his head. There is the sound of the men returning, so Curley's wife leaves. As Candy is leaving, Crooks tells him he wouldn't be interested in coming with them after all.

The next afternoon, Lennie is in the barn alone with his puppy. He accidentally killed it with his strong hands. Curley's wife comes in, and sits down next to Lennie. She tells him how she could have been in the movies, but Lennie continues rambling about the rabbits on their farm. When she finds out how much Lennie likes soft things, she offers to let him touch her hair. Lennie strokes too hard and she gets frightened. He tries to quiet her and accidentally breaks her neck. Lennie runs and hides by the banks of the river. Candy finds Curley's wife, and goes to tell George. The other men come in and see what happened, and they get their guns. They want to find Lennie and kill him.

Lennie is sitting by the banks of the river. George shows up, and he assures Lennie he isn't mad at him. Lennie wants to hear about that piece of land they are going to get, and the rabbits for him to tend. George tells him, and when the men are nearly there, George shoots Lennie in the head. The men appear, and Curley and Carlson congratulate George. Slim understands George didn't want to shoot Lennie, and he leads him away, offering him comfort and a drink.

Major Characters

George Milton: George is a small man, with a dark face and sharp features. Smart and quick, he often gets Lennie out of trouble. He and Lennie travel together, and George takes care of him. When Lennie kills Curley's wife, George is forced to shoot his friend.

Lennie Small: George's companion. Lennie is a big man with great strength; his body and features are round and undefined. He is mildly retarded, and his speech is slow and simple. He loves soft things, and this desire often gets him in trouble. This is the case when Lennie kills Curley's wife.

Aunt Clara: Lennie's aunt, who asked George to take care of Lennie before she died.

Candy: An old man who works at the ranch, who lost his hand in a farming accident. He has an old sheepdog that Carlson kills out of mercy. Candy is a friend to George and Lennie, and plans to buy the farm with them.

Curley: The boss' son. He is a small, belligerent man, who especially dislikes big guys like Lennie. The only married worker, he wears a glove full of Vaseline on his hand, to keep it soft for his wife. He is very suspicious of the workers, and frequently asks if any of them are sleeping with his wife. None of the workers like him, but they put up with him.

Curley's wife: Curley's provocative spouse. She does not like her husband, and spends much of her time hanging around the workers. She is a pretty woman, but most of the men think she's troublesome and bold. She is often sad and frustrated that her life did not turn out any better, since in her youth a man offered to put her in the movies. Lennie kills her by mistake, when feeling her soft hair.

Slim: A quiet man with a great presence. He is the best worker on the ranch, and very respected. Sensitive and wise, he offers advice and comfort to the men.

Carlson: Another worker. He kills Candy's old sheepdog and later argues that Lennie should be killed for killing Curley's wife. George steals his gun, a Luger, and uses it to shoot Lennie.

Crooks: The crippled Negro stable buck. He lives alone in the barn, and is not allowed to enter the other men's quarters because he's black. He almost joins Lennie, George, and Candy in their plan to buy a farm.

boss: The man who owns and runs the farm. He is also Curley's father.

Whit: Another worker.

Bill Tenner: A man who used to work on the ranch. He wrote a letter that got published in a rancher's magazine.

Susy: The woman who owns the bordello the men often visit.

Andy Cushman: A guy Lennie and George knew when they were little. He ended up in jail because of a seductive woman.



Objects/Places

Salinas River: The River is south of Soledad and very close to the ranch. The novel begins and ends on the banks of the river. It is also Lennie's hiding place if he gets into any trouble.

Soledad: The town south of the ranch, in the California valley.

Gabilan Mountains: The mountain range near the ranch and the river.

Mice: Lennie loves to pet soft things. Mice are no exception. But Lennie often kills his tiny pets accidentally, when his petting gets too rough. He and George have an argument in the first chapter when Lennie wants to keep a dead mouse and George won't let him.

Weed: The last town where Lennie and George had a job. They had to leave when Lennie unintentionally assaulted a woman. The woman was wearing a red dress, and Lennie tried to touch it. She got scared and started to struggle, which made Lennie confused and caused him to hold on tightly. George heard them, and he had to hit Lennie with a fence post to make him let go. The woman went to the police and told them she was raped. George and Lennie hid in irrigation ditches until night, when they left town. George is careful when he talks about Weed; he doesn't want the wrong people to know (like the boss or Curley) what happened there. George does confide the story to Slim, and shares with him his worry that something like that will happen again.

Rabbits: The farm the men hope to get will have rabbits for Lennie to tend (and pet). Lennie is excited at the idea of this larger pet, because he is less likely to hurt a rabbit than a tiny mouse.

Candy's sheepdog: Candy has had his sheepdog since it was a pup. The arthritic, half-blind dog is his only companion. When Carlson urges Candy to kill it, or to let him kill it, Candy gives in and lets Carlson shoot it. He later feels bad he didn't shoot the dog himself. Candy's relationship to his dog is very similar to George's relationship with Lennie.

Curley's glove: The glove is full of Vaseline, to keep his left hand soft for his wife. All the men find it disgusting.

Pulp magazine: A type of magazine the men read to pass the time. Bill Tenner's letter is in one.

Puppies: Lennie is hopeful that because a puppy is bigger than a mouse, it will be strong enough to support his petting. Slim gives him one of his dog's puppies, which Lennie plays with and pets constantly until he accidentally kills it.

Carlson's Luger: This is the gun Carlson uses to shoot Candy's sheepdog. George will steal it and use it to shoot Lennie.

Quotes

Quote 1: "Evening of a hot day started the little wind to moving among the leaves. The shade climbed up the hills toward the top. On the sand banks the rabbits sat as quietly as little gray, sculptured stones." Chapter 1, pg. 2

Quote 2: "...and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws." Chapter 1, pg. 2

Quote 3: "You'd drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty." Chapter 1, pg. 3

Quote 4: "Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again." Chapter 1, pg. 9

Quote 5: "'Well, we ain't got any,' George exploded. 'Whatever we ain't got, that's what you want. God a'mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble....An' whatta I got,' George went on furiously. 'I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. Jus' keep me shovin' all over the country all the time. An' that ain't the worst. You get in trouble. You do bad things and I got to get you out.'" Chapter 1, pg. 11

Quote 6: "Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place....With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us." Chapter 1, pp. 13-14

Quote 7: "An' why? Because...because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why." Chapter 1, pg. 14

Quote 8: "'Well,' said George, 'we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof...'" Chapter 1, pp. 14-15

Quote 9: "At about ten o'clock in the morning the sun threw a bright dust-laden bar through one of the side windows, and in and out of the beam flies shot like rushing stars." Chapter 2, pp. 17-18

Quote 10: "Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's alla time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy." Chapter 2, pg. 26

Quote 11: "'Ain't many guys travel around together,' he mused. 'I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.'" Chapter 2, pg. 35

Quote 12: "Although there was evening brightness showing through the windows of the bunk house, inside it was dusk." Chapter 3, pg. 38



Quote 13: "Made me seem God damn smart alongside of him." Chapter 3, pg. 40

Quote 14: "He don't give nobody else a chance to win--" Chapter 3, pg. 44

Quote 15: "Well, you ain't bein' kind to him keepin' him alive." Chapter 3, pg. 45

Quote 16: "Carl's right, Candy. That dog ain't no good to himself. I wisht somebody'd shoot me if I got old an' a cripple." Chapter 3, pg. 45

Quote 17: "You seen what they done to my dog tonight? They says he wasn't no good to himself nor nobody else. When they can me here I wisht somebody'd shoot me. But they won't do nothing like that. I won't have no place to go, an' I can't get no more jobs." Chapter 3, pg. 60

Quote 18: "We could live offa the fatta the lan'." Chapter 3, pg. 57

Quote 19: "I could build a smoke house like the one gran'pa had..." Chapter 3, pg. 57

Quote 20: "An' we'd keep a few pigeons to go flyin' around the win'mill like they done when I was a kid." Chapter 3, pg. 58

Quote 21: "I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog." Chapter 3, pg. 61

Quote 22: "Lennie covered his face with huge paws and bleated with terror." Chapter 3, pg. 63

Quote 23: "I seen it over an' over-a guy talkin' to another guy and it don't make no difference if he don't hear or understand. The thing is, they're talkin', or they're settin' still not talkin'. It don't make no difference, no difference....It's just the talking." Chapter 4, pg. 71

Quote 24: "Want me to tell ya what'll happen? They'll take ya to the booby hatch. They'll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog." Chapter 4, pg. 72

Quote 25: "'A guy needs somebody-to be near him.' He whined, 'A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody.'" Chapter 4, pg. 72

Quote 26: "Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land." Chapter 4, pg. 74

Quote 27: "Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely." Chapter 5, pg. 86

Quote 28: "He pawed up the hay until it partly covered her." Chapter 5, pg. 92

Quote 29: "As happens sometimes, a moment settled and hovered and remained for much more than a moment. And sound stopped and movement stopped for much, much more than a moment." Chapter 5, pg. 93

Quote 30: "-I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we'd never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would." Chapter 5, pg. 94

Quote 31: "Already the sun had left the valley to go climbing up the slopes of the Gabilan mountains, and the hilltops were rosy in the sun." Chapter 6, pg. 99

Quote 32: "No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know." Chapter 6, pg. 106

Quote 33: "Sure, right now. I gotta. We gotta." Chapter 6, pg. 106

Quote 34: "The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again." Chapter 6, pg. 106

Quote 35: "'Never you mind,' said Slim. 'A guy got to sometimes.'" Chapter 6, pg. 107

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie Described as an Animal)

Animal 1: The first time we see Lennie, he is immediately compared to an animal:

"...and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws."
Chapter 1, pg. 2.

Throughout the novel there will be many such comparisons, and also occasional comparisons to children and the insane. But it is references to animals that occur most frequently. Such representations of Lennie as an animal color how we respond to him and how accountable we hold him for his actions. Therefore, it is significant that Steinbeck immediately mentions an animal when he first describes Lennie.

Animal 2: After walking into the clearing, Lennie's first action is very animal-like. He falls to his knees and slurps water from the river, just as a horse might, or a dog drinking water from a bowl. George comments:

"You'd drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty." Chapter 1, pg. 3.

Here we have the image of a man who is not intelligent enough to check if the water is fresh, but who also drinks in a very animal-like fashion. Lennie's mental retardation comes across clearly, as he is presented as almost less than human.

Lennie tries to hide his mouse from George, but it is no use. George demands the mouse. In the exchange is another animal comparison which also reveals something about George and Lennie's relationship:

"Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again." Chapter 1, pg. 9.

The task of caring for Lennie has fallen to George, who like a dog's "master", must watch Lennie every moment.

Animal 3: In the description of how he used to play tricks on Lennie, the comparison between Lennie and George as dog and master is reinforced. George tells Slim that Lennie will do anything he tells him to, even jump into the river when he doesn't know how to swim. Much like a faithful dog, Lennie's love is unconditional. He follows orders, even when he doesn't know the harm they might cause.

Animal 4: During the fight between Curley and Lennie, both dog and sheep are used to describe Lennie:

"Lennie covered his face with huge paws and bleated with terror." Chapter 3, pg. 63.

Animal 5: While taunting Lennie with the idea that George might not come back, Crooks predicts Lennie's fate without George:

"Want me to tell ya what'll happen? They'll take ya to the booby hatch. They'll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog." Chapter 4, pg. 72.

Animal 6: After Lennie kills Curley's wife, he attempts to hide what he has done:

"He pawed up the hay until it partly covered her." Chapter 5, pg. 92.

Animal 7: As he enters the brush, Lennie's movement is compared to that of a bear. When he gets to the river he falls to his knees and laps up the water like an animal, just as he did at the beginning of the book.

Topic Tracking: Dreams

Dreams 1: A little bit of land, their own crops and animals-this is all they want. It is a simple American dream. They want to be self-reliant:

"'Well,' said George, 'we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof...'"
Chapter 1, pg. 14-15.

Their perfect world is one of independence. Workers like Lennie and George have no family, no home, and very little control over their lives. They have to do what the boss tells them and they have little to show for it. They only own what they can carry. Therefore, this idea of having such power over their lives is a strong motivation.

Dreams 2: When Whit brings in the pulp magazine with the letter written by Bill Tenner, the men are all very impressed. They are not certain that Bill wrote the letter, but Whit is convinced he did, and tries to convince the others. In the transient life of these workers, it is rare to leave any kind of permanent mark on the world. In this letter Bill Tenner has achieved some of the immortality the other men cannot imagine for themselves.

Dreams 3: When George goes into a full description of the farm, its Eden-like qualities become even more apparent. All the food they want will be right there, with minimal effort. As Lennie says:

"We could live offa the fatta the lan'." Chapter 3, pg. 57.

When George talks about their farm, he twice describes it in terms of things he loved in childhood:

"I could build a smoke house like the one gran'pa had..." Chapter 3, pg. 57.

"An' we'd keep a few pigeons to go flyin' around the win'mill like they done when I was a kid." Chapter 3, pg. 58.

George yearns for his future to reflect the beauty of his childhood.

Dreams 4: The ideal world presented by Crooks also reflects childhood. His father had a chicken ranch full of white chickens, a berry patch, and alfalfa. He and his brothers would sit and watch the chickens. Companionship and plentiful food are both parts of Crooks' dream.

Dreams 5: Curley's wife has a dream that although different in detail from the other's dreams, is still very similar in its general desires. She wants companionship so much that she will try to talk to people who don't want to talk to her, like all the men on the ranch. Unsatisfied by her surly husband, she constantly lurks around the barn, trying to engage the workers in conversation.

The second part of her dream parallels the men's desire for their own land. She wanted to be an actress in Hollywood. She imagines how great it would be to stay in nice hotels, own lots of beautiful clothes, and have people want to take her photograph. Both attention and financial security would have been hers. Like the men she desires friendship, and also material comforts, though the specifics of her dream differ from theirs.

Dreams 6: When George tells Lennie to look across the river and imagine their farm, he lets Lennie die with the hope that they will attain their dream, and attain it soon. George, who must kill Lennie, is not allowed such comfort. He must go on living knowing the failure of their dream, as well as deal with the guilt of having killed his best friend.

Topic Tracking: Friendship

Friendship 1: Despite George's impatience and annoyance with Lennie, and his remarks about how easy his life would be without him, he still believes that:

"Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place....With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us." Chapter 1, pg. 13-14.

And Lennie finishes:

"An' why? Because...because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why." Chapter 1, pg. 14.

The kind of life these men lead, moving all over the country, never knowing anyone very long, and having very little to call their own, is intensely lonely. Even if Lennie is not very bright, he still listens to George, and he remains the one constant in George's transient life. For this George is grateful.

Friendship 2: Slim comes across very differently than the other men. Friendly and understanding, he invites George into conversation. When discussing how George and Lennie travel together, Slim remarks:

"'Ain't many guys travel around together,' he mused. 'I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.'" Chapter 2, pg. 35.

Slim is much more open than most of the men on the ranch, and a marked contrast to Curley, whose can only communicate with fighting. Curley will push his wife away, choosing to go visit prostitutes rather than work on their marriage, whereas Slim attempts to construct a relationship with George the first chance he gets. The men have a deep respect for Slim, and his opinion is the final word on any subject.

Friendship 3: When George tells Slim how he used to play tricks on Lennie, beat him up, and generally abuse him for his own amusement, we get a very different picture of Lennie and George's friendship. George admits one reason why he behaved such:

"Made me seem God damn smart alongside of him." Chapter 3, pg. 40.

George takes very good care of Lennie, but he often feels anger at this burden, an anger which he takes out on Lennie. This fuels Lennie's greatest fear--that he might have to live without George.

Friendship 4: Candy's sheepdog is old, arthritic, and blind--his life is not a pleasant one. Carlson and Slim feel these are adequate reasons to kill the dog. Carlson tells Candy:

"Well, you ain't bein' kind to him keepin' him alive." Chapter 3, pg. 45.

And Slim responds:

"Carl's right, Candy. That dog ain't no good to himself. I wisht somebody'd shoot me if I got old an' a cripple." Chapter 3, pg. 45.

The argument the men use to convince Candy it is okay to euthanize his old friend will come up again at the end of the novel when George must kill Lennie. The dog and Lennie have parallel stories, with parallel fates, except Lennie has someone who cares enough about him to put him out of his misery, whereas Candy wouldn't get rid of his dog if he wasn't forced. Lennie has what Slim wishes for--someone who loves him enough to know when his life would be better for him if it were over.

Friendship 5: Candy tells George:

"I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog." Chapter 3, pg. 61.

Candy feels that friends should look out for each other, and he knows he failed his old companion.

Friendship 6: Crooks is so desperate for companionship that he is appreciative of someone who cannot understand him or converse with him. He understands now that this is the reason why George keeps Lennie around him.

Friendship 7: Crooks reveals how easy it is to feel crazy when you are alone. With no one to confirm his reality, he begins to call it into question:

"'A guy needs somebody-to be near him.' He whined, 'A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody.'" Chapter 4, pg. 72.

Crooks' lonely present is very different from his childhood, when he had his two brothers to keep him company, even sleeping in the same bed.

Friendship 8: Curley's wife tries repeatedly to assure Lennie that it's okay for him to talk to her. Like most of the characters in the book, she also feels a need for companionship. Her self-centered and aggressive husband does not fill this need.

Friendship 9: When George suggests they find Lennie and lock him up instead of shooting him, Slim has to remind George how terrible it would be if Lennie were locked in a cage, or strapped to a bed. Like the painful life of Candy's arthritic sheepdog, life in prison or an asylum would be no better for Lennie. Just as Candy had to realize that his sheepdog would be better off dead than alive, so must George with Lennie.

Friendship 10: After Lennie killed Curley's wife, George was faced with a terrible choice--let Curley find Lennie and kill him, or kill Lennie himself. Unlike Candy, he will not let someone else shoot his best friend. He also will not subject his best friend to unnecessary pain. Slim's sympathetic response is best:

"Never you mind," said Slim. 'A guy got to sometimes.'" Chapter 6, pg. 107.

George lets Lennie die believing in their dream, though he himself must continue, knowing they will never reach it.

Topic Tracking: Landscape

Landscape 1: Before we meet any characters the narrator introduces us to the California valley, along the Salinas River, and its beautiful landscape. These descriptions of nature bookend sections of the novel. They are very poetic and stand apart from the rest of the novel, which is composed primarily of dialogue. An example:

"Evening of a hot day started the little wind to moving among the leaves. The shade climbed up the hills toward the top. On the sand banks the rabbits sat as quietly as little gray, sculptured stones." Chapter 1, pg. 2.

The description of the green river and its yellow sands is a quiet image, broken only by the entrance of George and Lennie.

Landscape 2: The conditions of the bunkhouse starkly contrast the lush and beautiful description of the valley's landscape. Inside the bunkhouse it is dark and dull. Each man's bunk is the same as the others. Each has a little shelf to put his belongings on, but that is all. The contrast between this man-made world and that of nature is described as follows:

"At about ten o'clock in the morning the sun threw a bright dust-laden bar through one of the side windows, and in and out of the beam flies shot like rushing stars." Chapter 2, pg. 17 - 18.

Landscape 3: For the third consecutive chapter Steinbeck begins with a description of the setting. He contrasts the dark bunkhouse with the light still visible outside:

"Although there was evening brightness showing through the windows of the bunk house, inside it was dusk." Chapter 3, pg. 38.

Landscape 4: After Lennie leaves and Curley's wife lies dead in the hay, a strange quiet settles over the barn:

"As happens sometimes, a moment settled and hovered and remained for much more than a moment. And sound stopped and movement stopped for much, much more than a moment." Chapter 5, pg. 93.

This moment lingers, then decisively ends when Candy enters the barn, looking for Lennie.

Landscape 5: The book ends as it began-by the banks of the Salinas River. The scene is described as tranquil and beautiful, just as in the first chapter:

"Already the sun had left the valley to go climbing up the slopes of the Gabilan mountains, and the hilltops were rosy in the sun." Chapter 6, pg. 99.

The Salinas River and its creatures have not changed despite the turmoil Lennie and George have suffered.

Landscape 6: After the shot is fired, there is a description of how the landscape reacts to the violence:

"The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again." Chapter 6, pg. 106.

Chapter 1

The novel begins near the Salinas River, south of Soledad in the California valley. The Gabilan Mountains rise up on one side and drop to valleys on the other. The river and its banks are alive with animals and plants. A path leads to the banks of the river, and the two main characters, George Milton and Lennie Small, follow this path to the river. While George is small with sharp features, Lennie is a big man with rounded features. He drags his feet when he walks, following George step for step. They are on their way to a job at a nearby ranch, and their ride has left them several miles away. It is hot and they are tired from the walk.

Topic Tracking: Landscape 1

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie as an animal) 1

When the two men reach the water, Lennie falls to his knees and takes a long drink. George gets angry with him for drinking so fast from water that might not be good. Lennie's action and this exchange show his mental retardation. When George sits down, Lennie imitates him exactly. And when George starts to complain about how their ride left them so far from their destination, Lennie has to ask George where they are going because he can't remember. George, annoyed, reminds Lennie about where they got their jobs and their work cards, and Lennie looks in his pocket for his. Certain Lennie would lose it, George did not let him keep his card. But Lennie does have something in his coat pocket. It is a dead mouse, which Lennie wanted to keep and pet. Lennie loves to pet such soft things, but he is so strong he usually kills them. It is not important to Lennie that the mouse is dead, but George is annoyed. Lennie reluctantly gives him the mouse, and George throws it across the water. George then asks Lennie if he remembers where they are going, but he has forgotten again. George tells him it is a job like the one they had in Weed. George tells Lennie not to say anything when they get to this new job, and Lennie repeats the instructions softly to himself. It's important that he remember because George wants to avoid trouble like they had in Weed. Also, if the boss heard Lennie's slow speech they could lose their jobs.

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie as an animal) 2

The sun is starting to set. George and Lennie are still by the river. Lennie wants to know why they aren't going ahead to the ranch for supper. George answers that he wants some rest before work starts. He has beans for them to eat, and he sends Lennie to get some wood for a fire. Instead of getting wood, Lennie sneaks off to find his mouse, hoping for something soft to pet. George isn't fooled, and demands the mouse. Lennie reluctantly gives it to him, and George throws it away again. Lennie starts to cry, and George feels sorry for being so mean. He promises Lennie when they find a live mouse he'll let him keep it awhile. Still upset, Lennie wishes the lady who used to give him mice was here. This woman was Lennie's Aunt Clara, but Lennie is not able to remember much, including his aunt's name. Aunt Clara stopped giving Lennie mice because he would always kill them. He is just too strong to play with something so delicate. Lennie thinks rabbits would be much better, because they're bigger. George tells Lennie to

forget about rabbits and go get wood so they can eat. When they start to eat, Lennie says how he likes his beans with ketchup. George yells:

"Well, we ain't got any," George exploded. "Whatever we ain't got, that's what you want. God a'mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble....An' whatta I got," George went on furiously. "I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. Jus' keep me shovin' all over the country all the time. An' that ain't the worst. You get in trouble. You do bad things and I got to get you out."
Chapter 1, pg. 11.

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie as an animal) 3

It is dark now, and George has become quiet. Lennie creeps over and apologizes for asking for ketchup, and says if there was any here he would give it all to George. George is all Lennie has, and he can't stand having him angry with him. George forgives Lennie, and becomes friendlier. But Lennie isn't convinced. He offers to go off alone and find a cave. He would live alone and find his own food, and if he got a mouse no one would take it away. George knows Lennie isn't smart enough to do this, and he feels bad for pushing Lennie to this suggestion. To cheer Lennie up, he promises him a pup. But Lennie keeps up this talk, making George feel bad so he will tell him again about the rabbits. The rabbits are part of a dream the men have. They hope one day to buy a farm and raise their own food and animals. Lennie is very excited because there will be rabbits for him to tend (and pet). They have faith their dream will come true because they aren't alone in the world. They have each other, and that means there is always someone looking out for them, and someone they can talk to.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 1

Topic Tracking: Dreams 1

George reminds Lennie not to say a word tomorrow, and that if there is any trouble, to come back to this spot and hide in the brush. He warns Lennie that if he isn't good, he won't get to tend the rabbits.

Chapter 2

The men arrive at the ranch the next morning after the other workers have gone out to the fields. An old man (Candy) takes them to the bunkhouse and shows them where they can put their belongings. The old man is bent with age and missing one of his hands. George becomes angry with him when he finds lice spray near his bed, but the old man reassures him the bed is clean. The boss comes in, angry that Lennie and George have arrived late. Lennie forgets about not talking, and when the boss hears him repeat George's words, he becomes suspicious. George has to reassure the boss that although Lennie isn't bright, he is a hard worker. Still suspicious, the boss asks George what kind of scam he's running. George lies and says Lennie is his cousin, and he takes care of him because he was kicked in the head as a child. The boss is somewhat satisfied, and leaves. Once the boss is gone George gets mad at Lennie for almost losing their job. Lennie asks George if he was kicked in the head, or if they are cousins. Lennie seems unsure of his own history, and confused by the lie. George tells Lennie of course what he said was a lie. Without George's aid Lennie could never have gotten or kept this job.

Topic Tracking: Landscape 2

Candy comes back, this time with his old sheepdog. He and George are starting to talk when Curley comes into the bunkhouse. Curley is a small in size but strong, a former boxer. Insecure about his stature, he becomes defensive and irritable around guys who are bigger than him, and Lennie is no exception. Curley comes in looking for his father, the boss, and like his father he is suspicious of silent Lennie. Curley becomes angry, and tells Lennie that next time he better speak when he is asked a question.

George is worried that Curley will mess with Lennie. Candy confirms George's fears when he says:

"Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's alla time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy." Chapter 2, pg. 26.

Candy has a bit of gossip for George-the glove Curley wears on his left hand is full of Vaseline, to keep it soft for his wife. George is disgusted, and this response makes Candy feel more comfortable with George. Candy tells George that Curley's wife is pretty, but that she's too flirtatious, always giving men "the eye."

The men can hear Curley yelling outside for the stable buck. George tells Lennie to make sure he stays away from Curley, because any guy who doesn't like big guys is sure not to like him. George is reminding Lennie where to go if there's trouble when Curley's wife walks into the bunkhouse. She is wearing a dress that shows her legs, and her lips and nails are red. She says she is looking for Curley. The other men avoid her eyes, but Lennie stares with fascination at this beautiful woman. When she leaves Lennie mentions how pretty she is, and George (remembering Weed) yells at him to stay away from her. Having two people to steer clear of is too much for Lennie, who

becomes frightened and upset. He asks George if they can leave. But they still have money to raise for their farm, so they must stay and work.

Carlson and Slim come into the bunkhouse. Slim is a quiet and powerful presence, and the best worker on the ranch. Carlson is another worker. Slim's dog just had her puppies last night, and Carlson suggests Candy take one of Slim's pups and get rid of his smelly old sheepdog. But the dinner bell rings and the men head out, with George promising to ask Slim for a pup for Lennie. As the two are leaving Curley comes in again, this time looking for his wife. He eyes Lennie and George suspiciously, but lets them leave. A moment later, Candy's sheepdog struggles in, and she is the only one there when Curley returns a moment later, still looking for something.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 2

Chapter 3

The light of evening shines into the dark bunkhouse. Some of the men are outside playing horseshoes, but George and Slim are inside.

Topic Tracking: Landscape 3

George thanks Slim for giving Lennie a pup. He expects Lennie will be out in the barn all night petting it. Slim comments on how hard a worker Lennie is, and George reacts proudly, the way a mother might of her child. Slim mentions how odd it is that a smart guy like George travels with a crazy guy like Lennie. His questioning is friendly, though, and George senses an invitation to talk. Defending Lennie, George admits he himself isn't so smart, or he would have his own farm by now. He tells Slim how he and Lennie grew up in the same town. Lennie's parents are never mentioned, only his Aunt Clara who raised him. When she died Lennie just started to come along with George. At first George played tricks on Lennie, because he was so dumb he would do anything he was told, without even thinking about it. And he never held a grudge; he couldn't even realize when someone was mean, nevermind remember it. George and Slim agree that Lennie is a good guy, never mean. But he does get into trouble. George trusts Slim enough to tell him what happened in Weed. Lennie saw a woman in a pretty dress, and because he loves to touch soft things, he started to stroke her dress. The woman, terrified, tried to pull away. But Lennie got confused and held on with all his strength. George had to hit him over the head to get him to let go, and they were run out of town, narrowly avoiding arrest or worse.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 3

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie as an animal) 3

Lennie comes into the bunkhouse, attempting to conceal his puppy from George. George isn't fooled now anymore than he was yesterday when Lennie tried to hide his mouse. The puppy is very small and young, so George orders Lennie to go put it back. Slim comments how much Lennie is like a child, and George agrees, except for one thing--Lennie is much stronger.

Candy comes into the bunkhouse now, followed by the other men who have finished their game of horseshoes. Carlson complains about how good the stable buck plays:

"He don't give nobody else a chance to win--" Chapter 3, pg. 44.

This comment echoes Candy's description of Curley, who likes to force big guys to fight him, making them look bad whether they win or lose. The difference between these men lies in the fact that Curley has a lot more power than Crooks, the Negro stable buck, and it is therefore an odd comment for Carlson to make.

Full of complaints tonight, Carlson becomes annoyed that Candy's old sheepdog is in the bunkhouse. He thinks the dog makes the bunkhouse smell. He pressures Candy to



shoot it, or to let him shoot it. Carlson repeatedly shows Candy where he would shoot, right in the back of the head, so the dog would feel no pain. Candy has had the dog for years and is reluctant to part with his faithful companion, but Carlson and Slim insist that the dog is so old and sick that it is cruel to keep it alive.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 4

Whit, another worker, comes into the bunkhouse offering a distraction from this discussion. He has a pulp magazine that contains a letter written by a former worker, Bill Tenner. The men crowd around to see a fellow worker's words in print. Carlson is not distracted, though, and he continues to press Candy to let him shoot his dog, relieving its pain. Slim and the other men are quiet, and Candy is unable to stand up to Carlson. He lets him take his dog outside to shoot it. The men are mostly silent, waiting for the shot. When it comes, Candy turns away and remains quiet.

Topic Tracking: Dreams 2

Slim heads out to the barn to fix his mule's foot, and George remains to talk to Whit. They talk about Curley's wife, how flirtatious she is and how likely it is she'll cause trouble. Whit suggests George come with them to Susy's place to let off a little steam. Susy runs a brothel where men can come and drink or have sex for a reasonable price. George resists this temptation, and says he might come along, just for a drink, because he doesn't have much to spend.

Lennie and Carlson come back from the barn, and Carlson starts to clean his gun. When the barrel snaps, Candy turns around, smarting at this insensitivity. Then Curley bursts in, asking again if anyone has seen his wife. Slim isn't around and Curley, instantly suspicious, thinks Slim is with his wife. Curley storms off to the barn. Whit is expecting a fight, so he and Carlson head over to the barn. Lennie, George, and Candy stay behind.

George asks Lennie if he saw Curley's wife out in the barn, but he didn't. George complains again about how much trouble Curley's wife is, and states his belief that men should just go to a brothel and get it out of their system. He reminds Lennie about Andy Cushman as proof of the trouble seductive women can cause. Andy was a childhood friend who ended up in prison because of a woman. Lennie isn't interested, though. He asks George how long until they get their place with the rabbits. George tells Lennie again about an idyllic future home—ten acres with orchards, salmon in the river, their own animals to eat—total self-sufficiency. They will have a house with a stove and room for friends, and plenty of space for Lennie's rabbits. Lennie and George are startled when Candy breaks into the conversation. He asks where a place like that is, and how much it costs. Candy reveals to the men he has some money saved up, partly from the accident that severed his hand. He asks George if he could come with them. George thinks carefully before letting another person into their plan, but he agrees. In amazement they realize that with Candy's money, they could be there by the end of the month!

Candy explains to George why he needs a place like theirs:

"You seen what they done to my dog tonight? They says he wasn't no good to himself nor nobody else. When they can me here I wisht somebody'd shoot me. But they won't do nothing like that. I won't have no place to go, an' I can't get no more jobs." Chapter 3, pg. 60

The three are very excited now at the prospect that in one month they can have their dream. George will write to the people who own the farm and tell them they'll take it.

Topic Tracking: Dreams 3

Topic Tracking: Friendship 5

Slim, Curley, Carlson and Whit come into the bunkhouse. Slim and Curley are arguing. Carlson and Candy each insult Curley and his wife. But what infuriates Curley is when he looks over at Lennie and sees him smiling. Lennie is still happy from the memory of their farm, and has not noticed the commotion in the bunkhouse. But Curley thinks Lennie is laughing at him, thinking him a coward. Defiantly Curley attacks Lennie, slashing at his face as Lennie tries to shield himself. Lennie does not fight back. After repeated urging from George, Lennie takes Curley's hand in his, crushing it. Curley immediately goes pale and the men try to make Lennie to let go. When Lennie does, Curley's hand is hurt badly. George anxiously asks Slim if they'll be fired now. Slim has a plan. He tells Curley that if he doesn't want everyone to laugh at him, he better just say he got his hand caught in a machine. Curley agrees, and is lead away to the hospital.

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie as an animal) 4

Slim looks at Lennie, awestruck of his strength. George finds himself defending Lennie again, saying he was scared and confused. Lennie wants to know if he can still tend the rabbits. George reassures him that he didn't do anything wrong, just what he was told to do, and that everything will be okay. He sends Lennie to wash up his bleeding face.

Chapter 4

Crooks sits on his bed in the harness room of the barn. He lives alone, away from the other workers. Because of his job and his crooked back, Crooks is more permanent and has more possessions than the other men. Books and medicine fill the room, but Crooks keeps his room clean, and is not accustomed to visitors. He is rubbing liniment on his crooked back when Lennie walks in, standing noiselessly at the door. Surprised and annoyed, Crooks removes his hand from his back and tells Lennie that he has no right to be in his room. Lennie wanted to look at his puppy, and he saw Crooks' light. Crooks is angry at this invasion of privacy, as he is not allowed the option of entering the men's bunkhouse.

Lennie asks Crooks if he can stay because everyone else went into town tonight. Lennie hovers around the doorway, talking about his puppy, and Crooks gives in and lets Lennie come into his room. Only Candy has stayed home, and he is sitting in the bunkhouse making calculations about their farm. Lennie starts to talk about the rabbits they're going to get, but Crooks just thinks he's crazy. Lennie tells Crooks if he doesn't believe him he can ask George. Crooks asks Lennie about travelling with George and if the two of them talk. Crooks becomes very excited when he realizes he can tell Lennie anything, because Lennie won't understand it. He tells Lennie how when he was young his father had a chicken ranch. Crooks used to play with the white children, but his father didn't like it. Now, the only black person around, Crooks understands his father's apprehension towards whites.

Crooks' idea that he can tell Lennie anything is confirmed when after this confession, Lennie asks Crooks a question about his puppy. Crooks says excitedly:

"I seen it over an' over-a guy talkin' to another guy and it don't make no difference if he don't hear or understand. The thing is, they're talkin', or they're settin' still not talking. It don't make no difference, no difference....It's just the talking." Chapter 4, pg. 71.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 6

After a pause, Crooks quietly asks Lennie what he would do if George never came back from town. Lennie, confused, tells Crooks that George would never do that. Crooks proceeds cruelly, suggesting perhaps that George was hurt or killed, keeping him from returning. Crooks presses Lennie with this possibility until Lennie becomes threatening, demanding who hurt George. Crooks backs off, and tells Lennie that he was really talking about himself. Black and therefore alone, Crooks doesn't have anyone. As a child he had his brothers, who would all sleep in one bed, but today he is painfully lonely.

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie as an animal) 5

Topic Tracking: Friendship 7

When Crooks mentions the chickens on his childhood farm, Lennie becomes interested. He tells Crooks how he and George will have rabbits and a berry patch on their farm. Crooks is doubtful, since he has seen men with this dream many times before. He pessimistically remarks:

"Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land." Chapter 4, pg. 74.

Topic Tracking: Dreams 4

Candy comes into the barn now, looking for Lennie. Though trying to appear angry, Crooks is secretly happy to have another companion. Candy wants to talk to Lennie about how they can make money off their rabbits. Crooks interrupts them, still skeptical about their plans. Candy corrects him, telling him how they already have the land picked out and they almost have all the money. Crooks touches his spine, imagining his life when he can no longer work. Haltingly, he asks Candy if they might need an extra hand.

They are interrupted by Curley's wife, who says she is looking for Curley. Candy says they haven't seen him. Curley's wife knows her husband went to a prostitute. Lennie watches her intently while Candy and Crooks look away. Crooks and Candy try to make her leave, telling her she shouldn't be out in the barn with them. She retorts that she needs something to do, since Curley is so boring. All he does is talk about guys he wants to fight. Lately he has been quiet, and she asks them what really happened to Curley's hand. Candy tells her it got caught in a machine, but she doesn't believe him. She becomes angry at the lie, and to show her superiority, she tells them how she could have been in shows. She proceeds to insult the men, and Candy becomes angry. He tells her it doesn't matter what she says or does, because they have land and friends. They don't need her or these jobs for anything. She scoffs at their talk of land, and Candy again urges her to leave. She turns her attention to Lennie and the cuts on his face. When he repeats the line about getting a hand caught in a machine, she realizes it was he who hurt Curley and answers him flirtatiously. Candy tells her George doesn't want her bothering Lennie, and Lennie "answers" by telling her George is going to let him tend the rabbits. When Curley's wife provocatively says maybe she should get some rabbits, Crooks coldly tells her to leave. She lashes out at him, reminding him what a white woman can do to a black man. She tells him if she wanted to he'd be hanging from a tree in no time. Crooks draws into himself as she continues to insult him. Candy tries to stand up for him, but Curley's wife reminds him that no one would believe him anymore than they'd believe Crooks. Curley's wife doesn't have much power, but she has enough to intimidate these three. Candy thinks he hears noise outside, and Curley's wife leaves, afraid Curley will find her in here.

Candy told Crooks how unfair that treatment was, but Crooks responds that it was nothing. In their company he had momentarily forgotten his color, and therefore his place. George comes in looking for Lennie, and scolds him for being in Crooks' room. When Candy starts to talk with George about the farm, George becomes angry that Candy mentioned their plan in front of Crooks. As the men are leaving, Crooks tells Candy that he wouldn't want to go to their farm after all. Curley's wife sufficiently

crushed Crooks back into his place. Alone again, he resumes rubbing liniment on his back.

Chapter 5

It is Sunday afternoon, and bright sun falls into the barn. Hay forms large mounds, and horses' heads peek out of the stables. It is quiet inside the barn; outside is the clang of horseshoes. The men are having a horseshoe tournament, and Lennie is alone inside.

Lennie sits in the hay and strokes his dead puppy. He accidentally hit it, killing it. Lennie doesn't understand why the puppy got killed, since it is so much bigger than a mouse. His thoughts turn now from the puppy to the rabbits, and Lennie is afraid that George won't let him tend them since he killed the puppy. Lennie tries to hide it, thinking he can tell George he found it dead. But Lennie knows George can't be fooled. He grows angry now, and throws the puppy across the barn.

Horseshoes clang and the men yell outside. Lennie walks over to his dead puppy and picks it up. Instead of getting mad at the puppy, this time Lennie blames himself for not listening when the others told him the pup was too small for so much handling. Still petting the dead puppy, he thinks hopefully that maybe George won't care about it, and he'll get to tend the rabbits after all.

Quietly Curley's wife enters the barn and walks up to Lennie. She is wearing her bright dress and her red shoes trimmed with ostrich feathers. Her face is made up, and her hair is perfectly curled. Lennie is startled when he sees her and rushes to hide his puppy. She asks him what he's hiding. Lennie simply tells her George said he isn't supposed to talk to her. Curley's wife thinks George must be scared Curley will get mad at him. She tells Lennie she knows he broke Curley's hand, but Lennie does not say anything, except that he isn't supposed to talk to her. Curley's wife grows angry at all these rejections, and says:

"Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely." Chapter 5, pg. 86

Lennie responds by telling her again that he isn't supposed to talk to her. She expresses again how lonely she is with only Curley to talk to, but Lennie is still cautious.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 8

Curley's wife changes the subject, and asks Lennie what he has hidden in the hay. Lennie moves the hay and tells her it's his pup. She sees that it's dead and Lennie tells her what happened: he thought the pup was going to bite him, so he pretended to hit it, and then he did hit it, accidentally killing it. Curley's wife is comforting. But Lennie is still worried he won't get to

tend the rabbits. Her own needs on her mind, Curley's wife again reassures Lennie it's okay to talk to her, prompting him to repeat his phrase about how he isn't supposed to talk to her. She gets angry that she doesn't have anyone. Living on the ranch, there is no one she can talk to but Curley, and she doesn't even like him. Wistfully, she tells



Lennie how she could have had a better life. There was a man she knew who wanted to put her in shows. He promised to write her when he got back to Hollywood, but she never got the letter. She thought her mom stole it, and to get away from her she married Curley. Unhappy with Curley and her life at the ranch, she still thinks about what she could have had if she had gone to Hollywood.

Topic Tracking: Dreams 5

Lennie, thinking out loud, wonders again if George will let him tend the rabbits. This prompts Curley's wife to ask him why he likes rabbits so much. Lennie carefully answers that he likes to pet soft things. Curley's wife identifies, since everybody likes to touch soft things. Her own hair is very soft, and she offers to let Lennie touch it to feel how soft it is. Lennie starts to stroke it, then presses harder, and she tells him to stop or he'll mess it up. Lennie holds on tighter as she yells for him to let go. He covers her mouth, in a panic. He tells her not to yell, or George won't let him tend the rabbits. She continues to struggle, and Lennie shakes her, telling her to stop yelling. Curley's wife stops moving then, since Lennie has broken her neck.

Lennie lays her down in the hay, telling her he didn't want to hurt her. When she doesn't move, Lennie realizes she is dead. Confused and then terrified, he covers her with hay. Realizing he has done something bad, he remembers George's instruction to go hide by the river. He takes his puppy with him and leaves quietly.

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie as an animal) 6

It is quiet inside the barn, though the men can be heard outside. A shepherd dog walks by and bristles at the dead body of Curley's wife. She lies unmoving in the hay, and looks peaceful. Time seems to move very slowly.

Topic Tracking: Landscape 4

Candy comes in, looking for Lennie. He sees Curley's wife, and assumes she's sleeping. When he realizes his error, he immediately runs to get George. They return to the barn, and George looks at her, hopeless. He knows it was Lennie, just as he had always feared this

would happen. George asks Candy to wait a few minutes before telling the others. He wants time to go into the bunkhouse so it'll look like he had nothing to do with it. Candy cautiously asks George if they can still get their farm. George is silent, then says:

"-I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we'd never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would." Chapter 5, pg. 94.

All their dreams disappeared the moment Lennie snapped Curly's wife's neck. George's only hope now is that maybe they won't want to hurt Lennie.

George leaves the barn and Candy waits a few minutes before going outside. He speaks angrily to the corpse, as he thinks about everything that could have been. With tears in his eyes he leaves the barn to tell the guys.

The men come in and stand over Curley's wife. Slim quietly feels her twisted neck, and Curley explodes with anger. He knows it was Lennie, and he plans to shoot him for it. Carlson runs to the barn for his gun. In the face of all this blood lust, George tells them Lennie probably headed south, and asks if they could just lock Lennie up. Slim reminds George that jail would be no good for Lennie.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 9

Carlson comes running in-his gun has been stolen. Thinking Lennie stole it, the men become even more intent on killing Lennie. Curley tells George he better come with them, to prove he's innocent. George tries again to keep them from shooting Lennie, but to no avail. Everyone heads out, except Candy, who lies down in the hay, hiding his face behind ??

Chapter 6

The chapter opens by the banks of the Salinas River, where the novel began. The water is still and the sun is high in the sky. Nestled between the valley and the Gabilan Mountains is the river and all its creatures. A water snake swims by, only to be grabbed by a heron's jaw. The wind moves softly, reflecting the quiet of the place.

Topic Tracking: Landscape 5

Lennie breaks this quiet when he creeps quietly out of the brush. He is not quiet enough, though, and the heron flies away. Lennie kneels by the banks of the river and drinks in the same dog-like fashion he did the first time he came to the river. He is nervous, awaiting George.

Topic Tracking: Animal (Lennie as an animal) 7

The sun rises higher, coloring the valley with bright light. Lennie is sitting on the banks of the river, talking to himself. He knows he will be in big trouble when George arrives. He thinks again that he could go off and find a cave, and have no ketchup, and leave George alone if that's what he wants.

Still sitting alone by the river, Lennie begins to hallucinate. A plump old woman steps out from Lennie's head. She wears thick glasses and a clean apron. She is Lennie's Aunt Clara. With her hands on her hips she scolds Lennie for not listening to George like she told him. She praises George for his patience with Lennie, then continues to scold Lennie for not being more considerate of George. Lennie repeats weakly that he did his best. Aunt Clara tells Lennie how much fun George could have had without him, spending his money on prostitutes and pool games. This is the argument George always confronts Lennie with when he becomes frustrated, not the argument an old woman would likely offer. Lennie's guilt has come to the surface in the form of his dead Aunt Clara. When Lennie offers to go off and live in a cave, Aunt Clara tells him she knows he will never do it. Lennie responds that he might as well, since he won't get to tend any rabbits now.

At the word rabbit Aunt Clara disappears and a giant rabbit comes fully formed out of Lennie's imagination. It looks at him in disgust, and tells Lennie he's too crazy to tend any rabbits, and that he probably would forget to feed them. Lennie protests, but the rabbit is stern. It tells Lennie that George is going to beat him up when he finds him, and then he will leave him. Over and over the rabbit repeats "He gonna leave you" as Lennie cries out for George. The rabbit disappears back into Lennie's head as George comes quietly through the brush.

George asks Lennie what's the matter, and Lennie asks George if he's going to leave him. George tells him no. Stiff and quiet, George dreads what he will have to do to his friend. When Lennie tells George how he did a bad thing, George uncharacteristically tells him it doesn't matter.



The sun is nearly over the valley now, and a blue shadow has settled inside. In the distance is the sound of men's voices. Lennie asks George if he's going to yell at him again about how much better he would be without him. George says the words, but without feeling. Lennie coaxes him on, but George stops. Lennie offers again to go live in a cave, and when George tells him to stay here Lennie takes this opportunity to ask George to tell him their story. George tells Lennie again how most guys like them have no one, but they are lucky, because they have each other. During the story Lennie happily interrupts George, who is in contrast very quiet and subdued.

An evening breeze blows the trees as the sounds of the men grow closer. The two men are sitting on the banks of the river. George asks Lennie to remove his hat. Then Lennie asks George to tell him about their future, their farm. George, listening to the sounds, tells Lennie to look across the river and imagine their farm. Lennie obediently complies and turns to face the mountains. George, sitting behind Lennie, starts to tell him about their farm as he quietly pulls out Carlson's Luger and starts to ready it. He looks carefully at the place where Lennie's spine and head meet.

Lennie urges George on with the story. George raises the gun, but he cannot do it. Instead he tells Lennie about how they will have cows and chickens, and alfalfa for the rabbits. George reassures Lennie that he will get to tend the rabbits. At the mention of rabbits Lennie starts to turn around, but George tells him to keep looking across the river and imagining their farm. Lennie asks when they are going to do it, and George tells him soon. Lennie asks George again if he's mad at him. George's response:

"No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know." Chapter 6, pg. 106.

The men's voices are very close now. Lennie begs George to let them get their farm now. George's response:

"Sure, right now. I gotta. We gotta." Chapter 6, pg. 106.

Then George raises the gun and brings it to the back of Lennie's head. His hand is shaking, but he steadies himself and pulls the trigger. The sound bounces off the mountains. Lennie lay on the ground, unmoving. He dies instantly.

Topic Tracking: Dreams 6

Topic Tracking: Landscape 6

George throws the gun away as the men crash through the brush. Curley stands over Lennie's body. Slim walks over to George, reminding him he had to do it. Carlson, cold and insensitive, wants only to know how George did it. Carlson imagines that Lennie had his Luger and George fought it away from him, then shot him. George quietly agrees. Slim is the only one understands what really happened. Sympathetically he leads George away, offering him a drink. They leave Curley and Carlson behind. Confused, Carlson wonders what's wrong with them.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 10