

# Text annotation and essay – Of Mice and Men

Assessment focuses: AF2, AF3, AF4, AF5, AF6

## Context

As part of a longer sequence of work on the novel, pupils re-read the fight scene between Curley and Lennie from John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* as a whole class and then individually. They annotated the text in detail, discussing key points as a whole class and then wrote up their ideas as a commentary on the extract. In groups they then discussed the ending of the novel, identifying features and aspects they thought effective before writing an essay individually.

Whole pages from *Of Mice and Men* that feature the annotated text have not been included here due to copyright restrictions.

## Pupil's work

*The fight scene*

The whole fight scene is really caused when Slim and Carlson start to humiliate Curley at the start of the passage. This starts first when Slim tells Curley that, "If you can't look after your own God damn wife, what do you expect me to do about it?" This really gets on Curley's wick, as it makes a challenge to his ability to control his own wife, and as a result is getting shown up in front of the other men. Inevitably he is now angry, as "Curley whirled on Carlson" which clearly shows that he is looking for someone to take his anger out on, and that he is ready to snap.

This is further proven as Slim and Carlson refuse to be bullied by Curley, even hurling threats at him. Slim is quite clearly annoyed as he tells Curley, "You lay offa me." While Carlson goes so far as to say "I'll kick your God damn head off." Quite clearly the men dislike Curley, and it has come to the point where they stand up to him, even Candy adds insult to injury, as he refers to Curley's "Glove pulla caseline," a very tender point for Curley, further dragging out the anger in Curley.

In contrast, Lennie is quite clearly out of his depth when it comes to the fight, and he "looked helplessly

Excerpts from the essay written by a pupil that displays his understanding on The Fight Scene in 'Of Mice And Men'.

at George" showing that he relies on others to look after him in difficult situations. This is further shown when the author uses animal imagery to display Lennie's vulnerability when "Lennie covered his face with his huge PAWS and BLEATED with terror." This likens him to both a puppy through the use of PAWS and a sheep or lamb through the use of BLEATED. Both of these are innocent and vulnerable, and are apt descriptions for Lennie in this situation.

The atmosphere of the fight changes dramatically when George shouts, "Get him Lennie. Don't let him do it!" as all of a sudden it becomes an emergency and they need to stop Curley. People take sides and Slim calls out "The dirty little rat, I'll get him myself!" which makes the fight seem more of a contest, and the atmosphere is more excited and rowdy, as George is shouting, as well as Slim, so that the reader can tell how overwhelmed Lennie must be feeling.

Lennie finally breaks out of his haze and fights back when "Lennie reached for it," (Curley's hand). This also changes the atmosphere as "Curley was flopping like a fish on a line" showing the reversal of roles as Lennie becomes the attacker. This is a significant moment as it foreshadows the scene when Lennie ends up killing Curley's wife. It is through the crushing of Curley's hand that Lennie becomes the hunted animal at the end of the story, as Curley seeks revenge.

English Reading Assessment on 'Of Mice and Men' A pupil has displayed his understanding of the literature through comparison of Lennie and Curley in the fight.

### Mice and men assesment

Why and how is this an effective and moving ending to the novel?

This is a moving ending to this book because George shows that he really does care for Lennie when he says, "No Lennie, I ain't mad, I never been mad, and I ain't mad now, That's a thing I want ya to know." He says this and the reader feels that George is trying to get the load of his conscience by knowing that Lennie doesn't hate him. Obviously George has been mad at him before and we have seen that earlier in the book but he is trying to relieve himself of the guilt of killing Lennie while he was mad. The ending is quite effective because the shooting of Lennie is a bit like when Candy's dog was shot, it was a painless death. It shows that Lennie wasn't quite right and normal but that he almost needed to die. Curley realises this when he says "Right in the back of the head." This shows that it was a painless death and that Lennie was helpless. George had to kill him because otherwise Curley would have killed him in a much more painful way. Lennie has no idea that George is planning to shoot him and he is still happy and excited, "Let's do it now George, let's get that place now" He is still thinking of this dream that he has had for ages, the farm, George, however is answering but clearly is thinking

Excerpts from analysis of 'Of Mice and Men' by a pupil in the form of an essay. The pupil has written about the last incidence of the story wherein George shot Lennie in the back of his head. Although Lennie does not know it, George gave him more of a serene way out.

about his decision to shoot Lennie. He is clearly struggling with the fact that he was about to shoot his best friend. When he answers, "You ask me, Everybody gonna be nice to you, Aint gonna be no more trouble. Nobody gonna hurt nobody nor steal from 'em," he isn't talking about the delights of the farm he was planning to get and which Lennie is so excited about, but the afterlife Steinbeck has written is so that George seems to be talking about heaven which is where Lennie will rest.

George is still indecisive up to when he actually shoots Lennie and this is shown in the language that Steinbeck uses when George actually has the gun. "He brought the muzzle of it close to the back of Lennie's head, the hand shook violently, but his face set and the hand steadied." Even in this sentence, we can see George make the decision. His hand is shaking and that shows that he doesn't really know whether to do it or not but then we see his hand steady and his 'face set' he has just made his decision.

The actual gunshot is a big moment because 'the crash of the shot, rolled up the hills and down again!' When 'he pulled the trigger' that is a key moment and there was no turning back. Steinbeck shows that this was a very big and important thing by using the long descriptive sentence the sound of the shot. After the

Excerpts from analysis of 'Of Mice and Men' by a pupil in the form of an essay. The pupil has written about the last incidence of the story wherein George shot Lennie in the back of his head.

Shot, Lennie is dead but we don't feel angry or upset at George for doing it because he lay without quivering, This implies that he has died painlessly and is now in the peaceful and wonderful place that George has talked about earlier. We are sympathetic towards George but almost glad that he did it. When George throws away the gun, he is throwing away the object that has seperated him and Lennie. He throws it back upon the bank near the pile of old ashes. 'The old ashes are where George and Lennie first had their fire. This was the place where we first put them and it was here that they were both peaceful and relaxed. It is now also the place where their relationship ends. It shows that it is old by the way Steinbeck writes about the 'old ashes' signifies that George's happiness is over.

George is still in shock even though there is a lot of action around him. The brush seemed filled with cries and with the sound of running feet... but George sat stiffly on the bank and looked at his right hand that had thrown the gun away. He can't believe what he has done and he is shocked and scared and upset about what has just happened and what might happen afterwards. Before this George had always been the one that was reliable and mature.

Excerpts from analysis of 'Of Mice and Men' by a pupil in the form of an essay. The pupil has written about the last incidence of the story wherein George shot Lennie to give him in the back of his head. Although Lennie does not know it, George gave him more of a serene way out.

and Lennie had been the one that needed looking after but now George's position has been reversed and he is the one that needs looking after by Slim. Slim is trying to comfort George when he "sits down very close to George and says "never mind... A guy got to do it sometimes." Slim's sympathetic character is very different to that of Curley's who seems rather annoyed that George had shot Lennie rather than letting Curley do it. He shows this when he says "Got him, by God and then looks at George. Slim's character is also contrasting to Carlson's who is very unsympathetic and seems more interested in the gory details rather than George's feelings. These points show this passage is moving to the reader who sympathise with George and Lennie and also how and why it so effective because it links back to the story.

Extracts from Steinbeck, J. *Of Mice and Men*.