

*Of Mice and Men*  
SOCRATIC SEMINAR PREPARATION MATERIAL

LITERARY TERMS: Be able to discuss examples and meaning as related to the novel.

**Foreshadowing:**

**Parallels:** Characters and/or events

**Static vs. Dynamic Characters** (Who stayed the same? Who changed? How?)

**Characterization and Motivation:** How are they portrayed? Why do they do what they do?  
See also your handout on character dreams.

Lennie

George

Candy

Slim

Curley

Crooks

Curley's wife

Carlson

**Symbolism:** What do these symbols mean and what is their importance to the novel?

Clearing by the river:

Rabbits and Mice and Dogs:

Solitaire:

Bunkhouse:

Other Symbols:

**Topic and Theme:** Use these topics to describe a theme presented in the novel. The theme should be one sentence long. Then, back up your theme with evidence from the novel.

Idealism vs. Reality

Alienation and Loneliness

Race and Racism

Class Conflict

**Themes continued:**

Loyalty

Friendship

Dreams

Disappointment

Powerful vs. powerless Strength vs. weakness, physical vs. emotional

Escape

Violence

**Conflicts:** List and explain different conflicts that take place during the story.

**More Discussion Questions:**

The novella's title comes from a poem, "To a Mouse (on turning her up in her nest with the plough)" by the Scots poet Robert Burns (1759-1796):

"The best-laid plans of mice and men  
Gang aft agley (=often go astray).  
And leave us naught but grief and pain  
For promised joy."

How does this relate to the story?

Steinbeck was going to name his story *Something That Happened*. Instead, he named it *Of Mice and Men*. Which title do you think is more appropriate to the novel as a whole?

Which character do you feel most sorry for in this story? Explain your choice by referring closely to the events of the novel.

Slim is the only character in the novel who is not handicapped in some way. Do you agree? Some argue he is the only 'hero of this novel. Do you agree, and why or why not?

Why doesn't Slim share in the other men's dreams?

Consider the character pairs presented in this book: George and Lennie, Curley and his wife, Candy and his dog. Discuss the relationships involved in the various pairings. What is the basis for each relationship? What are the positive and negative aspects of each?

Why is Curley's wife the lone female on the all-male ranch?

The killing of Curley's wife is regarded with a lack of emotion by the characters, even less than the killing of the puppy or the shooting of Candy's dog earlier in the book. Why do you think this is so? Why is the moral issue of her murder, the question of right and wrong, never really an issue when Curley's wife's body is discovered by the men?

When George shoots Lennie, is this a sign of the strength of his love or the weakness of his love for Lennie?

Has he finally followed through on the threat to abandon Lennie?

Why does he shoot Lennie in the middle of their imagining the farm one last time?

Who is to blame for Lennie's death?

Did George do the right thing by shooting Lennie?

How can we justify what he does to Lennie? How can we condemn it?

Murder is a crime, in some states punishable by death. By all definitions, George plans and carries out the murder of his best friend. But there seems to be no concern for taking a human life. Why do you think this is so? When, if anytime, do you think it would be justified?

In tragedies, the central character comes to a realization about his life or an understanding of life in general as a result of his suffering. Is this true of *Of Mice and Men*?

This novella dates from 1937 - does it still have anything to say to us? Who are the "loneliest guys in the world" today? Are we more or less able to realize our dreams than the characters in this story?

**Quotes you might want to use in your discussion:**

**Also be prepared with: your book, reader response log, original anticipation guide, Character Dream Chart, and your American Dream Survey.**