

Title

*Of Mice and Men*

Author

John Steinbeck

Plot Summary

*Of Mice and Men* is the story of two men, George Milton and Lennie Small, living a hardscrabble existence as migrant workers during the Great Depression. Smart and practical, George has spent years looking after Lennie. Lennie is hardworking and kind, but he is feeble-minded. Each man is the only “family” the other one has. As George and Lennie move from place to place and job to job, they hope to save enough money to buy a place of their own. Soon their dream seems within reach. But forces beyond their control threaten to ruin their hopes forever.

Setting

The story takes place on a ranch in the Salinas Valley in California in the 1930s.

Major Characters

George Milton, a migrant worker

Lennie Small, George’s friend since childhood

Aunt Clara, Lennie’s kindhearted aunt, now deceased

The Boss, a man who owns the ranch where George and Lennie have come to work

Curley, the Boss’s jealous, hot-tempered son

Curley’s wife, who is unhappy and flirtatious

Candy, an aging ranch hand who fears becoming unable to work

Carlson, a fellow ranch hand

Whit, a fellow ranch hand

Crooks, a lonely, embittered black stable hand on the ranch

Slim, a confident mule driver who is greatly respected

Lesson Review Questions

Answering the following questions will increase your comprehension of the novel. Respond to these questions by writing the answers in your notebook. Some of the questions require you to express an opinion or describe your reaction to events in the novel. In these instances, there is no right or wrong answer, and responses will vary. The answers to factual questions are included in this study guide.

Lesson 1

Vocabulary: *junctures, debris, mottled, recumbent, bindle, morosely, periscope, thrashing, pantomime, imperiously, brusquely, dejectedly, cat house*

1. In your own words, briefly describe the place where George and Lennie are camping as the novel begins.

2. As Steinbeck introduces George and Lennie on p. 3, what are they talking about? What does this conversation reveal about both men?
3. Why does George instruct Lennie not to say anything when they get to the ranch?
4. Why does Lennie sneak the dead mouse back into his pocket? How does George react?
5. What can you infer about why the two men left their previous job in Weed?
6. When Lennie “patiently” reminds George that he prefers beans with ketchup, George lashes out at him. Why does George become so angry? How does Lennie respond?
7. What is George and Lennie’s dream?
8. What does George instruct Lennie to do if he ever gets into trouble on the ranch?

## Lesson 2

Vocabulary: *burlap ticking, vials, blacksmith, skeptically, liniment, stable buck, cultivator, cesspool, mollified, calculating, pugnacious, ominously, derogatory, tart, plaintively, contorted, rouged, bridled, apprehensive, gravity, profound, complacently*

1. When the old swamper (Candy) tells George and Lennie about the other men on the ranch, he uses a derogatory racial term to describe the stable buck, but also says the stable buck is “a nice fella.” What does his attitude reveal about the separation of races on the ranch?
2. How does the boss react to George and Lennie upon meeting them? What lies does George tell in order to manage the situation?
3. How does the boss’s son, Curley, treat George and Lennie? How does Candy explain his behavior?
4. According to Candy, what is Curley’s wife like? How does she act when she comes into the bunkhouse?
5. What problems does George foresee after Lennie’s encounter with Curley and his wife? What does he tell Lennie to do?
6. How is Slim described, and how do the other men regard him? What does George tell Slim about his friendship with Lennie?
7. What news do the two men learn at the end of this section? What promise does George make to Lennie?

## Lesson 3

Vocabulary: *derision, receptive, lynch, rheumatism, euchre, kewpie doll, hoosegow, alfalfa, subsided, entranced, reprehensible, reverently, bemused, whimpering*

1. What attitude does Slim have toward George and Lennie’s friendship? How does George react?
2. What details does George provide about his and Lennie’s childhood? Why does George still continue to look after Lennie?
3. What is the full story behind George and Lennie’s departure from Weed? Based on this story, what kind of trouble might Lennie get into on the ranch?
4. How has Lennie disobeyed the directions he was given about how to care for his puppy? What does his behavior toward the puppy reveal about his character?
5. Why does Carlson want to put Candy’s dog to death? Why does Candy resist the idea? What makes him finally give in?
6. What does Whit conclude from the fact that George and Lennie came to the ranch on a Friday? How does this make them different from other ranch hands?

7. What additional details are provided about the tension brewing between Curley and his wife?
8. What is “Susy’s place”? What do the ranch hands do for recreation?
9. Why do George and Lennie want to have their own farm?
10. Why does Candy ask if he can live on the farm with George and Lennie? Why do they agree to this arrangement?
11. What events lead to the confrontation between Lennie and Curley at the end of this section?
12. What is the outcome of the confrontation? What does Slim tell Curley to do?

#### Lesson 4

Vocabulary: *harness, riveter, aloof, fawning, disarming, conceal, sullenly, contemptuously, averted, appraised, crestfallen*

1. Where does Crooks stay on the ranch? What are his responsibilities?
2. Based on the description of Crooks’s possessions and his appearance, what conclusions can you draw about him?
3. How does Crooks initially react when Lennie enters his room? Why does he react this way? How does his manner change as the encounter continues?
4. When Crooks was a child, how did his father react when he played with white children? How does the adult Crooks feel toward whites?
5. Why does Crooks taunt Lennie with the possibility that George will abandon him?
6. How does Crooks react when he learns about George, Lennie, and Candy’s plan to get their own house and farm?
7. Why does Curley’s wife come by the stable? How does she behave toward the men?
8. How does Crooks respond at first when Curley’s wife attacks them? What makes him change his demeanor?
9. What does Crooks change his mind about at the end of this section? Why?

#### Lesson 5

Vocabulary: *consoled, earnestly, contorted, muffled, writhed, bewildered, hovered, sluggishly*

1. What incident is Lennie upset about as he sits in the barn? How does this incident serve to remind the reader of Lennie’s weaknesses?
2. Why does Curley’s wife come to talk to Lennie? How does he respond?
3. What does Curley’s wife reveal about her youthful hopes and dreams? How do these hopes and dreams compare with the actual circumstances of her adult life?
4. Why does Curley’s wife invite Lennie to touch her hair? What happens as a result?
5. How does the incident in the barn echo other incidents in Lennie’s life?
6. Throughout the novel, the reader never learns Curley’s wife’s name. Why do you think John Steinbeck made this choice as an author?

#### Lesson 6

Vocabulary: *gingham, haunches, belligerently, monotonous, quivering*

1. What advice of George’s does Lennie follow after he leaves the barn?
2. What details illustrate the emotional stress Lennie is experiencing?
3. How does George respond to Lennie’s expectation that George will yell at him? What does George’s response show about how he feels?

4. Describe the moments immediately before Lennie's death. What is the purpose of George's conversation with Lennie in these final moments?
5. Why does Slim tell George, "You hadda. I swear you hadda"? Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. How do the other workers respond to Lennie's death? What does their response reveal about them?

### Answers to Lesson Review Questions

#### Lesson 1 Answers

1. As the novel begins, George and Lennie are camping on the banks of the Salinas River. The river bank is lined with willow and sycamore trees, and there are woodland animals nearby. Other men have camped there before. The weather is hot and dusty, but the water is cool and refreshing. The setting is tranquil.
2. Lennie has just drunk a large quantity of water from the river, and George warns him that drinking so much will make him sick. George also expresses concern that the water is still and scummy. The conversation reveals that Lennie is childlike and doesn't understand simple rules, such as not drinking stagnant water. George has to watch over him and protect him.
3. George doesn't want Lennie to speak because he fears that if the ranch boss sees how "crazy" Lennie is, they will not get a job there.
4. Lennie sneaks the mouse into his pocket because he likes petting small creatures and has become attached to it. He doesn't understand that petting a dead animal is unsanitary. George coldly threatens to hit Lennie if he doesn't get rid of the mouse.
5. Lennie got into trouble in Weed, forcing the two men to leave town quickly. On p. 11, George says that Lennie innocently tried to touch a girl's dress, but the girl perceived this as a threat.
6. George is frustrated by Lennie's inability to remember simple details, such as the fact that they have no ketchup. He is tired of having to explain the same things over and over, and he resents having to look after Lennie like a parent looking after a child. At first Lennie is apologetic, but soon he realizes that George feels guilty about losing his temper. He tries to play on George's sympathy to get him to "tell him about the rabbits" again.
7. George and Lennie's dream is to save enough money to buy a house and just enough farmland to support themselves. They will raise a few animals and keep a vegetable garden, and Lennie will tend the rabbits.
8. George tells Lennie that if he ever gets in trouble, as he has done before, he should hide in the brush by the river and wait for George to find him.

#### Lesson 2 Answers

1. Candy's comment reveals that racism and segregation are taken for granted on the ranch. Although Candy doesn't personally dislike Crooks, he doesn't think twice about using racial slurs to describe him, and he doesn't see anything unusual about Crooks sleeping in a separate area. The other men also accept the racial segregation as an ordinary fact of life.

2. The boss is annoyed that George and Lennie have arrived later than he expected. He is suspicious of Lennie's silence and thinks that either the two men are trying to take advantage of him, or George is somehow taking advantage of Lennie. George explains Lennie's behavior by saying that as a child, Lennie was kicked in the head by a horse. This is false, as is George's statement that they left Weed only because the job was done.
3. Curley is arrogant and quick to take offense at Lennie's silence. He seems to be looking for a fight. Candy explains that Curley is a small man who feels insecure around a man of Lennie's size. Curley also has some boxing experience and likes to pick fights.
4. Candy says that Curley's wife of two weeks is pretty but too flirtatious. She often gives "the eye" to other men on the ranch. Curley's wife lives up to this description when she comes into the bunkhouse. She claims to be looking for Curley, but she seems equally interested in meeting George and Lennie and talking with Slim.
5. George immediately realizes that Curley and Curley's wife pose a threat to Lennie. Curley dislikes Lennie on sight and wants to pick a fight with him. Meanwhile, Lennie is not capable of understanding why Curley's wife's behavior is inappropriate. He simply thinks that she is very pretty and friendly. His innocent response to her could easily be misinterpreted by Curley. George warns Lennie to keep away from both of them, but to fight back if Curley attacks him.
6. Slim is described as tall, good-looking, and highly skilled at his work. His manner is quiet and serious, and he is very perceptive. The other men on the ranch deeply respect him. George confides in him about his friendship with Lennie, explaining that they travel together and look after each other, and that Lennie is a good person and a great worker despite his weak intellect.
7. Slim's dog has just had puppies. Slim kept the five biggest puppies but isn't sure what he will do with them. George promises to ask Slim if Lennie can have one of the puppies.

### Lesson 3 Answers

1. Slim finds it unusual that George and Lennie travel together because most workers travel alone and look out for themselves only. Slim also does not understand why a reasonably intelligent man like George accepts the burden of caring for Lennie. He casually tries to find out why. George is slightly defensive at first and then explains his relationship with Lennie by revealing that they are childhood friends.
2. George and Lennie are from the same town, Auburn. George knew Lennie's aunt Clara, who raised Lennie and who is now deceased. George explains that he used to take advantage of Lennie's limited intelligence by playing practical jokes on him; Lennie never got angry because he never realized what George was doing. George stopped playing jokes on Lennie after Lennie nearly drowned when George told him to jump in a river. He still looks after Lennie because he doesn't want to be alone, he is used to Lennie's company, and he knows Lennie cannot look after himself.
3. Lennie innocently touched a young woman's pretty dress, but the woman was scared and screamed. Lennie then became confused and anxious and held onto the dress even more tightly, upsetting the woman even further. She later told police she was raped, and a lynch mob set off after Lennie. George and Lennie were forced to hide in an irrigation ditch until they could slip out of town at night. Based on this story, Lennie might get into trouble if he interacts with Curley's wife. Because of his size and strength, people may fear him even though he means no harm.

4. Although the newborn puppy is too small to be away from its mother, Lennie has brought it into the bunkhouse to sleep with him. He is so excited about his new pet that he unintentionally endangers its survival. His behavior shows that he can't really handle the responsibility of caring for the puppy and doesn't understand the possible consequences of his actions.
5. Carlson wants to put Candy's dog to death because it is old, smells bad, and suffers from rheumatism. Unlike the other animals on the ranch, it is useless. Candy cannot bring himself to put the dog out of its misery because he has had it since it was a puppy. He finally gives in and allows Carlson to shoot the dog after Slim takes Carlson's side.
6. Whit explains that men can easily take advantage of a ranch owner by arriving on a Saturday night after the work week ends, staying through Sunday and eating free meals, and then leaving before work begins again on Monday. Since George and Lennie arrived at midday on Friday, Whit concludes that they are serious about working for their keep.
7. Whit describes how Curley's wife continually finds excuses to hang around the other ranch hands. Curley mistakenly suspects his wife is involved with Slim, and his jealousy increases when he comes by the bunkhouse and can't find either of them.
8. "Susy's place" is a local bar and most likely a brothel. Some of the workers drink and visit the women there.
9. George and Lennie want to have their own farm so they can feel like they belong somewhere. They dream of raising crops and animals to support themselves rather than constantly traveling and working on other people's ranches.
10. Candy is elderly and lost one hand in an accident several years ago. He fears that he will become unable to work and will lose his job on the ranch. Like his dog, he will be seen as useless, and if this happens, he will have nowhere else to go. George and Lennie agree to let Candy live with them because he knows of a house they could buy cheaply, and he has saved about half of the money needed. Candy's help could enable them to achieve their dream much sooner than they anticipated.
11. Curley has been badgering Slim, and Slim insists that it's Curley's responsibility to look after his wife. Carlson agrees and mocks Curley for being afraid of Slim; Candy joins in. Lennie is innocently smiling to himself as he daydreams about his farm. Curley thinks that Lennie is laughing at him and punches him in the face.
12. At first Lennie cowers in fear and confusion as Curley attacks him. However, when George tells him to defend himself, he grabs Curley's fist and does not let go. His grip is so strong that he unknowingly breaks every bone in Curley's hand. He is confused and afraid, but George and Slim reassure him. George is afraid they will now be kicked off of the ranch, but Slim orders Curley to explain his injuries by saying he got his hand caught in a machine.

#### Lesson 4 Answers

1. Crooks stays in a shed where harnesses are stored, just off of the barn. He is responsible for taking care of the horses and stable and maintaining harnesses and other equipment for the horses.
2. Crooks has more personal possessions than the other men because his place on the ranch is more permanent. He owns magazines and books, including a dictionary and an old copy of the California civil code. He seems better-read than most of the ranch hands. He

is in frequent pain due to his past injuries. His manner is proud and dignified; he keeps his distance from the other men on the ranch.

3. Crooks is initially offended when Lennie enters his room. Since the other ranchers exclude Crooks from social activities, he feels they have no right to invade his privacy. At first he rejects Lennie's attempts to be friendly, but he becomes more polite when he realizes Lennie is being sincere.
4. When Crooks was a child, his father didn't like his playing with white children, even if they were nice. Crooks says he didn't understand this at the time but does now. The adult Crooks is the only black man on the ranch and one of very few black people who live in the area. He says that, because he is black, white people ignore him and talk in front of him as if he can't understand; he realizes that this is similar to how people treat Lennie. Crooks looks down on whites.
5. Crooks is lonely and bitter. His taunting of Lennie is probably motivated by his irritation about Lennie's coming into his room. He may also resent George and Lennie's friendship since he is without friends.
6. At first Crooks reacts with contempt, believing they are just like other men who have similar dreams but never act on them. When he realizes that they are serious about pursuing their dream, he asks if he can come work for them.
7. Curley's wife says she is looking for Curley but soon admits that she knows where he is. Her visit is prompted by boredom and loneliness. She tries to confide in the men but becomes angry when they repeat the story that Curley injured his hand in a machine. She sees through the lie and resents them for not sharing the truth.
8. At first Crooks maintains a dignified silence while Candy lashes out. Finally he speaks, coldly ordering Curley's wife to leave. Curley's wife responds by reminding Crooks that she can easily get him lynched on false accusations if she wishes. Knowing this is true, Crooks becomes silent once more.
9. Crooks tells Candy that he doesn't want to work on their farm after all. His encounter with Curley's wife is a reminder that, as a black man, he does not have a secure position in society. He has most likely decided that it is safer to remain in his current situation than to risk trusting in George, Lennie, and Candy.

#### Lesson 5 Answers

1. Lennie is upset because he played with his new puppy too roughly and accidentally killed it. He is upset about the puppy's death and fears that George will be angry with him and not let him tend the rabbits when they get their ranch. The incident serves to remind the reader that Lennie possesses exceptional physical strength but also has the mind of a child. Despite similar incidents in the past, he has not learned to control his impulses.
2. Curley's wife comes to talk to Lennie because the workers are playing in a horseshoe tournament and she has no one to talk to. She repeats several times that she is lonely. At first Lennie refuses to talk to her, stating repeatedly that George has forbidden him to do so. Eventually Curley's wife draws Lennie into conversation.
3. Curley's wife reveals that as a young woman, she wanted to become a famous actress. She was approached by people in the theater and film industries, but her mother prevented her from fulfilling her ambitions. As a result, she decided to marry Curley. Her dull, isolated life on the ranch is nothing like her youthful dreams of glamour, celebrity, and success.

4. Curley's wife invites Lennie to touch her hair because she is vain about it. She also recognizes that Lennie is kind, childlike, and essentially harmless. However, she becomes angry when Lennie's touch musses up her hair. She scolds him, he holds on tighter, and she screams. Terrified, Lennie tries to silence her. The resulting physical struggle leads him to accidentally break her neck.
5. The incident in the barn echoes previous incidents where innocent behavior on Lennie's part has harmed others. For instance, he loves small animals, but on more than one occasion he has killed them by unintentionally being too rough. The incident also parallels the incident that forced Lennie and George to leave Weed. In both situations, Lennie panicked and was unable to let go of the girl, causing her to become afraid. This situation is more serious because Lennie's panicked response, combined with his physical strength, led to Curley's wife's death.
6. Responses will vary. By choosing not to give this character a name, Steinbeck emphasizes her isolation and her distance from the male characters. Curley regards his wife as a possession to be guarded closely, Lennie regards her simply as a pretty woman, and the other men regard her as a tramp and a troublemaker. None of them understands her as a person.

#### Lesson 6 Answers

1. Lennie follows the advice George gave just before their arrival at the ranch—to hide in the brush by the Salinas River if he is ever in trouble.
2. As he waits for George, Lennie is torn by guilt and by the fear that George will finally abandon him. He imagines that he sees his deceased Aunt Clara scolding him for always getting in trouble and making George's life difficult. Next he imagines a giant rabbit telling him that he is crazy and unfit to tend the rabbits and that George will leave him.
3. George does not lose his temper. He halfheartedly repeats the complaints he has made in the past about what a burden Lennie is to him, but he does this only because Lennie expects it. His response shows that he feels no anger toward Lennie. However, he realizes that the situation cannot continue, and he is trying to resign himself to what he feels he has to do.
4. As a mob approaches from the distance, George repeats the familiar words Lennie loves, stating that they will always have each other and will soon have their own place. He instructs Lennie to look across the river as if he can see the place. George then reassures Lennie that he has never really been mad at him and that no one will cause trouble for them anymore. The purpose of George's conversation is to make Lennie's final moments happy and peaceful.
5. Slim understands that George is devastated after killing Lennie. He believes that George had no other choice. Responses will vary as to whether this was something George had to do. Some readers might agree that killing Lennie was more merciful than allowing him to be harmed or killed by the mob from the ranch. Other readers might feel that George should have tried harder to find another solution.
6. Curley and Carlson do not understand why George is upset about killing Lennie. As far as they are concerned, Lennie's death means justice was served. Their response reveals their callousness toward Lennie and their black-and-white view of right and wrong. They do not care about the fact that Lennie never intended to harm anyone; to them, killing Lennie is no more significant than killing an animal.