Of Mice and Men

Class Notes
These were written by students during the lessons.

You could read through them to help you remember events and how to analyse the text. This will also help you to find key quotations.

Chapter 1: The Brush by the Salinas River

Possible exam question: Comment on the significance of the opening chapter and the extent to which it prepares us for the rest of the novel.

- Near Soledad – means loneliness in Spanish – foreshadows key theme in novel
- Vivid colours - peaceful, heavenly, idyllic setting –like Garden of Eden - snake
- Pathetic fallacy used to create a positive, harmonious mood
- ‘a path beaten hard by boys’ implies violence, predatory nature of man
- Sense of invasion when people arrive
- Rabbits at peace with nature
- Ominous - something bad might happen

How are George and Lennie described?

- George is ‘small and quick…’ we are given the impression that he is almost mouse-like –link to ‘mice’ in title
- Lennie ‘snorted into the water like a horse…’ animal imagery –implies carelessness –ominous – he is simple - it will be the reason they get into trouble later in novel
- “Lennie dabbled his big paw” – animal imagery - referred to as a bear, suggests his size, his movements, unrefined, simplicity of thoughts, clumsy, adorable yet aggressive, foreshadowing later danger – also like the bear hunting for fish. (see similes of Curley & wife)
- The characters contrast through size: “Behind him walked his opposite”; mouse and bear. (juxtaposition)
- Lennie “imitated George” so G-leader
- Soledad – loneliness (symbolic)
- We hear that Lennie got them into trouble in Weed “they run us out of Weed” – past gradually revealed
- Ominious/foreshadows future events with C’s Wife
- Lennie has got poor memory and stutters a lot. He likes small cuddly animals – implies that Lennie is lonely, it provides friendship - that’s why he wants to stroke the little mouse, yet L is dangerous “I didn’t kill it”.
- “A water snake slipped along on the pool, its head held up like a little periscope.” – Simile harmless at start of novel, but kills at end of novel – echoes main plot
- Ominous atmosphere from the pathetic fallacy, “mountains flamed” this symbolism is also echoed at end of novel.
- ‘‘Like a terrier who doesn’t want to bring a ball to his master’’ simile to compare Lennie to a terrier and George to a master.
• George feels sorry for Lennie ‘‘If I was alone I could live so easy… I could stay in a cat house all night’’. Shows the lonely quality of human relationships that most ranch/ itinerant workers have and how lonely and desperate they are. G. makes this threat, but it is implied that it isn’t true.

• George and Lennie feel they are different as they have friendship ‘‘because I got you to look after me and you got me to look after you.’’ Symbiotic relationship – they need each other.

• Most ranch workers are lonely ‘‘guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliness guys in the world’’ –key theme of novel

• DREAMS- ‘‘… A little house an’ a couple of acres an’ a cow and some pigs’’, ‘‘live off the fatta the lan’’ ‘‘they can live off of their own income and have independence. (American Dream)

• Rabbits or a puppy symbol of dream for Lennie.

• They left Weed because Lennie was believed to have assaulted a women ‘‘just wanted to feel that girl’s dress- just wanted to pet it like a mouse’’ evidence to suggest Lennie is the one who gets them into trouble. Explicit link between mice and girl –motif runs through the novel.

Chapter 2: The Bunk House
How does Steinbeck establish the setting and characters?

Setting
• Rectangular building
  • ‘‘white-washed,’’ ‘‘unpainted’’ not very cosy or lived in, more like a place where you would put animals
  • Like army barracks or a prison, unrefined, seems very male orientated e.g ‘Western magazines ranchmen love to read.’
  • Man made environment in contrast to the nature of the previous chapter.
  • Deserted as if everywhere man goes, nature is destroyed.
  • Quite sparse in contrast to the freedom of chapter one
  • Confined, impersonal, very basic
  • ‘‘Sun through a bright dust laden bar’’ dusty, pathetic fallacy? Suggestion of some hope?
  • ‘‘Flies shot like rushing stars’’ simile - rather negative symbolism.

Candy
• Old, swamper (cleaner) ‘‘Stick-like wrist but no hand’’ – disability seems to be a symbol of the character –also implies effects of the harsh life of ranch
• The dog seems to have similar characteristics to his owner - they’re both ‘‘old’’ and ‘‘lame’’
• Gossip! – gives him friendship, role within the ranch. (old man can’t work)

Boss
• Little stocky man
  • ‘‘high-heeled boots and spurs to prove he was not a labouring man’’ symbol of status
  • ‘‘I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy’’, insight into G&L’s close friendship
• ‘I seen wise guys before’ perceptive

**Crooks**

• ‘Stable buck’
• ‘Nice fella too’
• Racism is a habit e.g. often use term ‘Nigger’
• ‘Got a crooked back where a horse kicked him’
• Two disabled characters suggest how rough ranch life is.
• The employees that are crippled are symbols of the violence of the place.
• ‘Crooks’ known by his nickname reflects lack of respect for him and his low status.
• ‘He reads a lot’ symbol of his intelligence.
• Symbol of Segregation on the ranch, and segregation in 1930’s USA

**Curly**  
**Pg: 26**

• ‘he wore high-heeled boots’ –inferiority complex – needs to establish his status through heels  
• ‘he glanced coldly’, the adverb ‘coldly’ shows that he is not interested in the two men  
• ‘his hands closed into fists’ implies that he is aggressive  
• ‘calculating’ and ‘pugnacious’ implies that he is calculating and aggressive, always ready to start a fight  
• ‘you speak when spoken to’- he is acting like the boss and playing his status  
• ‘he’s handy’-pg 27 –good at fighting  
• ‘Curley’s like a lot of little guys’-pg 28 Implies he’s jealous, seems to have an inferiority complex, like he has to prove himself because he’s not confident about himself- this makes him aggressive  
• ‘Seems like Curley ain’t givin’ nobody a chance.’ He wins in all situations.  
• ‘Mean, little guy’  
• ‘Curley’s cockier ‘n ever since he got married’  
• ‘Curley’s pants is full of ants’- has cocky façade and yet seems to feel nervous and inadequate.

**Lennie**

• Lennie Small, name is ironic  
• ‘Strong as a bull’ animal imagery – motif -narrative device  
• George: ‘I’d shoot myself’. foreshadowing shooting that goes on later. These hints create an ominous atmosphere and prepare reader for later events  
• ‘Lennie don’t know no rules’- dangerous ?

**Curley’s Wife**

• Has no name implies low status of women at that time in this context  
• ‘she got the eye’ – ie: she is flirtatious  
• ‘… Curley’s married … a tart.’

**Slim**

• ‘Jerkline skinner’
• ‘He don’t need no high-heel boots’ – high status and doesn’t need to prove himself.

George playing solitaire- a one person card game. – foreshadows future events - ending when he will be alone
• In spite of calling Lennie a ‘bastard’, he compliments him in pg 35.

Curley’s Wife
• ‘Rouged lips’ Finger nails are red. – wants to appear sexy.
  Connotations/represents lust and danger. Is she trying to attract attention?
  Implies promiscuity.
• ‘She put her hands behind her back and leaned against the doorframe…’
  implies she wants physical attention. Is she posing like a film star?
• ‘The rectangle of sunshine in the doorway was cut off.’ Pathetic fallacy implies she is bringing something negative to the scene- ominous- she brings darkness.
• Wearing ‘red mules…little bouquets of ostrich feathers.’ Inappropriately dressed for a ranch.
• George calls her a ‘tramp’ and ‘jail bait’. Is this ominous, foreshadowing what might happen later in the novel?
• Lennie’s reactions ‘Lennie’s eyes moved over her body’ He was ‘fascinated’ by her ‘he smiled admiringly’. George is worried by Lennie’s reaction.
• Colours and L.’s reaction remind reader of girl in Weed. Creates a sense of foreboding.

Slim p. 34-35
• ‘His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject’. Highly respected.
• Highly skilled.
• ‘… Understanding beyond thought.’ Very wise!
• ‘…majesty only achieved by royalty.’ He is compared to royalty- motif - metaphor to imply he has very high status.
• ‘His ear heard more than what was said to him…’
• ‘His hatchet face was ageless’
• Steinbeck seems to admire Slim. Seems to make a hero out of the average man.
• Pg 37- ‘Slim stood up slowly and with dignity’ suggests his majesty.
• The fact that Slim drowns four of his pups and keeps the biggest implies that life in the ranch depends on the survival of the fittest.

Carlson
• Is he being mean or realistic when he suggests that they should kill Candy’s dog?
• He discusses with Slim whether they should kill the dog which suggests that Slim is the leader and the decision maker.
The end of chapter 2 seems ominous - it is implied that George might ‘tangle’ with Curley himself. Also, at the end of the scene the dog is sitting by himself which suggests loneliness and foreshadows his fate in ch.3

**Chapter 3- the bunk house (pg 39)**

- Pathetic fallacy- outside the bunk house there is brightness whereas inside it is ‘dusk’. Implies something ominous might happen inside.
- The light is on George and Slim showing that they’re both at an equal position and that they understand each other.
- ‘George spoke proudly’ about Lennie showing that he is like a father to Lennie.
- Slim is described, by the use of a metaphor, as having ‘Godlike eyes’.
- George has a ‘tone of confession’- a theme of guilt- he feels guilty about telling Lennie to jump in the lake
- which shows that he has a conscience.
- Slim is like a priest that George is confessing to - he is ‘Godlike’.
- Ranch people get ‘mean’ because of their loneliness.

**Story of girl in WEED.**

- ‘a red dress’
- Claim ‘rape’
- “I’d be scared too if he grabbed me. But he never hurt her. He jus’ wanted to touch that red dress, like he wants to pet them pups all the time.” Evidence for link between pets –puppy –girls

- George plays –solitaire-foreshadows ending
- Candy has a ‘gut ache’-could foreshadow that perhaps his instincts tell him something is going to happen - Carlson wants to kill his dog.
- ‘slim’s opinions were law’ pg45
- Empty lifestyle
- Killing of Candy’s dog by Carlson implies that if your useless, you die. Candy’s dog was a part of him therefore the author makes us empathise with Candy.
- Candy’s relationship to his dog is similar George’s relationship with Lennie.
- Killing of dog also foreshadows killing of Lennie by George
- Men’s regular visits to Susy’s (brothel) implies that the men are lonely. Sense of isolation.
- Page 57, when George talks about his dream, his voice turns ‘warm’
- Evocative description of the dream ‘the cream is so God damn thick’
- Page 58 describes their American dream which seems to be about independence and freedom.
- Candy is hopeful of a brighter future when he offers to contribute to George and Lennie’s American dream. Dream unites men, offers hope and stops sense of loneliness.
- Candy regrets not killing dog himself: ‘I ought to have shot that dog myself, George…’ feels as if he was a coward for not doing it himself. It’s his
responsibility/duty Page 61 Foreshadows George’s decision to kills Lennie himself rather than leave him to the mercy of others at the end.

- Curly only picks fights with big guys or people he thinks he can beat, so he doesn’t start a fight with Slim. He then starts on Lennie ‘Curly stepped over to Lennie like a terrier’ – simile, small, vicious)

- ‘Curly was flopping like a fish on a line’ – simile, Lennie is the bear that caught the fish. Foreshadows another act of violence by Lennie. Same fish simile used to describe Curley’s Wife when she dies.

- ‘His fist lost in Lennie’s paw’ – animal imagery - this surprises the men because they didn’t knew how strong Lennie actually was.

- ‘Lennie covered his face with his huge paws and bleated with terror’ – more animal imagery - relates back to the beginning when he asks George if he should go live in a cave.

- Slim says to Curly to tell everyone that ‘he got his hand caught in a machine’ and Curly abides by what he says even though his dad owns the ranch.

Possible exam questions:
1. Explain the significance of Candy’s dog.
2. What is the significance of the end of this chapter.
3. How does this chapter foreshadow future events?

Chapter 4 – Stable
- Crooks: Black, crippled, represents black segregation in 1930’s USA. Has his own room within the stables so he’s away from the white workers. He reads - implies he is intelligent/educated. Joins games of the white people but on their terms.

- ‘Long box filled with straw with his blankets thrown down’ – implies he has treated like a animal, in the barn with animals.

- ‘a broken harness in the process of being repaired’

- ‘medicine bottles… both for himself and the horses’ – shows he cares for animals

- ‘single barrelled shotgun’ – prepared to defend himself

- ‘California civil code’ – interested in knowing about his rights.

- He also has a dictionary, tells us he’s intelligent

- ‘Crook’s was a proud aloof man’ – implies he has his self respect and dignity and knows that’s how it will lead to the others to respect him in the future.

- ‘Kept his distance and demanded other people keep there’s’- method of self defence to protect his dignity

- ‘His eyes… glitter with intensity’ implies he’s full of knowledge and observing skills are immaculate

- ‘In one hand he held a bottle of liniment, in the other he rubbed his spine’ when he sees Lennie he puts it away as if to hide what he was doing.

- Steinbeck presents Crooks as a character that should be admired, he has noble qualities, appearing better educated and with more pride than the white men
but yet he is black so is treated worse then everyone else. Steinbeck is thus showing 1930’s racism (not advocating it.)

- Crooks segregates himself ‘ its jus a busting black nigger speaking.’
- Crooks realises G and L can at least escape loneliness because they got each other ‘its jus bein with another guy’
- Crooks represents Loneliness / isolation due to racism.
- Crooks wants Lennie to empathise with him.
- ‘Like a dog’ animal imagery ‘growled’
- ‘Suddenly Lennie’s eyes centred and grew quiet, and mad. He stood up and walked dangerously toward Crooks.’ Hints at his power and destructiveness.
- ‘ a guy needs somebody to be near him’ – Crook’s loneliness
- Crooks is fearing for his own sanity
- Crooks is cynical or even realistic - thinks that no ranch worker will ever get their American dream ‘Nobody never gets to heaven. Nobody never gets no land’ ‘I seen too many guys with land in their head’ ‘I seen guys nearly crazy with loneliness for land’
- How is Chapter 4 significant? It brings together all the people with physical disabilities and social disadvantages together.
- ‘it was difficult for Crooks to conceal his pleasure with anger’ this shows he wants the company of the white man even though he is at a social disadvantage because of his skin colour.
- Hope between the three men - share dream and even Crooks want to be in on their plan – he wants to be an equal
- Lennie is the catalyst – he brings hope and brings the men together.
- Curly’s wife is also lonely on this ranch - another isolated character – she also has no name because she is of low status
- ‘they left all the weak ones here’
- ‘you think I don’t like to speak to someone every once and a while’ – Curley’s Wife is lonely.
- ‘I tell ya, I could of went with shows’ C’Wife is deluded, kidding herself.
- ‘Crooks… dignity of the negro…’
- ‘Candy… master of the situation’
- The shared dream gives them confidence and hope and unites them so that they stand up for each other against the girl
- ‘Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree’. She implies she can get him lynched. Shows racism of 1930’s America.
- ‘Reduced himself to nothin’ – Crooks was diminished by Curly’s Wife. Stienbeck is showing the reader the racism of the era and is critical of it.
- End of chapter finishes where they began: cyclical -loss of hope.

Chapter 5 the Barn

- ‘ the lazy afternoon humming’, pathetic fallacy creates a calm tranquil setting
- ‘Afternoon sun sliced in through the cracks of the barn’ – creates a sense of hope yet also ominous ‘the horses stamped their feet…”
- ‘A dead puppy’ it makes it ominous, Lennie keeps harming or killing. Does this foreshadow future events in the chapter?
• ‘Red ostrich feathers’ C’s Wife – danger, likes the incident in weed. Colour red makes explicit link between the two girls as girl in Weed wore a red dress.
• Curley’s wife: ‘I get awful lonely’ (85)
• Her dream: ‘I coulda made somthin’ of myself.’
• ‘I never got that letter’ – deluded
• The dream is more about ‘nice clothes’ shows her vanity
• ‘as the sun went down’ ominous, pathetic fallacy
• ‘I like to pet nice things’ L - echoes past events, also ominous as everything he pets is harmed and usually dies
• ‘her body flopped like a fish’ - simile, comparing her to a fish like Curly was compared to a fish when Lennie crushed his hand. (Bears catch and eat fish)
• The dead puppy at the beginning of the chapter foreshadows what happens to Curly’s Wife. ‘he pawed up the hay until it partly covered her’ (animal imagery)
• ‘The meanness and the plannings and the discontent and the ache for attention were all gone from her face’ – yet the author also emphasises that she was ‘sweet and young’ (like her previous self). Author makes us reader feel sorry for her.
• The reaction of the horses and nature reflects the reaction of the people ‘the horses stamped and snorted’ (page 92)
• ‘I guess maybe way back in my head I did’ – George implies that Lennie’s actions were inevitable, implies he knew something terrible might eventually happen. (Link to title of novel which implies that ‘best laid plans’ inevitably will fail.) ‘I think I knowed from the very first.’
• ‘Lennie never done it in meanness’
• ‘every body knowed you weren’t no good’
• Old Candy is angry that her death shattered his dream.
• Curly’s reaction: anger, revenge but not sorrow.
• George doesn’t want Lennie to end up in prison ‘s’pose they lock him up and put him in a cage.’ – animal imagery
• End of chapter ‘the barn was darkening gradually’ Pathetic fallacy/ symbolic since loss of hope and death has occurred.

Chapter 6 The Brush by the Salinas River
Possible exam question: Discuss the significance of the final chapter. How is this scene different from the opening chapter? Why?

• Cyclical – novel begins and ends at the same place.
• Highlights the end of their American dream
• Peaceful until the humans come, again.
• Beginning like Garden of Eden, at the end it is as if the apple has been eaten and a sin has occurred.
• Lennie - ‘Silent as a creeping bear moves.’ (animal imagery)
• Heron ‘swallowed the little snake while its tail waved frantically’ whereas in the beginning the animals live in harmony.

Weather/ environment:
• ‘a pleasant shade had fallen’
• ‘the sun had left the valley’
• ‘Rosy in the sun’
• ‘The mountains seemed to blaze with increased brightness’ – like hell instead of Eden? – Ominous, dramatic climax?
• The scene is symbolic, suggests the place is evil and highlights the predatory nature of men and animals?
• The sun ‘is leaving the valley’ implying that the American dream has left this place and the hope is all gone. Symbolism/pathetic fallacy.

Lennie’s vision of Aunt Clara – expressionistic
  • ‘gigantic rabbit’ - shows his imagination and his vision of the American dream
  • Its like a conversation with his conscience
  • ‘Christ knows…’ reflects on how place could be like Garden of Eden?
  • ‘His voice was monotonous’ as if he had done it many times before
  • ‘Guys like us got no fambly.’ … ‘But not us’ ‘I got you. We got each other’
  • ‘I gotta’ – G. as if giving himself the confidence to kill Lennie
  • Why does George kill Lennie? - A mercy killing
  • Like Candy with his dog, George feels Lennie is his dog and his responsibility.
  • George kills Lennie like Carlson kills the dog ‘ back of the neck where the spine meets the neck’
  • George tries to make sure Lennie dies with happy thoughts of the American dream.
  • The use of pathetic fallacy foreshadows the death e.g. ‘blue and soft’ – 102 ‘ the shadow in the valley was bluer’ – 103 … ‘the darkening slopes on the Gabilans’
  • Slim can empathise with how George has acted, whereas Carlson again is cold hearted on the matter.
  • The chapter is a symbol of the end of their friendship
  • ‘the crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again’
  • The opening chapter is optimistic and the end chapter is pessimistic.

How does Steinbeck show that the end of the novel is inevitable?
• Lennie got into trouble before in Weed.
• Soledad means loneliness, and George is always playing solitaire. He ends up alone.
• When the heron ate the snake.
• The death of the dog foreshadows the death of Lennie.
• Events are foreshadowed throughout. Eg: Lennie kills mouse, then puppy then girl.
• Title’s significance.