**Title: Of Mice and Men**

**Author: John Steinbeck**

**Time, Place:**

Salinas Valley, California during the Great Depression in the 1930s.

**Background:**

Lennie Small and his friend, George Milton, were forced to leave their homes because Lennie was accused of raping a girl from another town. The book begins with the two of them hiding from the angry townspeople. Lennie had a tendency to kill small, soft animals by accident; he was unaware of his own strength. This repeatedly leads to severe problems.

***Characters Descriptions***

**George Milton** - George is small, intelligent, dark of face, has restless eyes and sharp, strong features with every part of him defined. He is a cousin to Lennie and loves him very much. Always has to bail Lennie out of his troubles.

**Lennie Small** - Lennie is unnaturally large and has a shapeless face. He drags his feet when he walks and lets his arms hang. He is mentally retarded and needs George's constant attention and care. He has an infatuation with anything soft and furry. He acts impulsively which gets him and George into trouble numerous times.

**Curley** - Curley is the boss's son, and was a welterweight boxer. He was short and stocky, and wore high-heeled boots and spurs to prove he wasn't a laboring man. He believes himself superior to everyone.

**Candy-**He is an old man that is missing a hand.He is an outcast and is   
discriminated against. He offers his life savings to George and Lennie to   
help finance their dream. He wants to be a part of it and live on the farm   
with them. He has a friend and long time companion, his dog. Candy is afraid   
of being alone but he consents to the killing of his dog and wishes he could   
have killed him himself after it is over. Candy represents what will   
ultimately happen to all ranch hands. They will get old and have no place to   
go. Candy is very old and has hardly any money to his name.

**Crooks**-Black stable worker. He is disfigured and is an outcast as well as   
Candy. He has a place of his own and stays there by himself. He doesn't want   
company. He also wants to be part of George and Lennie's dream. He said that   
he would work for free. He gives up on the farm dream when he realizes it   
isn't going to work out. He is the only one who understands Lennie, besides   
George, and befriends him. He looks past Lennie's mental handicap and Lennie   
looks past Crooks' physical handicap.

**Slim-**Tall, thin and quiet. Slim is both respected and admired. Everyone   
seeks his approval, even Curley, who seems to have contempt for everyone else   
on the ranch. The others give into Slim because his word is the law. He is   
the voice of reason and understanding, and he consoles George after he has   
killed Lennie. Slim is the kind of man that George hopes to become one day.   
Carlson- He has a lack of concern for other people's feelings and doesn't take   
time to understand them. He is an insensitive person who cares nothing for   
others. He pushes for the killing of Candy's dog and doesn't understand why   
George is so upset after he has killed Lennie. Carlson is the type of man   
George hopes to avoid becoming.

**Curley's wife**-There isn't much known about her. She isn't even given a name   
but referred to as Curley's wife. She is lonely because Curley doesn't pay   
much attention to her. This lack of attention from Curley forces her to seek   
it elsewhere. She flirts with the other ranch hands but they pay her no   
attention either. She is in reality the end of George's and Lennie's dream.   
When Lennie kills her their dream is forever lost.

**Boss**-There is little known about him, except that Curley is his son. He   
interviews Lennie and George when they first come to the farm. He becomes   
suspicious that George is trying to put one over him because he won't let   
Lennie talk. He thinks that George is going to take Lennie's pay, he warns   
them he has seen wise guys before. He says that nobody can get away with   
anything. They can't trick him. He isn't a trustworthy person.

***Plot Summary***

Chapter One   
Lennie and George are hiding after getting off a bus that took them from Weed to Soledad. They were forced to leave Weed because Lennie was accused of rape. This was a very common occurrence - not being accused of rape, but being driven out of when they were. They went from ranch to ranch. They sit eating and talking about the past and talking about the future - the future where they own a ranch of their own with rabbits and chickens, and where they live off "the fatta the lan'." They discuss what there plans are for the next day; they are to go to the ranch and George is to do all the talking.

Chapter Two   
Lennie and George arrived at the ranch where an old man introduced them to their new home. The boss walked in while George and Candy (the old man) are talking. He takes down George and Lennie's names, where they worked before, and what skills they have. George answers every time for Lennie which makes the boss curious. He asks George what his interest in Lennie is, thinking that George is out to get Lennie's pay. George told the boss that Lennie had been kicked in the head by a horse when he was little, and he had told Lennie's aunt that he would take care of Lennie. When the boss left, Candy came back in with his dog after listening to the conversation through the door. Curley, the boss' son, came in soon after. He noticed the two new guys and saw a challenge - especially in Lennie. Once Curley left, George and Candy had a discussion about him. Candy said that Curley just does not like men who are bigger than him. Curley has been even cockier since he got married. Candy also said that Curley's wife is a bit of a "tart" , and then he left to go to work. Soon after, Curley's wife entered looking for her husband. After flirting with George and winning Lennie's love, she leaves just as Slim comes in. Slim introduces George and Lennie to Carlson. After another short confrontation with Curley the men went to dinner.

Chapter Three   
Slim's dog just had puppies and George asked if Lennie could have one. Slim said yes. After dinner Slim and George went back to the bunkhouse and sat down to play a game of cards while the men outside played horseshoes. George told Slim about the incident in Weed. Lennie had met this girl that was wearing a pretty red dress. He also had a problem where he has to touch things that he likes, so he innocently grabbed the dress. The girl started screaming because she got scared which scared Lennie. He held on tighter because he did not know what to do. The girl accused Lennie of rape and the two men had to hide until nightfall and then leave town.

Lennie entered the bunkhouse hiding his new puppy underneath his coat and George promptly sent him to put it back. Candy and his old dog joined George and Slim and soon Carlson entered, too. Carlson tried to convince Candy to shoot his dog because it was so old and in constant pain. Candy finally gave in after several minutes of debate but had Carlson shoot and bury the dog. He regretted not shooting his own dog later on. Crooks poked his head through the bunkhouse door telling Slim that his mule's hoof was ready to be tarred and Slim left. Several minutes later Curley came into the bunkhouse looking for his wife. He was told that no one had seen her around and was about to leave but he noticed that Slim was not there, either. He asked where Slim was and took off after him to the stables, thinking that Slim was with his wife. Whit and Carlson who had returned from shooting the dog followed Curley out, hoping for a fight. George and Lennie forgot that Candy was still there and started discussing their plans for the future. Candy wanted to join them at their farm but George was cautious at first. When Candy said that he could put in $350 towards buying the farm, their dreams seemed possible. After the discussion, Slim and Curley walked in arguing. Slim is tired of being accused of spending time with Curley's wife. Curley, already in a bad mood, saw Lennie smiling and laughing to himself still daydreaming about his rabbit-filled farm, and punches Lennie in the face. Lennie was terrified and tried to block the punches, but Curley hits him in the nose and stomach. George ordered Lennie to fight back. Lennie grabbed a flying fist and held tight, too scared to let go, crushing every bone in Curley's hand. George had to slap Lennie numerous times in order to get him to let go of Curley's broken hand. Slim got one of the men to get a buggy ready to take Curley to a doctor, George tried to convince Lennie that it was not his fault.

Chapter Four   
Crooks, a cripple and a stable buck, stayed the longest and has many possessions. Crooks is proud and keeps his distance from the other workers. When Crooks is rubbing liniment on his back Lennie comes in and smiles wanting to be friends with him, but Crooks gets angry. Lennie asks him why he is not with the other workers, Crooks says because he is black and the others don't want to be with him. When Lennie mentions the plans he has with George about a farm with rabbits, Crooks thinks he is crazy. Crooks tells Lennie about how during his childhood his family was the only black family in the town. Then Crooks asks Lennie what he would do if George did not come back, and Lennie got scared. Candy comes looking for Lennie, and they all start talking, when Lennie tells about the plans for the land, Crooks tells him it will never happen. Curley's wife comes into Crook's room but all the workers want her to go home. The men tell her to leave but she refuses, then laughs at Lennie's idea of land. When Crooks tells her to leave, she threatens him but then leaves, and George comes for Lennie.

Chapter Five   
Lennie sat in the barn. He killed his puppy. He tries to hide it so George does not find out. He got angry and threw the puppy and walked away. Curley's wife came into the barnd but Lennie refused to talk to her. She tells him she is lonely and wants someone to talk to. She fins out the puppy died and tells him he could get another one. When Lennie tells her he is not supposed to talk to her, she gets angry and asks why not, she will not harm him. Curley's wife tells Lennie she does not like Curley and hates living on the ranch. Curley's wife lets Lennie feel her soft hair, then tells him to let go but he panicked, and broke her neck accidentally. Lennie plans to throw the puppy away and leaves. Candy finds Curley's dead wife, shows George. Both know it was Lennie's fault. Candy asks George if they would still get the land, but he knows it will not happen. Curley and the rest of the men found Curley's wife and knew Lennie did it. All the men got together to look for Lennie, planning to shoot him.

Chapter Six   
Lennie goes to the place George told him to go to if he got into trouble. Lennie imagined his Aunt Clara, who scolded him for always getting into trouble and never caring about George, who has to take care of him. Lennie imagined a rabbit who told him that George would get rid of him because he is sick of him. George came and when Lennie asked him if he would leave, George says no. When Lennie offers to leave, George declines. George tells Lennie of their plans for a rabbit farm and tells Lennie to look across the river. George puts the gun to the back of Lennie's head and shoots him. Slim guesses what happened and tells George it had to be done.

***Major Conflicts***

**Man Vs Society**   
Lennie had a problem with his self control. He couldn't control his actions   
and his fetish with soft things got him into serious trouble. He touched a   
women's dress once because of his obsession and she cried rape. The   
townspeople chased George and Lennie out of town because they believed what the   
girl had said. Lennie was a nuisance to most people and George had to   
constantly get him out of trouble. He had to take care of Lennie because   
without George, Lennie could not have survived. They had to travel from town   
to town because of Lennie's compulsive behavior. Lennie got himself into a   
huge mess when he was left alone with Curley's wife. He was touching her hair   
and she told him to stop because she was getting mad, and he got really   
nervous. He accidentally broke her neck and killed her because he didn't know   
his own strength. When Curley and the other ranch hands found Curley's wife   
dead, they soon came to the conclusion that Lennie was at fault. They set out   
to track him down and ultimately kill him. This put George in a bad situation   
because he had to make the most important decision in his life.

**Man Vs Himself**   
George had taken care of Lennie and had done his thinking and talking for   
him. He was responsible for his well being and was supposed to look out for   
him. In previous situations George could easily get Lennie out of trouble by   
getting him away from the problem. This time, however, it was a very   
different, more complicated situation. George realized he couldn't get Lennie   
out of this, that they would never have their own farm which was their dream.   
Lennie would never be safe because he couldn't control himself and would   
constantly get them into trouble. George had to decide whether to kill Lennie   
before Curley did, or to let him run away. If he let him run away and hide,   
then he would just keep experiencing hardship after hardship. His mental   
disability which produced uncontrollable behavior would always be a hindering   
factor. Lennie was George's best friend and he trusted him with his life.   
George didn't want to see Lennie get killed by Curley and decided he had to do   
it himself. This internal conflict ripped George up inside, debating the   
"right" thing to do. He always wanted the best for him and this was the last   
resort, he had to put Lennie out of his own misery. He found Lennie and sat   
beside him, calming his nerves. When Lennie was persuaded everything was   
going to be all right he was at ease. That was when George pulled out a gun   
and aimed it at the back of Lennie's head and pulled the trigger. This   
decision was the hardest thing that George had to do in his life and there was   
much debate over it. In the end George realized their dream would never be a   
reality and Lennie would always be a burden, a thorn in his side. There was   
nothing more he could do but to let him go in the only way he knew how.   
Lennie could be at peace now without the danger and the ignorance of a society   
that would never accept someone different from themselves.

***Themes and Key Issues***

**Friendship**   
Friendship plays a major role in the novel. The farm hands all seem to   
be sympathetic to one another's situations and predicaments. Of course,   
George and Lennie form the centerpiece of the importance of friendship   
in the story. Around this center revolve the lives of the other   
characters. Each of the characters lends another support during the   
hardships faced throughout the story. The difficulties that the   
characters face, for example, the abuse that Lenny takes from Curly, the   
death of Candy's dog, the plight of the Negro farm hand, Crooks, are made   
less tragic at different points in the book because of the friendship   
that they feel for one another. A kind word and a sympathetic ear go a   
long way to help these downtrodden characters to face their   
difficulties.

**Power**   
The theme of power and control over others provides the main impetus to   
move the story along. Curley symbolizes the aggressive, violent nature   
of abusive bosses. The pathetic situations of the farm hands offer   
perfect opportunities to make them objects of ridicule. Curley takes   
full advantage of these opportunities. This is especially apparent in   
his dealings with Lennie. His verbal and physical abuse of Lennie are   
relentless. Ironically, Steinbeck makes sure to show us that Curley's   
toughness is only a cover-up for his own weaknesses.

**Loneliness**   
Every character in the story exhibits loneliness. Curley's wife seeks   
the attention of the farm hands as a substitute for the lack of attention   
from the abusive Curley. Crooks keeps to himself because he believes that   
the white people want nothing to do with a Negro. Candy's only friend   
is his dog, and when his dog dies, he despairs. Each of the characters   
in the story is attracted to the plans of Lennie and George. As they   
fantasize about a future together, their loneliness subsides   
momentarily.

**Loyalty and Sacrifice**   
The issue of loyalty is embodied in the character of George. He is a   
bright man who could possibly make a successful life for himself on his   
own. He chooses instead to stay beside his friend Lennie. The   
dim-witted Lennie needs George for survival. It is this need which   
propels George to make the great sacrifice he does. He truly loves   
Lennie through thick and thin. He protects him, he guides him, and   
ultimately saves him from misery. George has sacrificed a better life   
for himself in the name of loyalty for a friend.

**Dreams**   
The only outlet for the characters in this book to rise above their   
troubles is a shared dream of a better place. From the beginning of the   
story Lennie and George ride high on the thought of someday owning a   
farm. For George, it is the expectation of being his own boss and   
taking care of his own place. For Lennie, it is the expectation of   
simply being able to pet animals all day long. When this dream is   
shared with others, it becomes contagious. Candy and Crooks sign on to   
this fantasy, which helps them also to transcend their circumstances.   
Without dreams these characters would have nothing.

***Lessons, Morals, And Applications***

Of Mice and Men deals with many facets of human responsibility and love. The main moral conflict deals with George's responsibility to Lennie, and to the rest of the group. We know that Lennie is prone to killing things, and George has to keep constant watch over him to make sure he does not hurt or kill anyone or thing. While George was playing horseshoes with his co-workers, Lennie kills Curley's wife by breaking her neck. As George, Curley, and the rest of the group try to find Lennie, he escapes to a river. George eventually does find him. George knows he has two choices to make: kill Lennie and save him from what would happen to him at the hands of the others, or let him live and see what happens. After they talked, George eventually killed him.

The central, and biggest, moral issue of the book is confronted at this point of the book. Does George, or anyone else for that matter, have the right to kill Lennie, even though he was a murderer? The popular saying about this type of issue is, two wrongs don't make a right. This is true when it comes to the conflict. George would become just as guilty as Lennie if he were to murder Lennie, which he does, even if he did it in everyone's best interest. Murder is never justified. Obviously, George felt that he did the right thing in killing Lennie, and doing it took courage. But sincere people can be dead wrong. Lennie should have been brought to the police for a fair trial. The ones who were hunting the murderers became murderers themselves.