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Of Mice and Men
John Steinbeck



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Of Mice and Men

SECTION 1

1. As you read Steinbeck's opening description of the river water forming a dark pool with "recumbent limbs" of sycamore trees arching over it, what feeling do you get? Tell or draw the image that you have in your mind that produces this feeling.
2. Re-read this introductory scene, paying particular attention to the details of Lennie's facial expressions, body movements, and actions. How do they contrast to George's? Write a letter giving your opinion of each man.
3. After listening to the dialogue between the two men, what is your opinion of their relationship?
4. When evaluating George's reaction to or treatment of Lennie, some readers might consider George too harsh. Others might think George is too protective; some might feel George is too unrealistic. What is your opinion? What advice would you give George or Lennie?
5. Can you relate to a time that you were, or felt you were obligated to care for an individual who was extremely frustrating? Perhaps you were babysitting, dealing with a brother, sister, grandparent, neighbor, etc. Include the details of the situation, some dialogue, and people's reactions.

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9. In their present reality, however, Lennie causes problems for George. There are repeated mentions of lost jobs, Lennie getting in trouble, and Lennie's compulsion to touch soft things. George seems to expect Lennie to get in trouble again because he tells Lennie if there is trouble to "hide in the brush 'till I come for you." If you were George, would you continue to protect Lennie?
10. Can you describe a pattern of troubled behavior that you have experienced yourself, or observed in others? Why do you suppose it's so hard for Lennie to change this pattern?

Section 2

11. How would you feel about living in the bunkhouse and working on the ranch with Candy, Carlson, Curley, and the rest of the characters in *Of Mice and Men*? Can you think of good and bad points, or only one or the other?
12. A person's reactions to situations in life often reveal his or her attitudes, concerns, and personality traits. In this section of *Of Mice and Men*, when George and Lennie arrive at the ranch, the reader is presented with three contrasting reactions to the unusual occurrence of two men travelling together. First, when George answers for Lennie, the boss responds with suspicion and accuses George of taking Lennie's pay. Next, Curley reveals his hostile personality by becoming threatening and insisting that Lennie speak. Finally, Slim, who is confident and friendly, approves of George and Lennie's friendship. If you were a worker on the ranch, how do you suppose you would have responded to George and Lennie? Does your choice say anything about you?

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16. “Lennie cried out suddenly—I don’ like this place, George. This ain’t no good place. I wanna get outta here.” What do you suppose he finds fearful about this situation?
17. Candy explains the general gossip about Curley’s wife. Then, the reader is given a description of her behavior when she comes to the bunkhouse door. Finally, George concludes that she is a tramp. However, a reader who understands the treatment of women might conclude that Curley’s wife may be the victim of gender bias. For instance, she has no name or identity; she is simply her husband’s possession. Even worse, the males see her only as a sexual object. Her attempts to talk to people are interpreted by the men as “giving the eye” and dangerous, because Curley would beat them up for showing an interest in his property. What is your view of Curley’s wife and her situation?
18. The issue of mercy killing is raised in this section. What is your perspective on Slim’s drowning of the four pups because the mother would not be able to feed them? What do you think of Carlson trying to get Candy to shoot his dog just because it is old?

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36. In *Of Mice and Men*, Crooks is not the only character who seems to take his pain out on someone else. For instance, Curley felt humiliated by Slim, Carlson, and Candy just before he began lashing out at Lennie. In addition, not even an hour after Crooks hurt Lennie and had to calm him down, Curley's wife, in response to the frustration and rejection she was feeling from Crooks and Candy, attacks Crooks. Steinbeck wrote:

She turned on him in scorn. "Listen, Nigger," she said. "You know what I can do to you if you open your trap? ...Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung upon a tree so easy it ain't even funny." Crooks had reduced himself to nothing...

Imagine that after seeing *Of Mice and Men* performed as a play, two men are in an argument. One of the men is a "determinist." He believes that humans simply react to events; their choices are determined by forces beyond their control. For instance, Crooks can do nothing to control the racism that has created his alienation and pain. The other man is a religious man who insists that humans are given free will and have to account for their reactions. Do you think the reactions of Curley, Curley's wife, and Crooks are determined by forces beyond their control, or could they have chosen not to lash out at others in spite of their painful circumstances? What would you say to the determinist and to the believer in free will? As part of your remarks, include examples from your experience of the human reaction to rejection and humiliation in dialogue form.