

ENGLISH 11 – *Of Mice and Men* Reading Guide

NAME _____

“To a Mouse”

In November, 1785, while Robert Burns was plowing a field, he cut through the nest of a field mouse. So moved was he by this incident that he was inspired to pen “To a Mouse.” The poem contains the oft-quoted lines, “The best-laid schemes o mice and men gang aft agley.”

“To a Mouse” by Robert Burns	Translation of Key Words
<p>Wee sleekit, cow'in, tim'rous beastie, O, what a panic's ion thy breastie! Thou need na start awa sae hasty, Wi bickering brattle! I wad be laith to rin and chase thee, Wi murdering pattle!</p> <p>I'm truly sorry man's dominion Has broken Nature's social union, An justifies that ill opinion, Which makes thee startle At me, thy poor, earth-born companion, An fellow mortal!</p> <p>I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thief; What then? poor beastie, thou muan live! A daimen icker in a thrave 'S a sma request; I'll get a blessin wi the lave, An never miss't!</p> <p>Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin! Its silly wa's the win's are strewin! An naething, now, to big a new ane, O foggage green! An bleak December's win's ensuin, Baith snell and keen!</p> <p>Thou saw the fields laid bare and waste, An weary winter comin fast, An cozie here, beneath the blast, Thou thought to dwell, Till crash! the cruel coulter past Out thro thy cell.</p>	<p>sleekit - glossy coated breastie - breast sae - so bickering brattle – rushing scurry laith - loath, rin - run pattle - plow scraper</p> <p>whyles – sometimes muan - must daimen icker in a thrave - odd ear in 24 sheaves sma - small lave - remainder</p> <p>naething – nothing big – build ane - one foggage - coarse grass</p> <p>snell - bitter</p> <p>coulter – plowshare</p>

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<p>That wee bit heap of leaves an stibble, Has cost thee monie a weary nibble! Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble, But house or hald, To thole the winter's sleety dribble, An cranreuch cauld!</p> <p>But Mousie, thou art no thy lane, In proving foresight may be vain: The best-laid schemes o mice and men Gang aft agley, An lea'e us nought but grief and pain, For promis'd joy!</p> <p>Still thou art blest, compar'd wi me! The present only touched thee: On prospects drear! An forward, tho I canna see, I guess an fear!</p>	<p>stibble – stubble monie – many house or hald – without holding thole - endure cranreuch cauld - hoar frost</p> <p>lane – alone</p> <p>gang aft agley - often go awry</p>
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Interpret:

1. What happens in verse one? _____

2. In verse two, what does the speaker regret? _____

3. In verse three, why is the speaker not upset? _____

4. What three problems are mentioned in verse four? _____

5. In verse five, what is the speaker's attitude toward the mouse's plan? _____

In that same verse, what is the speaker's attitude toward himself? _____

6. In verse six, what has the mouse's home cost it? _____

What must it now endure? _____

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7. In verse seven, why should the mouse feel some comfort? _____

8. In verse eight, who is better off, the mouse or the speaker? _____

Even though the best-laid plans both of mice and of men often go wrong, in what way are the mouse and the speaker different?

Pre-reading (p. 9)

1. When and where was the play of Steinbeck's novel. *Of Mice and Men*, first performed?

2. How were Lenny and George briefly characterized?

3. What is true of the migrant worker population, whose tragedy Steinbeck hoped to dramatize through this story?

4. What three major literary awards did Steinbeck receive in 1940, 1962, and 1964?

5. About what kind of people did Steinbeck mainly write (whose stories became a central theme in his works)?

Act I, Scene 1 (pp. 10 -15)

1. How can you tell that Lennie tries to be just like George?

2. How does the playwright use Lennie to provide the story's exposition?

3. Why didn't George and Lennie stay in Weed, California?

4. How can you tell that George blames Lennie for losing their jobs in Weed?

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5. How can you tell that George doesn't fully trust Lennie where their jobs are concerned?
6. Why does Lennie carry a mouse? What does George say is the reason the mouse died?
7. What "lady" used to give Lennie mice? Why did she stop?
8. Why does George wish he were alone?
9. What did Lennie do in Weed that forced him and George to run away?
10. What does George promise to get for Lennie (to replace the mice)?
11. Why can't George simply send Lennie back to his aunt's house?
12. In what way are George and Lennie different from other migrant workers?
13. Why does George want Lennie to look carefully at their location.

Creative Writing Topic (extra-credit): Adopt the persona (character) of either George or Lennie. While pretending to be that character, write how you feel about your partner. Try to use that character's style of speech, if possible, (single-weight grade)

Act I, Scene 2 (pp. 15-23)

1. Why will George and Lennie have to be very diplomatic when they meet the boss of this farm?
2. After reading Candy's explanation, what would you infer to be the reason Whitey the blacksmith left the farm?
3. What is ironic about the treatment of Crooks last Christmas?
4. What sound does Lennie make when he is nervous?

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5. What does the boss seem to suspect George of doing?
6. How did George flatter Lennie while speaking with the boss?
7. What does Curley mean when he says to George, “You drawin’ cards this time?”
8. How does Candy explain Curley’s “tough-guy” behavior?
9. Why would Curley’s wife be partially responsible for his aggressive behavior?
10. What does George insist that Lennie do if they again encounter Curley?
11. What does George mean by “a little stake”?
12. When Curley’s wife “drops her coquetry,” what reason does she give for being in the bunkhouse?
13. How does Curley’s wife affect George? How does she affect Lennie?
14. Why does Lennie say they should leave?
15. What words in the *stage directions* characterize Slim?
16. What is Carlson’s plan for one of Slim’s pups?
17. What does Lennie want George to ask Slim?
18. What foreboding comment does George make about his future with Curley?

Act II, Scene 1 (pp. 23 - 32)

1. Why does Slim think Lennie and George are different from other migrant farm workers he has seen?

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2. Why does George regret playing one particular joke on Lennie?
3. Why was Lennie's reaction to that joke ironic?
4. What is ironic about Slim's opinion of "real smart guy[s]"?
5. What card game does George play during this scene?
6. When the girl in Weed screamed at Lennie, what was his instinctive reaction?
7. Why did Lennie and George have to hide in an irrigation ditch?
8. What does Lennie do (concerning a dog) that angers George?
9. What are Carlson's two main reasons for urging Candy to euthanize his dog?
10. What does Whit say the real issue is (with regard to Candy's dog)?
11. In what way does Slim mediate between Candy and Carlson?
12. How can Whit tell that George and Lennie *really* came here to work?
13. How long has Curley been married? Why does Whit object to her?
14. Why do Whit and Carlson go to the barn, following Curley there?
15. Name three things that George likes about the farm he wants to buy.
16. How does Candy make George feel that his dream of owning his own farm may become a reality?

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17. How soon will George, Lennie, and Candy have their own farm?
18. Why does Curley's Wife feel she is misunderstood?
19. Why is Slim angry with Curley, the boss's son?
20. How does Carlson react to Curley's invitation "ta step outside"?
21. How does Lennie draw Curley's hostility to himself?
22. What instinctive reaction by Lennie ends the fight with Curley?
23. How does Slim persuade Curley not to fire Lennie and George?

Act II, Scene 2 (pp. 32 - 35)

1. How does Crooks reveal the racism to which he is subjected?
2. How does Crooks torment Lennie briefly?
3. How can you tell that Crooks is educated?
4. How was Crooks' childhood very different from his current situation?
5. Why is Crooks so certain that Lennie and George will never get their farm?
6. How can you tell that Crooks changed his mind about Lennie and George's plan for the future?
7. What made George return from the town?
8. Why is Curley's Wife upset with her husband?

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9. Where does Curley's Wife feel she could have had a future, if not on this farm?
10. How can you tell that Curley's Wife knows that Lennie is the one who crushed Curley's hand?
11. Why does George nearly strike Curley's Wife?
12. Why doesn't George go ahead and strike her?

Act III, Scene 1 (pp. 35 - 38)

1. What happened to Lennie's puppy?
2. How is Lennie's reaction to the puppy typical of a young child's reaction?
3. What is Candy's good news for Lennie?
4. Why is Curley's wife leaving?
5. In the first two columns of page 36, Lennie and Curley's Wife talk but don't really talk with each other. What is each character describing?
6. Curley's Wife reveals her real motive for marrying Curley. What was it?
7. Curley's Wife reveals a childhood memory. In that memory, what dream does she say never came true?
8. What crucial mistake does Curley's Wife make? What is the result?
9. What does George believe he must do? Why doesn't Candy agree?
10. How can you explain Candy's anger at Curley's Wife?
11. What connection does Slim see between this death and an earlier event?

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12. How does Slim persuade George that there is “only one way to get [Lennie] out” of this situation?

13. Why does Curley believe Lennie is armed and dangerous?

Act III, Scene 2 (pp. 38 - 39)

1. In what way has the play come “full circle”?

2. Why does Slim suggest to Curley that they “spread out”?

3. How does George show his trust in Slim?

4. From the start of p. 39, about what has Lennie obviously forgotten?

5. What “lost” item does George have in his pocket?

6. What does George ask Lennie to visualize in the final moments of the play?

7. Looking back: What clues did we see throughout the play that George and Lennie’s dream would never materialize?

Metaphor/Symbol Analysis

A metaphor states that one thing is another thing, implying a comparison.

A symbol reduces a complex idea to a concrete representation of that idea.

Explain how each character or idea below was a metaphor or symbol in this story.

1. Candy’s dog -

2. The disabled characters (four total) -

3. Solitaire (the card game) -

4. The Dead Mouse and Dead Puppy -

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Theme

One strong theme in this story is this truth:

> Humans must often sacrifice their dreams in order to survive.

Explain briefly how this story showed that theme.

Quotations

For each quotation, name the speaker and explain what he was saying.

1. “Whatever we ain’t got, that’s what you want. God almighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job and work, and no trouble. No mess at all, and when the end of the month come, I could take my fifty bucks and go into town and get whatever I want.”

2. “Well, we’ll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we’ll just say to hell with going to work. We’ll build up a fire in the stove and set around and listen to the rain coming down on the roof.”

3. “Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy. I just like to know what your interest is.”

4. “Suppose you had to sit out here and read books. Sure, you could play horseshoes until it got dark, but then you got to read books. Books ain’t no good. A guy needs somebody-to be near him. A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody. Don’t make no difference who the guy is, long’s he’s with you. I tell you, I tell you a guy gets too lonely and he gets sick.”

5. “Everybody wants a little piece of land. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land. It’s just in their head. They’re all the time talking about it, but it’s just in their head.”

6. “Maybe you guys better go. I ain’t sure I want you in here no more. A colored man got to have some rights even if he don’t like ‘em.”

