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George

★ GRADE BOOSTER

Draw up a list of what other characters in the novel say about George. Opposite each quotation, write down exactly what we learn about George from the quotation.

WHO IS GEORGE?

George Milton is an itinerant farm worker, one of many who travel round the country from job to job with no permanent base or home. He is Lennie's friend and companion.



WHAT DOES GEORGE DO IN THE NOVEL?

- He promises Lennie's Aunt Clara that he will look after Lennie (see pp. 43–4).
- After originally mistreating Lennie he cares for him, despite considerable inconvenience and even risk (see p. 44).
- He finds work for himself and Lennie (see p. 6).
- He rescues and protects Lennie when Lennie gets into trouble. We hear about what happened in Weed. The implication is that this is not the first time (see pp. 45–6).
- He feeds Lennie the dream of them both owning a small ranch (see pp. 14–16).
- He orders Lennie to fight back against Curley (see p. 69).
- He leaves Lennie to go to the local brothel with the other ranch hands, showing the part of him that wants to be free from Lennie (see p. 75).
- He shoots Lennie dead, knowing this is kinder to Lennie than being lynched or locked up (see p. 116).

HOW IS GEORGE DESCRIBED AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Quotation	Means?
George is 'small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features'.	This suggests intelligence, a strong personality but also some unhappiness ('restless eyes').
'What the hell kind of bed you giving us, anyways. We don't want no pants rabbits.'	George is clean-living and healthy.
'I ain't nothing to scream about, but [Lennie] there can put up more grain alone than most pairs can.'	George is modest.
'"I ain't got no people," George said, "I seen the guys that go around the ranches on their own. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean."'	George is caring, but also frightened of being lonely.
'You keep away from Curley, Lennie.'	George is a good judge of character, and can sense danger.

6 EXAMINER'S TIP

You will know a lot about George when you've studied the novel. It is always tempting to put down everything you know in a written answer. But you only get marks for points that answer what the examiner asks. For example, if the question asks if George is justified in shooting Lennie, the fact that George lives cleanly is not relevant.

Quotation

Means?

'Get 'im, Lennie.'

He has a sense of justice, and will not allow Lennie to be beaten up.

Slim: 'That ain't no good, George.'
George: 'I know, I know.'

Slim means Lennie could not survive being locked up. In killing a man he loves, George is heroic.

EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT GEORGE



- George symbolises the itinerant farm worker – basically decent men trapped by their jobs and haunted by loneliness. These men have little or no control over their lives. George's dream of owning a tiny patch of land and becoming independent makes his life bearable. It is also the dream of thousands of other similar workers – as Crooks says, 'Ever' body wants a little piece of lan'. When Lennie dies, so does the dream.
- When writing about George be careful not to over-simplify what he is and what he does. It would be easy to see him as a hero who cares for Lennie as a father might. Make sure you note what it costs George to do what he does – 'If I was alone I could live so easy'. In joining the other ranch hands for a night on the town, George shows that part of him yearns for a 'normal' life.
- One of the points made in the novel through George is that intelligence on its own is worth little. If it were worth much, then both George and Crooks would be rich men, because both are obviously intelligent.
- George's companionship with Lennie staves off loneliness, but it also gives him a role in life. He has a clear task, looking after Lennie. Early on it made George feel superior. Now it simply makes him different, and even gives him status. In addition, just as there is trouble in being with Lennie, so there is strength; as George says to Slim: 'We kinda look after each other.' Who would fight George if they knew they would have to fight Lennie as well?
- Does George show 'moral growth' over the course of the novel? His relationship with Lennie matures him, forces him to think more and increases his awareness of moral problems. Early on he used to show off the power he had over Lennie – 'Made me seem God damn smart alongside of him' – forcing him to do stupid and, in one instance, life-threatening things. His sense of shame soon stopped him. However, his shooting of Lennie is the result of everything we have learnt about him and is almost inevitable. Features which George has possessed all along combine to force him to shoot Lennie.
- George is full of compassion and it is this which makes him wish for a clean death for Lennie, rather than a lynching or a lifetime spent cooped up in jail.
- Why does George shoot Lennie? George is a responsible person. He brought Lennie to the farm, and so the responsibility for what happened and for the punishment are his. He accepts them, with great heroism. Slim spots that George had to do what he does to Lennie: 'You hadda, George. I swear you hadda.'

KEY CONNECTIONS

Gary Sinise, who played George in the 1992 version, is a real Steinbeck fan. As a young man his favourite book was *Of Mice and Men*, and he has also starred in a stage production of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Sinise directed the 1992 film too!

CHECKPOINT 6

How is George's physical cleanliness emphasised in the novel?

Understanding the question

Questions in exams or controlled conditions often need **'decoding'**. Decoding the question helps to ensure that your answer will be relevant and refers to what you have been asked.



TOP TIP UNDERSTAND EXAM LANGUAGE

Get used to exam and essay style language by looking at specimen questions and the words they use. For example:

Exam speak!	Means?	Example
'convey ideas'	'get across a point to the reader' Usually you have to say 'how' this is done.	The sad description of the dead puppy might <i>convey</i> the idea of a hard life for innocent people in <i>Of Mice and Men</i> (see pp. 92–3).
'methods, techniques, ways'	The ' <i>things</i> ' the writer does – such as a powerful description, introducing a shocking event, how someone speaks, etc.	The writer might use the <i>method</i> of contrasting characters to show good and bad, e.g. Slim versus Curley (see pp. 70–1).
'present, represent'	1) present: ' <i>the way in which things are told to us</i> ' 2) represent: ' <i>what those things might mean underneath</i> '	The writer <i>presents</i> the reader with descriptions of the bunk house. It could <i>represent</i> a family home, or perhaps even a prison (see p. 19).

TOP TIP 'BREAK DOWN' THE QUESTION

Pick out the **key words** or phrases. For example:

Question: How does Steinbeck use the **character of Candy** to **represent** the **idea of broken dreams** in the novel?

- The focus is on **character** (Candy) so you will need to talk about him, what he does, says and how he is described by Steinbeck and the other characters.
- The words **'represent the idea of broken dreams'** tell us this is a question that is equally about one of the novel's **themes**, e.g. 'broken or failed dreams'.

What does this tell you?

Focus on Candy not on other characters, except for their relationships to him (i.e. Candy shares George and Lennie's dream).

TOP TIP KNOW YOUR LITERARY LANGUAGE!

When studying texts you will come across words such as **'theme'**, **'symbol'**, **'imagery'**, **'metaphor'**, etc. Some of these words could come up in the question you are asked. Make sure you know what they mean before you use them!

Planning your answer

It is vital that you **plan** your response to the controlled assessment task or possible exam question carefully, and that you then follow your plan, if you are to gain the higher grades.

TOP TIP DO THE RESEARCH!

When revising for the exam, or planning your response to the controlled assessment task, collect **evidence** (for example, quotations) that will support what you have to say. For example, if preparing to answer a question on how Steinbeck has explored the theme of loneliness, you might list ideas as follows:

Key point	Evidence/quotation	Page/chapter. etc
Loneliness is a major theme in the novel	'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world.'	Pages 14–15

TOP TIP PLAN FOR PARAGRAPHS

Use paragraphs to plan your answer. For example:

- 1 The first paragraph should **introduce** the **argument** you wish to make.
- 2 Then, jot down how the paragraphs that follow will **develop** this argument. Include **details, examples** and other possible **points of view**. Each paragraph is likely to deal with one point at a time.
- 3 **Sum up** your argument in the last paragraph.

For example, for the following task:

Question: How does Steinbeck present the character of Curley's wife. Comment on the language devices and techniques used.

Simple plan:

- Paragraph 1: *Introduction*, e.g. Curley's wife is presented as both a dangerous person and a victim of loneliness. She is both guilty and innocent.
- Paragraph 2: *First point*, e.g. Steinbeck forewarns the reader by having Candy warn George about Curley's wife. Refer to Candy's first meeting with George.
- Paragraph 3: *Second point*, e.g. Steinbeck describes her in physical terms that emphasise her sexual attractiveness and her use of this to tease men.
- Paragraph 4: *Third point*, e.g. Curley's wife can be cruel, and willing to misuse power. Refer to what happens when she visits Crooks's room.
- Paragraph 5: *Fourth point*, e.g. She is also shown as vulnerable and a victim. Refer to the final description of her lying dead in the stable.
- Paragraph 6: *Conclusion*, e.g. Make sure to mention the comments Steinbeck made to the actress chosen to play Curley's wife.

