Top Ten Tips

YORK NOTES

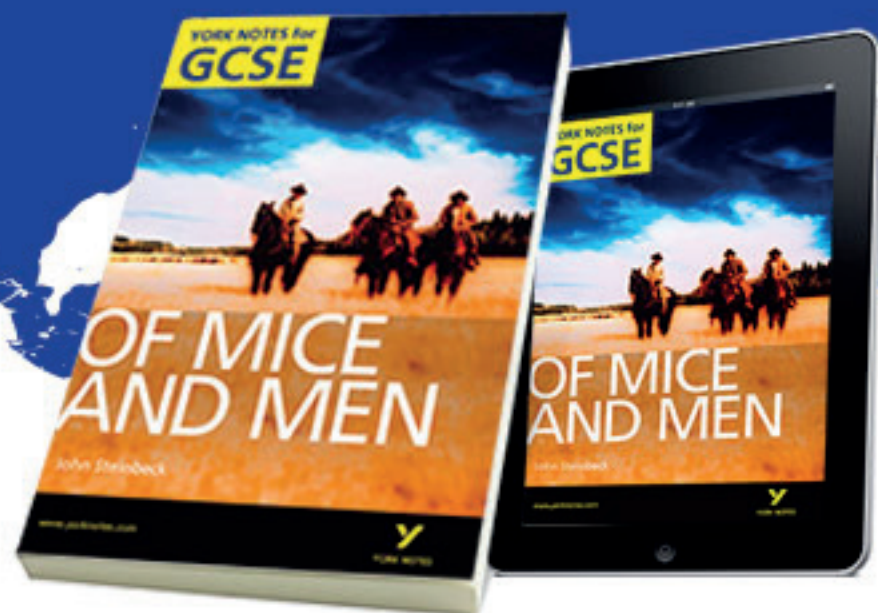### Studying
OF MICE AND MEN

YORK NOTES for GCSE

OF MICE AND MEN
John Steinbeck

TOP TIP 1

Read the book!

The starting point is, obviously, to read the book. Sacrificing a few hours of your time to **read the novel for yourself** is the first step in familiarising yourself with the text.

Whilst reading, **highlight** your **favourite moments, any lines that you particularly like** or anything that really stands out. Doing this means that you are **interacting critically** with the text, which will serve you well when you come to study the text more closely.

TOP TIP 2

Historical context is key

There are **four main settings** in *Of Mice and Men*, which can help you to **contextualise** the **action/plot** of the novel. They are:

✓ The pool
✓ The bunk house
✓ Crooks's hut
✓ The barn

Draw a spider-diagram for each, noting **what happens in each** and **why** these settings are **important**. You could argue that having so few locations **concentrates the action**, making the novel feel more like a **play** in some respects. Why do you think Steinbeck does this?

TOP TIP 3

Engage with the characters

The characters in *Of Mice and Men* are really **memorable**. Engaging with key characters such as **Lennie** and **George** will **unlock** the novel for you, and help to you form your own **independent ideas.** For example:

✓ What is it about the **relationship** between **George and Lennie** that is so **striking**?
✓ What would you have done in George's shoes – **is Slim right** when he says *'You hadda, George'*?

Think about how the characters link to the themes of **Relationships, Human fragility** and **Loneliness**. This will enrich your study of both characters and themes!

TOP TIP 4

Literary terms

Nothing is more **impressive** than being able to **identify** literary techniques used by an author and then **comment on how they are effective**! Grasping some of **Steinbeck's techniques** and using the proper terms is a sure way to **boost your grade**.

For example, do you know what a **paradox** is? How about **metaphors** and **similes**? Does Steinbeck use **imagery**? Does he **foreshadow** the ending?

REMEMBER: always comment on the **effect** of Steinbeck's techniques.

TOP TIP 5

Quotations

Get some **key quotations** under your belt for **themes, language** and **characters** – sometimes you can find quotations that touch on all three. Check out our '**Key quotations**' feature in the '**Revise**' section of the **online guide** to start you off!

REMEMBER: **embed your quotations** into a paragraph in your essay for a more sophisticated answer.

TOP TIP 6

Dreams / The American Dream

The themes of **Dreams** and **The American Dream** are both central to your understanding of the novel, so make sure you know them inside out!

The American Dream doubles up as good **contextual** knowledge, too, so make sure you understand what is **generally** meant by **The American Dream**, and how **Steinbeck** uses this idea in *Of Mice and Men.*

TOP TIP 7

Context of the novel

Think of the context like the **backdrop to the novel**: without understanding it, the novel will **not make complete sense**. Make sure you are familiar with:

✓ The Great Depression
✓ The American Dream

This will give your answers **more depth** and show **maturity**. But, make sure you apply the **context** to the novel, don't just repeat what you know.

How does the Depression **shape** the ranch hands and the life they lead? Understanding this may allow you to **empathise** with the **characters** more fully.

TOP TIP 8

Linking key themes with characters / events

Try linking the **key themes** with **characters** and **events**. For example, ask yourself which characters/events can be most closely associated with following themes:

✓ Loneliness
✓ Vulnerability
✓ Protest and racial prejudice
✓ Dreams versus reality

The more you 'map' your ideas, the more likely you are to remember key points and moments from the text as well as developing your own **interpretations**. For example, did you know that the name of the town, *Soledad*, means 'loneliness' in Spanish? Small **details** like this are a good way to **make your essays stand out**!

TOP TIP 9

Progress check

How much do you really know about the novel? Try and answer these questions – if you don't know the answers, maybe a bit more revision is needed!

✓ How many sections is the novel divided into?
✓ What happened at Weed that caused Lennie and George to leave? In which chapter do we learn about this?
✓ Who brought up Lennie and handed him over to George to care for?
✓ List the reasons for killing Candy's dog, and then list the reasons for George killing Lennie. How similar are they?

TOP TIP 10

Further questions

Nothing prepares you as well as **practising some exam questions**. Here are a few to get you started.

For more exam- or controlled assessment-style questions, see the **Grade Booster** section in the **print** and online study guide:

✓ In what way are dreams an important theme in the novel, and why do you think George and Lennie are unable to achieve theirs?
✓ How is the character of Curley important to the novel as a whole?
✓ How is the theme of friendship presented in the novel?

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