

She has a tragic death and Steinbeck describes her as a completely different character to the one in the novel's beginning (the girl in Weed)

Beneath her make up and her acting, she was merely "very pretty and simple"

Unlike the only other woman in the novel, she has no maternal qualities. Without children, how otherwise can women be defined and valued in the brutal world, other than as whores? Curley's wife suffers from this stereotyping

Ultimately, she does nothing to deserve her death. This shows how vulnerable she is. She is powerless against male strength, and so comes across as a tragic, young figure. She is a narrative device - Lennie's murder of her is awful, but but Steinbeck creates her as more sympathetic than this

Initially we are unsympathetic towards her but then we come to see her fate as supremely tragic

LONELINESS: "I'm looking for Curley" - she needs excuses to talk to people. Irony - they won't talk to her precisely therefore Curley becomes jealous. "Sat'day night. Everybody out doin' somp'pin. An' what am I doin'? Standin' here talkin' to a bunch of bindle stiffs..." etc. Likes to talk to anybody.

Quotations:

First appearance: "A girl was standing there looking in. She had full, rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made up. Her finger-nails were red. Her hair hung in little rolled clusters, like sausages. She wore a cotton house dress and red mules, on the instep of which were little bouquets of red ostrich feathers.

George threatens Lennie about her: "Don't you ever take a look at that bitch. I don't care what she says and what she does. I seen 'em worse than her. You leave her be."

Curley looking for her. First time: "'You seen a girl around here?' he demanded angrily.", second time, "'Well, I didn't mean nothing, Slim. I just ast you.'" - he is now having to apologise

Slim calls her a "looloo" and she's referred to as "jail bait" - all about her appearance

When she goes into Crooks' room they have to remind her about Curley, "you gotta husband" but even then she speaks ill of him, making it clear that she is very unhappy, "'I'm glad you bust up Curley a little bit. He got it comin' to him. Sometimes I'd like to bust him myself.'"

E. Crooks

Language

- Speaks using local slang and has a thick American accent. He also often misses letters out of words, which emphasises his use of colloquialisms; **"The thing is, they're talkin', or their settin'"**

Physical Characteristics

- Uses colloquial language, **"Glad ta meet ya."**
- **"Meant to ask you, Slim - how's your bitch?"** - Initially, he comes across as someone who is interested in others and appears to be friendly, however as the plot progresses we come to realise that this is not the case
- He uses racist language, and thinks nothing of offending others and making his lack of concern for them apparent, **"nigger"**

Importance to the plot

- He owns the Luger that is used to kill both Candy's dog and Lennie - he is willing to kill and commit violence
- He stands up to Curley about his wife and is willing to speak his mind, **"Why'n't you tell her to stay the hell at home where she belongs."** This also shows his archaic and backward views of women and his very sexist views
- When Curley's wife is found dead, Carlson and Curley join up to go and kill Lennie; Carlson seems to relish the idea of the chase and the kill at the end of it, **"I'll get my Luger.' and he ran out too."**
- When Carlson discovers that his Luger is missing, he immediately assumes that it is Lennie - he is always jumping to conclusions and assuming the worst of people, **"the bastard's stole my Luger"** - it was in fact George that took it!

Relationship with George and Lennie

- When they first meet, he is friendly towards them, **"Glad ta meet ya."**
- The relationship quickly deteriorates however when they come to realise how violent and lacking in compassion he is. It is for this reason that George has few qualms about taking his Luger from him- he sees it as a means of preventing further violence. **"He reached into his pocket and brought out Carlson's Luger."**
- Carlson has the final words in the novel, **"Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys?"** As well as showing his lack of compassion and his acceptance of violence, it also shows the general lack of empathy that is there throughout the novel and the hostility that these men face. They live in a hostile world and so revenge is an essential part of survival

G. Candy

Candy is **"a tall, stoop-shouldered old man He was dressed in blue jeans and carried a big push-broom in his left hand."** His right hand is simply a stump because he lost his hand in a ranch accident. Now the owners of the ranch keep him on as long as he can "swamp" out or clean the bunkhouse, **"the old man came slowly into the room. He had his broom in his hand. And at his heels there walked a drag-footed sheep dog, gray of muzzle, and with pale, blind old eyes"**. Candy gives Steinbeck an opportunity to discuss social discrimination based on age and handicaps. Candy represents what happens to everyone who gets old in American society: They are let go, canned, thrown out, used up. Candy's greatest fear is that once he is no longer able to help with the cleaning he will be "disposed of." Like his old dog, he has lived beyond his usefulness.

He is friendly to George and Lennie when they first arrive, and continues to be a companion to them, using their dream as a means of escaping the rejection that he will face if he stays on the ranch. He settles them in and reassures them that it will all be fine. He calls the boss and Crooks both **"nice men"**, unwilling to judge them as the others do.

Candy and his dog parallel the relationship of George and Lennie. Like Candy's dog, Lennie depends on George to take

care of him and show him what to do, **"got no teeth, damn near blind, can't eat. Candy feeds him milk. He can't chew nothing else."** Candy, like George, is different from the other ranch hands because he has his dog as a constant companion, someone devoted and loyal to him. When the unfeeling Carlson suggests that Candy's dog be put out of its misery, Candy abdicates the responsibility to Carlson, **"At last Candy said softly and hopelessly: 'Awright – take 'im'"**. He tells George later that he should have shot his dog himself, foreshadowing George's decision to take responsibility for Lennie's death and **"be his brother's keeper."**

Candy also plays a significant role in the dream, providing the money needed to make the down payment, . Because of Candy, the dream almost becomes real. Candy's down payment causes George to believe that, perhaps, the dream can be realized. But none of them count on the tragic meeting between Curley's wife and Lennie in the barn. Even then Candy still thinks he can have his safe haven, a place where no one will throw him out when he is too old. The dream is so strong in him that he pleads with George, to no avail, to have their farm despite Lennie's death.

H. Slim

Slim is a very important character in the novel as he is one of the few who is not handicapped in any way, either by race, gender or a physical difficulty. He displays natural authority and is respected by all. He is the "prince of the ranch". George trusts him and his "calm, godlike eyes". He is compassionate to people and animals but also realistic - that Candy's dog has to be shot, for example.

At the end of the novel, he comforts George after the shooting of Lennie but also points out the necessity of Lennie's murder to him, "You hadda, George". The suggestion seems to be that Slim and George will be friends after the book has finished. He is both more intelligent and sensitive than the other men and doesn't get involved in their petty feuds and fights. Slim keeps himself apart from the ranchers but is often referred to when they need a judgement or an opinion.

Descriptions of Slim:

1. "the prince of the ranch", "understanding beyond thought", "majesty", "gravity". He is not a labourer but is clearly skilled as he drives the mules.
2. "His tone was friendly", but he is realistic about drowning the pups
3. He is kind to George and Lennie when they first arrive and offers them food. It is this that causes George to trust him. He is a device through which the reader learns about George and Lennie's past. He has "calm, godlike eyes" whilst George confides in him about Weed.
4. He is non-judgemental, and has an innate understanding of Lennie's problems, "He's jes' like a kid, ain't he."
5. "Slim's opinions were law" about the puppies and it is also to Slim whom Whit comes when he wants to show him the letter from Bill Tenner. He will "take a shovel" to Candy's dog but also offers to give him a puppy in return for his loss.

people at that time.

The ranchers' community is a microcosm of the harshness of life for ranch workers during the Great Depression.

The ranchers are important as they symbolise the failure of the American Dream in that they cannot achieve their ideal of buying a small farm and "livin' off the fatta land."

Although the ranchers are all drawn from a narrow social range, the class of working men, Steinbeck creates different personalities and characters for them....from the slow Lennie, to the loyal George, Slim who is dignified and authoritative, the cynical and sceptical Crooks, the ruthless Carlson, Candy, the fatalist and Curley, the unpleasant, jealous, small man.

The ranchers all have a fatalistic sense of what will happen to them. They are often quite despondent about the future. George tells Candy about their dream of buying a ranch, "I think I knowed from the very start. I think I knowed we'd never do it."

Paradoxically, when George tells Lennie that, "An' you ain't gonna do no bad things like you done in Weed." We sense the predictability of his actions. The ranch is the place where Lennie's fate will be sealed as the ranchers cannot stop his immense and uncontrollable strength.

The ranchers are important as they add to the artistry of the novel by their plain, colloquial speech, "A guy on a ranch don't never listen. Nor he don't ask no questions."

The ranchers are the novel as Steinbeck controls the plot, their words and actions and uses the ranch itself as the stage on which all the action is played out. (N.B. the novel was originally conceived as a drama)

J. Disabled Characters

Why does Steinbeck create so many disabled characters in "OMAM"

Introduction:

Nearly all the characters that Steinbeck creates have at least one disability. They are either mentally or physically handicapped. He also uses disabled characters to help portray the hardship of the Great Depression and how every character, although suffering similar hardships, is struggling with their own issues.

Para. 1 - Physically disabled characters:

Crooks:

- Physically disabled - his back
- His race - he is treated differently to everyone else
- He has few rights
- He has to be careful about what he says
- People take their anger out on him - "The boss gives him hell when he's mad"

taking on them, as they overcome (or in some cases not) the difficulties that America throws at them. By creating disabled characters, Steinbeck makes it easier for the audience to sympathise with them, and the theme of unrequited dreams is one that the reader can associate with. Each has their own story to tell about how they nearly obtained their dream but circumstances have got in their way and now they are forced to live their lives on the ranch. Slim is the only character without a disability, or at least not one that we are aware of. This helps to highlight Slim's position as the "prince of the ranch" and the suggestion that he is somehow superior to the others implies that there are those who were able to survive the depression and brings a ray of hope to the novel.

Topic Sentences:

- With the exception of Slim, all of the characters have some kind of disability.
- All characters in the novel have disabilities, either mental, physical or emotional.
- Candy and Lennie are the only two characters who do not discriminate against people because of their disability.
- Curley's position as the boss' son and his aggressive behaviour means that no one trusts or likes him.
- Candy is the only person in the novel who doesn't seem to look at anybody differently because of a disability. He only uses a derogatory tone towards Curley's wife when he thinks that she is going to cause trouble and when she's dead. He says "poor bastard" and when he calls Crooks a "nigger" he means it not in a derogatory way but is simply using a term that was used unilaterally at that time.
- George is unique in the book as he is the only person who has chosen his handicap in the form of Lennie.
- Crooks is doubly handicapped: physically because of his back but he is also subject to discrimination on account of his race.

III. Themes

A. General themes

1. Misfits, outcasts and unfortunate characters

1. Candy's Dog

"A dragfooted sheepdog, gray of muzzle, and with pale, blind old eyes."

Candy's dog exemplifies how far both he and his master have come since they were successfully herding sheep together.

Carlson points this out to Candy, **"got no teeth, he's all stiff with rheumatism. He ain't no good to you Candy. An' he ain't no good to himself. Why'n't you shoot him, Candy?"**

This is right at the beginning of the novel, but immediately hints at the ending; George will have to, for one last time, get Lennie out of a terrible scrape when he has done a bad thing. It is the ultimate test of their friendship, but we know that it will be tested in some way by the beginning of the novel.

9. George playing solitaire

George plays solitaire all of the time, even though he is surrounded by people. It suggests that he is almost anticipating being on his own, and that he knows that he has to become self supporting and able to be alone and do his own thing rather than having to look after Lennie all of the time.

10. The heron killing the water snake

This early on suggests violence and killing as a theme in the novel; the natural world mirrors the world that the ranchers inhabit, where violence is the order.

2. The Ending

The pool by the river is the place where Lennie and George's story begins and ends. It is a safe sanctuary and a place free from the prejudices of the rest of the world, where Lennie and George can be themselves. This is where the story begins, and also where the dream farm and Lennie meet their end.

Here are a few questions to consider:

1. Why does Steinbeck begin and end the novella in the same place?

Cyclical structure; brings the novel full circle – shows that the ranchers are on a track that it is impossible to get off – shows that George and Lennie's dream of escaping is futile even though there were moments when it looked possible.

2. In chapter 3, Steinbeck mentions a heron, rabbits and other animals. What might these images symbolise?

The heron is a predator- the natural world mirrors the world that the characters inhabit- although it looks beautiful there is violence everywhere – see the heron eating the water snake. The rabbits are a part of Lennie and George's fantasy homestead – The talking rabbit shows that Lennie is more comfortable with animals than people, he doesn't feel judged by them. Lennie is often compared to animals in the novel, so it seems natural that he has an affinity with them. The rabbits are innocent and weak; they simply have to submit to what the world throws at them, in a similar way to the ranchers.

3. In his solitude and overwhelming fear and sadness, Lennie begins to have hallucinations about his Aunt Clara and a rabbit. How does Steinbeck use imagery to communicate Lennie's state of mind in this section?

Talking rabbit = weird

The fact that the rabbit says that he doesn't want Lennie looking after him removes all hope for the future. Tending the rabbits was the part of the dream that he

Aunt Clara – even though he is foolish, he knows that he has done something wrong. He is afraid that George is going to leave him as he has done something really wrong this time so he's turning to the maternal figure who was his protector before George. He defied George and spoke to Curley's wife – he feels like their

friendship can't be salvaged.

4. "Ain't you gonna give me hell?" Why do you think Lennie wants George to do this at this point in the novel? How does Steinbeck present George here?

Every time Lennie has messed up previously, George has always given him hell, then talked about the dream and moved on. Lennie doesn't like being told off by George, but at the same time he finds it quite reassuring as he knows that it will all be alright and George will look after him. The fact that he doesn't do that makes Lennie think that there is something seriously wrong.

George knows what he has to do at this point, so he goes through the motions, speaking monotonously. He does what he has to to reassure Lennie and to make sure that he dies quietly.

5. "The wind waves flowed up the green pool". Comment on Steinbeck's choice of image here, as the men get nearer to George and Lennie.

6. Why do you think George talks about the farm as he shoots Lennie? How does this conclude the theme of 'dreams'?

Killing the dream. George keeps the dream alive because of Lennie – were it not for Lennie he would be like all the other ranchers. George talks about the farm to try and make it peaceful for Lennie.

7. If George didn't kill Lennie, what would have happened to him? Consider the context of the novella.

He would have probably been lynched, or sent to prison, or an asylum. If he had been left to Carlson and Curley they would have shown him no mercy and killed him in a very violent and brutal way.

8. Was George's decision an act of love or selfishness?

Mercy killing – murder to stop someone harming others.

Love – wanted to protect Lennie, as there was no escaping or getting away from what he had done.

Selfishness – George's life would be easier without Lennie – see the beginning of the novel – George will be able to go out and enjoy himself rather than having to deal with the hindrance that is Lennie – he is now free from responsibility.

9. Comment on Slim's reaction to what George has done. How is this consistent with his character throughout? Link this to the shooting of Candy's dog.

Slim is typically calm and takes control, not overtly shouting orders at them like Curley but simply steps in and soothes the situation. He is, at this point, "the prince of the ranch" with his "god-like eyes." He has the respect of the men so doesn't need to force them to do things for him. There is also a sense that there will be a friendship developing between him and George – he will not allow him to be alone. When Candy's dog is killed, he talks about other things, trying to diffuse the tension and even offers one of his pups to him. He doesn't want him to dwell on it.

10. The last lines of the novel are famous. Think of as many reasons as you can for why Steinbeck chooses to end the novel in this way, and why the ending might fit in so well.