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Instructional Guides  
for Literature

# Of Mice and Men

John Steinbeck





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## How to Use This Literature Guide

Today's standards demand rigor and relevance in the reading of complex texts. The units in this series guide teachers in a rich and deep exploration of worthwhile works of literature for classroom study. The most rigorous instruction can also be interesting and engaging!

Many current strategies for effective literacy instruction have been incorporated into these instructional guides for literature. Throughout the units, text-dependent questions are used to determine comprehension of the book as well as student interpretation of the vocabulary words. The books chosen for the series are complex exemplars of carefully crafted works of literature. Close reading is used throughout the units to guide students toward revisiting the text and using textual evidence to respond to prompts orally and in writing. Students must analyze the story elements in multiple assignments for each section of the book. All of these strategies work together to rigorously guide students through their study of literature.

The next few pages will make clear how to use this guide for a purposeful and meaningful literature study. Each section of this guide is set up in the same way to make it easier for you to implement the instruction in your classroom.

### Theme Thoughts

The great works of literature used throughout this series have important themes that have been relevant to people for many years. Many of the themes will be discussed during the various sections of this instructional guide. However, it would also benefit students to have independent time to think about the key themes of the novel.

Before students begin reading, have them complete *Pre-Reading Theme Thoughts* (page 13). This graphic organizer will allow students to think about the themes outside the context of the story. They'll have the opportunity to evaluate statements based on important themes and defend their opinions. Be sure to have students keep their papers for comparison to the *Post-Reading Theme Thoughts* (page 64). This graphic organizer is similar to the pre-reading activity. However, this time, students will be answering the questions from the point of view of one of the characters in the novel. They have to think about how the character would feel about each statement and defend their thoughts. To conclude the activity, have students compare what they thought about the themes before they read the novel to what the characters discovered during the story.

## How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

### Vocabulary

Each teacher overview page has definitions and sentences about how key vocabulary words are used in the section. These words should be introduced and discussed with students. There are two student vocabulary activity pages in each section. On the first page, students are asked to define the ten words chosen by the author of this unit. On the second page in most sections, each student will select at least eight words that he or she finds interesting or difficult. For each section, choose one of these pages for your students to complete. With either assignment, you may want to have students get into pairs to discuss the meanings of the words. Allow students to use reference guides to define the words. Monitor students to make sure the definitions they have found are accurate and relate to how the words are used in the text.

On some of the vocabulary student pages, students are asked to answer text-related questions about the vocabulary words. The following question stems will help you create your own vocabulary questions if you'd like to extend the discussion.

- How does this word describe \_\_\_\_\_'s character?
- In what ways does this word relate to the problem in this story?
- How does this word help you understand the setting?
- In what ways is this word related to the story's solution?
- Describe how this word supports the novel's theme of . . . .
- What visual images does this word bring to your mind?
- For what reasons might the author have chosen to use this particular word?

At times, more work with the words will help students understand their meanings. The following quick vocabulary activities are a good way to further study the words.

- Have students practice their vocabulary and writing skills by creating sentences and/or paragraphs in which multiple vocabulary words are used correctly and with evidence of understanding.
- Students can play vocabulary concentration. Students make a set of cards with the words and a separate set of cards with the definitions. Then, students lay the cards out on the table and play concentration. The goal of the game is to match vocabulary words with their definitions.
- Students can create word journal entries about the words. Students choose words they think are important and then describe why they think each word is important within the novel.

## How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

### Analyzing the Literature

After students have read each section, hold small-group or whole-class discussions. Questions are written at two levels of complexity to allow you to decide which questions best meet the needs of your students. The Level 1 questions are typically less abstract than the Level 2 questions. Level 1 is indicated by a square, while Level 2 is indicated by a triangle. These questions focus on the various story elements, such as character, setting, and plot. Student pages are provided if you want to assign these questions for individual student work before your group discussion. Be sure to add further questions as your students discuss what they've read. For each question, a few key points are provided for your reference as you discuss the novel with students.

### Reader Response

In today's classrooms, there are often great readers who are below-average writers. So much time and energy is spent in classrooms getting students to read on grade level that little time is left to focus on writing skills. To help teachers include more writing in their daily literacy instruction, each section of this guide has a literature-based reader response prompt. Each of the three genres of writing is used in the reader responses within this guide: narrative, informative/explanatory, and argument. Students have a choice between two prompts for each reader response. One response requires students to make connections between the reading and their own lives. The other prompt requires students to determine text-to-text connections or connections within the text.

### Close Reading the Literature

Within each section, students are asked to closely reread a short section of text. Since some versions of the novels have different page numbers, the selections are described by chapter and location, along with quotations to guide the readers. After each close reading, there are text-dependent questions to be answered by students.

Encourage students to read each question one at a time and then go back to the text and discover the answer. Work with students to ensure that they use the text to determine their answers rather than making unsupported inferences. Once students have answered the questions, discuss what they discovered. Suggested answers are provided in the answer key.

## How to Use This Literature Guide *(cont.)*

### Close Reading the Literature *(cont.)*

The generic, open-ended stems below can be used to write your own text-dependent questions if you would like to give students more practice.

- Give evidence from the text to support . . . .
- Justify your thinking using text evidence about . . . .
- Find evidence to support your conclusions about . . . .
- What text evidence helps the reader understand . . . ?
- Use the book to tell why \_\_\_\_ happens.
- Based on events in the story, . . . .
- Use text evidence to describe why . . . .

### Making Connections

The activities in this section help students make cross-curricular connections to writing, mathematics, science, social studies, or the fine arts. Each of these types of activities requires higher-order thinking skills from students.

### Creating with the Story Elements

It is important to spend time discussing the common story elements in literature. Understanding the characters, setting, and plot can increase students' comprehension and appreciation of the story. If teachers discuss these elements daily, students will more likely internalize the concepts and look for the elements in their independent reading. Another important reason for focusing on the story elements is that students will be better writers if they think about how the stories they read are constructed.

Students are given three options for working with the story elements. They are asked to create something related to the characters, setting, or plot of the novel. Students are given a choice in this activity so that they can decide to complete the activity that most appeals to them. Different multiple intelligences are used so that the activities are diverse and interesting to all students.

## Analyzing the Literature

Provided below are discussion questions you can use in small groups, with the whole class, or for written assignments. Each question is given at two levels so you can choose the right question for each group of students. Activity sheets with these questions are provided (pages 18–19) if you want students to write their responses. For each question, a few key discussion points are provided for your reference.

Story Element	■ Level 1	▲ Level 2	Key Discussion Points
Character	What do George and Lennie physically look like?	How do George's and Lennie's physical descriptions mirror their characters?	George is described as being small and dark with sharp, strong features. Lennie is very large with a shapeless face, sloping shoulders, and pale eyes. This echoes their characters because George is intelligent and controlled while Lennie is slow and awkward.
Setting	Why are George and Lennie camping at night?	Why do you think the author has Lennie and George camp out instead of going to the ranch that night?	The bus driver lets them off far away from the ranch, so they have to walk four miles to the ranch. George wants to relax for the night before going in the morning. Answers may include that the camp scene allows readers to learn about the characters' dreams of owning land. Starting at the ranch would make introducing that specific information more difficult.
Character	What does George say his life would be like without Lennie?	How does Lennie cause trouble for George?	George says that without Lennie, he could keep a job and do whatever he wants—play cards, buy whiskey, or stay at a hotel. Lennie causes them both to lose their jobs. George gives the example that in Weed, Lennie touched a girl's dress and wouldn't let go when she got scared. They ended up hiding from a group of men looking for them.
Plot	Why is the dialogue written in non-standard English?	How does the author's style of writing the dialogue help tell the story?	The dialogue is written to show how George and Lennie actually talk. It helps make the story feel more realistic and shows the readers their characters. Saying things like, "You never oughtta drink water when it ain't running" lets readers know the two men are probably not rich nor highly educated.



## Analyzing the Literature

**Directions:** Think about the section you just read. Read each question and state your response with textual evidence.

1. What do George and Lennie physically look like?

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2. Why are George and Lennie camping at night?

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3. What does George say his life would be like without Lennie?

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4. Why is the dialogue written in non-standard English?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 1



# Analyzing the Literature

**Directions:** Think about the section you just read. Read each question and state your response with textual evidence.

1. How do George's and Lennie's physical descriptions mirror their characters?

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2. Why do you think the author has Lennie and George camp out instead of going to the ranch that night?

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3. How does Lennie cause trouble for George?

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4. How does the author's style of writing the dialogue help tell the story?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 1

# Close Reading the Literature

**Directions:** Closely reread the section in chapter 1 when George tells Lennie about their future plans. Begin with, “George stared morosely at the fire.” Read until he says, “I ain’t got time for no more.” Read each question and then revisit the text to find evidence that supports your answer.

1. According to the text, how are George and Lennie different from the other workers?

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2. Explain why Lennie says, “I could go off in the hills there. Someplace I’d find a cave.” Justify your answer using the text to provide evidence.

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3. What role does the setting play in this section? Support your answer with textual examples.

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4. What does the author want readers to infer about George and Lennie’s relationship?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 1

# Creating with the Story Elements

**Directions:** Thinking about the story elements of character, setting, and plot in a novel is very important to understanding what is happening and why. Complete **one** of the following activities based on what you've read so far. Be creative and have fun!

## Characters

Create work cards for George and Lennie. Include their names, skills, and any other information you feel would be important for their potential employers to know.

## Setting

Create a map of the place where George and Lennie camp the first night. Include the bus stop, campsite, and ranch. Use the author's description for distance scale.

## Plot

Write a letter from George to the woman in the red dress from Weed. Explain and apologize for what happened.