

Of Mice & Men Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Use specific textual evidence and quotations when appropriate. If you quote, be sure to embed and cite your quotations.

Chapter 1

1. Look at the way both Lennie and George are first described. How is this initial description fitting when the reader finds out more about each man?

2. Is the relationship between George and Lennie one of friendship, or does George only feel obligated to take care of Lennie? What evidence can you find to support either conclusion?

3. Why does Lennie have the dead mouse? Why does George take it away?

4. What happened at the last place where Lennie and George worked?

5. Describe the dream George and Lennie share for their future. Why is it so important to both men?

Chapter 2

The second chapter opens in the bunkhouse of the ranch where George and Lennie are seeking farm work. Although the bunkhouse is where all the field hands live, it's deserted, indicating that the men are already out in the fields. An old man who's missing one hand enters the bunkhouse with a broom. He is later identified as Candy, and his only friend is an old, blind, foul-smelling sheepdog that follows him around the ranch.

George and Lennie enter and first encounter Candy, who provides some description of the ranch, including a reference to the African-American named Crooks. Named as such due to a crooked back that resulted from being kicked by a horse, Crooks is the only black ranch hand, and his job as "stable buck" is to care for the horses and

mules in the stables. Shortly thereafter, the boss enters, angry that George and Lennie had not arrived the night before as he'd been told they would. The boss, a stocky man in a Stetson hat, flannel shirt and boots with spurs, employs the two men anyways, and Lennie manages to stay quiet as George arranges their employment. Shortly after the boss leaves, his son, Curley, enters looking for his dad. Curley, a thin, young curly-haired man wearing a work glove on one hand, insists that Lennie respond to his questions. Curley is clearly intimidated by Lennie's size and apparent strength. Lennie fearfully stutters his responses to Curley and later, after Curley's departure, tells George he is afraid of another potential encounter with Curley. Once again, George privately reminds Lennie to run away and hide in the brush if he gets into trouble again.

After Curley leaves, Candy tells George and Lennie that Curley's wife also lives on the ranch and that she has a habit of flirting with the other field hands. Soon she appears in the bunkhouse, looking for Curley. Curley's wife, who is never given a proper name, is adorned in red fingernails, heavy makeup, a cotton dress, and red shoes.

Soon, the laborers return from the fields and one named Slim enters the bunkhouse. He is tall, has long, black hair combed straight back, wears denim jeans and jacket, and walks with an authoritative air about him, setting him apart as a skilled worker and craftsman. Slim engages George in conversation and expresses curiosity and bewilderment over seeing two guys traveling together. Slim introduces the two men to another field hand, Carlson, and shares that his dog had nine puppies last night, four of which he had to drown so that the others could live.

Chapter 3

George thanks Slim for giving one of his puppies to Lennie. Slim responds by commenting that Lennie isn't bright but that he's shown great strength in bucking barley on the ranch. Slim again mentions how unusual it is to see two guys traveling together as migrant farm workers to which George replies that he's gotten used to traveling with Lennie ever since Lennie's Aunt Clara died and left him in George's care. Throughout their conversation, George expresses compassion for Lennie, while still not hesitating to point out Lennie's flaws. When Slim asks why the two men left Weed, George hesitantly explains that Lennie had latched onto a woman's red dress, got all "mixed up" and wouldn't let go of it. George had to intercede to convince Lennie to let go of the dress, and shortly thereafter the woman told the police she'd been raped.

Carlson returns from playing horseshoes with Crooks and immediately begins complaining about the stench of Candy's dog. Slim offers a pup to Candy and tells him that he should shoot the old dog to put it out of its misery. Eventually Carlson offers to shoot the dog himself. Candy is clearly hesitant to end the life of his beloved companion, but eventually he agrees to let Carlson do it, and Carlson subsequently takes the dog outside and shoots it.

Meanwhile over a game of cards, George comments to a field hand named Whit that he and Lennie aim to stick around for a while and "roll up a stake" of cash. Crooks pokes his head in to tell Slim that Lennie is pestering the newborn puppies. When Slim leaves, Whit tells George about a local drinking establishment and brothel called Old Susy's. Lennie and Carlson return to the bunkhouse and Carlson cleans his gun and returns it to the bag under his bunk. George and Lennie repeat their dream of rolling up a stake and buying their own ranch where Lennie can tend the rabbits. Candy offers to chip in some money if he can live on their ranch and tend the garden. Candy fears that if he's deemed helpless, he'll be shot like his dog, and he laments having not shot the dog himself. George and Candy make a plan to put a down payment on a plot of land in a month's time.

Their plans are interrupted when Curley returns, seeking his wife. Carlson snaps at Curley telling him he should keep better track of her. As Curley's responding to Carlson's affront, he notices Lennie, still smiling at the thought

of tending the rabbits on his own ranch. Assuming Lennie is laughing at him, Curley confronts Lennie, challenging him to a fight. Noticeably terrified, Lennie begs George to stop Curley. Irritated at Curley's taunts, Slim nearly throws a punch, but before he can, George instructs Lennie to "get 'im." Mid-punch, Curley finds his fist grasped by Lennie, who proceeds to crush his fingers and hand, incapable of letting go until instructed to do so by George. Slim convinces Curley to claim his hand was caught in a machine and Carlson escorts him to a doctor. Visibly shaken, Lennie apologizes for hurting the man, simply stating that he was only following George's instructions.

Chapter 4

Crooks relaxes in a separate bunk, since he's not allowed to reside in the same quarters as the white farm hands. His room is sparse but neat. When Lennie stops in for a visit, Crooks initially reacts with irritation but eventually warms up to Lennie and invites him in to sit and talk. Crooks reveals his family history—that he was born in California and that he's used to being the only "colored man" around. Lennie ignores Crooks' back story, continually redirecting the conversation to Slim's new pups. Crooks asks Lennie what he'd do if George left him, but Lennie assures Slim that George would never leave him. Crooks comments that you never know what a guy might do. When Lennie relays their dream of owning their own land to Crooks, Crooks laughs and recalls the dozens of men he's seen come through with the same never-fulfilled dream.

Candy arrives at Crooks' door, looking for Lennie, and reluctantly accepts Crooks' invitation to enter. When the conversation reverts to talk of owning their own ranch, Crooks again denies that their plan will ever materialize, but Candy insists that it will. Crooks reminds the men that George is in town at the moment spending his money at Old Susy's whorehouse, but when Candy explains that he's already got some savings he can put towards the venture, Crooks expresses an interest in helping out at their ranch. Curley's wife appears, asking the men if they've seen Curley. Although Crooks and Candy avoid engaging with her, Lennie appears enthralled by her presence. When Crooks suggests she go on her way, Curley's wife begins to describe how lonely and miserable her life is at home with Curley. Before she leaves she inquires about the bruises on Lennie's face and threatens Crooks' life when he scolds her for entering his room without permission.

George returns from town and reprimands Lennie for hanging out with Crooks. On their way out, Crooks tells Candy to never mind his talk about lending a hand on their ranch. After the white men leave, Crooks is once again alone, rubbing ointment on his crooked back before turning in for the night.

Chapter 5

1. How have Curley's wife's dreams for her life changed or been lost?

2. Why does Curley's wife tell Lennie about "the letter"? What does the letter symbolizes?

3. How does Lennie's killing of the puppy parallel his killing of Curley's wife and the mice?

4. How does Candy react to the death of Curley's wife?

5. What options do George and Candy discuss after the discovery of the body?

Chapter 6

1. What is the significance of the rabbit appearing at the end of the book?

2. Why did George kill Lennie and was he justified in doing that?

3. Explain what happens to the dream at the end of the novel for both Lennie and George.

4. In what way does Slim show understanding for George's decision? Why does Carlson ask the last question?