

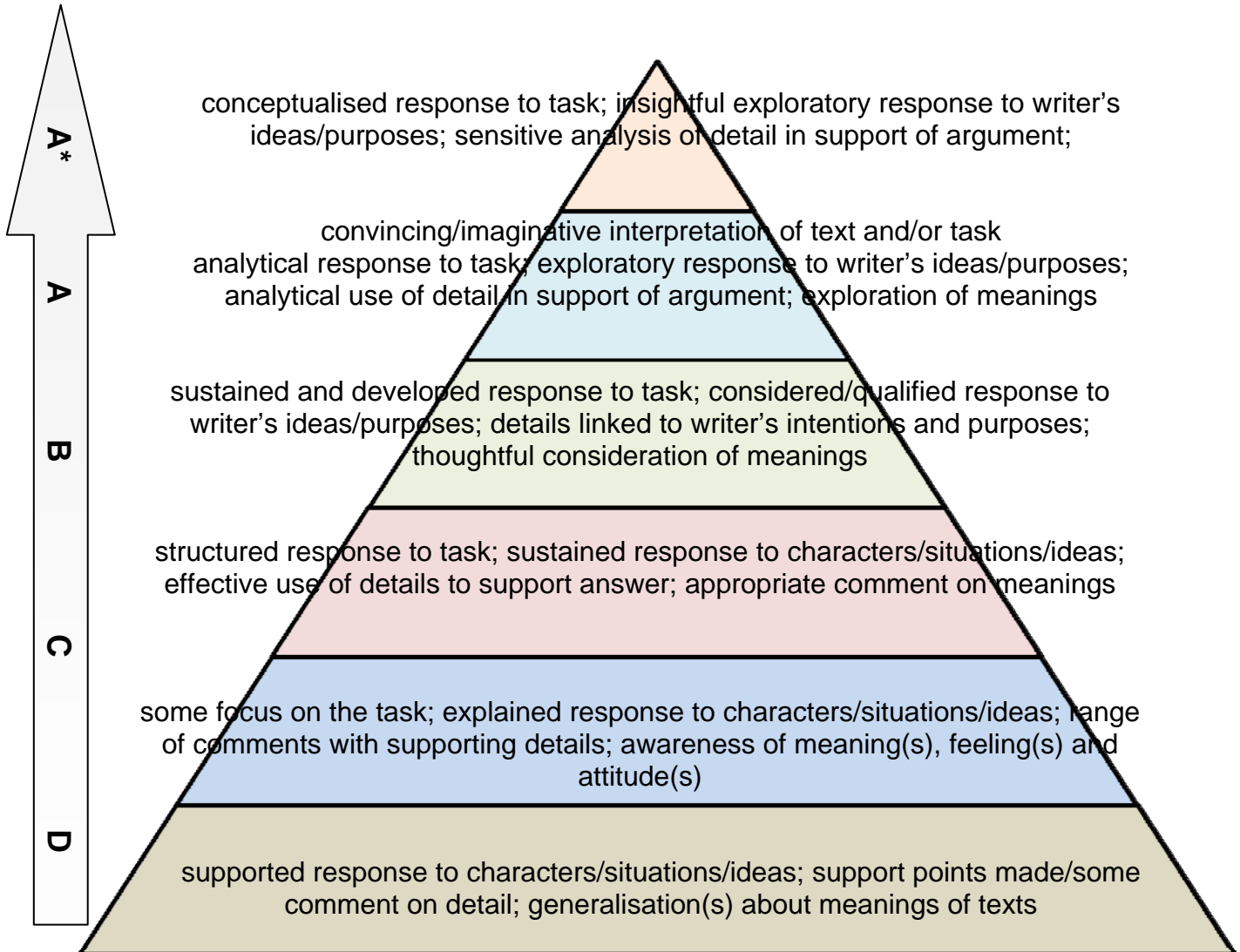
STUDENT GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING FOR OF MICE AND MEN

NAME _____

This section of the GCSE Literature examination requires you to:

- respond to texts critically, sensitively and in detail, selecting appropriate ways to convey their response, using textual evidence as appropriate;
- explore how language, structure and forms contribute to the meanings of texts, considering different approaches to texts and alternative interpretations;

Check your target grade against the criteria on the Learning Triangle below so you know exactly what you need to do to achieve. Ask your teacher if you are unsure.



Past Paper Questions

1

Choose **two** characters from the list below; say why you think they are important in the novel and how Steinbeck presents them:

Candy

Crooks

Curley

Curley's wife

Slim

2

How do you respond to George as a character?

- Write about:
- what George is like
- whether you always sympathise with George
- how the writer makes you respond to George by the ways he writes.

3

Many readers find that *Of Mice and Men* is a sad book. How far do you agree?

4

Write about **two** places in the novel which you think are important.

Write about:

- what the different places are like
- how they are presented by Steinbeck
- why you think these places are important.

5

In *Of Mice and Men* Steinbeck presents some of his characters as being weak in some way. Choose **two** characters you think are weak. Write about these characters and how they are presented. (27 marks)

6

How does Steinbeck present loneliness and isolation in the novel?

Write about:

- characters who are lonely and isolated
- why they are lonely and isolated
- how Steinbeck's settings are used to reflect the characters' loneliness and isolation.

7

How does Steinbeck prepare you for the idea that the death of Curley's wife is inevitable?

8

The title of the novel is about plans and dreams that often go wrong. Write about:

- the dreams the characters have
- the effects of these dreams on the characters
- to what extent the writer presents the dreams as futile.

9

'Soledad' means loneliness. Why is this relevant in 'Of Mice and Men'?

You should write about:

- Which characters are lonely and why
- How their loneliness is similar or different

10

"I never seen no piece of jail bait worse than her" (George). What is the reader supposed to think about Curley's wife?

You should write about:

- How she is described by the other characters
- How the author describes her
- How she behaves/speaks
- Her Dreams
- Is she the cause of all the trouble?

11

Hopes and Dreams are important in 'Of Mice and Men' – discuss.

You should write about:

- Which characters have dreams –
- how are they similar/different?
- Do they come true? Why/not?

12

How is the character of Slim important to the novel as a whole?

How does the author make Lennie a sympathetic character?

You should write about:

- How he is described
- How the other characters describe him
- How he speaks
- How he acts
- Why do you (the reader) feel sorry for him?

Writing an introduction

An essay introduction should refer to the question in

some way. You don't need to repeat the question but you do need to show the examiner that you have understood it. For example in response to this

question:

'We kinda look after each other.' This is how George describes his relationship with Lennie. Explain the nature of their relationship. You could write:

The relationship between Lennie and George seems an unlikely one, but both men benefit from it.

Your introduction does not need to be very long but you need to let the examiner know where you are going with your argument.

Using quotations

You can either use quotations which are **separate** from your writing and start a new line, or you can use **embedded** quotations. Here is an example of a

Activity 1: Introduction

Finish the introduction started above

longer separate quotation:

An advantage of the relationship for both men is that they have someone who cares for them:

'Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world ... With us it ain't like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us.'

This type of longer, separate quotation is usually used to emphasise a point that the writer is making. However, you must be careful that your quotation is not too long. You don't get extra marks for copying out long sections of the novel.

The other type – the embedded quotation – is usually just a few words from the novel inserted into a sentence. Here is an example:

We know that George has known Lennie for a long time: 'Him and me was both born in Auburn.'

An embedded quotation can be a sophisticated way of using quotations in your essay. It is a good way of showing the examiner that you have good overall knowledge of the novel. Another advantage of using embedded quotations is that they don't interrupt the flow of your writing, as a separate quotation might. However, the most important thing when using either type of quotation is that the quotation is relevant and helps you explain your point in some way.

Remember: even though using quotations is important when you are answering your essay question, making close references to the text can also be very effective. Look at this example:

Activity 2: Finding quotes

Find quotations in Chapter 1 to support the following points:

- Steinbeck creates an idyllic setting at the start of the novel
- George is convinced that the bus driver deliberately dropped them off at the wrong place
- George doesn't trust Lennie to remember things
- George can be short-tempered with Lennie.

Once you've found your quotations, experiment with using separate and embedded quotations. Write a few sentences about each bullet point.

Rather than let Lennie face an angry mob, George chooses to shoot him in the most compassionate way he can think of, by asking Lennie to remember the dream they shared and shooting him from behind.

This extract shows knowledge of the novel and offers a personal interpretation of the text. The writer not only demonstrates a knowledge of what happens at this point in the novel, but does so without simply retelling the story.

Linking paragraphs

We have already discussed how each bullet point in the sample question can be used to make one or two paragraphs. However, some candidates find it difficult to link their paragraphs together so that their essay flows, rather than jumping from one subject to another. When you write your essay plan you may notice that the ideas you have for one bullet point are connected to other ideas you want to use for other bullet points. If this is the case you can use these ideas to help your essay flow easily from one paragraph to another. Look at this example (in bold) of a phrase that links a following paragraph with the previous paragraph:

George is described as *small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features*. Lennie is described as the opposite to George: we are told that he is *a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders*.

As well as looking very different, it soon becomes clear that George and Lennie play very different roles in their relationship ...

Many candidates overuse the word 'but' to link their ideas. Instead you could use:

- However
- Yet
- On the other hand
- In contrast to this
- Another example is
- A different example is

Practise using these expressions in your essays to help your writing to become more fluent.

Activity 3: Link words

What other words or expressions could you add to the list above which would help your writing to flow?

Writing a conclusion

The purpose of a conclusion is to sum up your ideas and show that you have come to a considered point of view after discussing the ideas in the question. Sometimes an essay question will ask you if you agree or disagree with a particular statement. You might have stated both sides of the argument in your essay. If this is the case then you will need to say which side of the argument you agree with more in your conclusion.

You can include some of your own personal ideas about the question in your conclusion. This can be helpful because it shows the examiner that you have your own independent ideas about the novel.

However, the most important thing about a conclusion is that you refer back to the question. This shows the examiner that you haven't lost sight of your original purpose in writing the essay. The tone of your conclusion should show that you have an 'overview' of your whole essay. You could use phrases like;

'after examining several aspects of this question, it seems to me that ...'

Or 'after discussing both sides of the argument, it has become clear that ...'

Statements like this show the examiner that you have weighed up the points that you have made in your essay and arrived at a final decision about the question which was asked.

Improving a sample essay (Grade D)

Look at this essay question and its sample answer and as you read through, try to think of ways in which you could improve this essay.

Question

Remind yourself of the description of Lennie's fight with Curley. Write about the different ways in which this passage is important in *Of Mice and Men*.

Write about:

- the different aspects of Lennie shown in the passage
- what it reveals about the relationship between George and Lennie, and about Curley
- how this passage links to other parts of the novel
- the importance of the passage in the novel as a whole.

Essay

When Lennie fights Curley it all starts because of a misunderstanding. Lennie is still smiling because he's been talking to George and Candy about getting a farm and Curley comes in looking for a fight and he thinks Lennie is taking the mickey out of him.

First Curley had a go at Slim but Slim wasn't having any of it. Then Curley tried to fight Carlson but he had to back down because Carlson said, 'I'll kick his head in.' Then Curley sees Lennie sitting there and smiling, so he starts a fight with him.

I think that Lennie is really confused and he doesn't understand what is going on. He calls out to George to find out what to do and Slim wants to stop the fight but George says 'no' and tells Slim to wait for a minute. Because Lennie is confused he doesn't know what to do, so he doesn't fight back. I think that in a way Curley is a coward because he knows that everyone on the ranch knows that his dad is the boss, so if anyone fights him then they might get the sack.

Then George shouts out 'Get him' and there's a big change in Lennie. Suddenly he grabs Curley's fist in mid-air and he crushes it in his huge hand. Then Lennie goes from being like a scared child to being powerful and scary himself. This bit shows that Curley is a wimp because when Lennie grabs his hand, he isn't that strong, he just flops about like a fish.

At the end of the fight, they manage to get Lennie to let go of Curley's hand and Slim says to Curley that he has to say that he got his hand caught in a machine, so that George and Lennie won't get the sack.

I think that this passage is important because it shows you just how strong and powerful Lennie is and that he can be dangerous.

Improving the essay

This essay makes some valid points about the fight between Lennie and Curley, but there is plenty of room for improvement. To make it into a 'C' grade answer, you would need to improve on these things:

- Although the essay has a fairly good structure, it doesn't have an introduction or conclusion.
- The language is too informal. Phrases like, 'had a go' and 'taking the mickey' are slang expressions and need to be replaced with something more suitable.
- There is only one accurate short quote in the essay; the other quote is inaccurate.
- There is too much emphasis on retelling the story of the fight between Lennie and Curley, instead of making valid points about what is asked for in the bullet points.
- The third bullet point (how the passage links to other parts of the novel) isn't answered at all.

Activity 4: Improving the essay

Using the suggestions above make improvements to the essay.

Sample essay (Grade C)

Lennie, George and Slim all have a part to play in the fight against Curley. Discuss the roles they play in the lead-up to the fight. Write about:

- What we have learned about Curley so far
- Lennie, George and Slim's attitude towards Curley
- Curley's attitude towards each of them
- How important Slim and George's support was in encouraging Lennie to fight back

Curley is the boss's son. He doesn't do much manual labour and he knows that he's never going to get sacked. He has got a wife. We never learn her name, but in the beginning George is disgusted to learn that Curley wears a glove full of vaseline to keep one hand smooth for his new wife. He doesn't seem to care for her very much because he's hardly ever with her and she's always looking to talk with the other guys. He visits whorehouses, so that would say something about the state of their marriage.

He is a bully. He's always picking on guys bigger than himself to prove his strength and he sees in Lennie the perfect opportunity to assert himself. Unfortunately, despite Lennie's size he's anything but a fighter. Lennie is all brawn and no brain, but as Slim said, 'I can see Lennie ain't a bit mean.'

Just before the fight we see the closest thing to Slim losing his cool. He gets fed up with Curley asking him where his wife is. 'Well you been askin' me too often. I'm getting God damn sick of it.' Curley backs off and doesn't want to pick a fight with Slim, but Carlson and Candy join in and Curley is wound up and feeling threatened. I think Slim's initial irritation contributed to Curley being wound up and looking for someone to vent it on. I think Curley had always been looking for an excuse to fight Lennie so when he saw Lennie smiling at the memory of the ranch he jumped at the chance to interpret that as smiling at everyone getting at him and thought that was justification for challenging him to a fight.

George had identified Curley early on as trouble. 'This guy Curley sounds like a son-of-a-bitch to me. I don't like mean little guys.' George realised that he might use Lennie to prove himself. George had given Lennie strict instructions on how to avoid any set-to with Curley: 'He figures he's got you scared and he's gonna take a sock at you the first chance he gets.' Lennie is frightened and ironically wants George to protect him. Although Lennie is physically strong, he doesn't have the brains to avoid trouble.

George tells Lennie to keep away from Curley, but he knows that Curley may still find an excuse to attack him. George recognises Curley as a certain type, 'Curley don't take no chances. He always wins,' and George knows that Lennie could change this. Even though George wants to avoid trouble he would also enjoy Lennie giving him his just desserts and teaching him a lesson. 'Don't let him pull you in – but if the son-of-a-bitch socks you – let him have it.' It is noticeable that George and Lennie don't say anything to Curley before the fight. They stay well out of it.

In the extract, Lennie doesn't fight back. 'He is too frightened to defend himself.' Even though George tells him to fight back he doesn't do so immediately. This shows that Lennie isn't really a fighter.

George knows that Lennie could hurt Curley more than he ever could himself, but Slim is so angry with Curley that he wants to get him himself. He calls him a dirty little rat. Rats are filthy vermin. They carry disease and are disliked by most people. They have to sneak around to avoid getting caught. This makes me think of Curley as being sneaky and playing dirty. He hit Lennie when he wasn't looking.

The fact that Lennie took his hands away from his face and looked about for George after he told him to fight back makes me think that Lennie always obeys George and if George had not been there Lennie would have probably just let Curley beat him up. I don't think Lennie noticed Slim jumping up to get Curley himself, but I reckon Slim would have done it if George hadn't stopped him. It seems that George is the one controlling who fights Curley and when. Lennie just does what he's told.

Activity 5: Summary

Summarise each paragraph in a sentence. Identify the points made. Keep the question in mind.

Higher Tier

Unpacking a question

Read the extract below taken from Chapter 5 of *Of Mice and Men*. How much sympathy do you feel for Candy at this point, and why?

George turned and went quickly out of the barn. Old Candy watched him go. He looked helplessly back at Curley's wife, and gradually his sorrow and his anger grew into words. 'You God damn tramp,' he said viciously. 'You done it, di'n't you? I s'pose you're glad. Everbody knowed you'd mess things up. You wasn't no good. You ain't no good now, you lousy tart.' He sniveled, and his voice shook. 'I could of hoed in the garden and washed dishes for them guys.' He paused and then went on in a singsong. And he repeated the old words: 'If they was a circus or a baseball game ... we would of went to her ... jus' said 'ta hell with work an' went to her.

Analysis

Some questions provide an extract from the novel and ask you to discuss a particular aspect. These types of questions are useful for a number of reasons: the extract provides you with a lot of information in itself and it can be easily annotated, helping you to plan your essay effectively. An extract can also help you to make links with other relevant passages in the novel. For example, if the extract were about Curley's wife you might also consider it appropriate to mention other times when she has appeared.

An extract can also help to focus your response and provide parameters for your essay. Because of the time pressure you are under in an exam it is sometimes helpful to narrow down the choices and provide you with a starting point rather than having the whole novel to choose from.

The question itself is a 'character' question. Questions for *Of Mice and Men* are likely to fall into

one or more of the following categories:

- character
- viewpoint
- theme
- plot
- setting and atmosphere.

It is important to ensure that the answer you provide corresponds to the question asked. So, first of all, it is a good idea to make sure that you know what you are being asked.

It is helpful to unpack the question and rewrite it in your own words. Below is a list of possible interpretations of the sample question.

- Do I feel sorry for Candy and why?
- Have I felt more sympathy for Candy at other points in the novel?
- Does Candy's behaviour in this extract change the way that I feel about him?

Activity 6: Unpacking the question

Read the extract below in which Curley's wife finds Lennie and Candy in Crooks's harness room. A change comes over Crooks in this extract. What do we learn about him here and elsewhere?

Crooks stood up from his bunk and faced her. 'I had enough,' he said coldly. 'You got no rights comin' in a colored man's room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now you jus' get out, and get out quick. If you don't, I'm gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.'

She turned on him in scorn. 'Listen, Nigger,' she said. 'You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?'

Crooks stared hopelessly at her, and then he sat down on his bunk and drew into himself.

She closed on him. 'You know what I could do?'

Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall. 'Yes ma'am.'

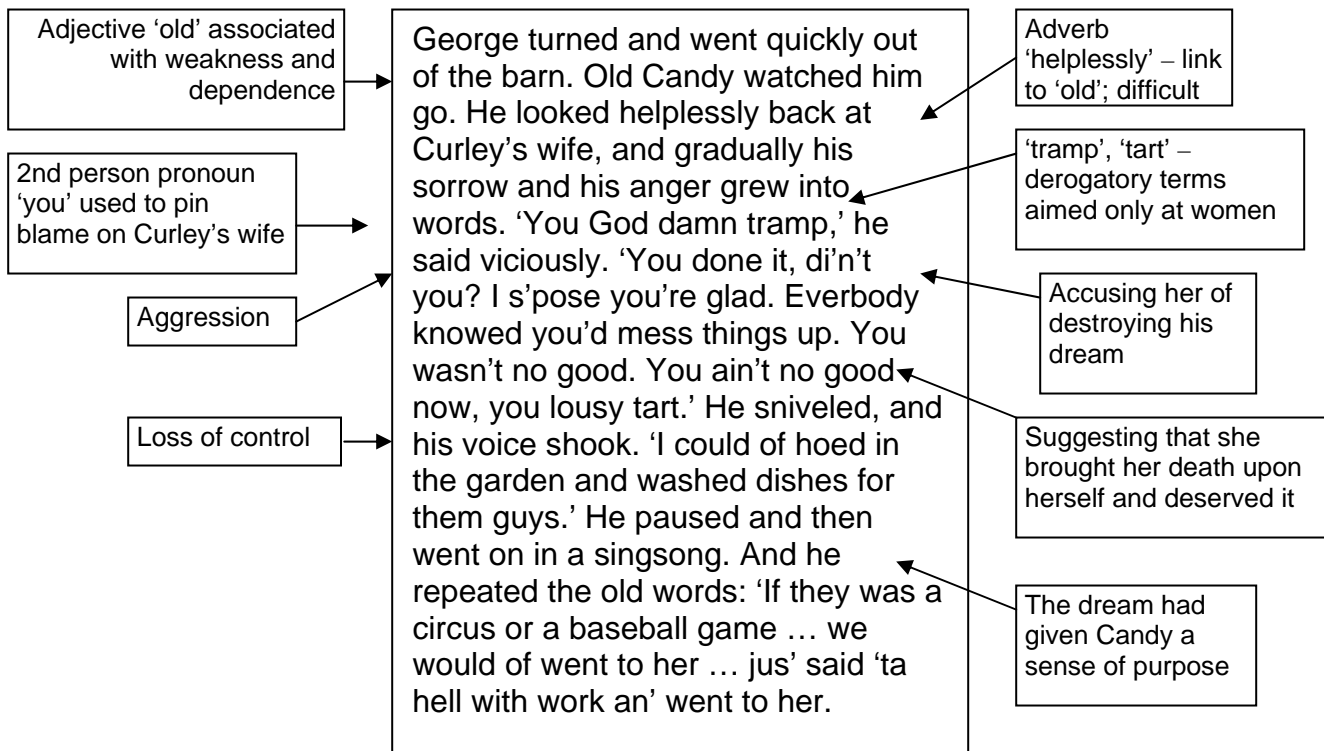
'Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't funny.'

Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego – nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, 'Yes, ma'am,' and his voice was toneless.

Unpack the question: write down other questions that you would need to answer your essay.

Writing an essay plan

A useful starting point is with the extract. Below is an annotated version of the extract from the sample question. Comments that are relevant to the question have been added.



Key points

Annotating the extract raises other relevant points that would need to be explored in the essay:

- What the dream meant to Candy
- What the future now holds for Candy
- Why he blames Curley's wife and whether he is justified in doing so
- Why Candy is more angry with Curley's wife than Lennie
- How Steinbeck wants the reader to feel.

Activity 7: Annotating for an essay plan

Annotate the following extract and write down points that would need to be covered in your essay **'A change comes over Crooks in this extract. What do we learn about him here and elsewhere?'**

Crooks stood up from his bunk and faced her. 'I had enough,' he said coldly. 'You got no rights comin' in a colored man's room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now you jus. Get out, and get out quick. If you don't, I'm gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.'

She turned on him in scorn. 'Listen, Nigger,' she said. 'You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?'

Crooks stared hopelessly at her, and then he sat down on his bunk and drew into himself.

She closed on him. 'You know what I could do?'

Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall. 'Yes ma'am.'

'Well, you keep your place then, nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't funny.'

Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego – nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, 'Yes, ma'am,' and his voice was toneless.

With the sample question, there are close links between the selected extract and the scene when Curley's wife finds Candy and Lennie in Crooks's harness room. Consider which other parts in the novel are worth referring to when responding to your question.

Writing a detailed plan

Before actually writing the essay, it is often useful to produce a plan. With practice, this should take less than five minutes and as long as you stick to your plan and your plan is thought through and organised, it ensures that your essay is well structured and remains relevant throughout.

From unpacking the question, annotating the passage and making links with other appropriate parts of the novel, you have actually assembled a lot of material for your essay already. This stage is about the organisation of that material.

The main body

In the planning stage you may notice that some points group together naturally. Think of these groupings as the forming of paragraphs. It is a good idea to elaborate on the points made when unpacking the question.

- What the dream meant to Candy
 - Provided him with a sense of purpose (link to extract – ‘I could of hoed in the garden’)
 - Independence
 - Hope

- What the future now holds for Candy
 - Dependent on Curley’s family again
 - Despair and loneliness
 - Shattered illusions – even worse than before
- Why he blames Curley’s wife and whether he is justified in doing so
 - Needs a focus for his anger
 - Candy considers himself morally superior to Curley’s wife
 - Curley’s wife had called him a ‘lousy ol’ sheep’ – presenting him as useless
 - Her death had prevented the possibility of realising the dream
- Why Candy is more angry with Curley’s wife than with Lennie
 - Curley’s wife is a vehicle for attitudes towards women at this time
 - He can’t blame Lennie – part of the dream as well – knows not his fault
- How Steinbeck wants the reader to feel
 - ‘Old’ Candy, ‘helpless’ – words that invoke sympathy
 - misogynist attitude – ‘tart’, ‘tramp’
 - sympathy for Curley’s wife – no forgiveness or release even after her death

Activity 8: Unpacking

Unpack the points that you made for Activity 7.

Writing an introduction

The introduction should make an initial response to the question and show the examiner that you have understood the question. A useful tactic is to begin with a statement that responds directly to the question being asked.

The introduction should also, briefly, provide any relevant background information and context. *Briefly* is the key word here: you will not help yourself by rewriting the novel in your own words.

Writing a conclusion

The introduction and conclusion are a similar structure. They frame the main body and neither should go into too much detail. All elaborations, explorations and discussions should be limited to the main body.

The conclusion signals the end of your essay. There should not be any new information here. It is an opportunity to draw your essay together and, most importantly, make a final and concise response to the question.

A* essay (1) - marked

Question

Read the extract below taken from *Of Mice and Men*, Chapter 5. How much sympathy do you feel for Candy at this point?

George turned and went quickly out of the barn. Old Candy watched him go. He looked helplessly back at Curley's wife, and gradually his sorrow and his anger grew into words. 'You God damn tramp,' he said viciously. 'You done it, di'n't you? I s'pose you're glad. Everbody knowed you'd mess things up. You wasn't no good. You ain't no good now, you lousy tart.' He sniveled, and his voice shook. 'I could of hoed in the garden and washed dishes for them guys.' He paused and then went on in a singsong. And he repeated the old words: 'If they was a circus or a baseball game...we would of went to her...jus' said 'ta hell with work an' went to her.'

Essay

I feel a certain degree of sympathy for Candy, who had been living a hopeless existence, disabled and demoted to swamper with little chance of achieving very much, saving little bits of money but with no purpose until Lennie and George's arrival. With them came the dream. Candy finally had something to look forward to and something worthwhile that he could invest in. Instead of being lonely and isolated, separated from the other workers because of his inability to equal them with the manual tasks they carried out, he found allies in Lennie and George. Their friendship eventually extended to encompass him. He was part of something, united by the dream, had some purpose, 'I could of hoed in the garden and washed dishes for them guys.'

I sympathise with Candy in his realisation that the dream would not be fulfilled. I think it is worse to have had hopes dashed than to have had no hopes in the first place. He is now conscious of what he stands to lose. Steinbeck describes him as 'Old Candy', conjuring up images of weakness, frailty and dependence. 'He sniveled and his voice shook.' The implication here is that Candy has lost his self-control. He is becoming consumed by 'his anger and his sorrow.' Lennie was an integral part of the dream and George had no interest in pursuing it without him. It is interesting that Candy does not express his bitterness towards Lennie, but instead towards Curley's wife.

Steinbeck uses Curley's wife to reveal a common attitude towards women and expose the hypocrisy that allows Curley to visit whorehouses, but denies his wife the opportunity to just talk to other men. Candy says to her, 'You gotta husban'. You got no call foolin' aroun' with other guys, causin' trouble.' This type of accusation suggests that Candy considers himself on the moral highground and Curley's wife's superior. This scrabble to avoid occupying the lowest rung in the social ladder evokes some pity.

Steinbeck uses a number of characters to represent groups of people and Curley's wife is Steinbeck's vehicle to explore men's oppression of women and the way that they are treated as inferior. Curley's wife is the only developed female character. The others, such as the women in the whorehouse, provide a service for men and are presented through their function rather than as people; their identities are irrelevant. Even with Curley's wife Steinbeck has deliberately maintained a degree of anonymity, never revealing her name.

When having a stake in the dream had first become a possibility for Candy, Curley's wife had arrived soon after, cruelly portraying Candy, Lennie and Crooks as they might appear to others, 'a bunch of bindle stiffs – a nigger an' a dum-dum an'a lousy ol' sheep'. Her description of him as a 'lousy ol' sheep' presented Candy as useless and at this point in the novel I felt some sympathy for Candy along with the other two characters under attack.

Clear introduction, well structured. Responds directly to question. Independent discovery and interpretation of significant details.

Close textual evaluation. Independent interpretation of significant details.

Insight into writer's methods and purposes. Convincing interpretation.

Consistent insight. Subtle response to implications of the question.

Evaluative personal response.

Candy went on to boast that getting them sacked would not matter as they had their own farm. She didn't believe him. Then later, in an ironic twist, Curley's wife's death ensures that they do not, in fact, get their own place.

Strong awareness

Candy is in a vulnerable position on the ranch. Because of having only one arm it was difficult for Candy to find work and he was particularly dispensable. After asserting himself and the others and declaring their independence from Curley and his family, I sympathise with Candy finding himself again reliant on Curley's family's charity as a result of Curley's wife's death

Perceptive

However, I find it difficult to wholly sympathise with a character that reveals himself to be such a misogynist. In the extract Candy calls her a 'tramp' and a 'tart', derogatory terms that are only applicable to women. Candy's words are direct and vicious, he repeatedly uses the second person pronoun 'you' making his tone accusing and pinpointing his anger specifically on Curley's wife. The misogyny extends beyond name-calling and perhaps this is representative of the men's general sentiment towards her.

Close textual analysis.
Independent discovery.

Furthermore, Candy blames Curley's wife for wrecking his dream, expressing his hatred for her ('... he said viciously. "You done it, di'n't you?"), putting words into the dead body's mouth, like forcing a false confession. I don't believe that Curley's wife can be held responsible for her own death and feel that Steinbeck always presented her as the underdog at the bottom of the hierarchy, not having her own name and simply referring to her as one of Curley's possessions. I feel that it was easier for Candy to blame her for the loss of the dream. He had colluded with George to defer revealing her death and being Lennie's best friend it had made it difficult for Candy to focus his blame on to Lennie. Instead, an ungenerous spirit is revealed as Candy directs his anger and misery at the dead body in front of him. He is unswervingly unforgiving of Curley's wife: ' "You wasn't no good. You ain't no good now." '

Subtle and forceful response to implications of the question
Insightful discovery

'He looked helplessly back at Curley's wife, and gradually his sorrow and his anger grew into words.' Candy's mourning for the loss of his dream and the chance of a happier life is pitiful, but his inability to see beyond his own selfish desires and the weakness in his character that prevents him from expressing anything but violent hatred towards Curley's wife make it difficult to feel much more than pity.

Overall assessment

An articulate and well informed essay. It shows consistent insight and good analytical and evaluative skills. The forceful response to the question remains relevant and demonstrates independent discovery and interpretation throughout.

Note that in order to achieve an A* it is vital that you discuss Steinbeck's use of language and his intentions. Go back through the essay and identify the places where these aspects are explored, annotate with L and S to show each.

Marking an essay to WJEC criteria

Below is an essay for you to mark. At the end of the essay there are some guidance notes adapted from the Learning Triangle to help you.

Essay question

Read the extract below taken from when Curley's wife finds Lennie and Candy in Crooks's harness room. A change comes over Crooks in this extract. What do we learn about Crooks here and elsewhere in the novel?

Crooks stood up from his bunk and faced her. 'I had enough,' he said coldly. 'You got no rights comin' in a colored man's room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now you jus' get out, and get out quick. If you don't, I'm gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.'

She turned on him in scorn. 'Listen, Nigger,' she said. 'You know what I can do to you if you open your trap?'

Crooks stared hopelessly at her, and then he sat down on his bunk and drew into himself.

She closed on him. 'You know what I could do?'

Crooks seemed to grow smaller, and he pressed himself against the wall. 'Yes ma'am.'

'Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't funny.'

Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego – nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, 'Yes, ma'am,' and his voice was toneless.

Essay

This extract shows another side to Crooks' character. At the start of the extract, he is defiant then he becomes more obedient because Curley's wife threatens him. In this essay I will examine the change in Crooks' character and consider other things we learn about him in the novel.

We first hear about Crooks near the start of the novel, when George and Lennie arrive at the ranch. Candy tells them that the boss gave Crooks hell when he was mad because George and Lennie were late. I suppose at this point we feel a bit sorry for Crooks because we already know that he is crippled and it's not fair that the boss bullies him. Candy also says that the boss is a nice guy and at Christmas he brought a gallon of whisky to the bunkhouse and said, 'Drink hearty boys, Christmas comes but once a year'. This shows that the boss has a good side too.

Crooks first appears in the novel at the start of Chapter 4. There is a long description of his room to set the scene. There are lots of tools which he needs to tend to the horses in the stables and there are also some personal items which tell us more about him as a person. He's got medicines for his crooked back, several pairs of boots, an alarm clock and a single-barrelled shotgun. He's also got books including, 'a mauled copy of the California civil code for 1905.' This is because Crooks, as the only black person on the ranch, was always checking his rights in the civil code book.

When Lennie enters Crooks's room, Crooks is a bit upset. 'Crooks was a proud, aloof man. He kept his distance and demanded that other people keep theirs.' Lennie is just a bit lonely and he goes to Crooks's room because he can see the glow of his light shining out of his room.

Lennie goes into Crooks's room looking for company and Crooks scowls at him and says, 'You got no right to come into my room. This here's my room. Nobody got any right in here but me.' Crooks says this because he's afraid of Lennie because of his size. Then Lennie says that he just came to look at his puppy and he saw Crooks's light. Then Crooks explains to Lennie that he is not wanted in the bunkhouse and doesn't want anyone in his room.

When Crooks is talking to Lennie, at first he thinks it's funny and amusing that Lennie doesn't understand much and at this point it seems like they are having a nice conversation. Crooks even opens up a bit and tells Lennie a bit about his own past, 'My old man had a chicken ranch, 'bout ten acres.' But even during this conversation,

Crooks is still a bit defensive, 'I ain't a southern negro ... I was born right here in California,' trying to prove that he's not quite at the bottom of the social ladder.

Then the conversation takes a turn for the worse. It's almost as if Crooks enjoys torturing Lennie with the idea that George won't return from town, at this point we lose a bit of sympathy with Crooks. It is one of the few occasions when Crooks has the power to inflict on others what he has inflicted upon him. However, Crooks soon takes it all back when he sees how aggressive and threatening Lennie becomes when he thinks someone has hurt George, 'Suddenly Lennie's eyes centered and grew quiet, and mad. He stood up and walked dangerously towards Crooks. 'Who hurt George?' He demanded.'

A bit later Candy joins them in Crooks's room. Crooks learns about their dream to run a farm and offers to work with them on the farm. Then Curley's wife comes in. She pretends to be looking for Curley, but it is obvious that she just goes in there because she's lonely and wants some company. The men reject her company and Crooks, in particular, wants her to leave his room. This is at the start of the extract in the question. I think that Crooks is a bit overwhelmed because normally he doesn't have any company and having two people and then Curley's wife is a bit too much, so he tries to assert himself and he asks her to leave. Then Crooks half-threatens Curley's wife by saying, 'I'm gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.' At this point she loses her temper. She quickly reminds him that even though she's a woman, he's black and she has more power. She says, 'I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't funny.' This is because she knows that she could say something, like accusing Crooks of assaulting her that would cause a lynch mob to come after him. At that time in America, black people didn't have many rights. There were black people who were strung up on trees by lynch mobs, so this was a real danger for Crooks. At that time there was also the Ku-Klux-Klan, who used to wear white robes and white pointed hoods. They would look for excuses to attack the black population. Then they would come and get them in the middle of the night and either hang them or tie them to a burning cross.

At the end of the extract Crooks has completely backed off from the argument because he knows what Curley's wife can make happen to him. It's almost like he makes himself invisible. This is quite sad because we imagine that he has been treated badly in the past and he's had to learn how to, 'reduce himself to nothing' so that he can keep himself safe.

I think that this extract is interesting because it shows two sides of Crooks' character. He isn't a travelling worker so he belongs on the ranch and he has a room there. He feels protective of his space. Yet he can't be too proud because there are always people like Curley's wife around who will bring him down a peg or two. It's interesting that even though Curley's wife calls Crooks a 'nigger', which is very offensive, even 'Crooks' is unlikely to be his real name, since it is more likely to be a derogatory reference to his crooked back. This shows just how disempowered Crooks is, as a black man at the time the novel is set.

Activity 9: Evaluating an essay

Positive aspects of this essay are underlined; negative aspects are broken-underlined. Positive and negative criteria taken from the WJEC mark scheme are highlighted below to correspond with the essay.

Match up negative and positive criteria from the mark schemes with the highlighted parts in the text.

Positive points (Underlined)

Understanding the context of the novel
Structured response to the question
Sustained knowledge of the novel
Use of details to support answer
Exploration of the text
Effective use of quotes
Evaluative comments

A* essay (2)

Negative points (Broken-underlined)

Unnecessary retelling of the story
Going off at a tangent
Not relevant to the question
Unsupported claims

'Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody never gets no land. It's just in their head.' To what extent is *Of Mice and Men* a novel about unfulfilled dreams?

There are a number of characters in *Of Mice and Men* who have dreams of a better life. These characters include George, Lennie and Candy, who dream of a farm of their own, and Curley's wife, who dreams of becoming a glamorous Hollywood actress. In this essay I will discuss their dreams and the effects on the novel's characters when their dreams are unfulfilled.

The central characters in *Of Mice and Men* are George and Lennie. Their dream is introduced to the reader in the first chapter,

*'OK. Someday we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and –
'An' live off the fatta the lan','* Lennie shouted. *'An' have rabbits.'*

George and Lennie's dream is to leave behind their lives as travelling workers and have a place of their own where they can settle down. For Lennie the dream of living on their own farm is closely connected to looking after rabbits. Perhaps this is because the only way that Lennie can actually relate to the dream is through the idea of something practical and touchable which relates to his tactile qualities. Clearly, the material aspect of owning his own land means very little to Lennie. At the start of the novel we learn that Lennie likes to pet soft things, like mice and rabbits. It is this trait that eventually leads to Lennie's downfall when he tries to smooth Curley's wife's soft hair.

However, for George the dream of the farm has other benefits. Firstly, George can see the practical, economic advantage of owning their own place.

'If I was bright, if I was even a little bit smart, I'd have my own little place, an' I'd be bringin' in my own crops, 'stead of doin' all the work and not getting what comes up outta the ground.'

Yet it is not just the practical benefits of owning a farm that attract George to this dream. We learn that George has no family – *'I ain't got no people'*, and it seems as though the dream of a farm also represents the notion of 'home' to George.

'An' we'd keep a few pigeons to go flyin' around the win'mill like they done when I was a kid'...'We'd jus' live there. We'd belong there.'

So, for George, the dream of a farm offers a psychological antidote to his rootless, travelling life and gives him a sense of belonging.

Another attraction of the farm dream is that it gives George the promise of some sense of control and autonomy in his life. In his conversation with Candy about owning a farm, George says:

'S'pose they was a carnival or a circus come to town, or a ball game, or any damn thing.' Old Candy nodded in appreciation of the idea. *'We'd just go to her,'* George said. *'We wouldn't ask nobody if we could. Jus' say 'We'll go to her', an' we would'.*

This shows how powerless George feels in his life and how much power employers exercised over their workers at that time. Another example of George and Lennie's powerlessness is shown after Lennie's fight with Curley, the boss's son; when George's immediate concern is that they will be 'canned' or dismissed. However, in this situation, they retain their jobs because Slim steps in and persuades Curley to say he got his hand caught in a machine.

In Chapter 2 when George and Lennie discuss their dream they are overheard by Candy, the old swamper. Candy is immediately swept up with the idea of owning their own farm and offers his savings to them to make the dream come true. At this point in the novel it seems as if the dream could actually become a reality.

They fell into silence. They looked at one another, amazed. This thing they had never really believed in was coming true. George said reverently, 'Jesus Christ! I bet we could swing her.' His eyes were full of wonder.

What is interesting is that at this point in the novel the dream of the farm actually moves from being a pipe dream which will probably never happen, to an achievable goal which is actually within their grasp. It is Candy's involvement that makes this change take place.

Although Candy shares George's reasons for wanting a farm, there is also an extra dimension for Candy wanting to live on their own place. We get the sense that Candy feels redundant, useless and vulnerable because he is old and has lost his hand. Candy feels uneasy about his future: *"They'll can me purty soon. Jus' as soon as I can't swamp out no bunk houses they'll put me on the county."* So for Candy the dream of the farm means independence – *'nobody could can us'*, because in his present situation he is entirely dependent on the boss's tolerance and charity. In the novel, this is partially demonstrated by Carlson shooting Candy's dog earlier that evening. In an echo of Candy's own situation of the ranch, Carlson, without much pity or concern, shoots Candy's dog because he is old and it is inconvenient to keep him because of the smell. It is not hard to imagine that Candy feels there is a parallel between his own situation and his dog's.

Candy's attachment to the dream of their own farm is demonstrated in Chapter 5 when he realises that all hopes of the dream have come crashing down when he discovers Curley's wife's dead body:

'You God damn tramp', he said viciously. 'You done it, di'n't you? I s'pose you're glad. Ever'body knowed you'd mess things up...' 'If they was a circus or a baseball game ... we would of went to her ... Never ast nobody's say so.'

Candy's reaction reveals how powerful and important the dream was to him and how bitter and angry he feels because he realises that their dream will now not be fulfilled.

In the novel, Curley's wife also experiences an unfulfilled dream. In Chapter 5 she tells Lennie that she dreamed of becoming a Hollywood actress. However, we learn that her dream did not come true because, firstly, her mother wouldn't let her join a travelling show and later, when she met a guy in show business who said he'd write to her, she didn't receive the letter and became convinced that her mother had stolen it. Even though she blames her mother, we get the feeling that these dreams would not have come true anyway. When she talks about meeting the guy in show business she demonstrates an innocent, teenage attitude and her language reveals that it is likely that she was being duped by the guy she met:

'Nother time I met a guy, an' he was in pitchers. Went out to the Riverside Dance Palace with him. He says he was gonna put me in the movies. Says I was a natural. Soon's he got back to Hollywood he was gonna write to me about it'...' 'I never got that letter'.

As the conversation progresses Curley's wife explains how she married Curley in a disappointed over-reaction to not being able to fulfil her dream.

'I always thought my ol' lady stole it. Well, I wasn't gonna stay no place where I couldn't get nowhere or make something of myself, an' where they stole your letters. I ast her if she stole it, too, an' she says no. So I married Curley. Met him out to the Riverside Dance Palace that same night.'

This demonstrates Curley's wife's frustration and her unconsidered approach to life. Steinbeck has created Curley's wife, like many other characters in the novel, as a character with an underlying pathos. She admits to Lennie that her marriage to Curley is an unhappy one, *'I don't like Curley. He ain't a nice fella'*. Unfortunately the sadness of not being able to fulfil her dream leads her to marry Curley, which in turn leads to the tragedy of her early death. It is interesting that, unlike George, Lennie and Candy, Curley's wife's dream is based in the past. Yet even though it is over and done with, she still clings to it as an important part of her identity and she still needs to talk about it, even if her only audience is Lennie. By having Curley's wife discuss her broken dreams, Steinbeck creates another side to her character, a side we can feel more sympathy with and a contrast to her harsh or vampish sides.

Of all the people on the ranch who might need a dream to keep them going, Crooks seems the one who might need it the most. When he first learns of George, Lennie and Candy's plan to buy their own farm he is sceptical at first. Then when he realises that it might happen, he too is swept along by the idea:

'If you.. guys would want a hand to work for nothing – just his keep, why I'd come an' lend a hand. I ain't so crippled I can't work like a son-of-a-bitch if I want to.'

Then, with the arrival of Curley's wife and the ensuing argument, Crooks is reminded of his 'position' as a negro in that society at that time: *"Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny."* After this interaction Crooks withdraws into himself: *'Crooks had reduced himself to nothing. There was no personality, no ego – nothing to arouse either like or dislike. He said, "yes, ma'am", and his voice was toneless.'*

Crooks is presented as such a powerless character because he was a black man in a prejudiced society, with very limited rights. We find that he has been so affected by the way he is treated by others that he finds it hard to even dream of a better way of life. After Curley's wife has left, Crooks realises that he can't be part of the dream, *'You guys comin' in an' settin' made me forget. What she says is true.'* At the end of the chapter, Crooks withdraws his request to join their future dream farm: *"Member what I said about hoein' and doin' odd jobs?... Well, jus' forget it."* By doing this, Crooks demonstrates a cautious attitude towards the dream, keeping it at arm's length, perhaps because past experiences have taught him not to step out of his 'place' and he doesn't want to be hurt by raising his expectations only to see them dashed.

In Crooks, Steinbeck represents what life would have been like for black workers in California at that time. In an already tough set of circumstances, Crooks has a double disadvantage because he is black and alone. In this sense, Crooks is possibly the saddest character that Steinbeck created in the novel because he can barely even dare to dream of a better life.

At the end of the novel, when George shoots Lennie, George asks Lennie to kneel down, look out across the valley and remember their dream. On one level it seems that George wants Lennie to at least be happy in the final moments of his life. Yet on another level, it seems as if George realises that by shooting Lennie, he is also symbolically killing the dream too. Although there is no practical reason why George and Candy still couldn't get the farm on their own, there is a sense that the spell has been broken and things will never be the same again.

From the start of the novel, when George and Lennie first start to talk about the dream of their own farm we learn that they often talk about this subject:

Lennie pleaded, 'Come on, George. Tell me. Please, George. Like you done before.'
...'You got it by heart. You can do it yourself.'

We learn that Lennie delights in hearing about the farm over and over, so that it seems like a well loved story that a parent would tell a child. The fact that both men revel in repeating the 'story' makes it seem like a dream and they are almost wishing it to come true. The dream does truly seem like a dream when you consider the cosy, almost fairytale language that George uses to describe their farm:

'Sure, we'd have a little house an' a room to ourself. Little fat iron stove, an' in the winter we'd keep a fire goin'.'

The repeated use of the word 'little' creates a very story-like, unreal atmosphere. George also uses the indefinite article to describe the features of the farm ('a' as opposed to 'the') which again takes away any 'concrete' qualities and makes it seem nebulous. Later we learn that, *'George sat entranced with his own picture'*, and we realise that George has created an unreal picture of the farm which we suspect will not come into being because the story-like descriptions make it seem so remote and unobtainable.

As the novel progresses the reader picks up other clues which hint that the dream of the farm will not be fulfilled. When we first learn about what happened in Weed between Lennie and the girl in the red dress, it becomes apparent that Lennie has the potential to get into trouble in a way that George can't always control. Steinbeck also drops hints about Lennie's impending doom. When George and Lennie first meet Curley's wife, they both realise that she could mean trouble:

'You keep away from her, 'cause she's a rattrap if I ever seen one.'
'Le's go, George. Le's get outta here. It's mean here.'

Through the novel we also learn that Lennie likes to pet soft things, which leads to an accusation of rape, the death of a mouse, then the death of a puppy and we suspect that it could be building up to a greater tragedy. Yet perhaps the biggest clue that George and Lennie's dream will not be fulfilled is in Candy and Lennie's conversation with Crooks:

'I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their head. Hundreds of them. They come, an' they quit an' go on; an' every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it.'

From Crook's words it seems that George and Lennie's is a common dream for migrant workers at that time and we suspect that they, like many others, will not get their piece of land.

In this novel Steinbeck has used the plight of migrant workers travelling around California in the Depression as a vehicle to explore the concept of having a 'dream'. This ties in with the idea of the 'American Dream' – the notion that if you work hard enough and try hard enough, then anybody can succeed and get what they want. In *Of Mice and Men* not only does Steinbeck comment on the conditions in 1930s America but he also uses a range of almost representative characters to explore and make observations about how different people formulate dreams and react to the loss of them.

In the end, Steinbeck's message about dreams is set out in the title of the novel. Taken from the Burns poem, the line 'of mice and men' refers to the plight of a mouse who worked hard to build a nest, only to have it destroyed by a farmer. The message in the poem and the message in the novel are the same and it is a message that is very much about broken and unfulfilled dreams. No matter what we plan or how hard we work, some things are inevitable and fate has a plan of its own which we can't avoid.

Activity 10: Selecting the best points

This essay is far too long to have been written in the examination. Look back at the essay, which paragraphs would you remove to ensure the essay still attained an A* grade but could have been written in 45 minutes?