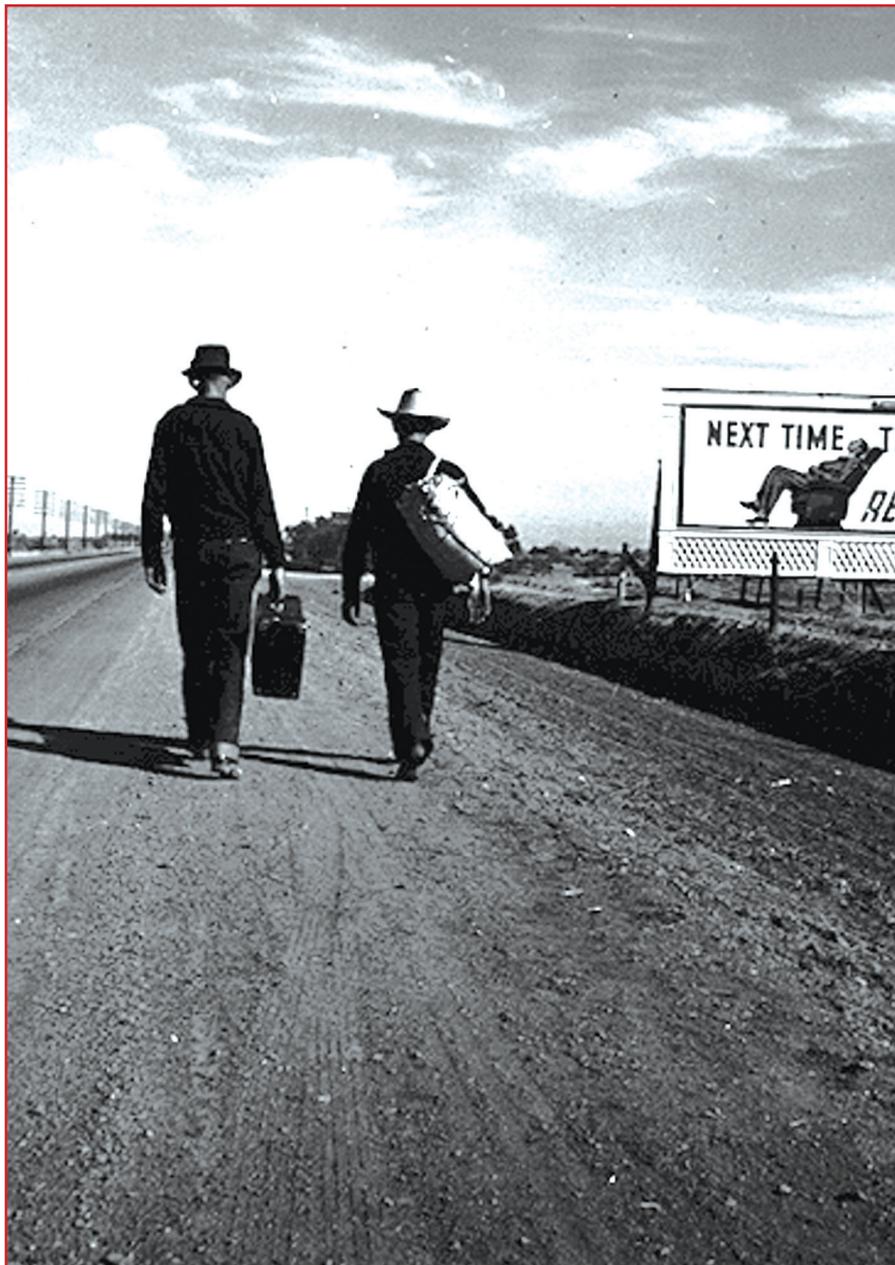


Of Mice and Men

10 New EMC Approaches



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Stop! Read me!

1. What does this EMCdownload publication include?

This EMCdownload publication includes two separate PDFs.

– A PDF called ‘OMM_Print’.

This PDF includes the activities in a **print-friendly form**. The A4 printable activity pages look like this:



– A PDF called ‘OMM_Screen’, with audio clips embedded.

This second PDF includes six audio readings, two songs and a slideshow of contemporary images.

2. How do I play the audio clips?

First make sure you have saved the file to your desktop.

To play the audio clips you need to open the file in Adobe Reader 9 or above. NB: The files will not display or play if you open the PDF in Adobe Reader 8 or below. You can download this free application by clicking here. 

Follow the instructions to install the latest version of the Adobe Reader program. Once it is installed and you have agreed the license, open the program.

Go to ‘File – Open’ and navigate your way to the PDF you have downloaded: ‘OMM_Screen’.

Move your cursor onto the image. Click and the audio clip will begin to play within the page.

To play the audio clips to a class you will need a computer, data projector and screen.

3. How do I stop the audio clips playing?

Either move to another page in the PDF or click the Play/Pause button on the control panel.

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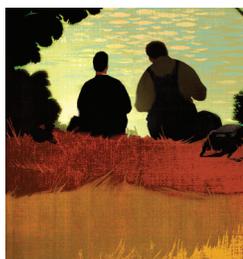
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Teachers' Notes

There is a lot of classroom material available on *Of Mice and Men* – it is a text that is much loved and much taught. EMC's popular print publication on the novel is still available and is also now being sold on EMCDownload as a PDF. It does the job of taking students through all the key aspects of the text, with before, during and after reading approaches that structure the teaching.

This publication is an *additional* resource, designed to refresh and supplement existing EMC and other published material and offer sparky new approaches to the text. Some are intended as 'stretch and challenge' for more able groups and students, giving them the chance to reach the highest grades and sharpening their literary understanding in preparation for A Level. Others are simply fun ways of finding out about the context and relating it closely to the text, getting to know the text itself better, clarifying ideas about language, structure and form, preparing for exams, or sharpening up drama activities so that they really pay their way.

The ten activities don't provide a 'scheme of work', taking you through the reading but instead should give you some brand new approaches that really engage students and develop their thinking.



The two songs from the period, Woody Guthrie's 'Brother Can you Spare a Dime' and 'Yip' Harburg and Jay Gorney's 'I Ain't Got No Home', performed by musician Guy Tortora, give a flavour of the times and the context for the novel. 'I Ain't Got No Home' also comes with a slideshow of images.

There are also six readings of key passages from the novel by Guy Tortora, which may offer a way of sharing the novel in class, with a Californian American voice doing the reading.

The songs and the readings are provided as embedded audio clips in the file 'OMM_Screen'.

7, 8 and 9 – 3 activities on style (Pages 28-34)

We recommend that you do either activities 6 and 8, or 6 and 7, but not 7 and 8 or all three. Once you've done 7 or 8, the other becomes difficult to do, as the students will have knowledge of *The Red Pony* that invalidates the task.

Notes on specific activities

5. Language, structure and form – The 5 point, 5 minute challenge

This activity is designed to get students thinking quickly, on their feet, as they may have to do in an exam. It can be adapted to make it a quicker activity (3, 3, 3) depending on how many points you want them to come up with. Equally nearer the exam, as revision and preparation, you could adapt it to 5, 3, 5 – in other words 5 points, in 3 minutes, explained in 5 minutes to another pair.

To help you with your lesson planning, here's how long it should take:

- 5 mins coming up with the points
- + 2x 5 mins telling another pair
- + 2 x 5 mins telling a different pair = 25 mins
- + 2 or 3 pairs tell the whole class about their points = 35 – 40 minutes
- + whole class debrief and feedback, if there's time = 60 minutes.

You could do it with the clock ticking, to add a game-like quality.

Some of the cards are more challenging than others. For instance, the 5 points on biblical language may be harder than the one on character oppositions. You could differentiate by giving more challenging cards to more able pupils.

7. Ex Libris

For this activity, you will need to cut up A4 paper into eight, so that each pair or three has a single small piece of paper. On one piece you will need to write this sentence, which is the opening of *The Red Pony* by John Steinbeck. Make sure the students don't see it.

At daybreak Billy Buck emerged from the bunkhouse and stood for a moment on the porch looking up at the sky.

- First ask students to briefly remind themselves of key features of Steinbeck's style. You can send them back into the book to find these qualities. Share these as a class.
- Next tell them that in their pairs or groups they're going to try to write the first sentence of another novel by Steinbeck and try to persuade each other that theirs is the real thing. Give them the brief description of the novel on the student sheet. They'll need to do it quietly enough that other groups don't get to hear what they're planning. They should try to include some of the features that are typical of Steinbeck's style and can go back into the book to find typical vocabulary or ways of saying things. At the end, the class will vote on which they think is the real Steinbeck and the winning group will be the one that gets the most votes. One point is given for each vote and one point if you got the right Steinbeck sentence.
- When they've written something they think might convince others that it was written by Steinbeck, they write it legibly on their piece of paper, fold it once only and hand it to you.
- When you've collected all the first sentences, number each one and read them out once, including the Steinbeck quotation as one of them. As you're reading, ask students to be thinking about which one they think is the real Steinbeck opening.
- Read them aloud a second time, this time telling students that they'll be choosing one only to vote for, after the second reading.
- Get the students to raise their hands and vote for each sentence in turn. Record how many votes each sentence got. Tell the class which is the real quotation, work out which is the winning group and give them lots of applause.

Debrief by deciding why that group's sentence really did sound like Steinbeck's writing.

8. The writer's style – which are by Steinbeck?

The extracts are:

1. *That Old Ace in the Hole*, Annie Proulx
2. *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck
3. *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Carson McCullers
4. *The Red Pony*, John Steinbeck
5. *Let the Great World Spin*, Colum McCann

Here are some of the things students might notice in deciding which of the passages is by Steinbeck:

That Old Ace in the Hole

- Name – could be like Steinbeck. The name tells you something about him.
- Same focus on the landscape as Steinbeck.
- Also lots of detail of place, local vocabulary ('panhandle'), like Steinbeck.

BUT

- More elaborate vocabulary – more polysyllabic words. More sprinkled with metaphorical language for example, 'the broad face of a cat', 'roaring Spring morning', 'spiced with'.
- More information given about the character that goes beyond what he shows about himself right there and then, from the way he looks and the way he acts.
- More complex sentences, rather than compound or simple ones.
- Humour – the name of the character, the final sentence.

The Grapes of Wrath

- Broad panoramic vision of the land, such as one finds in the opening of *Of Mice and Men*.
- Very visual, almost filmic.
- Biblical tone.
- Repetition of words and phrases.
- Quite simple words, often monosyllabic, focusing on 'things' – concrete rather than abstract.
- Very little commentary on what the reader should be thinking or feeling – the description speaks for itself.
- Repetition of sentence structures.
- Lots of compound sentences joined by 'and'.
- A few strong metaphors, such as the grass as a 'bayonet' – some kind of war, nature against itself?

The Red Pony

- Characteristic settings – rural America, the ranch house.
- Specific, detailed vocabulary of ranch life that one finds in *Of Mice and Men*.
- Character names that are suggestive of their working role, or nature.
- Visual detail, almost filmic in quality.
- Lots of description of the physical appearance of the character, using this to create a sense of them.
- The character is shown by his actions, even small ones like clearing your nose, rather than by saying what he's like explicitly in the narrative voice.
- Lots of use of the connective 'and'. Compound sentences and simple sentences used more than complex ones.

Let the Great World Spin

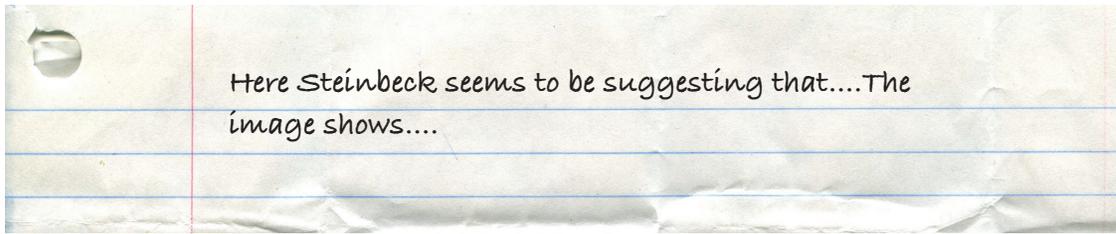
- Visual picture and focus on a place and a scene.

BUT

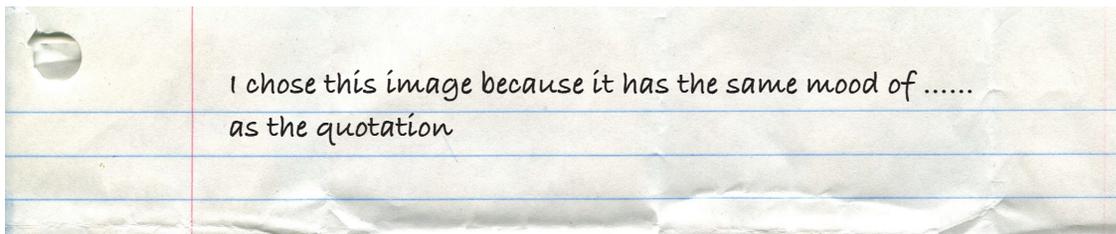
- Different context to Steinbeck – New York, urban East Coast.
- Different time – gangs of kids, cop cars, tenements.
- 1st person narrative voice.
- Unusual imagery that draws attention to itself for example, sunset like 'muscle', 'nightlands of America', 'a westward-ho'.
- Use of elaborate, difficult vocabulary – 'striated'.
- Few compound sentences. Lots of short, simple sentences and minor sentences for example, 'Arson.'

1. Context and Quotations from the Opening of the Novel

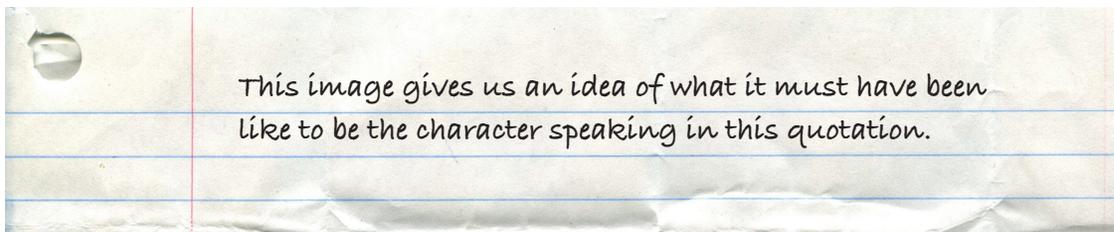
1. Match each of these quotations from the opening of the novel to one of the images provided.
2. Justify your choice, drawing on the quotations to explain. For instance,



Or



Or



1	<p>‘A few miles south of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank and runs deep and green. The water is warm too, for it has slipped twinkling over the yellow sands in the sunlight before reaching the narrow pool. On one side of the river the golden foothill slopes curve up to the strong and rocky Gabilan mountains, but on the valley side the water is lined with trees – willows fresh and green with every spring, carrying in their lower leaf junctures the debris of the winter’s flooding; and the sycamores with mottled, white, recumbent limbs and branches that arch over the the pool.’ (Pg 1)</p>
----------	--

2	<p>‘Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place. They come to a ranch an’ work up a stake and then they go inta town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they’re poundin’ their tail on some other ranch. They aint got nothing to look ahead to.’ (Pg 15)</p>
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3	<p>‘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 – <i>‘An’ live off the fatta the lan’,</i>’ Lennie shouted. (Pg 16)</p>
----------	---

4

‘You can have them two beds there,’ he said, indicating two bunks near the stove.

George stepped over and threw his blankets down on the burlap sack of straw that was a mattress. He looked into his box shelf and then picked a small yellow can from it. ‘Say. What the hell’s this?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the old man.

‘Says ‘positively kills lice, roaches and other scourges.’ What the hell kind of bed you giving us, anyways. We don’t want no pants rabbits.’ (Pg 20)

5

‘...Ya see the stable buck’s a nigger.’

‘Nigger, huh?’

‘Yeah. Nice fella too. Got a crooked back where a horse kicked him. The boss gives him hell when he’s mad. But the stable buck don’t give a damn about that . He reads a lot. Got books in his room.’ (Pg 22)

6

The boss stepped into the room with the short, quick steps of a fat-legged man. ‘I wrote Murray and Ready I wanted two men this morning. You got your work slips?’ George reached into his pocket and produced the slips and handed them to the boss. ‘It wasn’t Murray and Ready’s fault. Says right here on the slip that you was to be here for work this morning.’ (Pg 23)

7

George looked down at his feet. ‘Bus driver give us a bum steer,’ he said. ‘We hadda walk ten miles. Says we was here when we wasn’t. We couldn’t get no rides in the morning.’

The boss squinted his eyes. ‘Well, I had to send out the grain teams short two buckers. Won’t do any good to go out now till after dinner.’ He pulled his time book out of his pocket and opened it where a pencil was stuck between the leaves.’ (Pg 23)









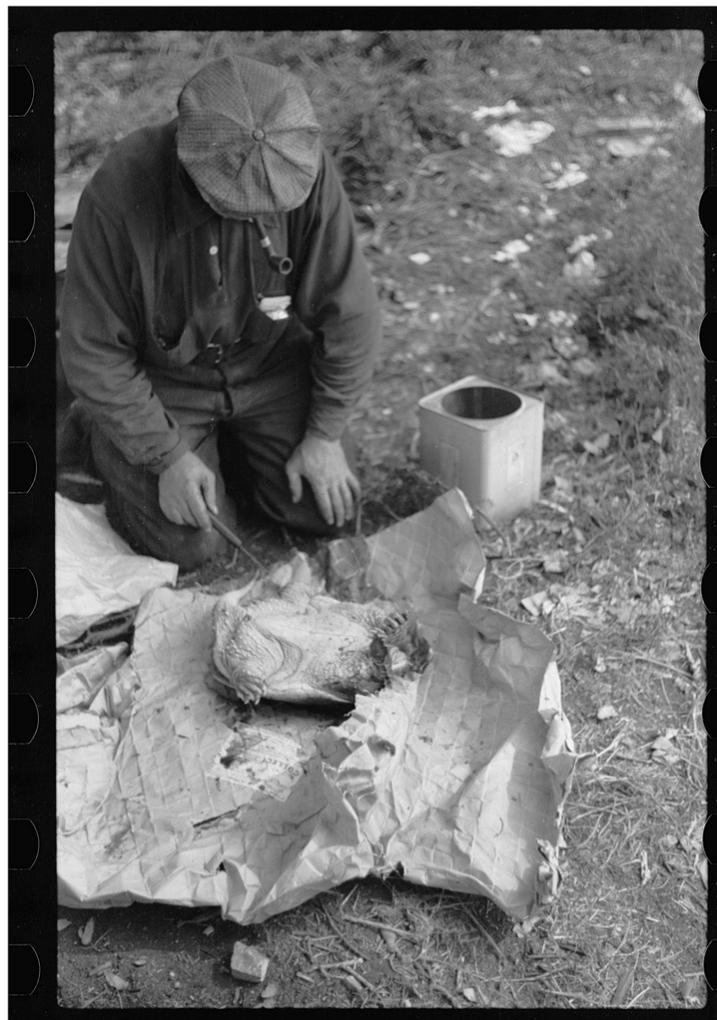












2. Exploring Character – Top Trumps

1. Working in pairs, your task is to create a set of 'Top Trumps' cards for some of the key characters in *Of Mice and Men*, using the following criteria.
 - How sympathetic?
 - Importance to the plot?
 - How heroic?
 - Provides tension?
 - Portrayed in detail?
 - Develops a key theme?
2. For each of the criteria, rank the characters on a scale of 0 to 10.

You can do this on a piece of paper or on a print out of the blank 'Top Trumps' cards on page 18.

3. Join up with another pair and compare the rankings you have given the different characters. Be ready to look back into the novel to find one piece of evidence to defend your ranking. Did any of the characters cause you problems, for example because they change over the course of the novel?

Looking across the cards

4. Look across the cards. Do you notice anything interesting about the characters as a whole. For instance:
 - are there a surprising number for whom you feel sympathy? What does that tell you about the novel?
 - are there a surprising number who develop the same key theme? What does this suggest to you about the novel?

GEORGE

- How sympathetic?
- Importance to the plot?
- How heroic?
- Provides tension?
- Portrayed in detail?
- Develops a key theme?

LENNIE

- How sympathetic?
- Importance to the plot?
- How heroic?
- Provides tension?
- Portrayed in detail?
- Develops a key theme?

CURLEY

- How sympathetic?
- Importance to the plot?
- How heroic?
- Provides tension?
- Portrayed in detail?
- Develops a key theme?

CURLEY'S WIFE

- How sympathetic?
- Importance to the plot?
- How heroic?
- Provides tension?
- Portrayed in detail?
- Develops a key theme?

CROOKS

- How sympathetic?
- Importance to the plot?
- How heroic?
- Provides tension?
- Portrayed in detail?
- Develops a key theme?

SLIM

- How sympathetic?
- Importance to the plot?
- How heroic?
- Provides tension?
- Portrayed in detail?
- Develops a key theme?

CARLSON

- How sympathetic?
- Importance to the plot?
- How heroic?
- Provides tension?
- Portrayed in detail?
- Develops a key theme?

THE BOSS

- How sympathetic?
- Importance to the plot?
- How heroic?
- Provides tension?
- Portrayed in detail?
- Develops a key theme?

3. Exploring Characters – Stand Up, Sit Down

1. In this activity you will be working in pairs on just one of the characters from *Of Mice and Men*. It doesn't matter if there is more than one pair working on each character; in fact it can be quite interesting to compare your ideas.
2. Your teacher will select one aspect of characterisation, either the role or presentation of the character, from the list below. You will then have a minute to decide whether or not there is anything interesting to say about your character in relation to this particular aspect.
3. When your minute is up, your teacher will ask all those who think it applies to their character to stand up, for example 'Stand up if your character is presented mainly through dialogue'. He or she will ask some of the people who have stood up to justify their decision (and may do the same for those who have remained seated).

ROLE OF A CHARACTER

- appears all the way through the novel
- is associated with a particular strand of the story
- changes and develops throughout the novel
- is included to develop the theme of loneliness
- is included to develop the theme of masculinity
- expresses ideas about hopes and dreams
- helps provide the context for the main events
- is included mainly as a contrast to another character

PRESENTATION OF A CHARACTER

- is presented mainly through dialogue
- changes during the novel
- is presented mainly through the narrative voice
- is described physically
- is presented through what he or she does – his/her actions
- has a name that expresses his/her personality
- is presented mainly through what others say about him/her
- has one major symbol or motif associated with him/her
- has a past that the reader finds out about
- is spoken about but never appears in the novel

4. Of Mice and Men Character Role-plays

Role-play can be a good way of getting inside the characters in a novel, finding out more about their lives and motivations and burrowing back into the text for evidence about them and about the way they speak and act.

Here are some different possible role-plays to try out, to help you think more deeply about some of the characters in *Of Mice and Men*.

The characters in the world of the novel

1. Choose from this list. Imagine that:
 - a. George talks to Lennie's aunt about Lennie, just before her death.
 - b. George asks Lennie what happened in Weed and decides that they should go on the run.
 - c. Curley talks to a friend about the two new men who have arrived on the ranch.
 - d. Carlson and Candy talk, after the final events of the novel, about their thoughts on George and Lennie and what happened.
 - e. Slim ends up marrying. He tells his wife about George and Lennie and what he thinks about them and what happened.
 - f. Looking back at the events and the history of the period in which they happened, George tells his grandchildren about this time in his life.
2. When you've practised your role-plays, you are going to take it in turns to perform them, either to the whole class or in small groups, using the instructions below.
3. Before the performances of the role-plays, share out the characters to track carefully. Each time you watch a role-play with the character you are concentrating on, fill in an observation sheet to explore how well the 'actor' has got inside the character.
4. Feed back to that person individually, or listen to some of the feedback as a whole group, focusing your comments on the aspects that people did especially well and on the insights that were gained.

On page 22 you can see an observation sheet that's been filled in, showing one person's response to a role-play they've observed on Lennie.

Role-play observation sheet

		Shade area to show how far the person achieved this	Comment and egs
IN ROLE	Stayed in role throughout		
CHARACTER'S VOICE	Sounded like the character sounds in the dialogue in the novel		
DRAWING ON WHAT HAPPENS	Drew on aspects of the novel – events, episodes & relationships		
NEW IDEAS ABOUT THE CHARACTER	Gave a bit of new insight into the character and his/her feelings and motivation		

Role-play observation sheet

		Shade area to show how far the person achieved this	Comment and eggs
IN ROLE	Stayed in role throughout		<i>Sometimes Sounded like he understood too much, for example, why Curley's wife was afraid of him</i>
CHARACTER'S VOICE	Sounded like the character sounds in the dialogue in the novel		<i>used Lennie's typical phrase about the rabbits. Sounded slow and child-like.</i>
DRAWING ON WHAT HAPPENS	Drew on aspects of the novel – events, episodes & relationships		<i>Only really talked about Curley's wife and 'the fatta the land'. Could have mentioned Aunt Clara, Weed etc.</i>
NEW IDEAS ABOUT THE CHARACTER	Gave a bit of new insight into the character and his/her feelings and motivation		<i>New insight into his obsession with animals and small creatures – human beings too complicated for him.</i>

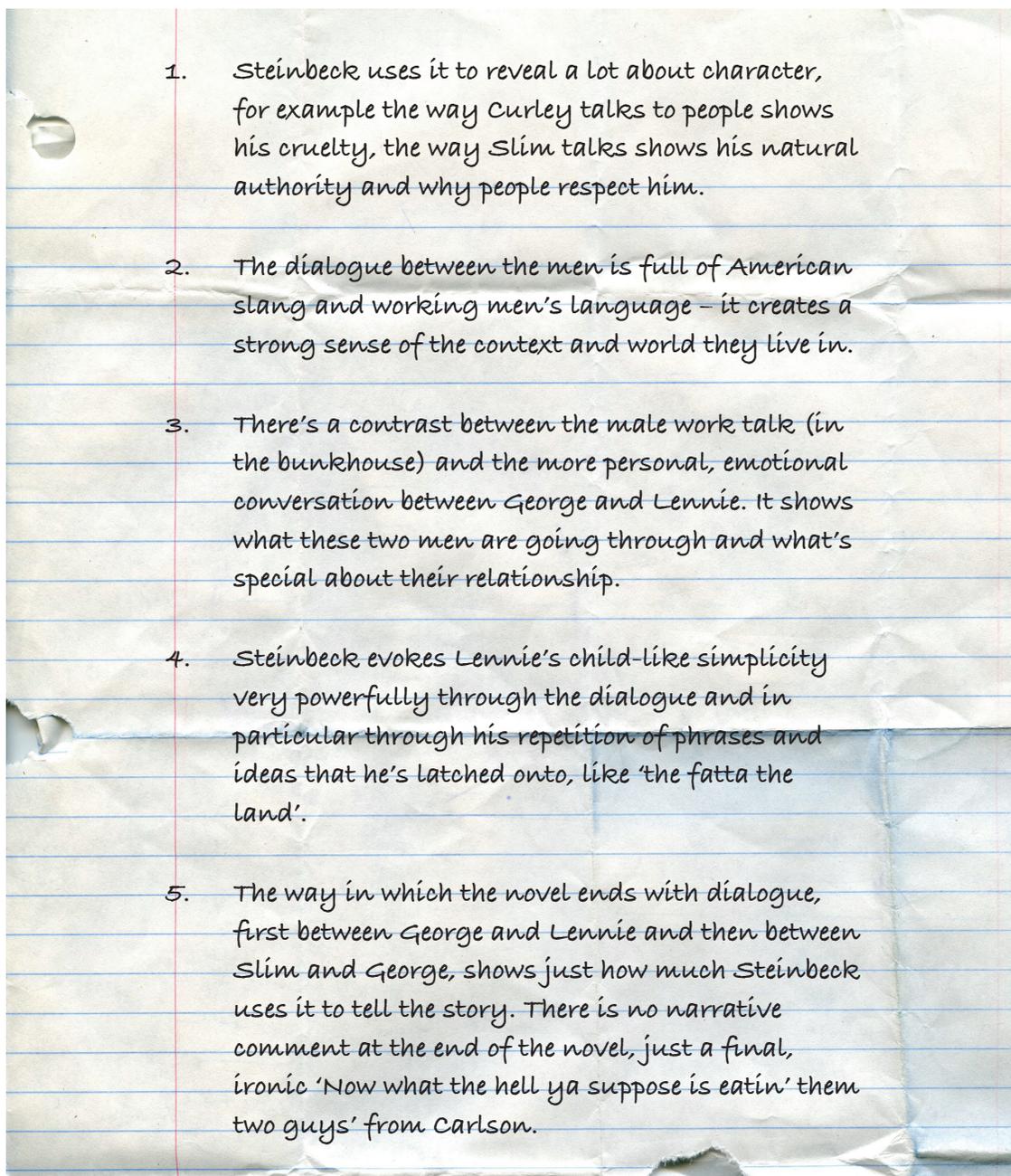
5. Language, Structure and Form – The 5 Point, 5-Minute Challenge

You will be given a pack of cards, each with an aspect of Steinbeck's writing style.

1. Turn over a card. Talk in pairs for 5 minutes about 5 points you could make about the aspect of Steinbeck's technique that's on the card.
2. Find another pair and talk to them for 5 minutes, telling them your key points and listening out for any others they might have.
3. Finally, find another pair and do the same again.

Here is one example for the 'DIALOGUE' card:

5 points about dialogue



4. Next time, have a go at the same activity but do it in a different time period for example, the 1 point, 1 minute challenge, or the 3 point, 3 minute challenge.

You could do the same for exam questions, as part of your build-up to the exam.

DIALOGUE

**BIBLICAL
LANGUAGE**

**POETIC
LANGUAGE**

ANIMAL IMAGERY

**CHANGES OF
POINT OF VIEW**

**MOMENTS OF
TENSION**

**PHYSICAL
DESCRIPTION OF
SETTING**

**PHYSICAL
DESCRIPTION OF
CHARACTERS**

**CHARACTER
OPPOSITIONS**

**CHARACTER
TYPES**

FORESHADOWING

**NARRATOR
DIRECTING THE
READER'S VIEW**

*for example, telling you what a character is
like or thinks*

**DRAMATIC
ACTION IN THE
PLOT**

**5 SECTION
STRUCTURE**

6. Creative Writing Approaches

Write an extra character for *Of Mice and Men* in the style of Steinbeck

1. Choose one of the following:
 - Another ranch hand, who's been on the ranch for a long time
 - Curley's wife's older sister from back home
 - Crooks' brother, who comes to visit him at the ranch
 - A friend of Aunt Clara's who comes in search of Lennie and George
 - A migrant worker, who comes looking for work and is turned away
2. Now follow the sequence below. For each stage, delve back into the book to find out more about Steinbeck's technique, using the suggestions provided.
 1. Give him/her a name.

Look at all the names in the novel and think about whether Steinbeck uses the name to suggest something about the character, for example 'Crooks' – crooked back? On the wrong side of the law? Not allowed to be a 'straight' member of the society?
 2. Write a paragraph where he/she is introduced for the first time.

Look back to see how one or two of the characters are introduced for the first time in the novel for example, Crooks, Carlson, Candy, Curley. Pick one of Steinbeck's techniques to try out in your writing.
 3. Write a bit of dialogue between him/her and one other character in the novel.

Look back at a bit of the dialogue in which your other character talks and see if you can use their style of talking and Steinbeck's way of using dialogue in your own writing.
3. As each student reads out their piece of writing, listen out for anything that sounds really like Steinbeck. Note it in the chart on page 27, along with the reasons you picked it out.

7. Creative Writing Approaches

Ex Libris: Writing in the style of Steinbeck

1. Play the 'Ex Libris' game in the following way, with one or two other people in your team.

Playing the Game

Writing Your Sentence

- Look back at the opening of Steinbeck's novel. Make a bullet point list of five features that you think sum up the style of the opening.
- Write the first sentence of a Steinbeck novel called *The Red Pony*. It is about a boy called Jody Tiflin, who lives on his father's ranch in California and learns how to train horses from Billy Buck, a working hand who lives on the ranch. Make sure you try to include at least one or two of your bullet point features in your opening sentence, to make it sound as much like Steinbeck as possible.
- When you've written something you think might convince others that it was written by Steinbeck, write it clearly on a piece of paper, fold it once only and hand it to your teacher.

Listening to the Sentences and Making Your Choice

- Listen to your teacher reading your sentences. As you listen, think about which one you think is the real Steinbeck opening.
- Listen to the sentences being read aloud for a second time. This time you need to decide which sentence you are going to vote for.

Voting

- After you have heard all the sentences for a second time, your teacher will hold a vote. Raise your hand to vote for the sentence you think is by John Steinbeck. Your teacher will record the votes.

How to Win

- Every vote your sentence gets equals one point.
- You will get a bonus point if you vote for the real sentence by Steinbeck.
- The winner is the person with the most points.

8. The Writer's Style – Which are by Steinbeck?

Here is a short extract from *Of Mice and Men*.

One end of the great barn was piled high with new hay and over the pile hung the four-taloned Jackson fork suspended from its pulley. The hay came down like a mountain slope to the other end of the barn, and there was a level place as yet unfilled with the new crop. At the sides the feeding racks were visible, and between the slats the heads of horses could be seen.

It was Sunday afternoon. The resting horses nibbled the remaining wisps of hay, and they stamped their feet and they bit the wood of the mangers and rattled the halter chains. The afternoon sun sliced in through the cracks of the barn walls and lay in bright lines on the hay. There was the buzz of flies in the air, the lazy afternoon humming.

1. As a class, use what you have learned so far to pick out three or four features which you think are really distinctive about Steinbeck's style of writing.

Included on pages 30 to 31 are five novel openings. They're all set in the USA and are written by American writers. Two of them are written by John Steinbeck, three are not.

2. Which of the novel openings do you think are written by John Steinbeck?
3. What made you make the choice you did?
4. What has this taught you about Steinbeck's style of writing?

1

In late March Bob Dollar, a young, curly-headed man of twenty-five with the broad face of a cat, pale innocent eyes fringed with sooty lashes, drove east along Texas State Highway 15 in the panhandle, down from Denver the day before, over the Raton Pass and through the dead volcano country of northeast New Mexico to the Oklahoma pistol barrel, then a wrong turn north and wasted hours before he regained the way. It was a roaring spring morning with green in the sky, the air spiced with sand sagebrush and aromatic sumac. NPR faded from the radio in a string of announcements of corporate supporters, replaced by a Christian station that alternated pabulum preaching and punchy music. He switched to shit-kicker airwaves and listened to songs about staying home, going home, being home and the errors of leaving home.

2

To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth. The plows crossed and recrossed the rivulet marks. The last rains lifted the corn quickly and scattered weed colonies and grass along the sides of the roads so that the gray country and the dark red country began to disappear under a green cover. In the last part of May the sky grew pale and the clouds that had hung in high puffs for so long in the spring were dissipated. The sun flared down on the growing corn day after day until a line of brown spread along the edge of each green bayonet. The clouds appeared, and went away, and in a while they did not try any more. The weeds grew darker green to protect themselves, and they did not spread any more. The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country.

3

The town itself is dreary; not much is there except the cotton-mill, the two-room houses where the workers live, a few peach trees, a church with two coloured windows, and a miserable main street only a hundred yards long. On Saturdays the tenants from the nearby farms come in for a day of talk and trade. Otherwise the town is lonesome, sad, and like a place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world. The nearest train stop is Society City, and the Greyhound and White Bus Lines use the Forks Falls Road which is three miles away. The winters here are short and raw, the summers white with glare and fiery hot.

If you walk along the main street on an August afternoon there is nothing whatsoever to do.

4

At daybreak Billy Buck emerged from the bunkhouse and stood for a moment on the porch looking up at the sky. He was a broad, bandy-legged little man with a walrus mustache, with square hands, puffed and muscled on the palms. His eyes were a contemplative, watery gray and the hair which protruded from under his Stetson hat was spiky and weathered. Billy was still stuffing his shirt into his blue jeans as he stood on the porch. He unbuckled his belt and tightened it again. The belt showed, by the worn shiny places opposite each hole, the gradual increase of Billy's middle over a period of years. When he had seen to the weather, Billy cleared each nostril by holding its mate closed with his forefinger and blowing fiercely. Then he walked down to the barn, rubbing his hands together. He curried and brushed two saddle horses in the stalls, talking quietly to them all the time; and he had hardly finished when the iron triangle started ringing at the ranch house. Billy stuck the brush and currycomb together and laid them on the rail, and went up to breakfast.

5

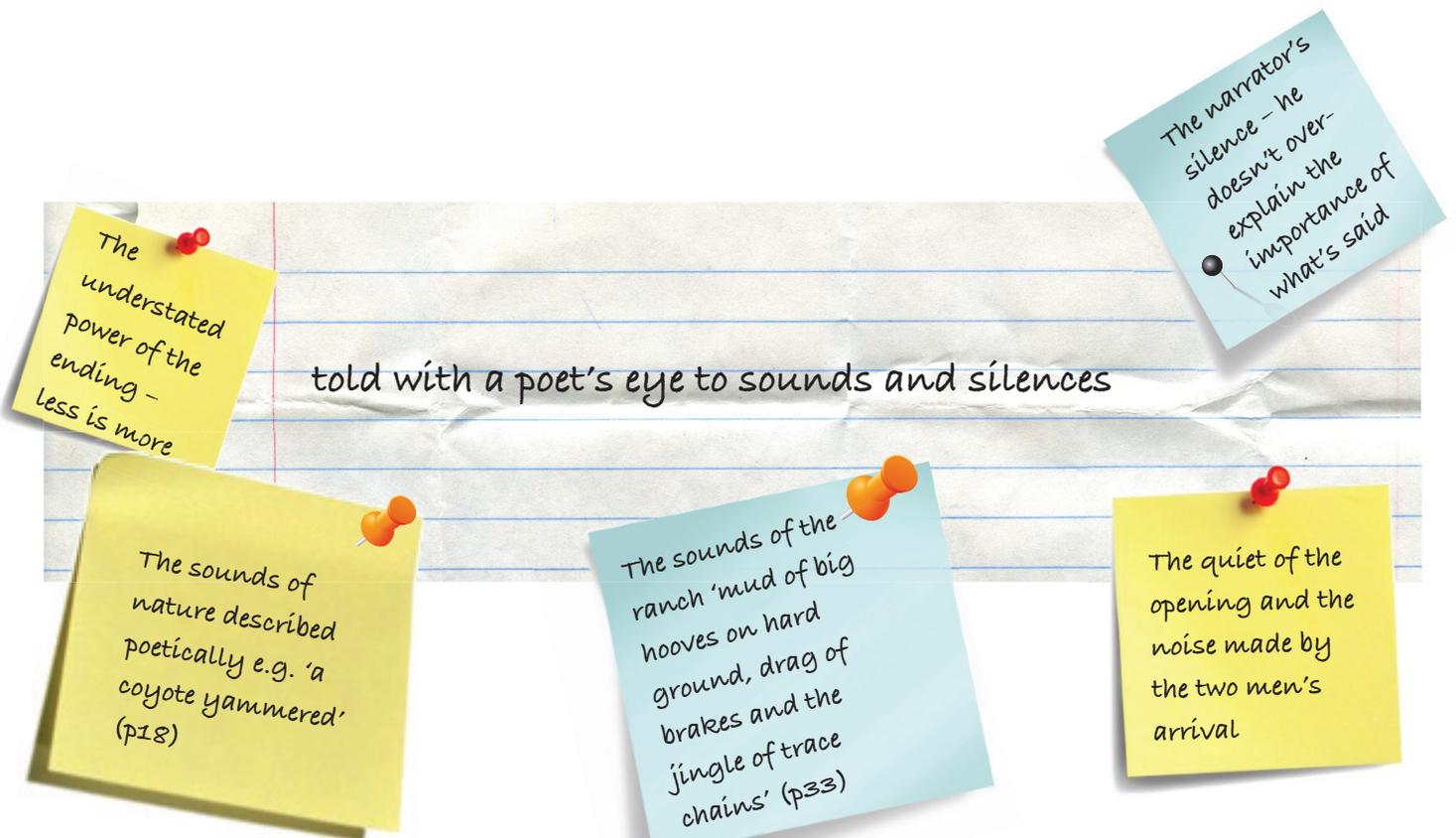
Corrigan drove me through the South Bronx under the flamed-up sky. The sunset was the color of muscle, pink and striated gray. Arson. The owners of the buildings, he said, were running insurance scams. Whole streets of tenements and warehouses abandoned to smolder.

Gangs of kids hung out on the street corners. Traffic lights were stuck on permanent red. At fire hydrants there were huge puddles of stagnant water. A building on Willis had half collapsed into the street. A couple of wild dogs picked their way through the ruin. A burned neon sign stood upright. Fire trucks went by, and a couple of cop cars trailed each other for comfort. Every now and then a figure emerged from the shadows, homeless men pushing shopping trolleys piled high with copper wire. They looked like men on a westward-ho, shoving their wagons across the nightlands of America.

9. What People have said about *Of Mice and Men*

1. Read the comments on pages 33 and 34 about *Of Mice and Men*, both from the time when it was written and more recently.
2. Choose one short phrase, that you find specially interesting, thought-provoking, persuasive or that you strongly agree or disagree with. Don't worry too much about anything you don't understand or find difficult. Just look for a little phrase that sparks off your thinking.
3. Write it in the middle of a sheet of blank paper. Jot down any reasons for agreeing or disagreeing, or any questions that it raises for you. Go back into the novel to find examples or pieces of evidence that relate to the phrase you have chosen.

Here's one example of the kind of initial thinking you might do:



Views from the 1930s

JOHN STEINBECK

The basic rule given us was simple and heartbreaking. A story to be effective had to convey something from the writer to the reader, and the power of its offering was the measure of its excellence. Outside of that, there were no rules.

CHARLES A. WAGNER, 'Books' New York Mirror, 24 Feb 1937

... in the course of his swift-moving tale, Mr. Steinbeck gives us a holiday pageantry of portraits in toil, in men's passions and repressions, in workers' dreams and devilments, told with a poet's eye to sounds and silences which make his book a memorable thing indeed, and something at last to cheer about.

LEWIS GANNETT, 'Books And Things' New York Herald Tribune, 25 Feb 1937

...and you will close this strange, tragic little idyll with a vast sense of compassion for big, dumb Lennie and for George, who knew Lennie would never get to tend those rabbits, and that if he did stroke their fur with his too strong hands he would kill them. And it is, perhaps, that compassion, even more than the perfect sense of form, which marks off John Steinbeck, artist, so sharply from all the little verbal photographers who record tough talk and snarl in books which have power without pity. The most significant things John Steinbeck has to say about his characters are never put into words; they are the overtones of which the reader is never wholly conscious – and that is art.

FANNY BUTCHER, 'Books' Chicago Daily Tribune 27 Feb 1937

Brutality and tenderness mingle in these strangely moving pages. Language that gentle ears would never hear seems as inevitable as Lennie's clumsy devotion to the puppy which he kills with his petting. The reader is fascinated by a certainty of approaching doom. It comes swiftly, inevitably, and the final moments of George's service to Lennie are high tragedy. One false word, and *Of Mice and Men* would have been melodrama, and bad melodrama at that. But the author never, after the first few pages, writes one false word.

WILBUR NEEDHAM, 'John Steinbeck Does Dramatic Novel' La Times, 28 Feb 1937

A little book, half the size of an ordinary novel (the gods be praised for that!) but containing more. In everything but its superficial form, the novel is a play... There is fluid movement, here, and inevitability; never spoiled by theatrical mechanics – and yet, it is theater, as theater ought to be. With inner rhythms that move out into a prose that is Steinbeck's own.

MAXINE GARRARD, Columbus Enquirer, 1 March 1937

Serving his strong meat fresh and still warm from life's slaughter house, John Steinbeck shades nothing in presenting his terrifying tale; however, beneath the superficial horror of the story the reader senses a dream of breathless beauty shimmering through the lives of the two main characters. These vagabonds are men predestined to a stark, empty existence but between them flickers some unexplained devotion and future vision of the time when they will 'live on the fatta the lan'.' ...

From the sordid lives of a cocky tramp and a balmy moron, John Steinbeck has written a drama of indescribable magic and heart-breaking futility. Even if you think you are tough and can 'take it,' this book will cause an emotional upheaval. It is strong, it is powerful and it is wonderful, but unless you can swallow raw stuff – lay off.

More recent views on the novel

NICK HORNBY

I always thought *Of Mice and Men* was such a perfect book because there's nothing not to understand, but it's still really clever and moving and complicated, but everybody understands the complication.

LOUIS OWENS, 'Deadly Kids, Stinking Dogs & Heroes: The Best Laid Plans'

In a fallen Garden where men and women drift past one another alone and infinitely lonely, George and Lennie at least have each other, and together they symbolize humanity's inescapable need to be connected, to touch another human being profoundly in some inarticulate way. George and Lennie have what Curley's wife, Candy, and Crooks all long for: meaningful human contact, something like love. When George shoots Lennie, George is not only killing his dream, but more importantly he is acting as his brother's keeper, making the ultimate, and ultimately heroic gesture of sacrifice and responsibility.

JEAN EMERY, 'Misogyny in of Mice And Men'

Of Mice and Men is not, as most critics would have us believe, a poignant, sentimental drama of an impossible friendship and an unattainable dream. Rather, the story actually demonstrates the achievement of a dream – that of a homogeneous male fraternity not just to repress, but to eliminate women and femininity. *Of Mice and Men* depicts the rescue of men from women...

MICHAEL J. MEYER, 'Steinbeck's Paradoxical Attraction'

Of Mice and Men, rather than merely being a treatise on the values of community and acceptance, may be far more complex than readers have previously thought. Crooks ends the penultimate chapter by being resigned to a solitary existence.

As his uninvited guests leave, he momentarily glances toward the door (perhaps in regret) but then proceeds to concentrate on his physical ailments rather than his emotional ones, applying a soothing liniment to his sore back and resolving not to take the risk of interaction again. He has experienced the trauma that comes with community, a trauma that is perhaps indicative of the negatives an individual can encounter when opening one's life, establishing ties with others, and moving away from self-consideration to embrace a demanding whole.

10. Exploring Contexts

1. Read the seven pieces of contextual information on pages 36 and 37.
2. In pairs or small groups, focus on just one of the contextual pieces. Look back into the novel and select 4 or 5 short quotations which you think fit particularly well with the contextual information.
3. Annotate your passage with the quotations you have chosen.
4. Share your choices either in class feedback or by displaying your annotated context cards on the classroom wall.

Here are five examples of exam question focuses:

Question 1

A question about this passage and the presentation of Crooks both here and in the novel as a whole: 'On one side of the little room there was a square four-paned window' to 'pain-tightened lips which were lighter than his face.' (Pg 75-76)

Question 2

A question about this passage and the presentation of Slim, both here and in the novel as a whole: 'A tall man stood in the doorway...' to 'You guys ever bucked barley?' (Pg 37-38)

Question 3

A question about this passage and the role of Curley's wife in the novel and what it reveals about women in 1930s America:

'Both men glanced up, for the rectangle of sunshine in the doorway was cut off. A girl was standing there looking in...' to 'You leave her be.' (Pg 34-36)

Question 4

A question about this passage, what themes it develops in the novel and what it reveals about life in America in the 1930s:

'George's voice became deeper. He repeated his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before...' to 'Lennie choked with pride. 'I can remember,' he said. (Pg 15-17)

Question 5

A question about this passage, how the detail is used to suggest the setting and context and what it reveals about the world Steinbeck is describing:

'Evening of a hot day started the little wind to moving in the tree...' to 'I bet it was *more* than four miles. Damn hot day.' (Pg 2-4)

5. Still working in your pair or group, choose one of the questions.
 - Which piece of contextual information you've read do you think is most relevant to this question?
 - Which of the quotations you chose from the novel are most relevant?

1. JOHN STEINBECK, America And Americans: Paradox and Dreams

Consider the dream of and the hunger for home. The very word can reduce nearly all of my compatriots to tears. Builders and developers never build houses – they build homes. The dream home is either in a small town or in a suburban area where grass and trees simulate the country. This dream home is a permanent seat, not rented but owned. It is a center where a man and his wife grow graciously old, warmed by the radiance of well-washed children and grandchildren... The home dream is only one of the deepset American illusions which, since they can't be changed, function as cohesive principles to bind the nation together and make it different from all other nations...

2. LOUIS BANKS

1929 was pretty hard. I hoboed, I bummed, I begged for a nickel to get somethin' to eat. Go get a job, oh, at the foundry there. They didn't hire me because I din't belong to the right kind of race. 'Nother time I went into Saginaw, it was two white fellas and myself made three. The fella there hired the two men and din't hire me. I was back out on the streets. That hurt me pretty bad, the race part.

When I was hoboing, I would lay on the side of the tracks and wait until I could see the train comin'. I would always carry a bottle of water in my pocket and a piece of tape or rag to keep it from bustin' and put a piece of bread in my pocket, so I wouldn't starve on the way. I would ride all day and all night in the long hot sun...

...A man had to be on the road. Had to leave his wife, had to leave his mother, leave his family just to try to get money to live on.

3.

In America in the 1930s there was mass unemployment. In 1932, one out of four Americans wanting work couldn't find any. Many single men travelled the country in search of work, hitching lifts on trucks or travelling on the railroads and sleeping rough if they had to.

4. EDWARD C. SCHALK, from Hard Times, Studs Terkel

We thought American business was the Rock of Gibraltar. We were the prosperous nation, and nothing could stop us now. A brownstone house was forever. You gave it to your kids and they put marble fronts on it. There was a feeling of continuity. If you made it, it was there forever. Suddenly the big dream exploded. The impact was unbelievable.

I was walking along the street at that time, and you'd see the bread lines. The biggest one in New York City was owned by William Randolph Hearst. He had a big truck with several people on it, and big cauldrons of hot soup, bread. Fellows with burlap on their shoes were lined up all around Columbus Circle, and went for blocks and blocks around the park, waiting.

...The prevailing greeting at that time, on every block you passed, by some poor guy coming up, was: 'Can you spare a dime' Or: 'Can you spare something for a cup of coffee?' ... 'Brother, Can you Spare a Dime?' finally hit on every block, on every street. I thought that could be a beautiful title. If I could only work it out by telling people, through the song, it isn't just a man asking for a dime.

This is the man who says: I built the railroads. I built that tower. I fought your wars. I was the kid with the drum. Why the hell should I be standing in line now? What happened to all this wealth I created?'

5. ED PAULSEN, from *Hard Times*, Studs Terkel

‘I worked punching cattle, 10 dollars a month. I was never satisfied to stay there. I was always taking a pop at L.A. or San Francisco.

Everybody talks of the Crash of '29. In small towns out West, we didn't know there was a Crash. What did the stock market mean to us? Not a dang thing. If you were in Cut Bank, Montana, who owned stock? The farmer was a ping-pong ball in a very tough game.

I finished high school in 1930 and I walked out into this thing...’

He picked apples in Washington, ‘hustled sheets’ in Los Angeles, and worked on road gangs all along the coast. ‘It got tougher. We didn't know how to make out in the city. It was terrifying. There were great queues of guys in soup lines. We didn't know how to join a soup line. We – my two brothers and I – didn't see ourselves that way. We had middle-class ideas without a middle-class income. (Laughs.)

We ended up in San Francisco in 1931. I tried to get a job on the docks. I was a big husky athlete, but there just wasn't any work...

6. JANE ADAMS, from *True Tales Of American Life* Ed. Paul Auster

Things began falling apart for us in the summer of 1930. That's when my father refused to take a cut in pay and wound up losing his job. He spent a long time looking for something else, but he couldn't find work, not even for lower wages than what he had already turned down. Finally he settled in a chair with his *Argosy* magazine, and my mother began to nag and fuss. Eventually we lost our house.

I remember a dream I had about finding jewels for them, but when I put my hand in my pocket, all I found was a hole. I woke up crying. I was six years old...

...My folks saw that at least the famers could put food on the table. They decided to become farmers, too. Land was cheaper in Arkansas, so that's where we headed. But what did my father know about farming? My mother, my two little brothers, and I settled into a small house on a bit of land, and my father went to work for a lady outside of town. We seldom saw him.

My mother later said she thought he worked the lady's bed more than her fields.

7. LAURA BROUGHTON WATERS, From *True Tales Of American Life* Ed. Paul Auster

According to our mother, Aunt Myrtle was a naturally beautiful woman who always kept herself very thin. She cut her hair fashionably short and dyed it coal black, a shocking thing for a woman to do in rural southern Arkansas in the early 1930s. She wore lots of lipstick, eyeliner, rouge, and nail polish, even if she was just staying home. She had the finest clothes, the latest fashions, and was probably the only woman in the community who spent her money this way. Aunt Myrtle had lots of boyfriends, most of them travelling salesmen, although some, according to rumors, were married men who lived in the area. The boyfriends bought her furs and jewelry and took her on trips to hotels in the city.

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