

Plot Summary

1	Ch 1	George & Lennie are on their way to start work as labourers at a ranch. They camp outside and they talk about their dream of getting a place of their own and living off the land.
2	Ch 2	George & Lennie arrive at the ranch to start work. They meet the boss and most of the other characters on the ranch; they don't have a good feeling about the place but decide to stay. George tells Lennie where to hide if he gets into any trouble.
3	Ch 3	George confides in Slim, explaining that they had to leave Weed because a woman accused Lennie of rape. Carlson pressurises Candy into having his dog shot; a depressed Candy finds hope again when he hears about George and Lennie's plans, offering to give money to join them in buying a house. Slim's dog has puppies, Lennie is given one to keep. Curley starts a fight with Lennie and ends up with a crushed hand.
4	Ch 4	The ranch workers have gone out for the evening. Crooks, Candy, Lennie and Curley's Wife stay at the ranch. Lennie goes to see Crooks in his hut and along with Candy, the three of them share a dream about getting a place together. Curley's Wife joins them but she is not welcome; Crooks asks her to leave but she threatens him saying she will accuse him of rape if he is rude to her. Lennie accidentally kills one of the puppies, unaware of his own strength.
5	Ch 5	Lennie tries to bury the puppy discreetly in the barn. Curley's Wife sees Lennie and asks what he is doing. They have a conversation and she confides in Lennie saying that her husband isn't nice. Lennie strokes her hair but when she asks him to stop Lennie panics and accidentally kills her. Her body is found and the ranch workers organise a hunt for Lennie.
6	Ch 6	George realises that if Lennie is caught by the ranch workers he will be lynched and if he is taken to the police he will be taken to prison. He knows that Lennie is extremely vulnerable and kills him to save him being murdered by the others. Slim is the only other character who fully understands George's decision.

Characters

1	George	The protagonist. Introduced as a smart but modest character, he is compassionate and feels a huge sense of responsibility where Lennie is concerned. George is a moral person who has to make difficult decisions.	5	Crooks	Crooks is the only black man on the ranch and experiences racism. He is intelligent and proud but battles with loneliness. Like Candy, he is excited by the idea of buying land with George and Lennie.
2	Lennie	Also the protagonist of the novella, Lennie is childlike and innocent, highly dependent on George to take care of him. He looks to George for guidance and reassurance and although he is a kind person he makes mistakes that have huge repercussions.	6	Curley	The antagonist of the novella. Curley is a cruel, insensitive man who enjoys picking fights with people. He is insecure about his height and often starts fights with those who are bigger than him to prove a point. Although recently married he doesn't try to understand or care for his wife.
3	Slim	A natural leader and an intelligent man who others listen to and respect. He is highly skilled and is the only other character who fully understands why George has to kill Lennie.	7	Curley's Wife	The only woman on the ranch, she is lonely and unhappy. She always appears to be searching for her husband but in truth she is looking for company.
4	Candy	The eldest of the ranch workers, Candy lost his hand in a farm accident. He cleans the ranch and is dependent on his old dog for company. A lonely character who is delighted by the idea of being able to buy a patch of land with George, Lennie & Crooks.	8	Carlson	An insensitive character who pressurises Candy into agreeing to have his dog killed. He owns the Luger pistol that is later used to kill Lennie.

Context

1	The Great Depression	In 1929 the American stock market crashed meaning that the value of businesses dropped suddenly. Lots of these businesses had to close down and many people lost their jobs. People couldn't pay back the money they owed to the banks and as a result lost their homes. Many people lived in poverty.
2	Migrant Workers	During the Great Depression many farmers lost their jobs, they had borrowed money from the banks to buy farms but couldn't give the money back when the banks asked for it. This meant that many of these farm workers had to find work elsewhere, travelling around for temporary work, usually alone.
3	The American Dream	In the 1800s many people saw America as a place to start a new life and settle on empty land (at this time most of western America hadn't been explored). Many people believed they could be their own boss and make their own fortune. This was the American Dream.
4	Women in 1930s	Women weren't treated in the same way as men, they were expected to obey their husbands. Their job was to be a good wife and stay at home looking after the children.

Themes

1	Dreams	Many of the characters have dreams about what they would like to achieve if they had the opportunity. George and Lennie dream about having their own plot of land and Curley's Wife dreams of being an actress.
2	Loneliness	The majority of the characters are battling with loneliness. The men on the ranch have no family and workers usually travel alone. Curley's wife is constantly searching for company and Crooks feels lonely because he is given his own hut, separated from the others.
3	Death	Death features in every chapter of the novella; it is a part of life on the ranch and nobody can escape it. Lennie is often involved in the deaths suggesting that he is dangerous. His accidental killing of the puppy can be seen as foreshadowing Curley's Wife's death.
4	Prejudice	Crooks faces the most prejudice on the ranch because he is a black man. Black people were separated from white people in schools, prisons and hospitals in 1930s America. Candy also faces prejudice because of his age and disability whilst Curley's Wife experiences prejudice because she is not staying at home like a woman was expected to do. She is judged for talking to the men on the ranch.

Key Vocabulary

1	Novella	A short novel.
2	Itinerant worker	An itinerant worker travels around a region, working for short periods in different places.
3	Foreshadowing	To be a warning or an indication of a future event.
4	Motif	A powerful or recurring idea in a novel.