OF MICE AND MEN

by

John Steinbeck

Teacher Guide

Written by

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Note
The text used to prepare this guide was the Bantam softcover, ©1937, 1965 by John Steinbeck. The page references may differ in other editions.

Please note: Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with your class.
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Note
Quizzes, tests and vocabulary checks are provided in the Student Packet for *Of Mice and Men*. 

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Plot Summary

Chapter One
The story opens in rural California on a warm evening during the Depression. Two men, George and his retarded friend Lenny—a simple giant of a man—are walking along the Salinas River. They left their last job in a hurry when Lenny caused trouble by touching a woman's dress, and now they are on their way to a new job at a ranch. George makes Lenny throw away the dead mouse he has been keeping in his pocket and fixes them both some beans over the campfire. At Lenny's entreaty, George tells Lenny's favorite story about how they will get their own place where Lenny can tend the rabbits and both will live off the fat of the land. Lenny promises George he will return to the riverbank and hide if he gets into any trouble.

Chapter Two
When they get to the ranch, Candy—an old "swamper" with only one hand—shows them their bunks. George explains to the new boss that Lennie may not be bright but is as strong as a bull. They meet the boss's son, Curley—a pugnacious guy who spends a lot of time looking around the ranch for his new wife—a flirtatious, lonely woman who tries to catch the eye of any man she can.

Chapter Three
To Lennie's delight, Slim, the respected mule skinner, lets Lennie have one of his dog's new puppies. Carlson, one of the other workers, hounds Candy about how the old man's dog smells until Candy finally lets him shoot the dog. Later, Candy asks if he can go in with George and Lennie on their dream place and George assents. Curley provokes a fight with Lennie and Lennie crushes Curley's hand.

Chapter Four
Crooks, the lonely, lame, black stable hand, doesn't socialize with the white workers and isn't allowed into the whites' bunkhouse. While everyone else is in town at the whorehouse, Lennie goes to Crooks' room and tells him about the place he and George are getting; Candy comes in, too. Curley's wife shows up and Crooks tells her to leave, but he shrinks when she reminds him she could have him lynched.
Chapter Five
While the other men are playing horseshoes, Lennie sits in the hay stroking the puppy he has accidentally killed. Eager for a willing ear, Curley's wife comes in and starts complaining about how she could have been in pictures but ended up married to someone she doesn't like. When she tells Lennie he can touch her hair, he pats it harder than she'd like. She gets angry; he panics and smothers her. Candy finds the body and tells George, who consults with Slim. When Curley finds out what has happened, he vows to kill Lennie and organizes a search party to find him.

Chapter Six
George steals Carlson's gun and goes to meet Lennie at the appointed place by the riverbank. He finds Lennie there, and tells Lennie to relax and look off into the distance while he tells him his favorite story about the place they'll have. As the other searchers approach, he kills Lennie with one shot to the back of the head. When the others arrive, he lets them think that he wrestled the gun from Lennie. Slim, who knows better, privately tells him that he did what he had to, and the two go off together to get a drink.
Background on the Novelist

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California on February 27, 1902. His early experiences and interests helped mold his writing, and much of his fiction is set in California. His mother, a former schoolteacher, encouraged him to read; he developed an early interest in science. Occasionally he worked as a hired hand on neighboring farms and ranches. His scientific curiosity, his knowledge of the agricultural worker, his ear for realistic dialogue, and his concern for the downtrodden are evident throughout his work.

He attended Stanford University in California, but did not complete his degree. While working at a variety of jobs, he wrote several short stories and began writing his first novel, Cup of Gold (1929), about a famous pirate, Sir Henry Morgan. In 1930, he settled near the coastal town of Monterey, California, where he met Edward Ricketts, a free-lance marine biologist. The "biological" view of life evident in many of Steinbeck's novels was influenced by Steinbeck's acquaintance with Ricketts. Steinbeck gained critical notice in 1935 with the publication of Tortilla Flat. He collaborated with Ricketts on Sea of Cortez in 1941.

In 1937 Steinbeck wrote Of Mice and Men, a compact tragedy about the friendship of two migrant workers. In 1940 he won the Pulitzer Prize for his best-known work, The Grapes of Wrath, a novel about the migration of the "Okies" from the Dust Bowl region of the Great Plains to California during the Great Depression (and one of the most widely-read books of the Depression years). This epic is considered one of the best fictional portrayals of the American Depression.

During World War II, Steinbeck worked as a war correspondent. A short time after returning home from overseas, he wrote Cannery Row (1945), followed by The Pearl (1947)—an elaboration of a Mexican fable—and The Wayward Bus (1947)—like Cannery Row, an indictment of the materialistic morality of modern civilization.

Several of Steinbeck's subsequent books focused on a new theme: man's inherent goodness and the human capacity to overcome evil. One of his best-known novels from this period is the partially-autobiographical East of Eden (1952). In 1962, he wrote Travels with Charley—a sketch of Steinbeck's trip across the U.S. with his poodle, Charley. In the same year, six years before his death, Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for "realistic and imaginative writings, distinguished as they are by a sympathetic humor and a social perception."
Initiating Activities

1. Anticipation Guide
   Students discuss their opinions of statements which tap themes they will meet in the story, rating them on a scale like the one below.

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<td>agree strongly</td>
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<td>disagree strongly</td>
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Sample statements
   a. You don't need money to be happy.
   b. "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation." (Thoreau)
   c. Everyone needs a piece of land to care for.
   d. When you have a pet, you have a responsibility to put him out of his misery if he is old and sick.
   e. It's important to have someone to talk to—even if he doesn't really understand.
   f. "Mercy killings" are never justified.

2. Video
   Have students watch one of the film versions of the story. (the 1930s version starring Burgess Meredith and Lon Chaney, Jr., the 1980s version starring Robert Blake and Randy Quaid, or the recent one starring Gary Sinise and John Malkovich)

3. Log
   Have students keep a response log as they read. In one type of log, the student assumes the persona of one of the characters (e.g., George). Writing on one side of each piece of paper, the student writes in the first person ("I...") about his or her reactions to one episode in that chapter. A partner (or the teacher) responds to these writings on the other side of the paper, as if talking to the character.

   In the dual entry log, students jot down brief summaries and reactions to each section of the novel they have read. (The first entry could be made based on a preview of the novel—a glance at the cover and a flip through the book.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
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<tr>
<td>(These might begin: &quot;I liked the part where Lennie...&quot;, &quot;This reminded me of the time I...&quot;, &quot;Curley reminds me of another character...&quot;, &quot;If I were George, I wouldn't...&quot;, and so forth.)</td>
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As an alternative to this activity, simply have students jot reactions on sticky notes which they affix to pages for later reference during class discussion.
4. Verbal Scales
After students finish a section of the story, have them rate their feelings and judgments about particular characters and the story overall using the following scales or others you construct. Students should discuss their ratings (and how these ratings change as students get further into the novel) using evidence from the story.

Like 1 2 3 4 5 6  Dislike
High Tension 1 2 3 4 5 6  Low Tension
Happy 1 2 3 4 5 6  Sad
Honest 1 2 3 4 5 6  Dishonest
Caring 1 2 3 4 5 6  Unkind
Responsible 1 2 3 4 5 6  Irresponsible
Proud 1 2 3 4 5 6  Humble
Rich 1 2 3 4 5 6  Poor
Company-seeker 1 2 3 4 5 6  Loner
Content 1 2 3 4 5 6  Lonely

5. Brainstorming
Have students generate associations with “loneliness”—a theme that is central to the story—while a student scribe jots ideas around the central word or statement on a large piece of paper. Help students “cluster” the ideas into categories. A sample framework is shown below.

6. Geography
Have students locate Soledad on a map of California and refer to the map as other locations are mentioned in the story (e.g., Gabilan Mountains, Salinas River, etc.).
7. Role Play
Have small groups of students improvise skits demonstrating one of the following situations (analogous to situations that arise in the story):

- You feel responsible for someone and it makes you feel tied down (e.g., your kid brother is trying to tag along with you).
- A bully is picking on your friend. You don't like it, but you don't want to start trouble.
- Your little brother likes to hear the same story from you over and over about something fun the two of you are going to do together.

8. Discussion Topics
Steinbeck’s Writing: Have you read anything by Steinbeck before? What is his writing style like? About what topics and themes does he usually write?
"Setting Down Roots": What does it mean to “work the land”? Do you have certain times and places when you feel “close to the land”? How important is it going to be for you to have a place you can call your own some day? How important will it be to have a piece of land? What are some reasons people have for living a life of “wandering”? What would you like about being frequently on the move? What wouldn’t you like? What are migrant workers? How have they been mistreated? What laws do we have today to protect the rights of migrant workers and their children? (Research)
Retarded Adults: Have you ever known a retarded adult? What sorts of options are open to retarded adults, today? What problems do retarded adults face? What sorts of employment opportunities are open to these adults? Where do they socialize?

9. Background Information: The Great Depression
On October 24, 1929, the stock market crashed (Panic of 1929), leading to the deepest economic depression the nation had ever known. It lasted until 1939, when World War II broke out in Europe. The causes of the Depression were several, including loss of foreign markets, a farm depression that cut farm purchasing power, and lack of buying power for most people. The effects were also several, including—business bankruptcies, bank closings, factory shutdowns, farm foreclosures, and massive unemployment (1 out of 4 workers in 1933).

10. Prediction
Have students predict what the story might be about based on the title and cover illustration. What can you tell about the two men in the picture? Why do you think rabbits are shown? What does the setting in the picture seem to be?

11. Writing
Freewrite for a few minutes using each of the following sentence starters.
1. The life of a migrant worker...
2. My idea of the ideal life...
3. During the Great Depression...
4. You need a friend to...
5. Having a place of your own...
6. Loneliness...
12. Vocabulary
Give students the following word list—
1. debris p. 1
2. mollified p. 27
3. Luger p. 52
4. cowering p. 70
5. fawning p. 75
6. contemptuously p. 86
7. sluggishly p. 102
8. lynched p. 103
9. belligerently p. 112
10. retorted p. 112

Have students mark each word to indicate whether they are unfamiliar with the word, have seen/heard it, or can define it. Students then look up words they can't define. After discussing what the setting, characters, problem, goal, and resolution of a story are, have students fill out (and discuss) a chart in which they predict how the author will use the vocabulary words in the story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Characters</th>
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<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Something Else</td>
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13. Novel Sleuth
As they read, have students mark passages in the novel where characters experience loneliness with an L and passages where characters share companionship with a C, places where characters are hopeful with an HL and places where they feel hopeless with an HS.

14. “Book Hook”
Read aloud to students pages 8-10, “Lennie got up on his hands and knees…” to “…because they was so little.” Have students discuss what the passage tells them about George and Lennie—their personalities, their attitudes, and their relationship to each other. You might use these questions as prompts: Why do you think these two are cooking over a campfire? Are they related? What's the matter with Lennie? Why won't George let him keep the mouse? Elicit their predictions about what happens next, then have them read the novel to test their predictions.
Chapter 1

Vocabulary Activity
Word mapping is an activity that can be used with any vocabulary list. Split the class into cooperative groups and have each group map the target words, using the framework shown below. For words that have no antonyms, students can provide a picture or symbol that captures the word's meaning.

**SYNONYMS**

*horizontal, reclining*

**TARGET WORD**

*Recumbent*

**DEFINITION**

*Lying down in a position of rest*

**ANTONYMS**

*prone, upright*

**SENTENCE USING WORD**

*She was recumbent on the couch.*
Discussion Questions

1. What is the setting as the novel begins? (California, Depression years, warm evening on the banks of the Salinas River near Soledad) What do you picture as the story opens? (river, bank, yellow sand, golden foothills, sycamores, lizards and rabbits, two men on the path) What does your imagination add to the sights, sounds, smells? What is happening? (George and Lennie are walking down the path and stopping for a drink from the pool.)

2. What is George like (based on how he looks, what he says, how he acts)? (He is a small intense man, gruff with Lennie but cares about him) What is Lennie like? (very large, mentally slow, child-like, dependent on George) Use the graphic below to discuss these questions with your class.

3. What sort of relationship do these two seem to have? (George directs Lennie and Lennie looks to George for instructions and approval.) Why do you think they are together?

4. Where are George and Lennie going? (to a new job on a ranch, bucking grain) Where have they come from? (They ran away from Weed, where they had been working.) Why are they camping out? (The bus didn’t leave them at the entrance to the ranch, so they have to walk.)

5. What does Lennie have in his pocket? (dead mouse) Why? (He likes to pet it.) Why do you suppose George won’t let him keep it? (George probably wants Lennie to act more “normal” so other people won’t judge him and make trouble for him.) How did George know that Lennie went to look for it? (After George threw the mouse into the brush on the other side of the water, he sent Lennie for firewood; Lennie headed in the direction of the dead mouse, splashed around in the river and came back wet, with only one stick.) Why do you suppose Lennie always killed the mice Aunt Clara gave him? (Maybe Lennie just didn’t know his own strength when he stroked them; also maybe he got angry with them for biting, etc.)

6. What do you learn about what happened to make Lennie and George leave Weed? (George complains about having to hide in an irrigation ditch after Lennie felt a girl’s dress and grabbed onto it when the girl complained.) What other details does your imagination supply?

7. Why does George get angry with Lennie (p. 12)? (Lennie points out that he likes his beans with ketchup; George has none.) Why does Lennie tell George he wouldn’t eat any ketchup if it were there (p. 13)? (Lennie is trying to appease George, to show that he’s sorry for mentioning the ketchup earlier.) How do you think he would do on his own? (Lennie probably couldn’t take care of himself, and George knows it.)
8. Why do you think the author uses the word “craftily”: “Lennie spoke craftily, ‘Tell me—like you done before...’ ” (p. 14)? How is Lennie being tricky? (He knows that now is a good time to get George to do him a favor and tell the story because George is feeling guilty about snapping.) What story does he like to hear over and over? (how they will get a place of their own and raise rabbits and chickens and cows and pigs and live off the fat of the land)

9. What does George coach Lennie to do if there is trouble? (return to this spot on the riverbank) Why? (so that Lennie will know to hide where George can find him if Lennie does something to get himself in trouble—which he has done before)

Prediction
How will Lennie and George be treated on their new job? Will they ever get the place George tells Lennie about?

The Author’s Craft: Repetition
Steinbeck has a distinctive writing style; his language has an almost biblical, rolling quality at times. He often uses repetition of words and phrases for emphasis. Reread the last paragraph on page 1—

“There is a path through the willows and among the sycamores, a path beaten hard by boys coming down from the ranches to swim in the deep pool and beaten hard by tramps...”

Where do you see repetition? (“beaten hard by...”) What is the effect? (How hard the earth is packed down is emphasized; so is the contrast between exuberant boys looking for a cool swimming hole and weary tramps looking for a campsite.)

Writing Activity
We learn that Aunt Clara used to give mice to Lennie. Write a scene showing why she stopped. (How does Aunt Clara treat Lennie? How does he seem to feel about Aunt Clara? Why does he kill the mice she gives him? How does she react?)
Chapter 2

Vocabulary

- bunk house 19
- whitewashed 19
- ticking 19
- vials 19
- swamper 20
- graybacks 20
- skeptically 21
- liniment 21
- skinner 22
- relish 22
- stocky 23
- Stetson hat 23
- cultivator 24
- bale 24
- mollified 27
- calculating 28
- pugnacious 28
- gingerly 28
- lashed 28
- levelly 28
- lightweight 29
- scappy 29
- ominously 29
- slough 30
- cockier 30
- derogatory 30
- solitaire 31
- jerkline 31
- flounced 32
- plaintively 32
- mourned 33
- trace 33
- decisive 33
- contorted 33
- mules 34
- nasal 34
- briddled 34
- brusquely 35
- archly 35
- apprehensive 35
- defensively 35
- disengage 36
- majesty 37
- gravity 37
- complacently 38
- mused 38
- triangle 40
- dignity 40

Vocabulary Activity

Give students these three options for small-group work:

a) Create a crossword puzzle with the vocabulary words (using puzzle-making software, if you wish).

b) Create "jeopardy"-like statements for each word (e.g., Answer: a trademark for a hat with a high crown and wide brim. Question: What is a Stetson?).

c) Create a picture puzzle for each word. On one side of a card goes a drawing or cutout that represents the word. The player tries to guess the word (printed on the other side).

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the new boss angry before George and Lennie arrive? (They haven't shown up on the day they were supposed to.) How does the reader find out? (Candy tells George.) Do you think George and Lennie are worried about angering their new boss? (George wants the job, but does not act meek and apologetic.)

2. Why isn't George happy with his bunk? (He finds a can that indicates there have been bugs.) How does Candy reassure him? (tells George the previous guy was super-clean and using the spray for prevention) Do you believe Candy?

3. Who was Smitty? (a skinner who used to work on the ranch) How did he treat the black worker with the crooked back at Christmas? (got drunk and entertained the other men by fighting Crooks) Do you feel sympathy for the black man? Does Candy? (seems to relish the memory)

4. What is the boss like? (Candy thinks the short, stocky man is okay; he dresses to distinguish himself from the laborers; he is direct, businesslike, keeps his workers in their place, but isn't unfair.) Why doesn't Lennie answer him? (George has told him not to speak.) How does the boss feel about Lennie's mental slowness? (suspicious, but willing to give him a try)
5. What is Curley like? *(small, belligerent, dresses like a dandy, always looking for his new wife)*
How does he rub George the wrong way from the start? *(demands that Lennie speak for himself, tells George to keep out of it)* What does George mean, “What’s he got on his shoulder?”—p. 29? *(George is asking why Curley is so defensive and irritable—what “chip” he has on his shoulder.)*

6. Why does Candy say that Curley’s “pants is full of ants”—p. 31? *(Curley is anxious to control his wife, prove his manhood and sexual prowess.)* How do Curley and his new bride get along? *(Evidently the new wife is already flirting with other men.)*

7. Why is Curley’s wife “suddenly apprehensive” when she finds out he has gone into the house (p. 35)? *(She knows he won’t like finding her gone.)* What do George and Lennie think of her? *(George distrusts her; Lennie likes her.)* Why does Lennie mention “defensively” (p. 35) that she is pretty? *(Lennie is defending her after George has just called her a tramp.)*

8. Who is Slim? *(skinner who takes care of the mules)* What is he like? *(respected, quiet, dignified)* How is he different from the others? *(self-contained, others respect him as the authority)* How does he treat George and Lennie? *(quietly friendly)* How is his opinion of their friendship different from Curley’s opinion? *(Slim approves of George’s traveling with Lennie to combat loneliness, rather than implying there is something strange about it.)*

9. Curley’s “eyes flashed over George, took in his height, measured his reach, looked at his trim middle” (p. 41). What is Curley thinking? *(probably wondering whether George could hold his own in a fight)* Why do you suppose he is so pugnacious? *(He’s probably insecure due to his height, and he may suspect that his wife has a roving eye.)*

**Prediction**
Will George tangle with Curley? Will Candy shoot his dog?

**The Author’s Craft: Foreshadowing**
*Foreshadowing* is a hint or suggestion of something that will happen later in a story. What might be foreshadowed by the scene where George warns Lennie that Curley’s wife is a trouble-maker?

**Writing Activity**
Reread the section in which the boss first meets his new employees. Have you ever experienced anything like this? Describe your conversation with your employer the first day of your job.
Chapter 3  

Vocabulary

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<td>wryly</td>
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Vocabulary Activity

Have students complete each of the following four analogies using a vocabulary word from the list above. (Then have them create their own analogies for partners to solve, using the remaining vocabulary words.)

Sample: GOOD is to BAD as HOT is to COLD.

1. EBB is to FLOW as ______ is to INCREASED. (subsided)
2. SLITHERED is to SNAKE as ______ is to CRAB. (scuttled)
3. CHEER is to APPROVAL as SNICKER is to ______. (derision)
4. LOONY BIN is to NUTHOUSE as ______ is to SLammer. (hoosegow)

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Slim call Lennie a cuckoo? (Lennie is obviously slow.) Why does George correct him? (George distinguishes between being slow-witted and being crazy.) How does Slim feel about the friendship between George and Lennie? (curious, approving)

2. What was the last prank George played on Lennie? (told Lennie to jump in a river) Why was it the last he’ll ever play? (Lennie nearly drowned; George realizes how much Lennie loves and trusts him.)

3. What further details do we learn about the incident in Weed? How do we find out? (George tells Slim Lennie panicked and held onto the screaming girl’s dress until George hit him on the head with a fence post.) Does this remind you of anything you may have seen on film? (Some students may remember a similar scene in Frankenstein.)

4. Where does Lennie get the pup? (George asks Slim if Lennie can have one of Slim’s dog’s puppies.) How does George know that Lennie has brought the pup into the bunkhouse? (Lennie comes in from the barn walking hunched over.) Why doesn’t he let the puppy stay? (The puppy is a newborn and needs its mother.)

5. What game do several of the men play outdoors? (horseshoes) How good a player is the black worker? (good) Is Carlson jealous? (says irritably, “He don’t give nobody else a chance to win”—p. 48)
6. Why does Whit want Slim to read the magazine? (Bill, a guy who used to work on the ranch, wrote to the magazine and had his letter published.) Why is it that Carlson "refuses to be drawn in" to the conversation? (Carlson is intent on getting Candy's dog out of the way.)

7. Why do you think Candy allowed Carlson to kill his dog? (He got tired of arguing, realized they all had to live in the bunkhouse and that the dog's smell was bothering some, and possibly knew it was best for the dog.) Should he have done it himself—or refused to have it done?

8. Why do the men like Susy's place? (It is a clean whorehouse where they can have drinks.) Why is it better than Clara's? (Overall prices are lower; at Susy's, they can just come in for drinks.)

9. How does Lennie end up hurting Curley? (Curley picks a fight and George tells Lennie to fight back; Lennie crushes Curley's hand.) Was George giving good advice when he told Lennie to fight back? Is Curley's wife to blame for the fight? (The reason Curley was in such a bad mood was that his wife had been wandering; Slim, Candy, and Carlson all told him off after he accused Slim of encouraging her, so Curley took out his anger on Lennie.)

**Prediction**
Will Curley get revenge? Will Lennie take good care of the pup? Is Curley's wife "jail bait"?

**The Author's Craft: Figurative Language**
A simile is a comparison that includes the words "like" or "as." For example: "Her hands are like ice cubes." Point out the simile on page 69: "Curley was flopping like a fish on a line."

A metaphor is a comparison without the terms "like" or "as." For example: "The night sky was a black velvet blanket." Point out the metaphor on p. 69: "Lennie covered his face with his huge paws and bleated with terror." (Lennie is compared to a large dumb animal—a bear perhaps—and to a small one—a sheep.) Start a list of similes and metaphors you find in the novel.

**Writing Activity**
Write the conversation that Curley has at the supper table with his father and his wife about what happened to his hand.
Chapter 4

Vocabulary
riveter 73  
tattered 74  
advanced 76  
alof 74  
meager 74  
flexed 74  
disarming 76  
aloof 74  
persuasive 78  
apprehension 79  
bored 79  
scornful 81  
bluntly 83  
overwhelmed 84  
sullenness 86  
protective 86  
ego 89  
contemptuously 86  
crestfallen 91  
averted 89  
appraised 89

Vocabulary Activity
Have students make up individual vocabulary cards that connect the target word and its definition with something or someone from the student’s personal experience or observation. Then students provide two synonyms or definitions and connect the target word with the experience of the characters in the novel. For example, if the word “aloof” makes the student think of a certain relative, his or her card might look like this:

aloof
my Uncle Alden
Crooks
—distant
—cool

Discussion Questions
1. What is Crooks’ bunk like? (It’s in the harness room; tools and harnesses he is working on line the walls; there are books, medicines, scattered personal possessions.) What does it show you about him? (spends a lot of his energy on the animals; escapes by reading; has pain from his disability; lives alone; has accumulated more things because he is more permanent than the other workers)

2. Why doesn’t Crooks want Lennie to come into his room at first? (Crooks is used to being excluded from the activities of the whites, wants to exclude one of them for a change.) Why does he change his mind? (Lennie smiles)

3. Why does Crooks tell Lennie so much about himself? (Crooks is lonely, rarely has a listener.) Do you agree with him that “a guy gets too lonely an’ he gets sick” (p. 80)? What do you learn about Crooks’ past? (He’s a native Californian, not from the South; his father had a chicken ranch; theirs was one of the few black families in the area)
4. How does Crooks scare Lennie with his talk? (tells Lennie George might have deserted him) Why? (Maybe he is jealous of the friendship Lennie has and enjoys seeing someone else suffer the way he does; also, he is expressing his own fears.) How does he apologize? (says George will come back) Why? Is he afraid of Lennie? (Probably; as Lennie gets agitated, Crooks sees “the danger as it approached him”—p. 79.) Does he regret frightening Lennie? (Probably; he tries to explain that unlike Lennie, he has nobody.)

5. Why does Candy come into Crooks’ room? (Everyone else is off at the whorehouse; Candy wants to talk to Lennie about the rabbits and the place they plan to get.) How can you tell that Crooks is pleased? [“It was difficult for Crooks to conceal his pleasure with anger” (p. 82).] Why is he pleased to have visitors? (He rarely gets any and is kept largely isolated from the other workers.)

6. Why does Curley’s wife come to Crooks’ room? Where are all the other men? (She says she is looking for Curley, but she is probably looking for company as she knows most of the men are at the whorehouse.) Do you think Curley’s wife is right when she says (p. 85) “You’re all scared of each other, that’s what”? Is she lonely? (She complains to Candy, Crooks, and Lennie about how Curley spends all his time talking about fighting people.) What kind of life does she want? (She wants more attention and entertainment.)

7. Why does Curley’s wife insult Candy, Lennie, and Crooks (p. 86)? (She gets angry when they won’t tell her what happened to Curley’s hand.) How does Crooks stand up to her at first? (tells her she has no right in a “colored man’s room” p. 88) How does he back down—and why? (She reminds him she could have him lynched and he shrinks, saying “Yes ma’am.”) For which, if any, of these people do you feel sorry?

8. Why is George angry with Lennie and with Candy when he finds them in Crooks’ room? (They have been talking about their plans for a place, which he wants kept secret; also, Lennie has broken a taboo and George is always trying to keep him out of trouble.) How do you think Crooks feels when Candy protests, “Didn’t tell nobody but Crooks” (p. 91)? (Candy is implying that Crooks is not a person, not anyone who matters.)

9. How does Crooks offer to help out on the place George, Lennie, and Candy are planning to get? Why? (After reminiscing about the chicken ranch where he grew up with his brothers, Crooks tentatively offers to work for his keep.) Why does Crooks call to Candy, “Jus’ foolin’. I wouldn’t want to go no place like that”? (After Curley’s wife puts him down and George makes it clear that he isn’t happy about Lennie’s having anything to do with Crooks, Crooks protects his own pride by withdrawing the offer.) How can you tell that his mood has changed? (Crooks had been pleased, dreamy while chatting with his visitors; after they leave, he somberly rubs liniment on his sore back.)

Prediction
What kind of trouble will Curley’s “jail bait” wife cause?
The Author's Craft: Dialect

Explain that a dialect is a local form of a language. It may differ from the standard in pronunciation, intonation, grammar, or vocabulary. Steinbeck recreates dialogue realistically; many of his characters speak in dialect.

Have students "translate" into standard English the passage in which Curley's wife speaks on p. 86—"Awright...because they ain't nobody else" and the passage in which Crooks speaks on p. 88—"I had enough...not to ever let you come in the barn no more."

Writing Activity

Describe the dream that each man—Crooks, Candy, Lennie—has the night after Candy and Lennie stop by Crooks' room. Included in each dream would probably be images from the conversation about the place they want to get. Crooks has given up hope of joining the venture and his dream might well turn into a nightmare.
Chapter 5

Vocabulary

taloned 92 slats 92 jeering 92 manger 92
consoled 95 gesture 97 chorus 97 ringer 97
conclusion 98 reassured 98 complacently 99 contorted 99
writhed 99 bewildered 100 dusky 101 hovered 101
sluggishly 102 sulkily 104 sniveled 105

Vocabulary Activity

Have students provide synonyms that fit in the spaces provided.

Target Vocabulary Word Synonym

jeering t s f i g (taunting)
consoled s (soothed)
contorted t (twisted)
hovered f (floated)
sluggishly i (indolently)
sulkily g (grouchily)

Discussion Questions

1. What happens to Lennie's puppy? (Lennie accidentally kills it while playing with it.) How does Lennie feel about it? (upset, worried that George won't let him tend the rabbits)

2. Why does Curley's wife talk to Lennie in the barn? (She is lonely; the others are off playing horseshoes.) How is the conversation similar to when Crooks talked to him? (Like Crooks, she needs a listener—even one who doesn't understand.) What do you learn about her background? (Her mother wouldn't let her join the traveling show or go off to act in movies; angry with her mother, wanting an escape, she married the first man to come along—Curley.) How do you imagine the scene where Curley and his wife first met?

3. Why does Curley's wife let Lennie pat her hair? (They have been talking about how nice it is to pet soft things.) Why does she end up screaming? (He pats too hard, then panics.) How is this like what happened to Lennie before? (As with the woman in Weed, Lennie is clumsy, and overreacts when the woman panics.)

4. Why does Lennie get angry with Curley's wife and kill her? (He doesn't want her to get him in trouble.)

5. How is Curley's wife discovered? (Candy finds her while he is looking for Lennie to talk about their dream place.) Does Candy feel sorry for the dead woman? (No—he is angry that she has spoiled their plans.) Do you feel sorry for her?

6. What does George mean when he tells Candy, "I think I knewed we'd never do her" (p. 103)? (He knew that they'd never get the dream place.) Are you surprised?
7. What plan does George come up with after Candy finds the body? Why? (George tells Candy to come running in and announce the discovery to the group so that George has time to separate himself from suspicion of involvement in the murder.) What else could he do?

8. Why do Slim and George agree, "I guess we gotta get [Lennie]" (p. 106)? (They know that otherwise Lennie may be killed painfully or put into an institution.)

9. What is Curley's immediate reaction to the murder? (angry, vengeful) What about Carlson and Whit? (excited by the chase) What plans do they make? (Whit is to go to Soledad to get the sheriff while the others go gunning after Lennie.) Why does Curley want George along? (as proof that George isn't protecting Lennie)

Prediction
What will happen to Lennie? Where is Carlson's gun?

The Author's Craft: Atmosphere
Explain that the atmosphere of the novel is the emotional tone at a given point—how the piece makes the reader feel. Atmosphere is created by the handling of setting, character, and theme. It is often described with adjectives that are used to describe the weather—such as gloomy, cheerful, threatening, tranquil.

Ask: What is the atmosphere at the beginning of this chapter, where the narrator describes the barn—the new hay, afternoon sun, buzz of flies? (tranquil) How does that atmosphere shift when we learn what Lennie is doing? (The atmosphere becomes gloomy and tense when we find that Lennie has killed a puppy.) How does the atmosphere change after Lennie kills Curley's wife? (Tension becomes chaos as the critical event occurs.)

Writing Activity
Describe what is happening to Lennie after the killing. Where is he going? What is he saying to himself? How is he feeling? Then describe what is happening to George. What is he doing? What choices is he weighing? What emotions is he experiencing?
Chapter 6
pages 109-118

Vocabulary
scudded 109 gingham 110 haunches 112 scorncfully 112
retorted 112 belligerently 112 woodenly 114
jarred 117 monotonous 114

Vocabulary Activity
Have students answer the following questions.
1. Could clouds go scudding by? (yes)
2. Could you make a pudding out of gingham? (no)
3. Could you squat on your haunches? (yes)
4. Would you laugh scornfully at a funny movie? (no)
5. Could a legal case be retorted by a judge? (no)
6. Would you smile belligerently at a young child? (no)
7. Would you laugh woodenly if you were enjoying yourself? (no)
8. Would you find an exciting movie monotonous? (no)
9. Could a wire be jarred loose? (yes)

Discussion Questions
1. How is the setting at the opening of this final chapter like that of the first scene in the story? (Again, that pool of the river is described.) In what ways has the story come full circle? (George and Lennie are physically back where they started, again talking about their dream place.) How is a killing introduced into this placid opening? (The heron eats the snake.) How is the description of the snake's death like the description of Lennie's violence against Curley and against his wife? (The flopping of the snake echoes Curley's "flopping like a fish on a line"—p. 69—and the way Curley's wife's body "flopped like a fish"—p. 100.)

2. Why has Lennie come to this clearing? (This is where George instructed him to go if there was trouble.) What is he imagining? (His Aunt Clara with George's voice, scolding Lennie for causing George trouble; a giant rabbit with George's voice, taunting him about how he wouldn't take proper care of the rabbits and will get beaten when George finds him.) Why is he having these hallucinations about the old woman and the rabbit? (He is agitated about what he has done, worried that George will be angry and won't let him tend the rabbits.)

3. What is George's mood when he finds Lennie? (quiet, resigned) Why doesn’t he yell at Lennie at first? (He isn't angry, just sorry about what he is about to do.) Why does he go ahead with his usual complaints about Lennie—but "woodenly" (p. 114)? (Lennie wants him to go through his routine complaints, but George's heart isn't in it.)

4. How does Lennie know it is a good time to "trick" George into telling him the story? (George and Lennie are going through their ritual; Lennie knows that George feels guilty, so it is a good time to get George to tell Lennie's favorite story.) Why does the storytelling usually give both of them pleasure? (Both enjoy the dream of working for themselves.)
5. How does George distract Lennie while he takes out the gun? *(tells Lennie to relax, take off his hat, look off in the distance and imagine the scene as he describes it)* Where did the gun come from? *(George stole it from Carlson.)* Why does he tell Lennie to take his hat off? *(so he can aim the gun at a spot that will ensure instant death)* Why do you suppose Steinbeck chose to describe how George looked at Lennie's head with the starkly anatomical phrase—*"where the spine and skull were joined"*?

6. Why does George kill Lennie? *(He feels that this will prevent his friend from further suffering and preserve his dignity.)* Do you think he is doing the right thing? How is the killing of Lennie like the killing of Candy's dog? *(The same gun is used; both Lennie and the dog were out-of-step, in the way. Others did not want them around.)*

7. How do Slim and Carlson react when they find that Lennie has been shot? *(Curley is impressed by the accurate marksmanship as if Lennie were an animal being hunted down; Carlson is curious about the shooting, oblivious to George's feelings.)* How do you think they feel as they view the body? Does either suspect the truth about how Lennie died? Are you surprised?

8. How can you tell that Slim understands how George is feeling? How does he offer comfort to George? *(He tells George that George "hadda“ and goes off with him for a drink.)*

9. How does George lie about the circumstances of Lennie's killing? *(He agrees that Lennie had the gun and that he wrestled it from Lennie and shot him with it.)* What would happen if he told the truth—or if the search party had seen what happened? Do you think Slim should tell the others the truth?

**Prediction**
How do you suppose George gets along without Lennie? Does George ever get the place he has talked about?

**The Author’s Craft: Catharsis**
According to Aristotle, representations of suffering and death in literature paradoxically leave the audience feeling relieved rather than depressed. How do you feel at the end of this story? Is there anything uplifting about the way things have turned out?

**Writing Activity**
Describe the funeral service that is held for Lennie. Does George say a few words? Is there an inscription on Lennie's gravestone?
Post-Reading Extension Activities

Discussion Questions
1. How did you feel about the ending of this story? When did you “see it coming”? Do you think that George did the right thing? Do you think that George and Lennie would ever have gotten their place if Lennie hadn’t gotten into trouble?

2. Why were George and Lennie friends? What did each offer the other?

3. Do you agree with the statement on the back cover of this paperback that “the wanderers of today may wear their hair long and speak a different jargon, but their trip is one that men (and women) have taken for as long as this country has been pushing at its frontiers”? In what ways do George and Lennie compare with today’s “wanderers”—or do they? Do you agree that this novel is about “the painful search for self”?

4. Why do you think the characters of Crooks and Curley’s wife were included? How did you feel toward each? Would you say that both were lonely people?

5. What did George want out of life? What were his values? How did his dreams compare with yours?

6. What will you remember the longest about this story? Did you find anything humorous in the story? Which part was the saddest? the most surprising? the most thought-provoking? Did you learn anything from the book—about the Depression, about California, about ranch life, etc.?

7. How important was the setting to this story? When you think back over the places the narrator’s has described, which ones do you “see” most clearly in your mind’s eye? What do you think Steinbeck is saying about Americans’ attitude toward the land?

8. Based on what you know about Steinbeck’s life (see the “Background on the Novelist” section, page 5)—how much of himself do you think Steinbeck put into this novel? For instance—how did he know about life on a ranch? What did he need to know in order to write the novel? How did this novel compare with others by Steinbeck you may have read?

9. Steinbeck also wrote plays and screenplays. Is there a “play-like” quality to this novel? How might you adapt it for the stage—say a one-hour school production?

10. Did you find the characters in this story to be realistic? Which ones “came alive” for you the most?

11. Do you agree with the blurb on the opening page that this novel is “timeless and as relevant today as two young men on the highway hitching a ride to California”? Do Lennie and George have much in common with the homeless people found in this country’s cities—or with drifters/itinerant workers? How does their experience “speak to” what some members of America’s underclass are going through today?
Suggested Further Reading

1. Other books by John Steinbeck—

2. Other books set during the Depression about "the land," and/or having "a place of your own"—
   Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Mildred Taylor)
   The Good Earth (Pearl Buck)
   It Can't Happen Here (Sinclair Lewis)
   The Day of the Locust (Nathaniel West)
   Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (James Agee)
   You Can't Go Home Again (Thomas Wolfe)
   Their Eyes Were Watching God (Zora Neale Hurston)
   Death of a Salesman (Arthur Miller)
   Waiting for Leftie (Clifford Odets)
   And the Earth Did Not Devour Him (Tomas Rivera)

Viewing
Show students one of the several videotaped versions of the novel. See page 6 of this guide for more information.
Extension/Assessment Activities

Writing
1. Short Story: Write a short story that takes place at some point earlier in Lennie’s life—perhaps when he first met George. Through the story, reveal what Lennie’s childhood was like—and how he ended up traveling with George.

2. Writing Dialogue: Write the conversation that George has with Slim over drinks after Lennie’s death.

3. Obituary: Write an obituary for Lennie and/or Curley’s wife.

4. Newspaper Article: Write the account that appears in the local newspaper the day after Lennie and Curley’s wife are killed.

5. Description of Place: Steinbeck is a master at describing places. Reread the description of the bunk house on page 19. Note his use of words and phrases that signal spatial arrangement (e.g., against, over, on, in the middle). Using Steinbeck’s description as a model, write your own description of a living space—such as your bedroom or a summer camp bunk.

6. Poetry: React to the novel by writing a poem. Your speaker might be Lennie or George or another character—or you. Some possibilities: a memorial poem for Lennie, a wish poem by George or Lennie, or a cinquain about George or Lennie.

7. Write your own short story about two unlikely friends traveling together. Answer the following questions: How are the friends different? Why are they traveling? Where do their travels take them? What problems do they encounter? What are the major themes of the story?

8. Write a letter of advice to George. You might advise him on what to do about Lennie. Tell George about a similar problem you had when you felt tied to a responsibility you didn’t think you wanted.

9. Pretend that you are one of the characters and write a letter about something that happened in the story.
   a) the letter the boss wrote saying that he wanted two workers (p. 23)
   b) the letter Curley’s wife might write to her sister about married life
   c) the letter George might write to the old couple who own the piece of land George wants to buy

10. Describe a particular scene or situation from several points of view. Some possibilities include:
   a) Candy’s and Carlson’s thoughts on the day Carlson shot Candy’s dog
   b) diary/log entries written by Curley’s wife and Curley’s father about life on the ranch
   c) Lennie’s, Candy’s, and Crooks’ thoughts about the time spent in Crooks’ room

11. Rewrite a scene as it might have happened if another decision had been made or something else had happened. For example:
   a) What if Candy had come in while Lennie was patting Curley’s wife’s head?
   b) What if Crooks hadn’t backed down when Curley’s wife turned nasty?
   c) What if the searchers had gotten to Lennie before George did?
12. Add a short episode to the story in which you appear. (You might be a worker at the ranch, someone George meets in town, a relative of one of the men, etc.)

13. Create the copy for another book cover. Include a very brief synopsis of the story and some rave reviews.

14. Write a flashback scene to an earlier time that didn’t appear in the novel, but might have—such as Curley and his wife’s engagement or a scene from the days when Aunt Clara was taking care of George.

15. Write an essay on one of the following topics:
   a) Compare and contrast Lennie and George. (Organize your ideas first in a Venn diagram.) Analyze why they were friends and what each got from the friendship.
   b) Explain the significance of the title.
   c) Demonstrate how Steinbeck demonstrates his fine ear for dialogue and dialect in Of Mice and Men.
   d) Compare the theme and characters in Of Mice and Men with those in another Steinbeck novel, such as The Grapes of Wrath or Cannery Row. (For example, you might compare Doc in Cannery Row with George in Of Mice and Men.)
   e) Trace the development of these themes throughout the novel: loneliness, friendship, search for self, longing for home, love of the land. (Refer to passages that you marked per pre-reading activity #13 for supportive evidence.)
   f) Write a character sketch of one of the minor characters such as Slim or Carlson. What function does this character serve in the novel?
   g) Present and evaluate what some critics have had to say about the novel.
   h) Write an essay in which you defend or contradict one of the statements found in the anticipation guide (See pre-reading activities, page 6.). Use evidence from the novel to support your opinion.

16. Write a movie review of one version of Of Mice and Men. Compare the movie with the novel. Does the movie enhance your understanding of the novel? Is it true to the novel? Are the actors well-cast? What changes did you note? Why do you suppose they were made?

17. Describe an experience you have had that was somehow like something that happened in the novel.

18. Explain and evaluate George’s decision to kill Lennie. Use the graphic on the following page to organize your ideas about the alternatives he had. (Rate each choice 1=yes, 2=maybe, 3=no.) Then explain why his decision was or wasn’t the best one—and how that decision probably affected the rest of his life.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Choices</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will this keep Lennie from suffering?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Kill Lennie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Run off with Lennie.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Turn Lennie in.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Listening/Speaking**

1. Debate the following statement:
   *Of Mice and Men* is a novel that should not be taught in school because of the obscenities it contains and because of the references to prostitution—among other things. Students who agree with the statement get on one side of the room. Those who disagree get on the other, and both sides try to convince the “undecideds,” who remain in the center.

2. Suppose that George appears on a talk-show (like “Oprah”) about people who have killed a friend. Have him respond to questions and comments from the host and from audience members (e.g., “Why did you kill your friend?” “Did you ever regret your decision?”)

3. Interview: For homework, have two students prepare to be Lennie or George (by studying their attitudes and personalities as portrayed in the novel) and have the other students prepare questions to ask these two. Questions should range from the literal, easily answered (e.g., “George—how did you first end up with Lennie?”) to questions that will make the interviewees think (e.g., “Lennie—why did you kill that puppy? How did you feel afterward?”) George and Lennie might come to the interview with simple props or identifying clothes.

4. Create a taped “booktalk” in which you assume the persona of one of the characters (e.g., George or Lennie). Tell just enough about yourself and your troubles to make listeners want to read the book.
Drama
1. With a small group, act out the scene in the novel that was most striking to you.

2. Small groups of students might stage two or three back-to-back presentations of the same scene, with different interpretations. (For example, students may sympathize more or less with Curley's wife. Those differing interpretations might be reflected in different tones of voice, gestures, etc. when various groups act out one of the scenes where she shows up in the bunkhouse or in the barn.)

3. Act out a scene we know about but never actually see, such as the scene between Lennie and the woman in Weed.

4. Act out a scene that doesn't happen in the story, but might have (e.g., George and Lennie celebrate one of their birthdays or George and Slim have a drink following Lennie's death).

Language Study
1. Choose a passage in which a character speaks in dialect and "translate" it into standard English. Analyze why the original is more effective.

2. Make a list of your favorite examples of figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification) or examples of descriptive verbs in the novel.

3. Steinbeck plays with the sounds of words. For example, he uses alliteration on page 11: "A dove's wings whistled over the water." Find other examples of alliteration in the novel. What is the effect on the reader?

Art
1. Search photograph books for photos taken during the Depression, such as the WPA photographs taken by Margaret Bourke White and Walker Evans. Which of these might you use to illustrate the novel? Try writing a short short story by looking at one of these photos and imagining what happened before and after the picture was taken.

2. Capture your impressions of George and/or Lennie in any form you choose (drawing, collage, papier mâché, etc.) Write a brief accompanying description.

3. Create a five-frame "cartoon strip" that summarizes what happens in the scene from the novel that is most memorable to you.

4. Create a mobile or collage that combines significant objects from the story (e.g., the mouse, the puppy, the Luger, the can of beans, the rabbits). (These might be attached to a paper plate cut in half or to a coat hanger. Write a description on the back of each.)

5. Draw and caption a scene that was
   a) funny
   b) sad
   c) beautiful
Music
1. Write your opinion of the music used to set the scene in one of the movie versions of the story. Does it “work”? What music would you have used?

2. See if you can find songs that George and Lennie might have enjoyed in the 1930s.

Research
1. Find out more about
   • the Depression
   • the history of migrant workers in this country
   • the region of California described in the novel

2. Create a time line that shows historical events, inventions, works produced by famous artists, writers, etc. during the time period in which George and Lennie lived. How might Steinbeck have included some of these in the novel had he chosen to?

Geography
1. Map the places mentioned in the novel (Soledad, the American River, Gabilan mountains, etc.).

2. Create a “story map” of key events in the story. Include simple drawings or pictures to illustrate each “step” along the “way” in the story (e.g., a picture of Lennie and George cooking beans, one showing them their first time in the bunkhouse, Lennie petting his pup, etc.).

Current Events
Create a bulletin board display of articles or advertisements from recent newspapers and magazines that connect in any way with the story. In each case, write a paragraph explaining the tie-in with the novel.
Evaluation: Rubric for Essay-Writing

The following is a suggested set of criteria for grading student essays. It can be altered in any way that fits the specific needs of a class. We encourage you to share the evaluation criteria with your students before they write their essays. You may even want to use this form as a self-grading or partner-grading exercise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Maximum # Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Focus: Student writes a clear thesis and includes it in the opening paragraph.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Organization: The final draft reflects the assigned outline; transition words are used to link ideas.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Support: Sufficient details are cited to support the thesis; extraneous details are omitted.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Detail: Each quote or reference is explained (as if the teacher had not read the book); ideas are not redundant.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mechanics: Spelling, capitalization, usage are correct.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sentence Structure: The student avoids run-ons and fragments. There is an interesting variety of sentences.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Verbs: All verbs are in the correct tense; sections in which plot is summarized are in the present tense.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Total Effect of the Essay: Clarity, coherence, overall effectiveness.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total ________

Comments: