

## Themes in the novel

---

Which of the following are important themes in the novel? Are there any others you feel should be included?

Loneliness	Tragedy	Dreams
Prejudice	Friendship	Hopes

Identifying important themes and being able to write about them is a key skill when studying any novel. In the following activities you will focus on the theme of loyalty/friendship in the novel *Of Mice and Men*. Later you will be using the same approaches to prepare notes on the other themes.

### Task 1: quotation race

Agree on a suitable reward from your teacher before beginning the race – you might suggest that you are allowed to pack away a few minutes before everyone else, or to earn an achievement certificate, or the right to sing everyone a song (whatever rocks your boat!).

Working in pairs, spend ten minutes (and no more!) skim reading the novel and bookmarking pages that refer to friendship and loyalty in any way.

Aim to find more than the other pairs in your class in this time. (Hint – you will be more effective if you each start at different parts in the novel!)

### Task 2: collate your quotations

Join up with another pair and compare the quotations you have found between the four of you, bookmarking any new ones.

Can you agree on one quotation that sums up the importance of dreams as a theme in the novel?

Write it out and be prepared to share it with the rest of the class, explaining your choice.

### Task 3: identify a key quotation

Read the following quotation from Chapter three.

**'I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to have let no stranger shoot my dog.'**

Who does this quotation refer to? Can you interpret it on more than one level?

## Themes in the novel

### Task 4: embark upon an essay!

Part of a past paper (for English Literature) read:

**b) What does Steinbeck show the reader about friendship in *Of Mice and Men* and what does this tell you about the society in which the novel is set?**

Using either the quotation above or one of your own choosing, prepare an introductory paragraph in response to this question.

### Task 5: plan the rest of your essay

One way of doing this is to choose five of the quotations from your initial quotation race and to use each of these as the basis for a paragraph. Remember that you need to use PEE paragraphs and to use literary language in your analysis.

Create a grid like the one below in order to create an effective, quotation based plan. The first point has been completed as an example for you. Aim for similarly detailed explorations – make your quotations work hard!

Point	Evidence	Exploration
Despite George's annoyance with Lennie he sticks by him, like a true friend.	'George broke in loudly, 'Oh! I ain't saying he's bright. He ain't. But I say he's a God damn good worker.'	After what happened in Weed George could have left Lennie, but instead he helps him escape and find work together. George knows Lennie can't verbalise his points well, so he does the talking for him. Refers to Lennie's limitations – he knows he needs to look after him. Life is hard for the men, moving from place to place and struggling to find work so friendship and camaraderie is incredibly important.

### Task 6: write the essay!

Use your plan and pad it out with impressive vocabulary! Here are a few words you might like to use when writing the exploration sections of your paragraphs:

- suggests
- could be seen as
- reminds the reader of
- implies
- signifies
- refers to
- represents
- gives the impression

## Themes in the novel

### Task 7: proofread and improve

Proofreading your own work is an excellent skill to develop. Look at the following paragraph for the essay question you have worked on and compare it with your own. Annotate the good points of your own introduction in a similar way. Can you improve your answer? (*Remember that if you need to make additions to your essays in exams you can always add footnotes – indicate them clearly with asterisks and numbers.*)

Read your partner's essay as well as your own.

Throughout the novel, Steinbeck uses character relationships to demonstrate the importance of friendship as a theme. The friendship between George and Lennie, despite all of the difficulties and obstacles they face is very moving. Steinbeck contrasts this close friendship with other characters (such as Curley's wife) who feel isolated and abandoned and who don't seem to have supporters. He often shows us that George is sticking by Lennie: 'George still stared at Curley's wife. 'Lennie never done it in meanness' he said.' George knows that ultimately it's his friendship and support that will save Lennie and protect him from the dangers of life on the ranch.

Refers to author

Answers the question directly

Uses confident vocabulary

Gives overview of theme's development

Incorporates relevant quotation into sentence

### Task 8: repeat the process for the other themes

Go back to the themes you identified at the start of this session. Work in groups of four to come up with typical essay questions on each of these themes and repeat the essay writing process from steps 1–7!

Keep your quotations bookmarked for future reference ...