# *Of Mice and Men* Independent Project

As you read the novella, explore its themes through writing a personal response to the text. Here are your options:

1. Write a **short story** or **script** that develops one of the main themes. It may feature the setting (time and/or place) or characters of the story, but it doesn’t have to. You might consider picking a theme and choosing a totally different setting (what would bromance look like in Middle Earth? what dreams would people in the 3000 have?) or characters (what if all of the characters were the opposite gender? what if they were kids? or animals?).
2. Pretend that you’re one of the characters from the story and set up a ‘pen pal’ relationship with one of the other characters. You can pretend to be both characters, or you can **‘exchange letters’** with another classmate who has chosen to do the same. Your letters should express your reactions to and feelings about your life and what’s happening. They should also explore one of the main themes.
3. **Keep a journal** in which you respond to the question prompts for one or more of the main themes. Alternatively, you could pretend that you’re one of the characters and write your reflections about your life and what’s happening. You could also make up a character that might join the camp or write from the perspective of one of the animals. Your entries should explore one of the main themes.
4. Pretend you’re an investigative journalist writing about the life of migrant workers in California. Compose **news reports** and/or conduct **interviews** with characters that get at the heart of what’s happening in the camps and address one of the main themes.
5. Another wonderfully creative idea you have. Make sure you get approval from Ms. Friesen.

Whatever you produce **must**:

* **Develop/explore one of the main themes (or one of the ‘big questions’ from the syllabus)**
* **Be high quality writing\***
* **Be at least 4 pages long, double-spaced** (you may stick with one option for all 4 pages of writing, or you may choose 2 or 3 options to meet the page-length requirement [e.g., a 1-page journal entry, plus a 1-page news report, plus a 2-page script])

**\*High quality writing** means:

* **you haven’t just filled space with giant-sized, airy-fairy words that don’t really say anything**
* you’ve thought deeply about the issues/characters and asked yourself lots of questions
* you’ve considered what your audience expects and would be interested in
* you’ve used an appropriate form and applied the proper conventions of that form
* you’ve made sure that your ideas are organized and flow well
* you’ve made sure that your ideas are explained well
* you’ve checked that nothing is confusing or sounds awkward
* you’ve made sure to use proper syntax, grammar, and punctuation, and asked a friend or Ms. Friesen to help check it over if necessary

If you’re not sure that what you’ve written is high quality, get Ms. Friesen to check it and provide feedback BEFORE you hand it in. If there’s no time in class, please come in any time before or after school, or at lunch.

# Main Themes and Question Prompts

1. **Dreams:** The characters in *Of Mice and Men* have their own ideas about the American Dream during the Great Depression. Think about your goals and aspirations. List three goals or dreams you would like to accomplish before the age of thirty. List three goals or dreams you would like to accomplish before you die. Are your dreams similar/different to the characters we have read about? Of your goals and dreams, which are most important to you? How will you fulfill these dreams? What are you currently doing to insure your dreams will be possible in the future? How would you feel if you were unable to attain these dreams in the future? What do your dreams say about you as a person of 2014? Is the American Dream still alive today? How might dreams be dangerous?
2. **Bromance:** A quick search of the Times reveals that the term “bromance”, which entered the dictionary alongside “fist-bump” in 2011, has been applied to everyone from President Obama and Chris Christie to Dennis Rodman and Kim Jong Un. American literature is also full of bromances — Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady, and Emerson and Thoreau, to name three. Countless current films take their inspiration from the idea. And the word has even inspired a reality television show. But is a friendship between men different enough from other kinds of friendship to warrant its own buzz word? And why is this theme omnipresent in our culture now? How are male friendships different from those between girls and women? Or between people of different genders? (Can boys and girls be “just friends”?) Why are same-sex friendships important?
3. **Friendship:** Aristotle thought that there were three types of friendship: those of pleasure, those of usefulness, and true friendship. How would you describe the relationship between George and Lennie? Which of Aristotle’s three kinds of friendships would you say describes theirs? Why? How does the time we live in threaten the third, and most precious, kind of friendship? Why is it important to cultivate such friendships now? In a world in which “friending” and “unfriending” have become verbs, use Aristotle as a lens through which to think deeply about your own friendships. Which are “for pleasure”? Which for “usefulness”? Who do you consider to be your true friends? How did they come to be your true friends? Why are they important in your life? How does technology affect these relationships?
4. **Loneliness:** *Of Mice and Men* teaches a grim lesson about the nature of human existence. Nearly all of the characters, including George, Lennie, Candy, Crooks, and Curley’s wife, admit, at one time or another, to having a profound sense of loneliness and isolation. Each desires the comfort of a friend, but will settle for the attentive ear of a stranger. What is the difference between loneliness and being alone? Why are we afraid to be alone? Even if we are physically by ourselves but ‘connected’ to others via social media, are we ever truly alone? What are some of the advantages and benefits of cultivating solitude, and what would this involve?
5. **Resilience:** *Of Mice and Men* is a story of resilience in the face of sometimes heart-wrenching challenges. Friendship is part of what motivates George and Lennie to persevere. What does it mean to be resilient? Where does resiliency come from? How does George and Lennie’s friendship aid their resiliency? Though you are not living through the same circumstances as Steinbeck’s characters, teenage life is full of stressors which can lead to depression and suicide. What helps you when difficulties strike? How can you cultivate resilience in your life?
6. **Oppression:** Steinbeck records a profound human truth: oppression does not come only from the hands of the strong or the powerful. Even at their weakest, the characters seek to destroy those who are even weaker than they. Why does this happen? How does this reflect the idea that bullies themselves are often victims of bullying? How do we end the cycle? Is revenge or fighting back ever useful? The novel suggests that the most visible kind of strength, that used to oppress others, is itself born of weakness. What does it mean to be truly strong? Who are some ‘strong’ people in your life and what makes them that way?

# *Of Mice and Men* Independent Project Rubric

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| **Ideas and Impressions /5** | | **Presentation /5** | |
| When marking **Ideas and Impressions**, the marker should consider the quality of  -the student’s **exploration** of the topic  -the student’s **ideas** and **reflection**  ****-**support** in relation to the student’s ideas and impressions | | When marking Presentation, the marker should consider the effectiveness of    **- voice** in relation to the context created by the student in the chosen prose form  **- stylistic choices** (including **quality and correctness** of language and expression) and the student’s creation of **tone**  - the student’s development of a **unifying effect**  ****Consider the proportion of error in terms of the complexity and length of the response.**** | |
| Excellent  5 | The student’s exploration of the topic is insightful.  Perceptions and/or ideas are confident and discerning.  Support is precise and aptly reinforces the student’s ideas and impressions. | Excellent  5 | The voice created by the student is convincing.  Stylistic choices are precise and the student’s creation of tone is adept.  The unifying effect is skillfully developed. |
| Proficient 4 | The student’s exploration of the topic is purposeful.  Perceptions and/or ideas are thoughtful and considered.  Support is specific and strengthens the student’s ideas and impressions. | Proficient 4 | The voice created by the student is distinct.  Stylistic choices are specific and the student’s creation of tone is competent.  The unifying effect is capably developed. |
| Satisfactory  3 | The student’s exploration of the topic is generalized.  Perceptions and/or ideas are straightforward and relevant.  Support is adequate and clarifies the student’s ideas and impressions. | Satisfactory  3 | The voice created by the student is apparent.  Stylistic choices are adequate and the student’s creation of tone is conventional.  The unifying effect is appropriately developed |
| Limited  2 | The student’s exploration of the topic is vague.  Perceptions and/or ideas are superficial and/or ambiguous.  Support is imprecise and/or ineffectively related to the student’s ideas and impressions. | Limited  2 | The voice created by the student is indistinct.  Stylistic choices are imprecise and the student’s creation of tone is inconsistent.  The unifying effect is inadequately developed. |
| Poor  1 | The student’s exploration of the topic is minimal.  Perceptions and/or ideas are underdeveloped and/or irrelevant.  Support is lacking and/or unrelated to the student’s ideas and impressions. | Poor  1 | The voice created by the student is obscure.  Stylistic choices impede communication and the student’s creation of tone is ineffective.  A unifying effect is absent. |