

Honors Literature and Short Stories
Week 12

Of Mice and Men

The title of the novel comes from a poem by Scottish poet Robert Burns. The original may be read at: <http://www.worldburnsclub.com/poems/translations/554.htm>
 However, it may be difficult to understand the Scottish brogue used. Below is another “English” translation:

To A Mouse, On Turning Her Up In Her Nest With The Plough (*Translation*)

Original by Robert Burns (1785)

Small, sleek, cowering, frightened beast,
 Oh, what a panic you have in your breast!
 You need not start away so hastily,
 With a hurrying scamper!
 I would hate to run and chase you,
 With a murdering paddle.

I am truly sorry man’s power,
 Has broken the social union between nature,
 And justifies that poor opinion,
 Which make you run
 From me, your poor, earth-born companion
 And fellow-mortal!

I do not doubt, that while you steal;
 Why then, poor beastie, you must live!
 An odd ear of corn from 24 sheaves of it
 Is a small request;
 I will issue a blessing with the rest,
 And never miss it!

Your little house is in ruin too!
 It’s silly ways are being scattered by the winds!
 And there is nothing now to build a new one,
 Of greens!
 And bleak December’s winds are coming,
 Both bitter and intense!
 You sowed the fields that are bare and wasted,

And with weary winter coming fast,
 You were cozy here, beneath the winds,
 You thought to dwell-
 Until crash! The cruel plow blades pass
 And cast you out of your home.

That small little pile of leaves and such,
 Has cost you many exhausted nibbles!
 Now you have been turned out, despite all your
 troubles,
 But without your house,
 You must endure the winter’s sleety dribble,
 And cold white frosts!

But, Mousie, you are not alone,
 In proving foresight may be hopeless;
The best designed plans of both mice and men
Often go wrong,
And leave us with nothing but grief and pain,
Instead of our promised joy!

Still, you are blessed, compared to me
 You are only touched by the present:
 But me! I look back.
 On drear prospects!
 And I look forward, even though I cannot see,
 I guess on my future and fear what will come.

Did Steinbeck write his novel using Burns' poem as a base? Did he purposely shape his ideas around the plot of the poem? No one can know for sure, but it is easy to see the symbolism between the two works.

Tortilla Flat and the Knights of the Round Table

Unlike the "mystery" of the title of "Of Mice and Men", John Steinbeck makes no secret of the fact that he uses his story as an analogy for the Knights of the Round Table. If you are unfamiliar with the Knights of the Round Table, you may want to look up information. One good site is:

<http://www.timelessmyths.com/arthurian/roundtable.html#History>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Round_Table_\(Camelot\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Round_Table_(Camelot))

Thinking About the Essay

You will finish reading your chosen novel this week. You will be writing an essay based on this novel. This week you will need to **choose your topic** from the list below.

Theme of friendship:

1. What are three important elements of friendship?
2. How are these elements illustrated through the relationships of the characters in the story? For example, what element of friendship is illustrated through the relationship of George and Candy? Lennie and Crooks? George and Lennie? OR
3. Explain the roles of at least three of the six friends in Danny's group. They all seem to excel at different things. Do they work well as a group, or are they better off as individuals, as they end up? Be sure to include how the elements of friendship work into this.
4. Your essay will support this theme through showing examples from the story that support the elements of friendship you have noted.

The setting of the story:

1. What are three aspects of setting that are important in this story? Remember, setting can include geographic location, locality, time period...
2. How are these three aspects important to the story? For example, what aspects of the story are clearly the result of the time period in which the story is written?
3. Your essay will support the analysis of the importance of the setting through examples from the story.

Symbolism:

1. What are three symbols in the book? Suggestions for Of Mice and Men: Candy's old dog, the rabbits, Curley and Curley's wife. For Tortilla Flat: The Black Bird, The Pirate's Stash, The Machine Gun or the vacuum cleaner.
2. What do these symbols represent?
3. Your essay will support the analysis of these symbols.

Dreams:

1. The term "dreamer" is often used as a word of mockery or condemnation, yet dreams are a necessary part of life.
2. What are the dreams of the various characters in the novels? Your essay will support this theme of dreams through showing the examples of three characters and how their dreams help or hinder them in their daily lives.

Comparison of Robert Burns poem to the novel of the same name: (advanced)

1. George may be compared to the farmer or poet, as Lennie could be equated to the mouse, and their shared dream represented by the destroyed house.
2. How does the tale told in the poem relate to the novel?
3. Your essay will show the comparisons and support with examples from the book. You will use quotes from the poem as well as from the book.

Comparison of The Knights of the Round Table to the Paisanos in Tortilla Flat (advanced)

1. Quests
2. Companionship
3. Lifestyle

Three Main Ideas

You will also specify the **three main ideas** on which you will write. As you recall in Expository Writing, you will be writing three supporting paragraphs about your topic. Each paragraph will focus around **one main idea**.

There must be enough supporting detail to write your paragraph on each main idea as related to your thesis statement.

If you were writing about symbolism, you might select a symbol and find three characters or ideas or events that represent the symbol. Then your supporting paragraphs would be filled with examples of how they represent the symbol.

Thesis Statement

In addition, you will devise your initial **thesis Statement**

Indicate the direction of your thinking. In other words, what do you plan to say about your idea? Once you have the thesis devised, you will have the boundaries and limits your essay will need to stay within. Once you start writing, you will need to make sure you do not stray from idea expressed in the thesis statement.

- When you write your thesis statement, **you are taking a stand**. This means that you will write something which you believe and which you can support with examples from the book.
- A thesis statement must be a complete sentence and it must be specific.

- A thesis statement will be YOUR opinion (without using the words “I” or “you”). It is what YOU assert as being true. It is not a statement of fact or an observation.

Example:

Fact or observation: Some people in Maycomb are prejudiced against blacks and others are not.

Thesis: As the people of Maycomb choose sides in the trial of Tom Robinson, the issue of prejudice creates divisions between those who formerly were friends.

Since you have determined the topic about which you will be writing, your thesis statement will be the sentence that ties this together. For example:

The relationships between George and Candy, Lennie and Crooks, and George and Lennie exemplify how friendship holds together even through duress.

Gathering Information and Quotes

In Expository Writing, you used a variety of resources to research your topic. When you write an essay of Literary Analysis, you use the book itself as your source. You will take notes and find details which support your topic – main ideas and thesis statement. At the same time, you will select relevant quotes from the story that will enhance your essay. (Remember, quotes simply means a sentence or phrase that is taken word for word from the book – not necessarily something that is part of a dialogue, although that can be chosen as well.) It is very important to go through the entire book to find material to support your topic.

Review the margin notes or other notes you have taken on the book. Reread (or skim) the work at least once and analyze it carefully. When rereading, re-examine the plot, theme, figurative language, and all other elements. Keep an eye out for ideas, images, quotations, characters and relevant information that apply to your topic.

As you take notes or copy down quotes, make sure you note the page number from which you took the information. Make sure these notes and quotes support your topic and three main ideas. Find at least three details/examples to support each main idea, and at least two quotes for each main idea.

Assignments

1. Read Chapters 5 and 6 of Of Mice and Men, or the last 70 pages of Tortilla Flat, thus completing the novel. As you read, continue to take notes – either with margin notes, sticky notes, or on a separate sheet of paper. Note page numbers with specific points. Note observations and examples of the theme of friendship, the setting and its importance, and any symbolism.
2. Determine your topic from the above list, and devise your thesis statement and your three main ideas and send to me. Put these in the form:

Topic:

Thesis statement:

Main idea 1:

Main idea 2:

Main idea 3:

Remember, your three main ideas **must** be incorporated into your thesis statement. **Due this week. 20 points**

3. Using the book, your journal and your margin notes or sticky notes, gather the information you need for your essay. You don't need to send me your notes or quotes. Keep in mind, though, the better your notes and quotes, the easier time you will have when you write your essay. **Show your note taking to your mom or dad and have them e-mail me to confirm that you are doing it. Due this week. 15 points**
4. **Weekly Shorts:** Write a paragraph about your "dream" future. Where would you live? What job would you have? Would you be married? Have children? Remember, this is the "dream" future – no holds barred! **5 points**
5. **Journal: 10 points** Read the Robert Burns poem above. Write one paragraph commenting on the specific analogies to Of Mice and Men. **OR** Read a summary of Knights of the Round Table, and comment on specific analogies to Tortilla Flat. <http://www.timelessmyths.com/arthurian/roundtable.html#History>