

A/A* Grade Amplification – Of Mice and Men Exam Question

☒ Assured knowledge and understanding of the text.

You are able to compare different sections, characters and elements from the text to support an idea within one paragraph. You can remember many different aspects of a character's behaviour and involvement, and comment on how and why they act the way they do and what this shows – in all the key scenes.

You are really good at noticing how characters change, and how events alter their behaviour and attitudes. For example how Candy or Crooks change their attitude to the dream after bad experiences.

You show you can present several different ways that Steinbeck evokes a theme or presents a problem (example: unavoidable fate is evoked not only by the solitaire ritual but by cyclical events, the opening and closing descriptions of the water snake and the river, the phrase 'caught in a machine' suggesting repetitive mechanical action, and you might explain all of these things within one paragraph with examples).

You are aware and give examples of a number of different techniques the writer uses with plenty of examples from different parts of the text – for example the use of light imagery. You NEVER give an example without explaining where in the story it comes from or why it matters (or its effect).

☒ The response shows assured personal engagement and a perceptive critical style.

Your own response to the text is clear, but you do not write 'I' or 'me' in your essays. You show a persistent awareness of Steinbeck as the writer and the text as an artistic construct intended to influence us. You never, ever even begin to tell the story and every reference you make to it is made to explain or prove a point. You always start with a point and then explain it.

Your analysis explains deeply how meaning is created, and how connections exist between ideas and language, across the book. You may be able to write appreciatively about how several different images are used to convey a sense of trappedness for most of the characters – 'bars' of light, 'caught' in a machine, or the many negative references to hands and disability, for example.

You write with sympathy for the characters and their problems, but you never lose sight of the fact the writer has crafted those meanings into the book. Your sympathy is often very closely attached to analysis of techniques.

You never start or end paragraphs with quotations because you are aware that you are the one who needs the marks, not the writer. Your paragraphs begin with a sense of addressing the themes of the essay and the question, and end with a judgement that helps answer the question.

You never tell the story, because you know that would immediately detract from relevance. You frequently begin paragraphs or sentences with the word 'Steinbeck', so you don't drift into acting like you think it's real.

You have a superb grasp of all of these terms: ominous, melancholy, cyclical, motif, leitmotif, imagery,

☒ Understanding of the relationship between text and context is integrated convincingly into the response.

You show a lot of awareness of the American Dream, the lives of ranch workers, the great depression, the way women were viewed, and also Steinbeck's possible opinion on all of these things.

You may be able to explore Steinbeck's political views as a result of his presentation of inequality – for example Candy explaining he has sown seeds for everyone in the valley but never received the benefits. You may be able to explore the capitalist 'machine' and possible alternatives to it Steinbeck may be considering by showing Lennie 'fight back'.

You can explain the selfishness of the Dream, which addresses their own problems but not those of their comrades; is Steinbeck arguing everyone should be given a little bit 'o lan? Wouldn't that be communism?

You can comment on how relationships like George and Lennie's were viewed with prejudice and suspicion. You can explain that there was no social 'safety-net' for those who were vulnerable in their society.

☒ Discriminating use of relevant examples in support.

This means your quotations are extremely relevant and used very sparingly – 5 words at the most – and support your points beautifully. You also analyse them, exposing HOW the writer creates meaning in detail. You probably go 'into' the quotations to explore why Steinbeck selects specific words and perhaps even also why he doesn't select others. When you quote, you always analyse the quotation straight away to deepen understanding of it. You never quote to prove a point because this leads to repetition.

You are really good at using single-word quotations and this gives a feel of directness and efficiency in your writing.

This has the effect of showing your command of many different stages of the narrative at once.