



# Of Mice and Men

**past paper and quote on power**

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**Explore the theme of power in the novel. You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.**

(Edexcel past paper Jan 2022)

planning

body 1: power from money and social status as well as prejudice

body 2: power in form of violence

body 3: power of charisma



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**Tips: Pay attention to the background of the story, the Great Depression, the American society in the 30s, the drought as well as difficulty in agriculture. You are reminded through You must consider the context of the novel in your answer. Hence, one way to assure you do not forget it is including this in your introduction.**

**Intro** The book 'Of Mice and Men' focuses on many critical social issues in 1930s American society amidst the Great Depression and drought. Amongst those is the theme of power, the ability to persuade or enforce others to follow one's wishes. The notion of power can be explored in different forms; enforcing power, physical power and charismatic power.

**Body 1:** First, power derived from social status and wealth is the most conspicuous form of power. It is evident in behaviours such as the boss 'wearing high-heeled boots to distinguish himself from the labourers'. This imagery vividly depicts the boss's superiority over the workers, and the stark contrast with the ranch hands effectively conveys the powerful influence of social status and money. Another example is how Crooks enjoys taunting Lennie in George's absence: "Crooks' face lighted up with pleasure at his torture." This metaphor has a profound impact on readers, highlighting how causing distress to an anxious, mentally ill man brings Crooks significant satisfaction. It also reflects that even the marginalised exert power over those they perceive as weaker, exemplified by a black man (Crooks) tormenting a mentally ill man (Lennie). The abuse of power associated with higher social status and wealth illustrates the social dynamics in America at the time.

**Tip: before ending each body of your paragraph, make sure to relate to the question “Explore the theme of power in the novel”, make sure you still stay focus on the theme of power at the end**

**Body 2:** Second, physical power can subdue others: for example, Carlson’s use of a gun and Lennie’s murder of Curley’s wife due to his inability to control his emotions. The author cleverly employs physical power to demonstrate irony. Carlson’s shooting of the dog (“I’ll shoot him for you”) was motivated by pity, as the dog had suffered too much and would only suffer more if kept alive. The use of ‘him’ instead of ‘it’ indicates the speaker’s compassion towards the dog. Similarly, George’s mercy killing of Lennie was considered the least painful end for Lennie, rather than him being arrested or tortured by Curley, as Slim reassured, “You hadda, I swear,” implying that killing Lennie was the best solution, and he agreed with it. The use of colloquial language highlights the closeness between Slim and George and their background as ranch hands. The word ‘swear’ underscores how seriously this decision was taken. The contrast between physical power and authoritative power is intriguing: the wealthy do not resort to violence but can still cruelly oppress the poor, while poor men who possess guns or great physical strength do not have malicious intentions to kill. Power is displayed in its most violent form, yet from a more innocent or well-meaning perspective.

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**Body 3:** Third, there is charismatic power through characterisation, such as in George, who is seen as a smart guy having a great friendship with the ‘cuckoo’ of the ranch, according to Slim. The technique of contrast evokes surprise towards the leader and fosters a positive attitude towards George. This is further supported by Lennie’s admission: “because I’ve got you and you’ve got me.” This cliché emphasises the reciprocal relationship between them, from Lennie’s perspective. It portrays George as a fair man without common prejudices, unlike the majority of people in the 1930s who would typically react negatively towards a mentally ill person. His charismatic power also attracts Candy to support their dream of setting up a new farm, even stating, “I’d make a will an’ leave my share to you guys in case I kick off.” The informal phrase ‘kick off’ reveals Candy’s willingness to contribute his money to Lennie and George’s dream, indicating he is convinced by the idea. The support George receives from Lennie and Candy is a proof of his charismatic power. In this case, power does not need to be exerted negatively or cause tension.

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**Conclusion:** As a result, power can be exerted and expressed in many forms. The most violent manifestations of power do not always originate from the most malicious intentions, while other forms, such as those based on wealth and social prejudice, often maintain the status quo and exploit the less fortunate over generations. Power can also be beneficial, as Steinbeck demonstrates through his characters and their relationships.

**Tip: your ending of each body part will help you to formulate a good conclusion and a solid message.**



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## other example quotes on power

"I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny."

- Chapter 4, Curley's wife to Lennie
- Hyperbole, emphasises the cruelty and prejudice as well as power of the white against the black

"Crook's face lighted up with pleasure in his torture"

- Chapter 4, narration, Crook taunts Lennie George might not come back
- Metaphor, hinting how delighted Crooks was to torture another marginalised person (just like him). Exertion of power of social prejudice

"Don't tell Curley I said none of this, he's slough me "

- Chapter 2, Candy to George, about how Lennie is physically stronger than Curley and would be able to defeat Curley easily
- Curley won't ever get canned cause his old man's the boss
- 'Slough' is to cast off the skin, which is a hyperbole. It means Curley would be extremely upset and could harm him, but not sloughing
- And imperative is used, to highlight the seriousness of Candy not wanting his comment to be retold