

DIALECTICAL JOURNAL

Of Mice and Men | John Steinbeck | Summer Reading 2026

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date Completed: _____

What Is a Dialectical Journal?

A dialectical journal is a conversation between you and the text. You select a meaningful passage, respond to it with your own thinking, and then make a connection in the third column. It is not a summary. It is evidence of your mind at work.

Instructions

Read each chapter of *Of Mice and Men* carefully before completing the journal entries for that chapter.

Three passages have been selected for you per chapter. Use them - do not substitute your own unless instructed.

In the Response column, write your analysis of the passage. Explain what it reveals about character, theme, or craft. Avoid low-level verbs like says, shows, gets, or talks about. Choose stronger verbs: reveals, exposes, challenges, illuminates, suggests, forces, demonstrates, and confronts.

In the third column, you will alternate between two types of connections. The blue column asks you to respond to a corresponding Bible verse. The gold column asks you an odd question designed to connect the text to your own life and experience.

Be specific. Vague responses earn partial credit. A response that says, "This reminds me of a time I felt lonely," earns less than one that names the place, the year, and the person.

On the first day of school, you may be asked to discuss one of your entries in a brief one-on-one conversation. Be ready to explain your thinking.

Submit your completed handwritten journal. **No handwritten copy, no credit.**

Verb Bank -- Use These Instead of Says / Shows / Gets

reveals | exposes | challenges | illuminates | suggests | forces | demonstrates | confronts | critiques | underscores | establishes | conveys | portrays | embodies | signals | evokes | foreshadows | heightens | complicates | disrupts

A Note on the Bible Verse Column

The blue column provides a Bible verse for each passage. You may use the verse provided or substitute your own if you find one that connects more meaningfully to the text. Either way, you must still respond to the same prompt question printed in that column.

A Note on Honesty

This journal is a record of your thinking, not a performance. The odd questions in the gold column are designed to be impossible for artificial intelligence to answer on your behalf because they ask for your specific memories, your specific experiences, and your specific life. Answer them honestly. The best journals are the ones that feel like the student, not a search engine.

Side A | Bible Verse Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Bible Verse Column
"Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place... With us it ain't like that. We got a future." (13-14)		Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 - Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. Respond: How does this verse speak to George and Lennie's relationship?
"An' live off the fatta the lan'," Lennie shouted. "An' have rabbits... Tell about that George." "Why'n't you do it yourself? You know all of it." "No... you tell it. It ain't the same if I tell it." (14)		Proverbs 13:12 - Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. Respond: What does this verse reveal about why the dream matters so much to Lennie?
"...he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. He was dressed in denim trousers and in a denim coat with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats." (2)		Genesis 1:26 - Then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Respond: Steinbeck describes Lennie as animal-like from the very first lines. What tension does this create between Lennie's humanity and the way the world sees him?

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Bible Verse Column

Side B | Odd Question Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column
"Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place... With us it ain't like that. We got a future." (13-14)		Odd Question: Think of a time you felt like you truly belonged somewhere or with someone. Where were you? Who was there? How old were you? Be specific.
"An' live off the fatta the lan'," Lennie shouted. "An' have rabbits... Tell about that George." "Why'n't you do it yourself? You know all of it." "No... you tell it. It ain't the same if I tell it." (14)		Odd Question: What is a dream or goal you have repeated to yourself so many times that it has become like a ritual? Describe it as specifically as Lennie describes the rabbits.
"...he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws." (2)		Odd Question: Think of a movie, book, or personal memory where someone was judged entirely by how they looked or moved before anyone knew who they really were. What was the situation, and what happened?

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column

Side A | Bible Verse Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Bible Verse Column
"Well, Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's alla time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy." (26)		Proverbs 16:18 - Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Respond: How does this verse illuminate Curley's behavior and foreshadow what might happen to him?
"There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love." (33)		Proverbs 10:19 - When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. Respond: How does Slim's authority through silence contrast with the way Curley exercises power?
"I seen the guys that go around on the ranches alone. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean." (41)		Genesis 2:18 - Then the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone. Respond: How does this verse reframe the loneliness Steinbeck depicts on the ranch as something deeper than social isolation?

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Bible Verse Column

Side B | Odd Question Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column
"Well, Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's alla time picking scraps with big guys." (26)		Odd Question: Have you ever witnessed someone pick a fight or assert power over someone else just to feel important? Describe the situation without using any names. What did you feel watching it?
"There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke." (33)		Odd Question: Name one person in your life - a teacher, a coach, a family member, anyone - whose silence carries more weight than most people's words. What is it about them that commands that kind of respect?
"I seen the guys that go around on the ranches alone. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean." (41)		Odd Question: What is the loneliest you have ever felt - not physically alone, but truly unseen by the people around you? Where were you and what made it feel that way?

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column

Side A | Bible Verse Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Bible Verse Column
"Carlson said, 'The way I'd shoot him, he wouldn't feel nothing... He's all stiff with rheumatism. He ain't no good to you, Candy. An' he ain't no good to himself.'" (44-45)		Psalm 23:4 - Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Respond: Carlson frames the killing as mercy. What does this verse suggest about the difference between true comfort and the appearance of it?
"I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog." (61)		John 15:13 - Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. Respond: Candy's regret foreshadows the novel's ending. How does this verse complicate what it means to do the final act yourself rather than allowing a stranger to do it?
"S'pose I went in with you guys. Tha's three hundred an' fifty bucks I'd put in. I ain't much good, but I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the garden some." (59)		Romans 8:28 - And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Respond: Candy's hope is fragile. What does it reveal about what people will sacrifice or risk when a dream suddenly feels possible?

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Side B | Odd Question Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column
"Carlson said, 'The way I'd shoot him, he wouldn't feel nothing... He ain't no good to you, Candy. An' he ain't no good to himself.'" (44-45)		Odd Question: Think of a time someone made a decision that they said was for your good but that hurt you anyway. How did you process the difference between their intention and your experience?
"I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog." (61)		Odd Question: Is there a moment in your life where you let someone else handle something that you now wish you had handled yourself? What was it, and why do you think you stepped back?
"S'pose I went in with you guys. Tha's three hundred an' fifty bucks I'd put in." (59)		Odd Question: What song, film, or memory captures the feeling of a dream that almost came true? Describe the moment it felt most real and the moment it slipped away.

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column

Side A | Bible Verse Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Bible Verse Column
"A guy needs somebody -- to be near him. A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you." (72)		Ecclesiastes 4:10-11 - If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Respond: Crooks speaks from experience. How does this verse deepen the tragedy of his isolation specifically as a Black man on the ranch?
"I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads... An' never a *** one of 'em ever gets it." (74)		Proverbs 13:12 - Hope deferred makes the heart sick. Respond: Crooks has watched hope destroy men. Why do you think he still responds when Lennie's innocence briefly pulls him back toward believing?
"You got no right to come in my room. This here's my room. Nobody got a right in here but me." (68)		Lamentations 3:34-36 - To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth, to deny a man justice - does the Lord not see? Respond: Crooks's room is the only space he controls. What does Steinbeck reveal about the relationship between dignity and physical space?

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Side B | Odd Question Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column
"A guy needs somebody -- to be near him. A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody." (72)		Odd Question: Think of a book or film where a character's loneliness is so complete that it changes who they become. Name the character, the work, and describe one scene that made you feel it.
"I seen hundreds of men come by on the road... An' never a *** one of 'em ever gets it." (74)		Odd Question: Have you ever talked yourself out of hoping for something because you had been disappointed before? What was the dream, and what caused you to stop believing in it?
"You got no right to come in my room. This here's my room." (68)		Odd Question: Describe a space that is truly yours - a bedroom, a corner, a seat, anywhere. What makes it feel like yours, and what would it feel like if someone took that from you without permission?

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Side A | Bible Verse Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Bible Verse Column
"Damn you," he cried. "Why do you got to get killed? You ain't so little as mice." He picked up the pup and hurled it from him. (85)		Romans 7:15 - For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Respond: Lennie destroys what he loves without understanding why. How does this verse illuminate the tragedy of his nature?
"She was very pretty and simple, and her face was sweet and young." (86)		James 4:14 - Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Respond: Steinbeck gives Curley's wife her most humanizing description only after her death. What does this verse reveal about the way her life and death are framed in the novel?
"Lennie said softly, 'I don't want to hurt you.' She screamed then, and Lennie's other hand closed over her mouth and nose... He shook her then, and he was angry with her." (91)		Proverbs 14:29 - Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. Respond: Lennie does not intend harm, yet harm follows him everywhere. How does intention differ from consequence in this passage and in the novel as a whole?

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Side B | Odd Question Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column
"Damn you," he cried. "Why do you got to get killed? You ain't so little as mice." (85)		Odd Question: Think of something you have broken, lost, or hurt because you held on too tightly or did not know your own strength. It does not have to be dramatic. What was it, and what did you feel afterward?
"She was very pretty and simple, and her face was sweet and young." (86)		Odd Question: Name a character from a book, film, or story who was defined by others around them rather than by their own voice. What was lost because we never truly heard from them directly?
"Lennie said softly, 'I don't want to hurt you.'" (91)		Odd Question: Describe a moment - real or from something you have read or watched - where good intentions led directly to a terrible outcome. What does that situation teach you about the relationship between wanting to do right and actually doing right?

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Side A | Bible Verse Column

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"Look acrost the river, Lennie, an' I'll tell you so you can almost see it... We gonna get a little place... An' live off the fatta the lan'." (105)		Revelation 21:4 - He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. Respond: George gives Lennie the dream one final time as a mercy. How does this verse reframe what George does as an act of love rather than simply violence?
"George raised the gun and his hand shook, and he dropped his head into the grass by Lennie's shoulder." (106)		John 15:13 - Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. Respond: George does not lay down his life, but he sacrifices something irreplaceable. What does he lose in this moment, and how does this verse help define what kind of love it represents?
"Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys?" (107) -- Carlson's final line		1 Corinthians 13:4-5 - Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. Respond: Carlson cannot understand what he has witnessed. What does his incomprehension reveal about the difference between those who

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		understand love and sacrifice and those who do not?

Side B | Odd Question Column

Text from Of Mice and Men	Your Response / Analysis	Odd Question Column
"Look acrost the river, Lennie, an' I'll tell you so you can almost see it..." (105)		Odd Question: Think of a time you told someone a comforting story or memory even though the situation was painful. Why did you choose that story and what did it cost you to tell it calmly?
"George raised the gun and his hand shook, and he dropped his head into the grass by Lennie's shoulder." (106)		Odd Question: This is one of the most debated endings in American literature. Write three honest sentences about what you felt when you read this moment for the first time. Do not summarize. Write what you actually felt.
"Now what the hell ya suppose is eatin' them two guys?" (107)		Odd Question: Steinbeck ends the novel with a man who completely misses the point. Name a moment from your own life - or from a story you know - where someone was present for something significant and completely failed to understand it. What made the gap between them and everyone else so striking?

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Dialectical Journal Rubric

Category	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Insufficient
Critical Analysis (30 pts)	27–30: Interprets rather than summarizes; identifies craft (irony, symbolism, syntax, etc.) and explains effect; precise textual evidence; insightful, close reading.	22–26: Goes beyond summary; some literary observation; mostly accurate; could push further on craft or implication.	16–21: Slips into summary or general theme; lacks passage-specific insight; misses obvious craft.	0–15: Retells/paraphrases; vague, generic claims; no real engagement with author’s craft.
Bible Verse Engagement (20 pts)	18–20: <u>Directly</u> answers prompt; deep, meaningful connection between verse and passage; wrestles with complexity; well-chosen substitute verse if used.	15–17: Connects verse to passage; answers prompt; reasonable but not deeply developed.	10–14: Mentions verse but doesn’t answer prompt; treats verse and passage separately; connection feels forced.	0–9: Drops verse in; generic or unrelated commentary; entries skipped.
Odd Question — Specificity & Honesty (25 pts)	23–25: Highly specific (names, places, details); honest, reflective, risk-taking; clearly personal and authentic.	18–22: Specific and believable; identifies real people or moments; could go deeper.	12–17: Generic responses; lacks concrete detail; avoids discomfort of <u>prompt</u> .	0–11: Vague, evasive, or AI-like; contradicts known facts; entries skipped.
Diction — Verb Choice & Mechanics (10 pts)	9–10: Strong verbs (reveals, exposes, complicates, etc.); tight sentences; clean mechanics; precise language.	7–8: Mostly strong verbs; few weak ones; mechanics mostly clean.	4–6: Frequent weak verbs; repetition; mechanics distract.	0–3: Weak verbs dominate; errors undermine meaning.
Completion & Submission (15 pts)	14–15: All entries complete; legible; clear photos; organized; name/date included.	11–13: Mostly complete; minor issues; one or two thin entries.	6–10: Several missing/partial entries; poor photo quality or missing pages.	0–5: Many missing; no handwritten copy = no credit.