**Migrant Farm Workers:**

The two key characters in the novel, George and Lennie, are examples of migrant farm workers. They are examples of men who would travel great distances, either walking, using cheap bus services, hitch-hiking or travelling by train in the empty boxcars that were later used to ship out the grain they helped to farm. They would receive $2.50 or $3.00 a day, plus board (food) and a room. The food was basic and the room was sometimes nothing more than a shared tent.

However, this whole lifestyle was being threatened by drastic changes that were affecting America. Not long before the time in which *Of Mice and Men* is set, 350 men would be needed to complete a major harvest; by the time it was written, half of the available work was being done by machinery which required only five men to work it.

Before the days of mechanisation, the mule driver was at the top of the social tree. A good mule driver was regarded highly by the farm owner, who recognised how much work he could do and how much he could save, but also respected by the farm workers themselves for his skill. Slim is just such a figure in *Of Mice and Men*. The reward for his skill is a permanent employment on the farm.

**The American Dream**

In the novel, the two characters of George and Lennie have a dream of working their own smallholding or farm. This would allow them to be their own masters, earning a decent living from their own hard work.

The American Dream came about from the way in which people populated/ moved to America. People came from all over the world, all believing that America was the land of opportunity. They hoped for a better life, some escaping freedom from religious or political persecution, others escaping poverty and starvation. Poor Europeans saw an opportunity in America to own their own land- something they were unable to do in Europe. As a relatively ‘new’ country, large deposits of gold and minerals were discovered daily, and the massive influx of people meant that there was countless need and opportunity for careers, money and reputations to be made. The American Dream was therefore seen as a fresh start from which to achieve great things.

The idea of the American Dream lasted until the 1920s. By then most of the opportunities had been taken and the systems of wealth and status that had held people back in Europe had been created in America. The final major blow dealt to this idyllic hope was the Wall Street Crash; when the bottom fell out of the stock market and share prices. This marked the beginning of the Great Depression that swept across the world in the 1930s. Farming- like all other areas of the economy- was affected badly. Another reason why farming suffered was that whilst the land was seen as a source of opportunity for many; those that took it were not necessarily knowledgeable farmers: they overworked their land and did not know how to take care of it properly. Acres of farmland dried up, losing its topsoil and becoming desert-like. This created a ‘dust bowl’. Poor crops meant that many of the farmers were unable to pay back the debts they had taken out in order to buy the land in the first place.

)In the novel, George, Lennie and Slim were clutching at the fading American Dream. Their world was becoming history due to the combination of the recession and increased mechanisation. They constantly talk of their dream, although the audience can see that there is little hope of it becoming reality.