Questions About Friendship

1. Friendship generally seems like a good thing, but the ranch life might be better suited to loners. Are there some circumstances under which it's simply better to be alone? Does George have to learn this lesson the hard way?
2. Is George and Lennie's friendship fully reciprocal? Do both members contribute and receive equally from each other? Are there any other sets of friends in the book? Why is friendship so rare?
3. It seems like everyone, from Crooks to Slim, spends an awful lot of time complaining to his friends about how he has no friends. Are these guys really that lonely, or do they simply not recognize they've all got one other? *Do*they all have one other?
4. George says quite a bit about how much better his life would be if he didn't have to take care of Lennie. If this is true, why does he stay with Lennie?

Questions About Innocence

1. Is Lennie the only innocent character in the novel? Is he the most innocent? Does Lennie's innocence protect him, or make him dangerous?
2. Though Lennie seems gentle and dumb, he's not all sunshine and rainbows—like when he tries to break the future cats' necks for hurting the future rabbits. Do we just feel that Lennie is innocent because he's mentally slow, when he's actually a hardened killer?
3. Is Curley's wife malicious because she's really an awful person, or is she simply lonely and naïve?

Questions About Freedom and Confinement

1. Do Lennie and George see their life of traveling and working as a type of freedom? Do they ever consider the question of freedom?
2. Crooks is the only ranch hand to have his own room. Is this a type of freedom, or a type of confinement?
3. At the end of the story, when George is facing life without Lennie, does he feel freer, or more confined?
4. What does "freedom" mean to Lennie? Is it related to the "fatta the lan"? Does he find it in death?

Questions About Justice

1. Is it true that the ranch has its own kind of justice? What variables factor into that justice? What's most influential in deciding justice—ethics, the law, social status, intention, etc.?
2. Is Lennie justified in crushing Curley's hand? Is Slim justified in threatening Curley about letting anyone know what really what went on? Why or why not?
3. Is it reasonable to let Slim be the arbiter of justice on the ranch? Does Slim make good decisions?
4. Did Curley's wife get what she deserved?

Questions About Visions of America

1. In *Of Mice and Men*, is America the land of futility or opportunity? Are dreams ever realizable? If so, for whom? For anyone, or only for particular people?
2. Could this be a story about making it in a tough agricultural migrant town anywhere? Is it a universal story still relevant today, or is it particularly keyed to issues of the Great Depression http://www.shmoop.com/great-depression/?
3. Is struggle and overcoming obstacles part of the American story?
4. Is it possible to achieve the American Dream without struggling? Or is struggle a necessary element of the American Dream?

Questions About Violence

1. How do Lennie's violent tendencies affect the way we feel about him? Do we ever think of Lennie as violent, or does he seem more like a gentle guy who accidentally performs violent acts?
2. Is violence an acceptable part of life on the ranch? If so, at what point is it no longer acceptable?
3. Is Lennie's death ultimately a violent act or a loving act by George? Are Lennie's "murders" more or less violent than George's?

Questions About Prejudice

1. How can prejudice be maintained in an isolated environment where people interact constantly? On second thought, scratch that: do all isolated environments just lead to prejudices (like, say high school or summer camp?)
2. How can we tell the line between being prejudiced and simply being discerning? If the boss had known what happened in Weed and refused to hire Lennie, would that have been discrimination, or sensible and life-saving?

Questions About Weakness

1. What are the various weaknesses of the novel's different characters? Are any more serious than any others?
2. Does George and Lennie's relationship make them weaker or stronger? In general, does having close relationships in this novel seem to help or hurt the characters?
3. Does Lennie think of himself as weak? How do we interpret his mental weakness relative to his physical strength? Which defines his character more?

Questions About Man and the Natural World

1. Why is Lennie constantly compared to an animal? Is this a fair comparison? Is the author suggesting that not all humans are animals?
2. What separates the rule of civilized law from the rule of the natural world? Does Steinbeck seem to suggest one is better than the other?
3. Are the natural world and man's world presented as parallels to each other or as contrasts to each other? (And what's the role of women in all this?)