

## **Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck**

### **How does Steinbeck communicate to the reader the tension felt by the men as they wait for Candy's dog to be shot? (pages 50 to 51)**

**by Jenny Hastings, Greenwood Dale Technology School, Nottingham**

As soon as Carlson leads Candy's dog away, Candy lies 'rigid on his bed staring at the ceiling', and Slim speaks 'loudly' about one of his mules, making an attempt to change the subject. His voice 'trailed off', however, and is replaced by silence. Carlson's footsteps 'died away' and silence 'come into the room' and the silence 'lasted.' Here, Steinbeck repeats the word 'silence' three times to reinforce the feelings of the men waiting for the sound of the dog's death. Candy is waiting in dread and anguish at the loss of his old friend and companion. The others are feeling a mixture of unease at the way Carlson has bullied him into agreeing to the dog being shot, sympathy because they understand how much the dog means to him and guilt because they did not support him.

As the waiting continues, attempts are made to lighten the mood when George refers to Lennie's delight in having a new pup and Slim kindly offers Candy one of the pups. Candy remains silent, however, and Steinbeck again writes that silence 'fell on the room.' But now the silence has become stronger, as it 'came out of the night and invaded the room'. The use of the word 'invaded' suggests a powerful force as if the reader is almost threatened by the silence.

George suggests that they play a card game, but although Whit sits opposite him George's mind is obviously not on the game. They do not begin playing and instead 'the silence fell upon the room again'. Steinbeck uses this to show that the men cannot concentrate on anything as they listen for the shot. As the men make efforts to break the tension, Steinbeck twice repeats the sentence, 'Candy lay still, staring at the ceiling' showing the reader how painfully aware the men are of Candy's presence. The actions of the men betray their feelings of tension. George plays with his cards 'nervously', Slim 'subdued one hand with the other' and Whit reveals he is tense and on edge when he breaks out 'What the hell's taking him so long?'

At one point, as the men wait in uncomfortable silence, a 'little gnawing sound' is heard under the floorboards and the men look down towards it 'gratefully', since it releases part of the tension of waiting. As the shot finally sounds all the men look quickly at Candy. Steinbeck writes that every head turned towards him. It is as if the men cannot help themselves. As Candy then rolls over and faces the wall the tension is broken and the men resume their normal behaviour.