

Chapter One

Standards Focus: Dialogue

One of the unique aspects of *Of Mice and Men* is the use of dialogue. **Dialogue** is a conversation between two or more characters, distinguished by the use of quotation marks. Since this novel was conceived by Steinbeck as a “playable novel,” dialogue, rather than lengthy descriptive narration, helps the reader to understand the characters and plot. In drama, it is the actions and dialogue of the characters that tell the story. Dialogue can serve many different purposes. Dialogue:

- develops characters as the reader is able to experience the character’s own words. The way a person speaks, and how they say what they say, can reveal a lot about a person
- creates the setting through regional characteristics, such as dialects and slang, and helps to show how the characters live within their environment
- reveals important information about the plot and conflicts, without disturbing the momentum of the storyline
- allows the reader to experience the action as the character is experiencing it, rather than having it communicated from another perspective
- generates an impression of reality

Directions: To help you understand the differences between dialogue form and narrative form, complete the following activity. For each excerpt in dialogue form, convert it to narrative form. Once you have converted the dialogue, describe the purpose(s) served by each excerpt of dialogue. An example has been done for you. If you need more room for your answers, use a separate sheet of paper.

Example:

Dialogue Form:

Lennie looked timidly over to him. “George?”

“Yeah, what ya want?”

“Where we goin’, George?”

The little man jerked down the brim of his hat and scowled over at Lennie.

“So you forgot awready, did you?” I gotta tell you again, do I? Jesus Christ, you’re a crazy bastard!”

Narrative Form: Lennie looked over timidly at George. With a strange, confused apprehension he asked where they were headed. Angry and irritated over hearing the same question at least ten times, George snapped and yelled at Lennie.

Specific Purpose: By the way George scolds Lennie, we can see that George easily loses his patience with Lennie. There is also evidence of a dialect, although we are not completely clear which dialect it is.

1. Dialogue Form:

“Ain’t a thing in my pocket,” Lennie said cleverly.

“I know there ain’t. You got it in your hand. What you got in your hand—hidin’ it?”

“I ain’t got nothin’, George. Honest.”

“Come on, give it here.”

Lennie held his closed hand away from George’s direction. “It’s only a mouse, George.”

“A mouse? A live mouse?”

“Uh-uh. Jus’ a dead mouse, George. I didn’ kill it. Honest! I found it. I found it dead.”

Name _____

Period _____

Narrative Form:

Specific Purpose:

2. *Dialogue Form:*

“O.K. Now when we go in to see the boss, what you gonna do?”

“I... I,” Lennie thought. His face grew tight with thought. “I ... ain’t gonna say nothin’. Jus’ gonna stan’ there.”

“Good boy. That’s swell. You say that over two, three times so you won’t forget it.” Lennie droned to himself softly. “I ain’t gonna say nothin’... I ain’t gonna say nothin’... I ain’t gonna say nothin’.”

Narrative Form:

Specific Purpose:

3. *Dialogue Form:*

“George,” very softly. No answer. “George!”

“Whatta you want?”

“I was only foolin’, George. I don’t want no ketchup. I wouldn’t eat no ketchup if it was right here beside me.”

“If it was here, you could have some.”

“But I wouldn’t eat none, George, I’d leave it all for you. You could cover your beans with it and I wouldn’t touch none of it.”

Narrative Form:

Specific Purpose:

Name _____

Period _____

4. *Dialogue Form:*

Lennie spoke craftily, "Tell me—like you done before."

"Tell you what?"

"About the rabbits."

George snapped, "You ain't gonna put nothing over on me."

Lennie pleaded, "Come on, George. Tell me. Please, George. Like you done before."

"You get a kick outta that, don't you? Awright, I'll tell you, and then we'll eat our supper...."

Narrative Form:

Specific Purpose:

5. Steinbeck uses dialogue with dialect and slang, even using curse words and the word "nigger", to make his characters sound more realistic. How would the novel be different if Steinbeck used Standard English (no dialect, slang, or curse words), rather than this more naturalistic vocabulary? Explain. _____

6. Many schools have banned *Of Mice and Men* because of the use of the word "nigger" and other curse words. What is your reaction to schools banning the book for these reasons? _____

7. Steinbeck once wrote "For too long the language of books was different from the language of men. To the men I write about profanity is adornment and ornament and is never vulgar and I write it so." What do you think Steinbeck means when he says that "profanity is adornment and ornament"? Do you agree? Explain your thoughts.