**An Ecological Approach to *Of Mice and Men***

Amber Hastings

Mason High School, Mason, MI

American Literature, Grade 9

**Objectives:**

To gain a very basic understanding of ecology through the context of literature.

To examine a text through the use of an extended metaphor.

To glean a deeper understanding of literature through the use of essential questions.

To relate ecology and literature to current and personal events and situations.

**Procedure:**

**Pre-reading:** Present the accompanying PowerPoint to introduce *Of Mice and Men*. The PowerPoint gives some background information on John Steinbeck, some of the major themes in the story, and some definitions. It asks students to brainstorm different types of ecosystems (forest, desert, tide pool, etc.). You may need to prompt students to think about the ecosystems they belong to. Discuss healthy vs. unhealthy ecosystems (I have provided examples relevant to Michigan, but you may want to provide your own examples from your location). Finally, go through the list of essential questions. Students should write these down, as they will also be the questions on the essay test at the end of the unit.

**Essential Questions:**

1. How does the ranch exist BEFORE we become aware of it?
2. What happens when George and Lennie arrive?
   * Are George and Lennie an invasive species?
   * Do the other people on the ranch respond to them appropriately?
3. Is “the ranch” a healthy or unhealthy ecosystem?
4. What would happen if we were to remove one of the major characters?
5. How does predation work on “the ranch”?
   * Are there predators and prey?
   * Who is powerful and who is powerless? Why?
6. How does survival of the fittest play a role on the ranch?

**Reading:** Although we are also discussing character development, theme, setting, etc., these questions should remain at the center of discussion. I tend to focus discussion for Chapter 1 on the setting and the relationship (or ecosystem) between George and Lennie and the forest. The ranch setting is introduced in Chapter 2 and continues for the rest of the book. I usually choose one or two of the essential questions for each chapter or discussion, making sure to touch on each one several times throughout the unit.

**Post-reading/Assessment:** In-class essay. Open note, open book. Students will have the class period to respond to one of the essential questions, other than #1. In doing so, students should cite several examples from the text to support their ideas. Sometimes I give students the option of which question to answer and sometimes I assign them a particular question or us random draw. Even though students are completing the essay in class, I usually give them a chance to revise their ideas after I have read a draft. They get an initial score on the content and their ideas and another score for their revisions and organization.