**Of Mice and Men-Key Incident Essay Plan**

**Question**

Choose a novel or short story or work of non-fiction which has a key incident.

Give a brief account of the incident, and by referring to appropriate techniques, show how this incident is important to the text as a whole.

**Introduction**

Name of author **John Steinbeck**

Name of text **‘Of Mice and Men’**

Brief summary of plot-key points

* **Set in 1930s California, during the Great Depression-hard to find work**
* **Two men travelling for work, who have a dream of owning their own ranch one day and being their own bosses**
* **Novel about the American Dream and the difficulties it presents**

Ref to question-what is key incident, why is it important?

* **Key incident-death of Curley’s wife at the hands of Lennie, a vulnerable character with learning difficulties**
* **This is important as it leads to Lennie’s tragic demise, which is symbolic of the death of The American Dream**

**Summary Paragraph**

Where event takes place

**The barn of the ranch, while the other men play horseshoes**

Who is involved

**Lennie, Curley’s wife**

What has been happening prior to this-between Lennie and Curley, and Lennie and Curley’s wife

* **Lennie and Curley-Curley took an instant dislike to Lennie due to his size and strength. Earlier in the novel, he attacked Lennie for smiling at him, and Lennie, encouraged by George, fought back and broke Curley’s hand**
* **Lennie and Curley’s wife-Curley’s wife has been flirting with Lennie, and Lennie finds her attractive. Curley’s wife is mistreated by her husband**

Why/how the incident occurs

* **Lennie and Curley’s wife are alone in the barn, discussing Lennie’s dead puppy and Curley’s wife’s loneliness.**
* **Curley’s wife invites Lennie to stroke her hair.**
* **Lennie gets over excited and begins to pull the hair.**
* **Curley’s wife starts to scream and Lennie attempts to silence her**

What happens to Curley’s wife

**Lennie overpowers her in his attempt to silence her and snaps her neck, killing her.**

How Lennie responds

* **Lennie immediately realises he has done something terrible, and that George will be angry at him**
* **Lennie runs out the barn to hide in the brush, as instructed by George**

**Main Paragraph 1**

Linking word

**Firstly**

Technique Analysed

**Characterisation**

Link to Q

**To demonstrate Lennie’s initial idealism and enthusiastic outlook on life**

Context

**At the beginning of the novel, Lennie and George discuss their dream of owning their own farm one day and being self-sufficient**

Quotation

**“’Okay. Someday-we’re going to jack together and we’re going to have a little house and a couple of acres, and a cow and some pigs…’**

**‘An live off the fatta the lan’,’ Lennie shouted.”**

Explanation

**Here Steinbeck illustrates Lennie’s optimism and unfaltering belief in George and George’s plans for their future. Lennie can be seen as the typical naïve American settler, with simple faith and belief in the American Dream-that hard work, passion and determination will ultimately breed success and prosperity.**

**Main Paragraph 2**

Linking word

**To contrast,**

Technique Analysed

**Foreshadowing (predicting future events)**

Link to Q

**… used to show a realistic perspective of The American Dream, and how idealism can lead to disappointment**

Context

* **Midway through the novel**
* **encounters Crooks (the black stable buck)**
* **very negative outlook on life**

Quotation

**“every damn one of ‘em’s got a little piece of land in his head. An’ never a God damn one of ‘em ever gets it. Just like heaven.” (pg 106)**

Explanation

* **Crooks’ negative character contrasts clearly with Lennie**
* **Doubts Lennie and George’s plan to control their own destinies-** -**comparison to ‘heaven’-thinks it is too ambitious, unreachable**
* **Jaded tone**
* **Foreshadows later events of novel-Lennie and George’s disappointment and failure to achieve American Dream-Steinbeck uses Crooks to voice concerns about American Dream**

**Main Paragraph 3**

Linking word

**In addition**

Technique Analysed

**dialogue**

Link to Q

**…to illustrate the impact of the key incident**

Context

* **As previously mentioned**
* **Curley’s wife invites Lennie to stroke her hair**
* **Lennie gets over-excited, starts pulling hair**
* **Curley’s wife panics and screams**
* **Lennie overpowers her in an attempt to silence her, killing her**

Quotation

**“For a moment he seemed bewildered. And then he whispered in fright: ‘I done a bad thing. I done another bad thing.’” (128)**

Explanation

* **Repetition shows Lennie’s shock and fear-slow realisation**
* **His response is very childish, as if he still does not realise the true consequences and extent of what he has done**
* **Key incident as Lennie is aware life on the ranch will not be the same for him**

Quotation

**“’I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we’d never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would’.” (131)**

Explanation

* **Impact on George-realisation that dream is just that-not a reality**
* **Swept up in Lennie’s enthusiasm; innocence lost now Lennie’s violent act has been committed**
* **Key incident-affects all characters, changes their paths**

**Main Paragraph 4**

Linking word

**Finally**

Technique Analysed

**symbolism**

Link to Q

**…used to show impact of key incident on characters, and sum up Steinbeck’s main theme of disillusionment with The American Dream.**

Context

* **End of novel**
* **Lennie and George reunite in the brush**
* **George must make a difficult decision about the fate of his best friend**

Quotation

**“’…Look down there acrost the river, like you can almost see the place.**

**Lennie obeyed him. George looked down at the gun.”**

Explanation

* **Lennie still obeys George’s commands, despite committing a horrendous crime and feeling frightened of him. This shows that they have great trust in one another**
* **Lennie is still imagining a happy future with George, is unaware plans have changed dramatically due to his actions-naively hopeful**
* **Lennie’s death-symbolic of optimism and hope-death of The American Dream, failure to achieve this goal for working class, under-privileged people-always obstacles in the way**

**Conclusion**

Linking word

**In conclusion**

Summary of what key incident symbolises

* **important as it demonstrates the poor decision making that can lead to struggles faced by the working man, and the difficulties this causes in terms of achieving The American Dream.**

Impact of key incident on text/reader

* **impact on text-results in the death of vulnerable character**
* **impact on reader-emphasises harsh realities of capitalism in America.**