**OM&M Conflict Model Essay**

**Choose a novel or short story in which there is a character involved in some form of conflict.**

**By referring to appropriate techniques, show how the character comes to be involved in this conflict and how the conflict develops throughout the text.**

‘Of Mice and Men’ is a novella by John Steinbeck. The novella is set during the 1930s, the time of the Great Depression, in California. The two main protagonists Lennie and George are drifters who travel to find work on a ranch, in order to earn enough money to fulfil their dream of owning their own land. In this novella, there is conflict between Lennie, a working class man with learning difficulties, and Curley, a ranch owner’s son who is in a position of power and privilege. Steinbeck uses this conflict to explore the theme of The American Dream. This conflict is demonstrated through Steinbeck’s use of characterisation, key incident and symbolism.

Firstly, Steinbeck creates a sense of conflict between the characters of Lennie and Curley in their initial meeting, through characterisation. At the beginning of the novel, Lennie and George arrive at the ranch and are introduced to the ranch-owner’s son, Curley, who takes an instant dislike to Lennie:

“He glanced coldly at George and then at Lennie. His arms gradually bent at the elbows and his hands closed into fists.”

Here, Steinbeck emphasises the Curley’s immediate dislike and resentment towards Lennie through his characterisation. The description of Curley’s reaction demonstrates an instant dislike and feeling of threat, as Steinbeck indicates that he makes himself appear larger by bending his elbows, and uses his fists to create a threatening stance. In previous descriptions of each character, Steinbeck has created contrast in terms of their appearances: Lennie is very tall and large, Curley is small and stocky. potentially causing Curley to feel inferior to Lennie, despite the fact he is in a position of power on the ranch. These opposing descriptions, combined with Curley’s aggressive reaction towards Lennie indicate from the beginning of the text that these are very different characters, and are used by Steinbeck to demonstrate the inequality between the struggling working man and the privileged few in trying to achieve the American Dream.

Furthermore, Steinbeck shows that the conflict between the two men is growing stronger through the use of key incident. Midway through the novel, Curley tries to provoke Lennie. At first Lennie does not respond, however the encouragement from George leads him to retaliate:

“The next minute Curley was flopping like a fish on a line, and his closed fist was lost in Lennie’s big hand.”

Here, Steinbeck emphasises the growing conflict between Curley and Lennie through his use of key incident. The imagery used illustrates that Curley is not as powerful as he is made out to be, as the ranch-owner’s son and a former boxer. The comparison to a flopping fish makes Curley appear weak, vulnerable and completely under Lennie’s control. Despite his learning difficulties and lower status on the ranch, Lennie is able to overpower Curley completely in this physical conflict. In this key incident, Lennie’s true strength and fearsome nature is revealed to the reader, which contrasts with his child-like, sensitive personality.

To continue, Steinbeck brings the conflict between Lennie and Curley to a climax in the aftermath of Curley’s wife’s death. Lennie, in a state of panic and distress, accidentally kills Curley’s wife. When her body is discovered, Curley vows to seek revenge upon Lennie:

“He worked himself into a fury. ‘I’m gonna get him. I’m going for my shotgun. I’ll kill the big son-of-a-bitch myself.’”

Curley’s full fury towards Lennie is revealed by Steinbeck through his speech. His reaction is fully focused on Lennie’s actions rather than the shock of his wife’s death, indicating his pride overpowering any sense of grief, and suggesting he sees his wife as property and a symbol of prestige on the ranch. The fact he sees Lennie’s violence as a slight against his reputation rather than a horrific act against his wife demonstrates Steinbeck’s symbolic use of this conflict: that the American Dream is a prospect reserved for few, and any attempt to undermine that system will be met with violence.

Ultimately, the conflict between Lennie and Curley ends with the tragic and symbolic death of Lennie. At the end of the novel, Lennie is forced into hiding after killing Curley’s wife. With the threat of a violent and torturous death, George takes matters into his own hands:

“’…Lennie. Look down there acrost the river, like you can almost see the place.’ Lennie obeyed him. George looked down at the gun.”

Lennie’s tragic demise is symbolic of the death of the American Dream: any hope he had for the future has been destroyed by his inability to control his strength. His death also emphasises the inequality between the working class and middle class in America: Curley need not even go through with the murder, as his mere threat is enough to ensure that George puts Lennie out of his misery, indicating the tremendous power the middle class have over the working class. What should be a dramatic end to this conflict results in a miserable and heart-breaking farewell to a tragic character.

In conclusion, the conflict between Lennie and Curley is used by Steinbeck to demonstrate his key message concerning the American Dream: that is an unobtainable goal for many, and causes great inequality between the working and middle classes. This message is made particularly clear to the reader through Steinbeck’s intriguing use of characterisation, key incident, climax and symbolism.