Choose a novel which considers an important issue or theme. Explain the theme briefly and go on to show how the writer make this theme interesting to readers.

In his novel “Of mice and men” the writer John Steinbeck explores the theme of loneliness. He does this through setting, characterisation and foreshadowing.

The first way that Steinbeck explores the theme of loneliness is through the setting of the novel. Most of the action takes place on a ranch near the town of Soledad, California. The name “Soledad” means “The lady of loneliness” and effectively draws our attention that the main theme in the book is loneliness. It also successfully point out that events will centre around a woman, in this story that is Curley’s wife.

The setting influences the start and the end of the book. It is described as “golden foothill slopes.” The word “golden” suggests that the ranch is in a beautiful and perfect place. This place is spoiled when two men, George Milton and Lennie small arrive on the scene: “the rabbits hurried noiselessly for cover.” This suggests that the rabbits sense that something bad is going to happen and so they hide for protection. The story will come back full circle to this beautiful scene where the most tragic event in the novel will happen.

Another way that Steinbeck looks at loneliness is through characterisation. The story centres around three pairs of characters each one of them lonely and trying to meet their needs in each other. The first pair, and the main characters in the story, are George Milton and Lennie Small. They form a contrast, George is “small and quick” but Lennie is his opposite: “a huge man, shapeless of face.” The reader feels sorry for Lennie at the start of the story as he is backward and is described in animal terms: “paw” “snorted” and “bleated.” He is helpless without George.

What keeps George and Lennie together is their dream that one day they will own their own place. They want to be different from all the other unemployed men who worked on the ranches: “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place. With us it ain’t like that. We got a future.”

Lennie, however, has a real flaw in his character. He loves to stroke things but doesn’t know his own strength. The story begins with him stroking “a mouse” but he kills it. Later he kills a puppy. It also comes out in the story that he had tried to stroke a woman in a red dress in a town called Weed. The woman had mistaken it for attempted rape and the two men had to run for their lives. This attempted rape and the killing of the mouse and puppy foreshadow a much more important killing later in the story.

The second pair is an old man called Candy whose only real friend is an old dog: “had him since was a pup.” The other men in the bunkhouse complain about how badly the dog smells and suggest that Candy puts him down. Candy says: “No, I couldn’t do that. I had ‘im too long,” One of the other ranchers then puts the dog down with a pistol. This event foreshadows the end of the story when George will also have to kill his best friend, Lennie with the same pistol, the difference is that George does it himself, rather than have someone else do it for him.

The third pair is Curly the boss’ son and his wife. Curly is the boss’ son and is a bully. He used to box and he still pushes people around. He wears a hand covered by a vaseline filled glove supposedly to keep it soft for his wife. It seems however that he bullies his wife, she says: “He ain’t a nice fella.” Curley also bullies Lennie “slugging him in the face.” The word “slugging” suggests that he hit him very hard. The other men encourage Lennie to get his revenge so he crushes Curley’s hand: “his fist lost in Lennie’s paw.” The word “paw” reminds us of Lennie’s animal like nature and the incident forshadows Lennie being violent later in the story.

Curley’s wife has her dream too: “coulda been in the movies, an’ had nice clothes too.” Her dream was spoilt by marrying Curley who keeps her alone in the ranch. She is not allowed to talk to the other ranchers who see her as trouble. She starts talking to Lennie and invites him to stroke her hair. Lennie forgets to stop so she cries angrily “You stop it now, you’ll mess it all up.” A violent scene follows when Lennie, not knowing his own strength, accidentally kills her: “and then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck.” This is the climax of the novel which Steinbeck has skilfully foreshadowed in the setting, in the events in Weed and in the building up of Lennie’s killings.

As a result Lennie runs back to the river to wait for George. George comes armed with Carlsson’s pistol and shot Lennie in the back of the head. This fulfils the title of the book, taken from Burns’ poem “To a mouse” that “the best laid plans of mice and men will often go wrong.” Their plan of a place of their own will now never happen and George is left on his own.

In conclusion “Of mice and men” is a story about loneliness. The writer successfully brings a group of lonely people into a lonely place where they find that they do not make each other’s lives better, instead they make everything worse.