

## Learning Targets

- Analyze an author’s use of genre and detail for satirical purposes.
- Explore the impact of ridicule on the perception of a writer’s subject.

## Before Reading

1. Think about the characteristics of Horatian and Juvenalian satire and be ready to identify the following text as one or the other.

## During Reading

2. As you read, pay close attention to the use of parody. Mark the text for lines or phrases that show the author is **parodying** the form of a news article in creating this satiric piece.

### Satire

## Girl Moved To Tears by *Of Mice and Men* Cliff Notes

from *The Onion*

**1** CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA—In what she described as “the most emotional moment” of her academic life, University of Virginia sophomore communications major Grace Weaver sobbed openly upon concluding Steinbeck’s seminal work of American fiction *Of Mice And Men’s* Cliffs Notes early last week.

**2** “This book has changed me in a way that only great literature summaries can,” said Weaver, who was so shaken by the experience that she requested an extension on her English 229 essay. “The humanity displayed in the Character Flowchart really stirred something in me. And Lennie’s childlike innocence was beautifully captured through the simple, ranch-hand slang words like ‘mentally handicapped’ and ‘retarded.’”

**3** Added Weaver: “I never wanted the synopsis to end.”

**4** Weaver, who formed an “instant connection” with Lennie’s character-description paragraph, said she began to suspect the novel might end tragically after reading the fourth sentence which suggested the gentle giant’s strength and fascination with soft things would “lead to his untimely demise.”

**5** “I was amazed at how attached to him I had become just from the critical commentary,” said Weaver, still clutching the yellow-and-black-striped study guide. “When I got to the last sentence—‘George shoots Lennie in the head,’—it seemed so abrupt. But I found out later that the ‘ephemeral nature of life’ is a major theme of the novel.”

**6** Weaver was assigned *Of Mice And Men*—a novel scholars have called “a masterpiece of austere prose” and “the most skillful example of American naturalism under 110 pages”—as part of her early twentieth-century fiction course, and purchased the Cliffs Notes from a cardboard rack at her local Barnes & Noble. John Whittier-Ferguson, her professor for the class, told reporters this was not the first time one of his students has expressed interest in the novel’s plot summary.

**LEARNING STRATEGIES:**  
Marking the Text, Graphic Organizer, Quickwrite

### GRAMMAR & USAGE Dash

Notice how the writer uses dashes effectively to heighten the irony and humor. The student explains that she gets to the last sentence of the novel, and the writer sets the line *George shoots Lennie in the head* between dashes. The dashes signal a sudden shift or interruption and create more drama than commas would. Humor is often created through the sudden clash of expectations and reality, and dashes can emphasize that clash.

### My Notes

**KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS**  
Why include “under 110 pages” and the description of the book as a “pocket-sized novel”?

# The Tone of Satire

## My Notes

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What does the author think about Weaver's choice to read the Cliffs Notes rather than the actual novel? How do you know?

7 "It's one of those universal American stories," said Ferguson after being informed of Weaver's choice to read the Cliffs Notes instead of the pocket-sized novel. "I look forward to skimming her essay on the importance of following your dreams and randomly assigning it a grade."

8 Though she completed the two-page brief synopsis in one sitting, Weaver said she felt strangely drawn into the plot overview and continued on, exploring the more fleshed-out chapter summaries.

9 "There's something to be said for putting in that extra time with a good story," Weaver said. "You just get more out of it. I'm also going to try to find that book about rabbits that George was always reading to Lennie, so that I can really understand that important allusion."

10 Within an hour of completing the Cliffs Notes, Weaver was already telling friends and classmates that Steinbeck was her favorite author, as well as reciting select quotations from the "Important Quotations" section for their benefit.

11 "When I read those quotes, found out which characters they were attributed to, and inferred their context from the chapter outlines to piece together their significance, I was just blown away," said a teary-eyed Weaver. "And the way Steinbeck wove the theme of hands all the way through the section entitled 'Hands'—he definitely deserved to win that Nobel Prize."

12 Weaver's roommate, Giulia Crenshaw, has already borrowed the dog-eared, highlighted summary of the classic Depression-era saga, and is expecting to enjoy reading what Weaver described as "a really sad story about two brothers who love to farm."

13 "I loved this book so much, I'm going to read all of Steinbeck's Cliffs Notes," said Weaver. "But first I'm going to go to the library to check out the original version *Of Mice And Men* starring John Malkovich and Gary Sinise."

## After Reading

3. Is the tone of the piece objective or subjective?

**Writing Prompt:** As a small group, write an analysis of the author's use of the techniques of satire in the piece (refer to page 226). Be sure to:

- State the purpose of the satire. What is the author criticizing?
- Identify the other techniques of satire the writer uses.
- Identify the use of parody by citing specific genre conventions of a news article.

## Literary Terms

**Objective tone** refers to a tone that is more clinical, and which is not influenced by emotion.

**Subjective tone** refers to a tone that is obviously influenced by the author's feelings or emotions.

## INDEPENDENT READING LINK

Review the selections from your independent reading log and compose a short mock news story inspired by one of the texts.