Teacher’s Instructions for Only What You Can Take There and Back Again … A Problematic Situation for *Of Mice and Men*

**Purpose:** Students will be able to think through their priorities while getting a feel for life as a migrant worker in California during the Depression. This is intended as a pre-reading strategy for *Of Mice and Men*. Upon completion, they should be more in tune with the lives of Lennie, George, and the others. Also, this activity forces them to make decisions about what things would be important to each student if placed in a similar situation.

**Context:** This particular activity would fit in best as the final pre-reading strategy before beginning to read the actual novel. Students should have already had an in-depth coverage of life during this time (by looking at various films and functional texts) so they should be familiar with vocabulary words pertinent to that time period (i.e. hand-to-mouth, bindle, etc.) before doing this activity.

**Directions:** You have just entered a time machine and traveled back in time to be a migrant worker in California during the 1930's. It is right in the middle of the Depression and you have a hand-to-mouth existence. You are always on the run and therefore have not accumulated very many belongings. In fact, you cannot afford to own anything that you cannot carry in your bindle on your back. Your assignment is to narrow down your list of possessions. You need to rank them in order from most important (1) to least important (22). Keep in mind the technological restraints you might have (as you can only have access to the kinds of things that were available during that time – so you may put your video game equipment on your list, but it might not do you a lot of good if you cannot play it). If you get stuck, start with the things least important to you and work backwards. After you have your list prioritized, put an asterisk (✓) next to as many things as you think you can handle on your back. And remember, it will get heavy, so be choosy.

**An Alternative:** If appropriate, students can fill out the chart first on their own and then in a group with two or three other students to talk about each person’s different priorities, however, if this is attempted, further instructions should be provided to the students about what is expected during their group time.

**Assessment:** The assignment itself should be weighted in the medium range. As there are no right or wrong answers, it should be graded merely on if it was completed (and if students followed directions). After the activity, a more meaningful assessment should be made with the students by asking them what they got out of the activity and if they had to rethink their priorities in that time and if anyone would rather be in that time, etc. This kind of assessment would determine if students have become more capable to relate to the characters in the forthcoming novel.