

ACTIVITY ONE: THE AMERICAN DREAM

TEACHER DEBRIEFING SHEET

Unit: Of Mice and Men

Big Idea: Myths and Realities

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the role the American Dream plays in Of Mice and Men.
2. How does Steinbeck make use of a variety of literary devices to address the theme of the American Dream? Be sure to discuss at least three of the following literary devices: setting, dialogue, foreshadowing, symbolism, conflict, metaphor, and characterization.
3. Compare and contrast what your Resource Cards reveal about the myths and the realities of the American Dream with what is revealed in Of Mice and Men about the myths and realities of the American Dream.
4. How can race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, immigrant status, mental and physical disabilities, and sexual orientation affect the realization of the American Dream? As you answer, consider Of Mice and Men, your Resource Cards, your own experiences and observations, and how the American Dream is portrayed in popular culture (TV, movies, music, etc.)
5. To what extent is the American Dream a myth, and to what extent is the American Dream a reality?

TASK:

Create a two-part mural that shows the myth and the reality of the American Dream. Be sure to include images from Of Mice and Men as well as from today (your own experience, popular culture, etc.).

TASK EVALUATION CRITERIA:



- Mural has two parts and shows both the myth and the reality of the American Dream.
- Mural makes use of three or more of the following: color, texture, perspective, scale, and/or caricature.
- Mural includes images of the American Dream from the novel Of Mice and Men and images of the American Dream from today (your own experiences, popular culture, etc.).
- Mural shows multiple perspectives, or points of view, about the American Dream.
- Mural addresses the extent to which the American Dream is a myth, and the extent to which the American Dream is a reality.

Extension Questions:

1. What are the similarities between the American Dream in Of Mice and Men and your American Dream?
2. Do you think a person's social status shapes their personal American Dream? Why or why not?
3. How do you think Steinbeck would portray the theme of American Dream in a novel today?
4. How does a person's personal American Dream impact their daily actions?
5. In what ways is migrant work related to the American Dream?
6. In Of Mice and Men, how would the story be different if Steinbeck did not include the American Dream theme?
7. In Of Mice and Men, how would the story be different if George and Lennie achieved their dream?

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ACTIVITY CARD

-  Read the CONTEXT-SETTING CARD. Then use the information on your RESOURCE CARDS as well as the chapters of OF MICE AND MEN you have read, to talk about the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.
-  Examine the TASK and complete the project to meet all of the TASK EVALUATION CRITERIA.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

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4. How can race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, immigrant status, mental and physical disabilities, and sexual orientation affect the realization of the American Dream? As you answer, consider Of Mice and Men, your Resource Cards, your own experiences and observations, and how the American Dream is portrayed in popular culture (TV, movies, music, etc.)
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CONTEXT-SETTING CARD

The American Dream

The term “The American Dream” refers to the idea that anyone in the United States can make their dreams come true. Since American society is based on the ideals of freedom and equality, there is the belief that, with some amount of determination, everyone in the United States, no matter who they are or where they start from, has the ability to attain his or her goals. The idea of an American Dream can include fame, fortune, having lots of material possessions, owning a home, owning a car, having the perfect family, etc. The idea of the American Dream has brought many immigrants to the United States (beginning with the colonists who came over from Europe to pursue their dream of freedom of religion) and has given hope to millions of people in the United States. When times are tough, people often hold to the idea of the American Dream, knowing that in America, anything is possible, and with a little patience and determination, they will eventually succeed and prosper.

From *Of Mice and Men*:

George went on. “With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn about us. We don’t have to sit in no bar room blowin’ our jack jus’ because we got no place else to go. If them other guys gets in jail they can rot for all anybody gives a damn. But not us.”

Lennie broke in. “*But not us! An’ why? Because...because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that’s why.*” He laughed delightedly. “Go on now, George!”

“You got it by heart. You can do it yourself.”

“No, you. I forget some a’ the things. Tell about how it’s gonna be.”

“O.K. Someday – we’re gonna get the jack together and we’re gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an’ a cow and some pigs and –”

“*An live off the fatta the lan’*,” Lennie shouted. “an’ have *rabbits*. Go on, George! Tell about what we’re gonna have in the garden and about the rabbits in the cages and about the rain in the winter and the stove, and how thick the cream is on the milk like you can hardly cut it. Tell about that, George.”

“Why’n’t you do it yourself? You know all of it.”

“No...you tell it. It ain’t the same if I tell it. Go on...George. How I get to tend the rabbits.”

“Well,” said George, “we’ll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we’ll just say the hell with goin’ to work, and we’ll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an’ listen to the rain comin’ down on the roof...”

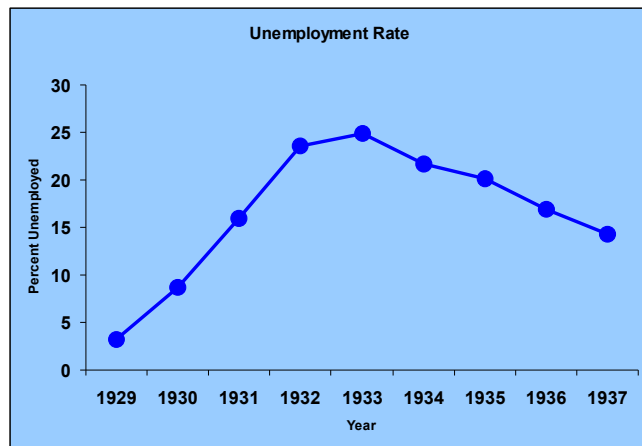
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RESOURCE CARD 1 (OF 4)

From Boom to Bust: The 1920s and the 1930s

In the 1920s, the United States' economy boomed (was very successful). New technologies and the availability of electricity pushed forward the development of new products and industries. The growth of advertising made people want to buy more and newer products, and the growth of the concept of buying on credit (making a series of smaller payments, with interest added, over time instead of paying the total amount owed up front) made it possible for people from a variety of economic classes to afford to buy what they wanted. Life was good for many Americans in the 1920s. They had more money to spend, more things were available for purchase (to buy), and, with the development of new and improved technology, Americans had more leisure (free) time. In other words, it became easier for many people to afford and live the American Dream in the 1920s.

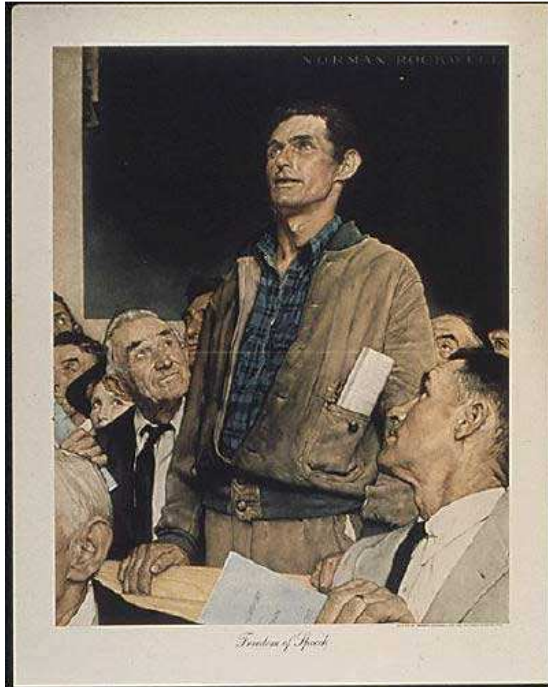
In the late 1920s and in the 1930s, the boom turned to bust in what has come to be known as the Great Depression. American factories and farms produced more goods than consumers (buyers) wanted or needed. As it became clear to manufacturers and farmers that supply was greater than demand, they began to cut production, reduce wages, and fire workers. In many cases, as farms and factories failed, farmers and manufacturers were unable to make payments on loans they had taken out to buy property and equipment. Because many banks couldn't collect the payments owed to them, those banks failed. People who had accounts at those banks lost their money and could not recover the money they had lost. Another factor in the bust was the stock market crash of 1929. As Americans lost confidence in their country's economy, stock prices fell dramatically, causing even more losses. Unemployment rose significantly in the 1930s, and Americans all over the country sought desperately to make ends meet. Charity organizations opened soup kitchens and breadlines, and many Americans uprooted themselves and their families and migrated to other parts of the country in search of work.



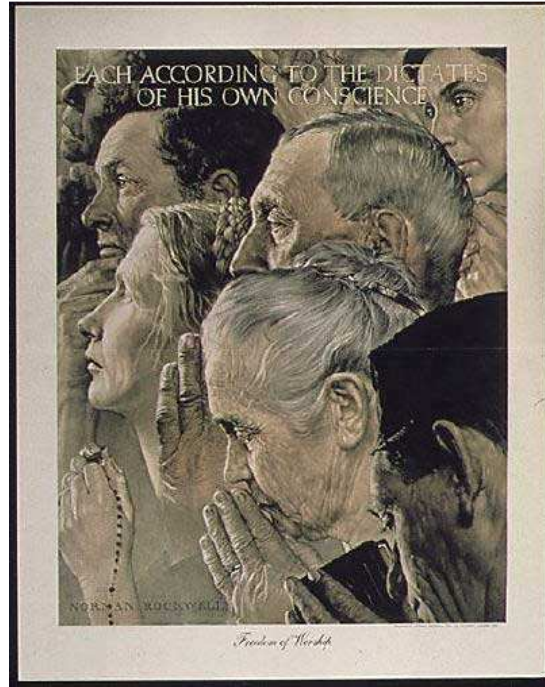
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RESOURCE CARD 2 (OF 4) The American Dream: Paintings

Inspired by U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech, delivered in January of 1941 (as the United States was emerging from the Great Depression), artist Norman Rockwell created a series of four paintings, which he completed in 1943.



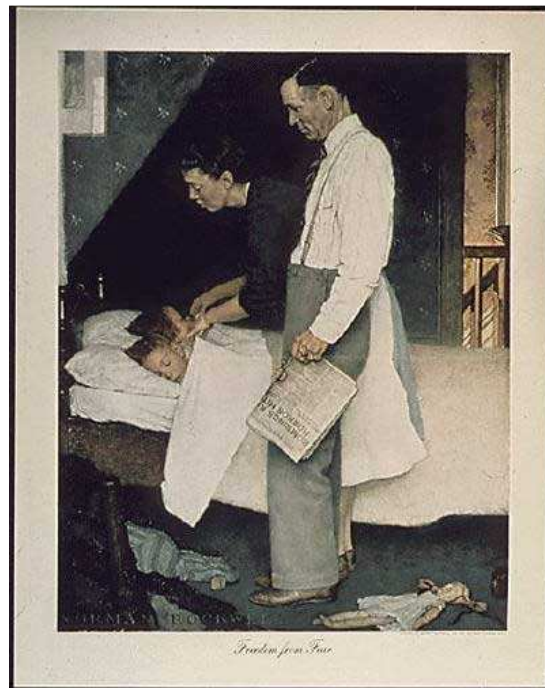
Freedom of Speech



Freedom of Worship



Freedom from Want



Freedom from Fear

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RESOURCE CARD 3 (OF 4) The American Dream: Writings

“Harlem”

By Langston Hughes, 1951

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

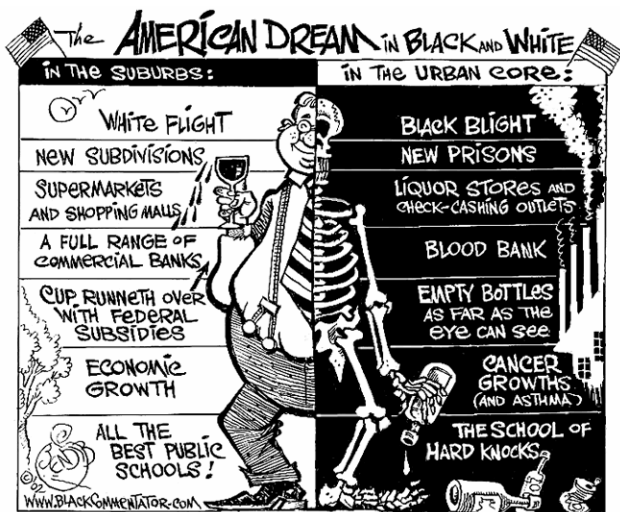
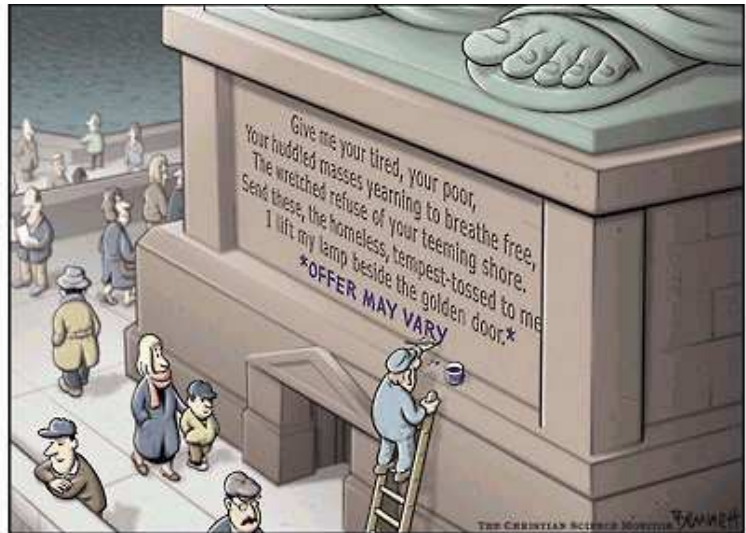
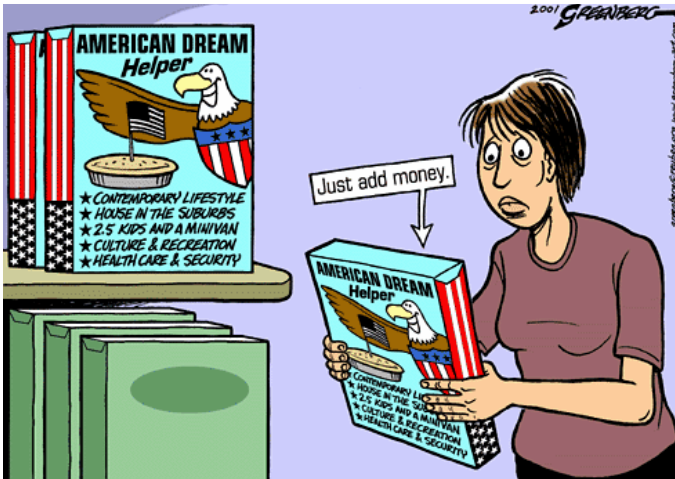
Langston Hughes was an African-American poet and an influential figure in the African-American artistic and literary movement of the 1920s known as the Harlem Renaissance.

Our parents or grandparents or great grandparents came to this land of freedom and opportunity to live the "American dream." Here, they - and we, their blessed and grateful descendants [children, grandchildren, etc.] - built a land where every individual can embrace [take advantage of] education, work hard, pursue happiness, and gain material success [be able to own many things] and personal soul-satisfaction. We have honored our diversity, and tried mightily to forge [create] a common bond. Our country surely has become the beacon [light] of hope for millions who wish to escape political tyranny [oppression] and economic hardship...

From "Dream a Little Dream" by Rabbi Wayne Dosick, University of San Diego Magazine, Winter 2002

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RESOURCE CARD 4 (OF 4) The American Dream: Cartoons



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LITERARY DEVICES CARD

Characterization: The author's means of conveying to the reader a character's personality, life history, values, physical attributes, etc. Also refers directly to a description thereof.

Conflict: A struggle between opposing forces that are the driving force of a story. The outcome of any story provides a resolution of the conflict(s); this is what keeps the reader reading. Conflicts can exist between individual characters, between groups of characters, between a character and society, etc., and can also be purely abstract (conflicting ideas).

Dialogue: Where characters speak to one another; may often be used to substitute for exposition.

Foreshadowing: Where future events in a story, or perhaps the outcome, are suggested by the author before they happen. Foreshadowing can take many forms and be accomplished in many ways, with varying degrees of subtlety. However, if the outcome is deliberately and explicitly revealed early in a story (such as by the use of a narrator or flashback structure), such information does not constitute foreshadowing.

Imagery: Language that describes something in detail, using words to substitute for and create sensory stimulation, including visual imagery and sound imagery. Also refers to specific and recurring types of images, such as food imagery and nature imagery.

Metaphor: A direct relationship where one thing or idea substitutes for another.

Mood: The atmosphere or emotional condition created by the piece, within the setting.

Setting: The time and place where a story occurs. The setting can be specific (e.g. Salinas in 1930) or ambiguous (e.g. a large farm during economic hard times. Also refers directly to a description thereof.

Symbolism: The use of specific objects or images to represent abstract ideas. This term is commonly misused, describing any and all representational relationships, which in fact are more often metaphorical than symbolic. A symbol must be something tangible or visible, while the idea it symbolizes must be something abstract or universal.

Verbal irony: Where the meaning is intended to be the exact opposite of what the words actually mean.

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INDIVIDUAL REPORT

To what extent is the American Dream a myth, and to what extent is it a reality? Be sure to include discussion of *both* the American Dream in Of Mice and Men *as well as* the American Dream today (your experiences, media portrayals, etc.).

Evaluation Criteria:

- Response includes a clear thesis statement that answers the question: “To what extent is the American Dream a myth, and to what extent is it a reality?”
- Response includes discussion of the American Dream in Of Mice and Men, referring to at least three specific quotes and/or events from the book.
- Response includes discussion of the American Dream today, referring to at least three specific examples from your experiences, the experiences of others, television, movies, music, etc.
- Response includes a conclusion that ties together the examples you have cited.