

Utopia/Dystopia: The American Dream: 11-12th Grade Lesson Plan



Overview

This series of lessons was designed to meet the needs of gifted children for extension beyond the standard curriculum with the greatest ease of use for the educator. The lessons may be given to the students for individual self-guided work, or they may be taught in a classroom or a home-school setting. This particular lesson plan is primarily effective in a classroom setting. Assessment strategies and rubrics are included. The lessons were developed by Lisa Van Gemert, M.Ed.T., the Mensa Foundation's Gifted Children Specialist.

Introduction

American Literature is a traditional course of study in eleventh grade English/Language Arts classes across the nation. Often, the novels and stories are taught without historical context or simply in chronological order with no overarching thread to tie them together thematically. Using the "City on a Hill" allusion from John Winthrop's famous sermon as a starting point, this lesson gives students a paradigm – The American Dream – through which to view their study of American literature, in the classroom and in their own reading as well.

Guiding Questions

- What is the American Dream?
- How has the vision of the American Dream been made manifest in literature, music, and art?
- How has the American Dream changed over time?
- In what ways is the American dream both utopic and dystopic?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

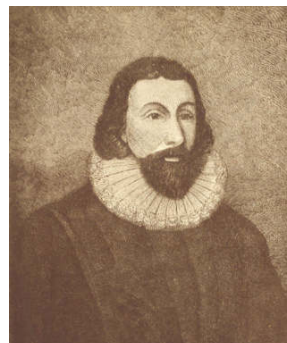
- Explain roots of the idea of the American Dream.
- Discuss the vision of the American Dream and how it has changed over time.
- Interpret the treatment of the American Dream in music, literature, and art.
- Evaluate the utopic/dystopic nature of the American Dream.
- Create an original piece of music, art, or literature that reflects the American Dream.

Preparation

- Print out copy of lesson, using color ink for paintings.
- Gather materials:
 - ▶ Casting Crowns' *American Dream* (audio)
 - ▶ Neil Diamond's *America* (audio)
 - ▶ John F. Kennedy's speech (audio): <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/OYhUZE2Qo0-ogdV7ok900A.aspx>
 - ▶ Ronald Reagan's farewell speech (audio and video): <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganfarewelladdress.html>

Lesson 1: John Winthrop's American Dream

John Winthrop, an ancestor of both George Bush and John Kerry, was the four-time governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He changed the goal of the colony from a commercial venture to a Puritan society. In a sermon titled *A Model of Christian Charity*, Winthrop set forth the idea that America was special (an idea that morphed into what is called "American Exceptionalism") because of its unique relationship to God and other nations.



This sermon was given while still on board the ship *Arbella* right before it landed in what is now Massachusetts. Winthrop, alluding to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, said:

... for we must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world, we shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God and all professors for God's sake; wee shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going ...

Based on what you've read, how would you explain John Winthrop's idea of the American Dream?

Interested in John Winthrop?

- Read it:
 - ▶ *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649*, edited by Dunn, Savage, and Yaendle
 - ▶ Bremer, Francis. *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father*
 - ▶ Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Library of American Biography)
- Surf it:
 - ▶ The Winthrop Society at winthropsociety.com

Lesson 2: The American Dream in song

Listen to Neil Diamond's song *America*. Read the lyrics while you listen, and look for the idea of American Dream in the song.

America

*Far
We've been traveling far
Without a home
But not without a star*

*Free
Only want to be free
We huddle close
Hang on to a dream*

*On the boats and on the planes
They're coming to America
Never looking back again
They're coming to America*

*Home, don't it seem so far away
Oh, we're traveling light today
In the eye of the storm
In the eye of the storm*

*Home, to a new and a shiny place
Make our bed, and we'll say our grace
Freedom's light burning warm
Freedom's light burning warm*

*Everywhere around the world
They're coming to America
Every time that flag's unfurled
They're coming to America*



*Got a dream to take them there
They're coming to America
Got a dream they've come to share
They're coming to America*

*They're coming to America
They're coming to America
They're coming to America
They're coming to America
Today, today, today, today, today*

*My country 'tis of thee
Today
Sweet land of liberty
Today
Of thee I sing
Today
Of thee I sing
Today*

What is the idea of the American Dream in Diamond's song?

How does Diamond's version of the American Dream differ from Winthrop's? What is missing in Diamond's version? What is missing in Winthrop's?

Now listen to *American Dream* by Casting Crowns. Read the lyrics while you listen, paying particular attention to how the American Dream becomes a nightmare through the course of the song.

American Dream

*All work no play may have made Jack a dull boy,
 But all work no God has left Jack with a lost soul.
 But he's moving on full steam.
 He's chasing the American dream.
 And he's gonna give his family finer things.*

*"Not this time son. I've no time to waste.
 Maybe tomorrow we'll have time to play."
 And then he slips into his new BMW
 And drives farther and farther and farther away.*

*'Cause he works all day and tries to sleep at night.
 He says things will get better;
 Better in time.*

[Chorus]

*So he works and he builds with his own two hands,
 And he pours all he has in a castle made with sand.
 But the wind and the rain are comin' crashing in.
 Time will tell just how long his kingdom stands...
 His kingdom stands...*

*Well his American Dream is beginning to seem
 More and more like a nightmare
 With every passing day.
 "Daddy, can you come to my game?"
 "Oh Baby, please don't work late."
 Another wasted weekend
 And they are slipping away.*

*'Cause he works all day and lies awake at night.
 He tells them things are getting better,
 Just take a little more time.*



[Chorus]

*He used to say, "Whoever dies with the most toys wins,"
 But if he loses his soul, what has he gained in the end?
 I'll take a shack on the rock
 Over a castle in the sand.*

*Now he works all day and cries alone at night.
 It's not getting any better;
 Looks like he's running out of time.*

[Chorus]

*All they really wanted was you
 All they really wanted was you
 All they really wanted was you
 [Fading] was you*

What is the idea of the American Dream in this song? _____

Can you find a similarity between this idea of the American Dream and Winthrop's?

How did the dream turn into a nightmare? _____

Lesson 3: JFK's American Dream

Listen to John F. Kennedy's speech at

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/OYhUZE2Qo0-ogdV7ok900A.aspx>

View the collage of pictures from Kennedy's administration and follow along with the text on the following pages.



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**Address of President-Elect John F. Kennedy
Delivered to a Joint Convention of the General
Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

*The State House, Boston
January 9, 1961*

I have welcomed this opportunity to address this historic body, and, through you, the people of Massachusetts to whom I am so deeply indebted for a lifetime of friendship and trust.

For fourteen years I have placed my confidence in the citizens of Massachusetts — and they have generously responded by placing their confidence in me.

Now, on the Friday after next, I am to assume new and broader responsibilities. But I am not here to bid farewell to Massachusetts.

For forty-three years — whether I was in London, Washington, the South Pacific, or elsewhere — this has been my home; and, God willing, wherever I serve this shall remain my home.

It was here my grandparents were born — it is here I hope my grandchildren will be born.

I speak neither from false provincial pride nor artful political flattery. For no man about to enter high office in this country can ever be unmindful of the contribution this state has made to our national greatness.

Its leaders have shaped our destiny long before the great republic was born. Its principles have guided our footsteps in times of crisis as well as in times of calm. Its democratic institutions — including this historic body — have served as beacon lights for other nations as well as our sister states.

For what Pericles said to the Athenians has long been true of this commonwealth: “We do not imitate — for we are a model to others.”

And so it is that I carry with me from this state to that high and lonely office to which I now succeed more than fond memories of firm friendships. The enduring qualities of Massachusetts — the common threads woven by the Pilgrim and the Puritan, the fisherman and the farmer, the Yankee and the immigrant — will not be and could not be forgot-

ten in this nation’s executive mansion.

They are an indelible part of my life, my convictions, my view of the past, and my hopes for the future.

Allow me to illustrate: During the last sixty days, I have been at the task of constructing an administration. It has been a long and deliberate process. Some have counseled greater speed. Others have counseled more expedient tests.

But I have been guided by the standard John Winthrop set before his shipmates on the flagship Arbella three hundred and thirty-one years ago, as they, too, faced the task of building a new government on a perilous frontier.

“We must always consider,” he said, “that we shall be as a city upon a hill — the eyes of all people are upon us.”

Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us — and our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill — constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities.

For we are setting out upon a voyage in 1961 no less hazardous than that undertaken by the Arbella in 1630. We are committing ourselves to tasks of statecraft no less awesome than that of governing the Massachusetts Bay Colony, beset as it was then by terror without and disorder within.

History will not judge our endeavors — and a government cannot be selected — merely on the basis of color or creed or even party affiliation. Neither will competence and loyalty and stature, while essential to the utmost, suffice in times such as these.

For of those to whom much is given, much is required. And when at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each one of us — recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state — our success or failure, in whatever office we may hold, will be measured by the answers to four questions:

First, were we truly men of courage — with the courage to stand up to one’s enemies — and the courage to stand up, when necessary, to one’s as-

sociates — the courage to resist public pressure, as well as private greed?

Secondly, were we truly men of judgment — with perceptive judgment of the future as well as the past — of our own mistakes as well as the mistakes of others — with enough wisdom to know that we did not know, and enough candor to admit it?

Third, were we truly men of integrity — men who never ran out on either the principles in which they believed or the people who believed in them — men who believed in us — men whom neither financial gain nor political ambition could ever divert from the fulfillment of our sacred trust?

Finally, were we truly men of dedication — with an honor mortgaged to no single individual or group, and compromised by no private obligation

or aim, but devoted solely to serving the public good and the national interest.

Courage — judgment — integrity — dedication — these are the historic qualities of the Bay Colony and the Bay State — the qualities which this state has consistently sent to this chamber on Beacon Hill here in Boston and to Capitol Hill back in Washington.

And these are the qualities which, with God's help, this son of Massachusetts hopes will characterize our government's conduct in the four stormy years that lie ahead.

Humbly I ask His help in that undertaking — but aware that on earth His will is worked by men. I ask for your help and your prayers, as I embark on this new and solemn journey.

What principles from Winthrop's speech did Kennedy adopt for his own administration?

How do you think Kennedy would define the American Dream?

How has the Kennedy dream turned into a nightmare?

Lesson 4: Ronald Reagan's American Dream

Kennedy wasn't the only politician to allude to Winthrop's sermon and ideal of the "City on a Hill." Listen to (and watch) Ronald Reagan's farewell speech to the nation at americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganfarewelladdress.html

Follow along with the text of the speech (below), highlighting references to the American Dream or the "City on a Hill" idea.

Text of Speech

My fellow Americans:
 This is the 34th time I'll speak to you from the Oval Office and the last. We've been together 8 years now, and soon it'll be time for me to go. But before I do, I wanted to share some thoughts, some of which I've been saving for a long time. It's been the honor of my life to be your President. So many of you have written the past few weeks to say thanks, but I could say as much to you. Nancy and I are grateful for the opportunity you gave us to serve. One of the things about the Presidency is that you're always somewhat apart. You spent a lot of time going by too fast in a car someone else is driving, and seeing the people through tinted glass — the parents holding up a child, and the wave you saw too late and couldn't return. And so many times I wanted to stop and reach out from behind the glass, and connect. Well, maybe I can do a little of that tonight.

People ask how I feel about leaving. And the fact is, "parting is such sweet sorrow." The sweet part is California and the ranch and freedom. The sorrow — the goodbyes, of course, and leaving this beautiful place.

You know, down the hall and up the stairs from this office is the part of the White House where the President and his family live. There are a few favorite windows I have up there that I like to stand and look out of early in the morning. The view is over the grounds here to the Washington Monument, and then the Mall and the Jefferson Memorial. But on mornings when the humidity is low, you can see



past the Jefferson to the river, the Potomac, and the Virginia shore. Someone said that's the view Lincoln had when he saw the smoke rising from the Battle of Bull Run. Well I see more prosaic things: the grass on the banks, the morning traffic as people make their way to work, now and then a sailboat on the river.

I've been thinking a bit at that window. I've been reflecting on what the past 8 years have meant and mean. And the image that comes to mind like a refrain is a nautical one — a small story about a big ship, and a refugee, and a sailor. It was back in the early eighties, at the height of the boat people. And the sailor was hard at work on the carrier Midway, which was patrolling the South China Sea. The sailor, like most American servicemen, was young, smart, and fiercely observant. The crew spied on the horizon a leaky little boat. And crammed inside were refugees from Indochina hoping to get to

America. The Midway sent a small launch to bring them to the ship and safety. As the refugees made their way through the choppy seas, one spied the sailor on deck, and stood up, and called out to him. He yelled, "Hello, American sailor. Hello, freedom man."

A small moment with a big meaning, a moment the sailor, who wrote it in a letter, couldn't get out of his mind. And, when I saw it, neither could I. Because that's what it has to — it was to be an American in the 1980's. We stood, again, for freedom. I know we always have, but in the past few years the world again — and in a way, we ourselves — rediscovered it. It's been quite a journey this decade, and we held together through some stormy seas. And at the end, together, we're reaching our destination.

The fact is, from Grenada to the Washington and Moscow summits, from the recession of '81 to '82, to the expansion that began in late '82 and continues to this day, we've made a difference. The way I see it, there were two great triumphs, two things that I'm



proudest of. One is the economic recovery, in which the people of America created — and filled — 19 million new jobs. The other is the recovery of our morale. America is respected again in the world and looked to for leadership.

Something that happened to me a few years ago reflects some of this. It was back in 1981, and I was attending my first big economic summit, which was held that year in Canada. The meeting place rotates among the member countries. The opening meeting was a formal dinner for the heads of government of the seven industrialized nations. Well I sat there like the new kid in school and listened, and it was all Francois this and Helmut that. They dropped titles and spoke to one another on a first-name basis. Well, at one point I sort of leaned in and said, "My name's Ron." Well, in that same year, we began the actions we felt would ignite an economic comeback — cut taxes and regulation, started to cut spending. And soon the recovery began. Two years later, another economic summit with pretty much the same cast. At the big opening meeting we all got together, and all of a sudden, just for a moment, I saw that everyone was just sitting there looking at me. And then one of them broke the silence. "Tell us about the American miracle," he said.

Well, back in 1980, when I was running for President, it was all so different. Some pundits said our programs would result in catastrophe. Our views on foreign affairs would cause war. Our plans for the economy would cause inflation to soar and bring about economic collapse. I even remember one highly respected economist saying, back in 1982, that "The engines of economic growth have shut down here, and they're likely to stay that way for years to come." Well, he and the other opinion leaders were wrong. The fact is what they called "radical" was really "right." What they called "dangerous" was just "desperately needed."

And in all of that time I won a nickname, "The Great Communicator." But I never thought it was my style or the words I used that made a difference: it was the content. I wasn't a great communicator, but I communicated great things, and they didn't spring full bloom from my brow, they came from

the heart of a great nation — from our experience, our wisdom, and our belief in the principles that have guided us for two centuries. They called it the “Reagan Revolution.” Well, I’ll accept that, but for me it always seemed more like the great rediscovery, a rediscovery of our values and our common sense.

Common sense told us that when you put a big tax on something, the people will produce less of it. So, we cut the people’s tax rates, and the people produced more than ever before. The economy bloomed like a plant that had been cut back and could now grow quicker and stronger. Our economic program brought about the longest peacetime expansion in our history: real family income up, the poverty rate down, entrepreneurship booming, and an explosion in research and new technology. We’re exporting more than ever because American industry became more competitive. And at the same time, we summoned the national will to knock down protectionist walls abroad instead of erecting them at home.

Common sense also told us that to preserve the peace, we’d have to become strong again after years of weakness and confusion. So, we rebuilt our defenses, and this New Year we toasted the new peacefulness around the globe. Not only have the superpowers actually begun to reduce their stockpiles of nuclear weapons — and hope for even more progress is bright — but the regional conflicts that rack the globe are also beginning to cease. The Persian Gulf is no longer a war zone. The Soviets are leaving Afghanistan. The Vietnamese are preparing to pull out of Cambodia, and an American-mediated accord will soon send 50,000 Cuban troops home from Angola.

The lesson of all this was, of course, that because we’re a great nation, our challenges seem complex. It will always be this way. But as long as we remember our first principles and believe in ourselves, the future will always be ours. And something else we learned: Once you begin a great movement, there’s no telling where it’ll end. We meant to change a nation, and instead, we changed a world.

Countries across the globe are turning to free markets and free speech and turning away from the

ideologies of the past. For them, the great rediscovery of the 1980’s has been that, lo and behold, the moral way of government is the practical way of government: Democracy, the profoundly good, is also the profoundly productive.

When you’ve got to the point when you can celebrate the anniversaries of your 39th birthday, you can sit back sometimes, review your life, and see it flowing before you. For me there was a fork in the river, and it was right in the middle of my life. I never meant to go into politics. It wasn’t my intention when I was young. But I was raised to believe you had to pay your way for the blessings bestowed on you. I was happy with my career in the entertainment world, but I ultimately went into politics because I wanted to protect something precious. Ours was the first revolution in the history of mankind that truly reversed the course of government, and with three little words: “We the People.” “We the People” tell the government what to do; it doesn’t tell us. “We the People” are the driver; the government is the car, and we decide where it should go, and by what route, and how fast. Almost all the world’s constitutions are documents in which governments tell the people what their privileges are. Our Constitution is a document in which “We the People” tell the government what it is allowed to do. “We the People” are free. This belief has been the underlying basis for everything I’ve tried to do these past 8 years.

But back in the 1960’s, when I began, it seemed to me that we’d begun reversing the order of things — that through more and more rules and regulations and confiscatory taxes, the government was taking more of our money, more of our options, and more of our freedom. I went into politics in part to put up my hand and say, “Stop.” I was a citizen politician, and it seemed the right thing for a citizen to do.

I think we have stopped a lot of what needed stopping. And I hope we have once again reminded people that man is not free unless government is limited. There’s a clear cause and effect here that is as neat and predictable as a law of physics: “As government expands, liberty contracts.”

Nothing is less free than pure communism — and yet we have, the past few years, forged a satisfying new closeness with the Soviet Union. I've been asked if this isn't a gamble, and my answer is no because we're basing our actions not on words but deeds. The detente of this 1970's was based not on actions but promises. They'd promise to treat their own people and the people of the world better. But the gulag was still the gulag, and the state was still expansionist, and they still waged proxy wars in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Well, this time, so far, it's different. President Gorbachev has brought about some internal democratic reforms and begun the withdrawal from Afghanistan. He has also freed prisoners whose names I've given him every time we've met.

But life has a way of reminding you of big things through small incidents. Once, during the heady days of the Moscow summit, Nancy and I decided to break off from the entourage one afternoon to visit the shops on Arbat Street — that's a little street just off Moscow's main shopping area. Even though our visit was a surprise, every Russian there immediately recognized us and called out our names and reached for our hands. We were just about swept away by the warmth. You could almost feel the possibilities in all that joy. But within seconds, a KGB detail pushed their way toward us and began pushing and shoving the people in the crowd. It was an interesting moment. It reminded me that while the man on the street in the Soviet Union yearns for peace, the government is Communist. And those who run it are Communists, and that means we and they view such issues as freedom and human rights very differently.

We must keep up our guard, but we must also continue to work together to lessen and eliminate tension and mistrust. My view is that President Gorbachev is different from previous Soviet leaders. I think he knows some of the things wrong with his society and is trying to fix them. We wish him well. And we'll continue to work to make sure that the Soviet Union that eventually emerges from this process is a less threatening one. What it all boils down to is this: I want the new closeness to continue.

And it will, as long as we make it clear that we will continue to act in a certain way as long as they continue to act in a helpful manner. If and when they don't, at first pull your punches. If they persist, pull the plug. It's still trust but verify. It's still play, but cut the cards. It's still watch closely. And don't be afraid to see what you see.

I've been asked if I have any regrets. Well, I do. The deficit is one. I've been talking a great deal about that lately, but tonight isn't for arguments, and I'm going to hold my tongue. But an observation: I've had my share of victories in the Congress, but what few people noticed is that I never won anything you didn't win for me. They never saw my troops; they never saw Reagan's regiments, the American people. You won every battle with every call you made and letter you wrote demanding action. Well, action is still needed. If we're to finish the job, Reagan's regiments will have to become the Bush brigades. Soon he'll be the Chief, and he'll need you every bit as much as I did.

Finally, there is a great tradition of warnings in Presidential farewells, and I've got one that's been on my mind for some time. But oddly enough it starts with one of the things I'm proudest of in the past 8 years: the resurgence of national pride that I called, "The New Patriotism." This national feeling is good, but it won't count for much, and it won't last unless it's grounded in thoughtfulness and knowledge.

An informed patriotism is what we want. And are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world? Those of us who are over 35 or so years of age grew up in a different America. We were taught, very directly, what it means to be an American. And we absorbed, almost in the air, a love of country and an appreciation of its institutions. If you didn't get these things from your family you got them from the neighborhood, from the father down the street who fought in Korea or the family who lost someone at Anzio. Or you could get a sense of patriotism from school. And if all else failed you could get a sense of patriotism from the popular culture. The movies celebrated democratic values and implicitly reinforced the idea that America was special.

TV was like that, too, through the mid-sixties.

But now, we're about to enter the nineties, and some things have changed. Younger parents aren't sure that an unambivalent appreciation of America is the right thing to teach modern children. And as for those who create the popular culture, well-grounded patriotism is no longer the style. Our spirit is back, but we haven't reinstitutionalized it. We've got to do a better job of getting across that America is freedom — freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of enterprise. And freedom is special and rare. It's fragile; it needs protection [protection].



So, we've got to teach history based not on what's in fashion but what's important — why the Pilgrims came here, who Jimmy Doolittle was, and what those 30 seconds over Tokyo meant. You know, 4 years ago on the 40th anniversary of D-day, I read a letter from a young woman writing to her late father, who had fought on Omaha Beach. Her name was Lisa Zanatta Henn, and she said, "We will always remember, we will never forget what the boys of Normandy did." Well, let's help her keep her word. If we forget what we did, we won't know who we are. I'm warning of an eradication of that — of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit. Let's start with some basics: more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual.

And let me offer lesson number one about America: All great change in America begins at the dinner table. So, tomorrow night in the kitchen I hope the talking begins. And children, if your parents haven't been teaching you what it means to be an American, let 'em know and nail 'em on it. That would be a very American thing to do.

And that's about all I have to say tonight, except for one thing. The past few days when I've been at

that window upstairs, I've thought a bit of the "shining city upon a hill." The phrase comes from John Winthrop, who wrote it to describe the America he imagined. What he imagined was important because he was an early Pilgrim, an early freedom

man. He journeyed here on what today we'd call a little wooden boat; and like the other Pilgrims, he was looking for a home that would be free. I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, windswept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all

kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still.

And how stands the city on this winter night? More prosperous, more secure, and happier than it was 8 years ago. But more than that: After 200 years, two centuries, she still stands strong and true on the granite ridge, and her glow has held steady no matter what storm. And she's still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home.

We've done our part. And as I walk off into the city streets, a final word to the men and women of the Reagan Revolution, the men and women across America who for 8 years did the work that brought America back. My friends: We did it. We weren't just marking time. We made a difference. We made the city stronger; we made the city freer; and we left her in good hands. All in all, not bad — not bad at all.

And so, goodbye, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

What is the idea of the American Dream in this speech?

How does this idea of the American Dream compare with Winthrop's?

Rudy Guiliani used the "City on a Hill" allusion when he nominated John McCain for president at the 2008 Republican National Convention. If you were a speechwriter, what would you see as the value of using this particular phrase?

Lesson 5: Utopia

Think about the word “utopia.” It comes from the title of a book written in 1516 by Sir Thomas More. Can you define it? If you’re not clear on it, look it up in the dictionary and see how your idea matches with the definition.

Look at this picture of a 1950s housewife:



What is the idea of the American Dream presented in this picture?
 In what way is it utopic?

How is this version of the American Dream different from today’s version?

How is it the same? _____

Now look at this painting by Grant Wood called *Spring in Townby*:



What is the idea of the American Dream presented in this picture?
 In what way is it utopic?

Notice the church in the center of town. How does that connect to the other versions of the American Dream you have read?

Lesson 6: Dystopia

The prefix “dys” means “apart, away, negative, bad.” We use it in words like “dysfunctional” or “disappear.” When paired with “utopia” to give us “dystopia,” we have an image of a place that is the opposite of ideal, or ideal gone bad.

Read Langston Hughes’s poem *A Dream Deferred*. As you read, think of how this presents a dystopic view of the American Dream.

A Dream Deferred

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?

This poem was published in 1951. What happened after that that seems a fulfillment of Hughes’ idea?

In what way is the American Dream portrayed as dystopic in this poem?

Can you agree that a dream “deferred” can be a disaster? What does timing have to do with dreams?

The painter Thomas Cole did a series of works called *The Course of the Empire*. It was based on a few lines from a poem by the poet Byron about the rise and fall of humanity. Byron wrote:

*There is the moral of all human tales;
This but the same rehearsal of the past*

*First Freedom, and then Glory: when that fails
Wealth, vice, corruption*

Look through the paintings in the series, noticing how the sun rises and moves through the sky like a day beginning with the sun rise and ending with the sunset. The mountain in the background is a constant, but the foreground changes drastically. As you look through the paintings, think about the parallels between them and the rise and fall of civilizations.

Painting 1:
*The Course of the Empire —
Savage State*



Painting 2:
*The Course of the Empire —
Pastoral State*



Painting 3:
*The Course of
the Empire —
Consummation
of the Empire*



Painting 4:
*The Course of
the Empire —
Destruction*



Painting 5:
*The Course of
the Empire —
Desolation*



Do you think that they are an appropriate metaphor for the rise and fall of America? If so, what stage do you think America is in?

Are the paintings utopic and dystopic? Can the same place be both utopic and dystopic?

For the future: As you read books by American authors, keep these ideas in the back of your mind. What is the manifestation of the American Dream in the work? What is the protagonist's view of it? Is it attained? Is it utopic or dystopic?

Think about your own feelings about the American Dream. Does it still exist? What is the dream for you?

Lesson 7: Putting it all together

Create your own American Dream portfolio. It should include the following:

Soundtrack

- Select at least three songs that portray some idea of the American Dream – someone seeking something that will make he/she happy, someone who has a vision of what success will look like, etc.
- Make at least one of the songs utopic and at least one dystopic.
- Write one paragraph about each song, explaining the lyrics' connection to the American Dream.

Art

- Select an image (painting, photograph, drawing) that reflects a manifestation of the American Dream.
- In a well-organized paragraph, explain the connection between the image you selected and one of the images discussed in this lesson.

Literature

- Select a piece of literature (poem, essay, short story, or novel) that explores the idea of the American Dream in some way. The connection may be overt, or it may be subtle. In an essay of no fewer than 500 words, describe how the work could be changed to shift it from utopic to dystopic or vice versa.

Collect: Collect at least five quotes on the American Dream. Find at least two quotes of each type (utopic/dystopic). Choose the one quote you feel best reflects your own idea of the American Dream. Explain in one well-written paragraph why this quote resonates with you.

Create: Using one of the three genres above (music, art, literature), create a version of the American Dream, either utopic or dystopic. You may write a song, draw a picture, create a collage, paint a painting, write a poem, or any other medium you chose. The work should be clearly connected to the ideas in the lesson, and should be of sufficient quality that it is clear to the viewer or reader that you dedicated both thought and time to its production. Imagine that it were to be included in your college application. That is the level of quality you should seek.

Assessment

The rubric below is intended to be used to evaluate the portfolio & written reflection throughout the unit.

AMERICAN DREAM STUDENT PORTFOLIO RUBRIC						
CATEGORY	5	4	3	2	1	NOTES
Required Items	Portfolio contains superior examples of all required elements.	Portfolio contains above-average examples of required elements.	Portfolio contains acceptable examples of all required elements.	Portfolio contains less than acceptable examples of all required elements or is missing required elements.	Portfolio contains poor examples of required elements and/or is missing required elements.	
Overall Presentation	Portfolio is exceptionally well-presented. Unusual creativity or connection is evident.	Portfolio is well-presented. Elements are neatly presented and organized.	Portfolio is fairly well-presented. Elements are neatly presented and organized for the most part.	Portfolio is not well-presented. Elements are not neatly presented and/or organized.	Portfolio is poorly presented.	
Application of Concepts/ Skills	Portfolio clearly and deeply reflects idea of the American Dream with clarity and thoroughness.	Portfolio reflects the idea of the American Dream with clarity and thoroughness.	Portfolio generally reflects idea of American Dream. Student demonstrates an understanding of concept and its application.	Portfolio fails to clearly reflect student's understanding and application of the idea of the American Dream.	Portfolio fails to reflect student's understanding of the American Dream.	
Personal Reflection	Student's reflections are thorough, thoughtful, and clearly demonstrate the student's superior understanding.	Student's reflections are thorough, thoughtful, and clearly demonstrate the student's understanding of the ideas discussed.	Student's reflections adequately display the student's understanding of the ideas discussed.	Student's reflections are not entirely adequate to display the student's understanding of the ideas discussed.	Student's reflections are inadequate, shallow, and/or fail to display the understanding of the ideas discussed.	
Create	Student's creation demonstrates not only mastery of the content but also a significant investment of time and attention. Product exceeds expectations.	The student's creation demonstrates mastery of the content and above-average investment of time and attention.	The student's creation demonstrates understanding of the content and average investment of time and attention.	Student's creation does not adequately demonstrate understanding of content and reflects below-average investment of time and attention.	The student's creation is inadequate and reflects unacceptable investment of time and attention.	