The American Dream

Literary Unit

Beccie Price  
Oklahoma  
NEH Steinbeck Institute 2013

Texts

Essay – “Squatter’s Camp” John Steinbeck

Painting – “Room in New York” Edward Hopper

Poem – “I Hear America Singing” Walt Whitman

Quote from Thoreau: “I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”

Objectives: 1) Students will read and think analytically.

2) Students will be able to understand opposing views.

3) Students will identify main idea: 1) claim, 2) data, 3) unspoken because

4) Students will listen respectively and respond respectively to others’ ideas.

5) Students will be able to apply these literary works to contemporary life.

A. Portfolios: Students will first write a short paragraph interpreting the quote and agreeing or disagreeing with the idea. They will also keep a list of words, both positive and negative, describing The American Dream.

B. Teacher will display a copy of “Room in New York” by Edward Hopper and lead the class in discussing the following questions: What is the American Dream? What, in this painting, is indicative of the American Dream? Have these people achieved it? Are these people happy? How does the painter convey their emotional state? Would the painter agree with the quote? What in the painting makes you think that he would or would not? In their portfolios, students, after class discussion, will write a paragraph answering the last question.

C. Students will read aloud “Squatter’s Camp.” After reading the selection, a class discussion will follow with these questions: Have these people achieved the American Dream? If not, what has gone wrong? Whose fault is their failure? Are these circumstances still possible today? Will readers sympathize with these “squatters”? Why or why not? What words does Steinbeck use to elicit sympathy from the reader? Would these people agree or disagree with the quote? Why or why not? In their portfolios, students will answer the last two questions.

Worksheet: Students will complete a worksheet modeled on the state mandated test. This worksheet will include vocabulary, application of literary terms, inferences, and reading comprehension.

D. Teacher will read “I Hear America Singing” aloud. She will read it a second time, applying literary terms. A class discussion will follow with these questions: Have these people achieved the American Dream? What words does Whitman use that makes the reader think that the characters are happy or unhappy? Would these people agree or disagree with the quote? Why or why not? Write a paragraph in portfolios answering the last two questions.

Worksheet: Students will have a worksheet modeled on the state mandated test, encompassing vocabulary, inferences, reading comprehension, and application of literary terms. Students will also complete a Venn diagram showing similarities and differences of the two literary works.

E. Each student will use their list of words, both positive and negative, to paint an abstract picture. They will choose ten words and assign a color to each word. They will write those words on paper and then paint over them. These “abstract paintings” will be displayed in the hallway.

F. Writing Assignment: Students will define “The American Dream.” They will explain how the authors and the painter make this dream seem realistic and attainable. They must cite evidence from all three sources. They will refer back to the paragraphs they have written in their portfolios.

G. Working in groups of 3-4, students will re-write “I Hear America Singing” using De Queen or Arkansas instead of America. They will then illustrate their poem.