**American Literature Course Syllabus**

Ms. Rankin lrankin@losd.ca (831) 477 – 0302 (ex. 256)

**Course Description**

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| Students analyze a diverse collection of American voices in literature and film as they relate to manifestations of “The American Dream” across time, regions, and cultures. Students think critically about how depictions of “The American Dream” have evolved and been perpetuated by literature and the media, and use this understanding to create textual and visual responses, which reflect a deep understanding and personal perspective on “The American Dream.” Students disseminate this extensive literary knowledge through writing, discussion, and speech. Throughout the course, students develop as readers, critical thinkers, and writers, in the analysis and design of their own American Dreams. |

**Materials Required Daily**

A daily journal/composition notebook

Binder/Folder for handouts, homework with college ruled paper

Current Textbook in use

Pencil/pen/eraser

Flash drive/USB memory stick

Homework/ Projects completed

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| **List of Possible Readings & Films**  **Novels/texts (in addition to many essays, poems, and podcasts)**  *The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury  *The Crucible,* by Aurthur Miller  *Lost in Yonkers*, by Neil Simon  *As I Lay Dying*, by William Faulkner  *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, (excerpts)  *Declaration of Independence*  *The Grapes of Wrath* (excerpts), by John Steinbeck  *Invisible Man* (excerpts), by Ralph Ellison  *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain  *Black Like Me* (excerpts), by John Howard Griffin  *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (excerpts), by Malcolm X and Alex Haley  *Into the Wild*, by Jon Krakauer  *White Noise,* by Don DeLillo *The Pearl,* by John Steinbeck  *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald  *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, excerpts, by             Hunter S. Thompson  *A Raisin in the Sun* (excerpts), by Lorraine Hansberry  *Moby Dick,* by Herman Melville, excerpts  *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller  *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (excerpts), by Barack Obama  *Water for Elephants,* bySara Gruen  *Anthem,* by Ayn Rand  **Films** *(possible supplemental excerpts to be shown from the following…):*  The Godfather, by Francis Ford Coppola The Birth of a Nation, by D.W. Griffith  Easy Rider, by Dennis Hopper  Brazil, by Terry Gilliam  One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, by Milos Forman  The Color Purple, by Steven Spielberg  American Experience: The Crash of 1929, by PBSAmerican Experience: The Kennedys, by PBS  American Experience: Surviving the Dust Bowl, by PBS  The Royal Tenenbaums, by Wes Andersen  Rebel Without a Cause, by Nicolas RayHappy Days, Leave It to Beaver, The Simpsons, Arrested Development  Citizen Kane, by Orson Welles  Persepolis, directed by Vincent Paronnaud  Black Like Me, by Carl Lerner  Malcom X, by Spike Lee  Into the Wild, by Sean Penn  I Heart Huckabees, directed by David O. Russell  Iconoclasts: Sean Penn and Jon Krakauer, Episode 1 Season 3, by Sundance ChannelThe Persuaders, by Frontline  Objectified, by Gary Hustwit  Garrison Keillor on Being Famous, by PBS American Masters Thank You for Smoking, directed by Jason Reitman  Office Space, by Mike Judge American Beauty, by Sam Mendes  Wall Street, directed by Oliver Stone  Taxi Driver, by Martin Scorsese |

**Objectives:** Students will be able to…

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| * Analyze American literature and visual imagery across time, focusing on the theme of “The American Dream.” * Explain the role and functions of text and mass media as tools for reflection and analysis, as well as a tools for the creation, evolution, and promotion of “The American Dream.” * Reflect upon and communicate personal responses to “The American Dream” using standard writing conventions, varied rhetorical strategies, and multiple media technologies * Analyze author’s ideas, presentation, and writing techniques through discussion and written expression * Discuss and present American social, economic, and political ideals as they have developed and changed across time |

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| **UNIT 1 : Identity, Culture & the American Dream**  **Essential Question:** “How is identity affected by the fundamental values of the American Dream and in what ways can this construction be represented through images?”  Through an examination of various cultural symbols -- textual and visual -- students collaboratively analyze the emergent concept of “The American Dream” and its expression in the literary and visual arts. Students gain foundational skills in writing and composition, creating narratives. Through these original narratives, students communicate a personal understanding of how our cultural identities are tied to ever-changing conceptions of “The American Dream.”  *The American Dream Research Paper:* Students begin their search [with the website http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/97/dream/index.html](http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/97/dream/index.html) and subsequently find a minimum of five other sources. They define “The American Dream”, where this notion originates, its various manifestations and how it has developed across American History, regions, and cultures.  They write a 3-4 page research report in MLA format.  **UNIT 2: Freedom & Independence**  **Essential Question:** “How does the story of the struggle for freedom and independence unfold, and how is this unfolding depicted through literary arts?”   In unit two, students explore the tension between individual freedom and social responsibility by analyzing performance-based literature, ranging from traditional speeches and plays to non-traditional storyboards and graphic novels. Students examine how the choice of tone, diction, style, and point-of-view determine the content, meaning, and relative “truth” of a narrative, whether fictional or non-fiction.  *This I Believe Essay:*  Students will write a 2 page composition about something that they value, and convey their individual convictions to others through a passionate speech to the class  **UNIT 3: Family & Home**  **Essential Question:** “Where does the American Dream reside, and what role does ‘family’ play in achieving the Dream? How are the American norms of ‘family’ and ‘home’ depicted through literature?”  Students analyze contrasting images of American families across time and cultures, as portrayed by canonical short-form literature, plays, and cinema. Students write a short play, either original or adapted from a course text, in response to the theme of ‘family’ or ‘home.’  *Analytical Narrative:* Students write a 3-4 page narrative about their own family, which must include dialogue and explore how a member of their family is pursuing a dream.  Students include information found in the interviews.  Students also compare and contrast their own family with representations of family in film and literature.  Students analyze the relationship between their own families and notions of the ideal family, as reflected in “The American Dream.”  **UNIT 4: Individualism, Community & Justice**  **Essential Question:** “How is the American Dream written -- how is it written by the individual, and how is it written by the community? How do images portray the relationship between the individual and the community?”  Students research, analyze, and evaluate the evolution of American thought about social responsibility, and the 20th Century and 21st Century perceptions of the relationship between civics, society, and the individual. In the first part of the unit, an emphasis is placed on the study of political speeches and works of non-fiction in the form of print, broadcast, and online media. Students go on to conduct independent research to uncover the current political and social climate of their own communities, and respond by creating a persuasive speech that addresses a local need or social issue and reflects a personal perspective.  *Problem & Solution Persuasive Essay:* Students write a 3-4 page persuasive research-based essay, which identifies a problem in the community, uses factual information to prove severity of the issue, and creates a solution that all classmates can participate in.     **UNIT 5: Race, Gender & Class**  **Essential Question:** “What colors represent you and your American Dream, and why? How do images depict issues of race, gender, and class?”  Through analysis and evaluation of poetry and other forms of creative writing, and the study and manipulation of connotations and subtle tones in a text, students examine methods of writing using tone, imagery, ‘color,’ and word choice to communicate ideas and establish moods.  *Evaluative Essay:*  Students evaluate the use of diction and in 4-5 primary sources. In a 2-3 page paper, students integrate their personal understanding of color, gender, and race with examples of these differentiations depicted in text and film in order to evaluate portrayal and representation.  **UNIT 6: Money, Consumption & Existentialism**  **Essential Question:** “Can you purchase the Dream? How does the American media portray the Dream as a material pursuit? How do some works of American literature treat the Dream as an existential struggle?”  Through the critical analysis of creative and persuasive literature, print ads, and television commercials, students explore how the glorification and criticism of consumption shape our contemporary values and the beliefs we hold about ourselves and “The American Dream.” Students respond by producing an original ‘commercial’ message, revealing a personal and informed perspective on the relationship between materialism, existentialism, and the American Dream.  *Reflective Essay:*  Students write a 2-3 page essay in which they reflect upon their own behavior as consumers. Using their logs as well as their readings as starting points for reflection, students articulate their own values as consumers and reflect upon the personal and social consequences of their choices.  **UNIT 7: Status & Fame**  **Essential Question:** “If you’re famous, have you achieved the Dream? What role do images play in perpetuating the allure of high-status and fame?”  Students explore the nature of today’s ‘celebrity culture’ by examining works of creative writing and visual art, as well historical and contemporary news articles about, and interviews with, famous and ‘everyday’ Americans alike. Students respond by writing their own magazine articles that shed light on the themes of ‘status’ and ‘fame.’  *Analytical Essay:* In a 3-4 page essay, students explore the causes and effects of fame in The Great Gatsby.  How does Gatsby experience fame and why?  Why is he famous and how do others treat him because of his fame?  What are the effects of this fame on his personal life, career, and relationships?  **UNIT 8: Aspiration, Failure & Success**   **Essential Question:** “How has the notion of the American Dream been created, sustained, and altered throughout American history, in text and in images? How do I personally define failure and success, and how can I illustrate my own ideas about the American Dream?”  Students’ literary studies culminate in the planning and execution of an original final project that addresses any aspect of ‘The American Dream.’ Students reveal a personal and informed perspective on ‘aspiration, failure and success’ in support of a narrative or rhetorical goal, which they will present to the class.  *Reflective Essay: Final Self-Assessment of Final Project, Yearlong Journey.* Students write a 3-4 page final self-assessment of their final project, their journey to get there, the progress they feel that they have made in all skills areas (reading, writing, public speaking, critical thinking, media production, team-work, leadership, citizenship, and presentation), and goals they have for the future, as well as strategies to achieve their success/dream. |

**Assessments/Grading:**

All assignments must be completed within ONE week of being assigned, losing one letter grade each day late.

Absences receive the number of days missed to be made up without penalty. Daily classwork MUST BE MADE UP upon return to school after an absence. It is your responsibility to find Ms. Rankin and get the make-up work.

Assignments should be typed in MLA format, or if impossible, written in pen, neatly, skipping every other line on non-shredded paper.

Assignments are due AT THE START OF CLASS, and MUST BE PRINTED OUT PRIOR TO ARRIVAL or will be considered late.

All typed papers/media projects must be submitted to digital class dropbox when it becomes available.

Your grade will be a total accumulation of points earned, each assignment worth anywhere from 10-100 points, depending on the depth/length of an assignment:

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| *Daily Classwork/homework*  *Quizzes*/ *Unit tests* *Peer Review and Editing* *Teamwork/Group Projects* *Individual projects/assignments*  *Presentations* *Discussions/Oral assessment* *Self-assessments* *Essays*/*Writing Assignments* *Socratic Seminars*  *Final project* |

\*\*Extra Credit can only be earned if all regular assignments have been completed

**Behavioral Expectations:**

1. Arrive on time, consistently, and use class time productively
2. Listen to the person addressing the class
3. Follow procedures and routines
4. Respect the learning environment and all members of class
5. Use positive language to express thoughts
6. Help maintain a clean classroom

**Consequences:**

1. Conference with teacher
2. Lunch/Afterschool detention
3. Phone call home
4. Referral/Possible suspension from class
5. Removal from class

**Communication:** Parents and students can check the link on the school website to Ms. Rankin’s homework calendar, as well as keep up to date on grades on Powerschool. Ms. Rankin is available at lunch and afterschool whenever a student needs extra help. This can be arranged in class or by email. She can also meet with parents/students 2nd period on Mondays & Wednesdays.

**Please sign the attached class contract** to acknowledge that you have read and understand the guidelines & policies of this class. Thank you; I look forward to a productive and creative year!

I welcome any questions, comments, ideas, field trip suggestions, or possible guest speaker appearances, so please don’t hesitate to contact me with your thoughts!

Ms. Lara Rankin

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