Colonial Writers and the American Dream  Lesson Plan

11th Grade Language Arts

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Topic: Explore the writings of the Colonial writers and their role in creating a separate American Identity giving hope and birth to the American Dream. On the block schedule, these activities would take approximately 30 minutes each day with much of the reading done outside of class. If you elect to read the assigned readings in class, the activities would take longer.

* I would suggest teachers read Robert H. Fossum & John K. Roth’s pamphlet titled, “The American Dream.” It is a great summary covering three centuries of history and literature surrounding the individual enigmatic pursuit of the “Dream.” It can be found online through the British Association for American Studies.

http://www.baas.ac.uk/resources/pamphlets/pamphdets.asp?id=6

If you have problems accessing this website, google the authors and it should pop up.

Day One - Introduction

Essential Questions:
- What is the American Dream? Is it alive today? Where did the phrase originate?
- What is the American identity? How was that identity created?
- What role did the founding fathers and other colonial writers play in developing the American Dream and creating the American Identity?

1. Read articles on the American Dream in class and discuss its reality or fallacy. (See below)

2. Assign students to read excerpts from the writings from the Colonial period to discover the views those people held regarding the American Dream. Assign excerpts from the writings of the following. If time permits, begin reading. (This list is a suggestion only. You may add or delete from this list.)
a. Benjamin Franklin
b. Thomas Jefferson
c. Thomas Paine
d. Phillis Wheatley
e. Patrick Henry
f. William Bartram

3. Note, in the next activity, each row will be formed into groups and assigned an individual person from the list above. As a group, they will analyze and discuss together the writings they have read. For simplification, students may only read on their assigned person; however, an understanding of the writings of all individuals will allow for a more enriching experience in the end. (These writings are teacher selected and can come from textbooks or from copied materials from other sources. Select writings familiar and available to you. We are using Prentice Hall’s Language Arts textbook, *The American Experience*; Holt, Reinhart, and Winston’s *Elements of Literature, 5th Course*; plus additional excerpts.

**Day Two – Group Assignments**

1. After students have done the assigned readings, place them in groups by row (1-6) and have them discuss and fill out the graphic organizer (chart) on their assigned individual’s response to the American Dream and the American Identity. (Graphic organizer is attached)

2. Even though they have read the passage as homework, I would have them re-read their selections again to each other so they become experts on their individual and his / her writing.

3. Provide each of these groups with additional biographical information on each author. Basically, each student needs to become an expert and share his / her information with students from other groups during the next class.

   a. Benjamin Franklin (row 1)
   b. Thomas Jefferson (row 2)
   c. Thomas Paine (row 3)
   d. Phillis Wheatley (row 4)
   e. Patrick Henry (row 5)
   f. William Bartram (row 6)

**Day Three – Jigsaw**

1. One student from each of the previous groups will now present and discuss their group’s findings to individuals from each of the other groups. (At this point, you have a person from the Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Phillis Wheatley, Patrick Henry, and William Bartram groups meeting together.)
Each individual will lead the discussion and help the other students fill out the chart on all of the individual colonial writers.  
(Note: I place students in groups by vertical rows on day one, and horizontal rows on day two.)

2. **Optional Writing activities** – Students may select one of the following writing activities:
   a. Following Benjamin Franklin’s model, write an almanac of your own. (2 pages)
   b. Write a speech either defending or refuting the validity of the American Dream. (2 pages)
   c. Using your notes, select one of the individuals whose work you have read, and discuss that person’s attitude towards the American dream. Organize your ideas and provide a clear thesis with evidence of your findings. (2-3 pages)
   d. What is the American Dream? Write a reflective essay where you define your dreams and how you can make those dreams a reality. (2-3 pages)
   e. Create a powerpoint presentation on one of the authors and his / her view of the American Dream. Or, create a biographical powerpoint one of the writer’s life and works. (15 slides)
   f. Put yourself in colonial Philadelphia at the time of the Constitutional Convention. Write a journal consisting of several entries and chronicle what you witnessed. (2-3 pages)
American Dream news articles – (Day One)

**American dream is still alive for many**

But gauges of family wealth, happiness vary

**By Peter Grier**  
Christian Science Monitor

**July 2007**

If the American dream means doing better than your parents did, then Mike Brockman’s not living it. Single, with a 10-year-old daughter, he’s a server at a Black Angus restaurant in Mesa, Ariz. His father at his age had a good, steady job as a machinist at TRW.

Today "there aren’t the kind of jobs available you used to get with a high school education, and work yourself up," says Brockman. "Now you have to have training or experience to start — then you can work your way up from there."

Norman Payne, on the other hand, thinks the American dream is alive and well. An immigrant from Panama, he’s lived in the United States for 16 years — and on June 28 in Boston he was sworn in as a U.S. citizen.

Payne works in customer service at Kodak and has high hopes for his young son and daughter.

"I don’t think the American dream has changed," he says. "I am trying to do everything I can do so that they can do better than I did."

Two hundred and thirty-one years after the 13 colonies declared their independence from Great Britain, is the United States still the land of opportunity, the light of hope for the poor of the world?

The economic dream that has united a diverse population for generations, that children would be more prosperous than their parents, is in question as perhaps never before.

Yet the nation’s overall standard of living remains high. Immigrants both legal and illegal arrive every year by the tens of thousands, testament to the U.S. economy’s continuing dynamism.

Overall, there is actually less economic mobility in the U.S. than in Canada and many European countries, notes John Morton, Managing Director, Program Planning and Economic Policy, for the Pew Charitable Trusts.

But for immigrants "the economic assimilation machine is in fact still very strong," says Morton, who is helping lead a long-term Pew project on the American dream’s health.

The phrase "American dream" is relatively recent. It was popularized in the 1930s by historian James Truslow Adams, who in his day was a widely read author on the major themes and figures of the nation, similar to, say, David McCullough today.

Yet the idea expressed by the phrase, that the U.S. was a land of opportunity where generation after generation would keep doing better and better, has always been the "gyroscope of American life," writes Southern Methodist University
political scientist Cal Jillson in his book "Pursuing the American Dream."

In some periods the American dream has seemed more attainable than in others, says Jillson. Most recently, it was alive and well in the era from the end of World War II through the early 1970s.

But since 1973, median family income has been essentially flat, says Jillson. "This is one of those periods in American history when to many ... the American dream seems illusory," Jillson says.

Some polls back up this contention. In a recent CBS News survey of 17- to 29-year-olds, only 25 percent of respondents said their generation would be better off than their parents. Forty-eight percent said they would be worse off.

The American dream is "obsolete," says Adam Gandelman, a Boston bike messenger. "It's a scam."

Income figures show that the days are gone when a single, stable income, typically earned by the father, was enough to launch the next generation to greater prosperity, according to a Pew report on economic mobility released this spring.

Today, men in their 30s earn about $5,000 less in real terms than did their fathers' generation, according to Pew.

That fits with Brockman's experience. Neither he, nor his father, graduated from college. Nor did his grandmother, but she worked her way up from a secretarial position to the executive ranks at GE.

"I couldn't get the job my dad had at age 30 without a degree, or waiting in line for years," he says.

However, overall family income is a different story. Families with men in their 30s today have about $4,000 more in annual income than did their parents' generation.

"The main reason that family incomes have risen is that more women have gone to work, buttressing the incomes of men by adding a second earner," notes the Pew economic mobility report.

Katy Curtis, a real estate agent in north Scottsdale, Ariz., did not work when she was in the family-rearing stage of life. "And we survived quite well," she says.

But her two daughters, now in that thirty-something cohort, are finding life economically more difficult, she says.

They see new cars and plasma TVs and other accoutrements everywhere, and they want them, too. "I think there are more demands made upon them materialistically, and it's harder," says Curtis. "Things have gone up in price, and I don't think salaries are commensurate with that."

Some experts point out that income measures today are an inexact gauge of family well-being.

Cash, for example, is just one part of compensation. "Total compensation includes such increasingly important components of workers' pay as health benefits, contributions to retirement plans, and paid vacations," writes Heritage Foundation labor expert James Sherk in a recent analysis of economic mobility.

And the use of the Consumer Price Index to calculate inflation-adjusted pay is a mistake, according to Sherk. Economists should use the more accurate implicit price deflator instead.

"The result of this mistake is that wage growth will almost always appear to lag
far behind productivity growth, even when workers are making gains," writes Sherk.

Nor does everyone judge the American dream to be purely based on monetary gain.

Mike Heitmann is a Kansas City resident visiting his wife's family in Boston, his four daughters in tow. "The American dream is having a strong family and living in a place where we have freedoms like we do in the U.S.," says Heitmann. "Family is the most important thing."

Wallace Sheppard will return to Iraq for his third tour there in October. The Army serviceman, based in Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, is also in Boston as a tourist. "I define the American dream as being happy," he says. "Money doesn't really matter if you make enough to sustain your family."

And for the masses in many other parts of the world, whether they are huddled or not, the Statue of Liberty still stands as their dream destination.

Joseph Nemorin today is a line cook at Nick's Italian Restaurant on Ocean Drive in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He's been there 17 years.

He arrived in the US from Haiti when he himself was 17. Today he is a legal permanent resident who says he has done better than his parents. He expects his children will do better than he has, because they were born in America.

The American dream is available for those who come to the US for the right reason, he says. "If you come to work, you don't get in trouble ... you should be doing fine, just like me."
WASHINGTON (AP) — The part of the American dream that says a man's children will be better off than he was has become a dream, not reality, according to an analysis of census data released Friday.

A generation ago, American men in their 30s had median annual incomes of about $40,000 compared with men of the same age who now make about $35,000 a year, adjusted for inflation.

That's a 12.5 percent drop between 1974 and 2004, according to data from the Pew Charitable Trusts' Economic Mobility Project.

To be sure, household incomes rose during the same period although the main reason is because there are more full-time working women, a new report on the project said.

While income is not the only measure of economic mobility, the findings challenge the historical presumption that each successive generation will be wealthier, said John E. Morton, the report's co-author.

"Today's data suggest that during a 30-year period of economic expansion, a rising tide did not lift all boats," Morton said in a release accompanying the report, "Economic Mobility: Is the American Dream Alive and Well?"

Of course, the men who run American companies don't have too much to complain about. CEO pay increased to 262 times the average worker's pay in 2005 from 35 times in 1978, according to the report's analysis of Congressional Budget Office statistics.

The pay gap between executives and the average worker continues to fuel outrage on Capitol Hill and among corporate shareholders nationwide. Many shareholder proposals to tie executive pay to a company's operating or market performance are introduced at corporate annual meetings every year.

Most Democrats favor giving shareholders at public corporations a voice in executive pay packages, while the White House and many Republicans favor a laissez-faire approach that includes regulators ensuring executive pay is transparent to workers and investors.

The Pew report also found that in numerous countries, including Denmark, Norway, Finland, Canada, Sweden, Germany and France, there is more economic mobility than in the U.S., when measuring by the income differences between generations.
The graphic organizer for notes for days two and three is on the next two pages.
Colonial Writers and the American Dream
Please use the following guide to take notes on the individual writers.

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<th>Thomas Paine</th>
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