

SVUSD CCSS Performance Task: STUDENT DIRECTIONS:

Course/Grade	English 3/Grade 11
Task Title	The American Dream
Task: Student Directions	<p>The idea of the American Dream is deeply rooted in the national psyche. The term was first used by James Truslow Adams in 1931. Adams defined the American dream in this way: "life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement regardless of social class or circumstances of birth." To most Americans, it has come to mean that through hard work and determination, one can achieve financial and personal success, defined as having a well-paying job, home ownership, and a family. The idea that each generation has the ability to do better than the previous one is also part of this dream.</p> <p>In recent times, especially since the Great Recession of 2008, some have questioned whether or not the American Dream is still alive. Is America still the land of opportunity that it once was? Is it still possible for people to achieve their dreams through hard work and determination?</p> <p>You have several sources to review. After you have reviewed these sources, you will answer some questions about them. Briefly scan the sources and the three questions that follow. Then, go back and read the sources carefully so you will have the information you will need to answer the questions and finalize your research. You may take notes.</p> <p>In Part 2, you will write an argumentative essay on a topic related to the sources.</p>
Directions for Beginning:	You will examine several sources. You can re-examine any of the sources as often as you like and take notes.
Research Question:	<p>After examining the research sources, use the remaining time in Part 1 to answer the questions about them. Your answers will help you think about the research sources you have read and evaluated, which will help you write your argumentative essay.</p> <p>You may use the graphic organizer for your notes; you can refer back to your notes at any time.</p>

Part 1
Sources for the Performance Task

Is the American Dream Still Alive?

Bob Miglani

It's not an easy question to answer, especially in our current times full of uncertainty in our work and in our lives. We read the news, go to work, run a business or meet friends and all we hear about is the challenging nature of life these days. And it feels as though the American dream is a distant memory of a past that we are trying so hard to grasp onto.

When my family moved from India to America in 1979, we had nothing more than a handful of clothes in an old suitcase and about \$75. When I would ask my dad why he brought us here, he always answered, "for a better opportunity of course!"

And those first several years, even though we had very little, we felt hopeful. My parents found employment and while it was hard work, it did put food on the table and allowed us to pitch in for the rent for the tiny apartment we shared with another family.

Over the years as I grew up, mowing lawns, delivering newspapers in the suburbs of small towns in New Jersey, I thought there was this formula for success and happiness in America. I thought that only if I got a good education, treated people right, worked harder than anyone else that I would be fine. And for a while that formula seemed to work as our effort allowed us to save enough money to buy a Dairy Queen franchise of our own, which we ran and my parents continue to run today for the last 23 years.

Running a quintessential piece of Americana, a Dairy Queen store wasn't all sunshine and rainbow sprinkles. It was hard but it gave us a path of possibilities as well as that tuition for college that my sisters and I desperately needed.

As I grew up and moved into a corporate career, I took the same formula for success and applied it to my work. Some years were better than others but I grew in my career and felt happy in my life.

But then things changed, especially since 2008. With constant change at work, the complex nature of careers, unpredictability of jobs and the speed of life, everything became overwhelming. And I found myself stuck, trying to figure out what happened to the American dream we came searching for not too long ago.

I couldn't let go of the notion that I did all I was supposed to do but how come I can't keep up.

Somewhere along the way, I felt as though I was let down by that 'formula' for life. 'Work hard and do everything right' wasn't working for me. I felt constantly stressed and worried about being able to save enough for my kids' education, provide for my family and care for my older parents.

What happened to the American dream?

My pattern of over thinking was interrupted by a chance trip to show a friend all that is India. It was there, in the capital of chaos that I rediscovered how to move forward in uncertain and complicated times. It was there which led me to rediscover my faith in human potential, which brought my family to America in the first place.

I came to the full realization that there is no formula for life. And a perfect job, a house, a business or a spouse is an illusion of our mind trying to bring order to a life that has none. Whether in India or America, life is not a linear proposition but one full of ups, downs and every way in between. I hadn't gotten here in a straight line and I wasn't going to move forward in a straight line.

There are no guarantees in America, only better chances.

I recognize that while the American dream for some may have lost its luster, it still remains vibrant within me. It is because it is in America that we have choices, chances and possibilities that my family didn't have in India.

Sure, gaps in incomes, health, jobs and the like exist in America, as they do in most countries. And each of us can play a role in addressing those in our own unique way. But the essence of the American dream is not a destination. We were never promised a big house and a fancy car. Only an opportunity to pursue possibilities, just as my father had stated so many years ago.

And while it helps to have a fair and just system, affordable education and supporting infrastructure and the rest, pursuing those possibilities is not necessarily up to someone else, it's up to us.

I realized that pursuing life's opportunities is dependent more on me and what actions I take than many of those external factors. It helps if things are always fair. But the reality is that no system is perfect and life isn't fair. But we can't wait for that perfect system because it may never appear. All we can do is to see an opportunity to learn, contribute and serve and get busy doing.

I believe the American dream is alive in each of us who wish to move forward and make a contribution to the place we work and to those we love. It is what we make of it. Realizing the imperfections of life was through a rediscovery of the land of my birth and getting a chance to serve and pursue opportunities are found in the land I now call home.

<http://bigthink.com/experts-corner/is-the-american-dream-still-alive>

Source 2

The Downsizing of the American Dream

Marianne Cooper

At the height of the Great Recession, [Jennifer Silva](#), a sociology professor at Bucknell University, interviewed working-class young people (ages 24 to 34) about coming of age in turbulent economic times. With good jobs harder to find and educational opportunities financially out of reach, Silva discovered that the young adults she talked with were letting go of traditional markers of adulthood. Rather than planning to go to college, buy a home, get married, and start a family, these young adults were bouncing from one low-paid job to the next, taking on debt to weather the tough times, and were wary of romantic attachments. Lacking the resources needed to stay afloat in the new economy, these young people were no longer setting their sights on the very things that have long symbolized the American dream: a home, a job, a family.

Recent data indicates they are in good company. This year a [survey](#) by Fannie Mae found that the share of consumers who said they would buy a home if they were to move has decreased and is now at an all-time survey low of 60 percent. According to the [latest employment statistics](#), 1.8 million Americans have not looked for work in at least the previous month, and 35 percent of them don't believe there are any jobs available. Another 6.5 million are only working part-time and would prefer to be working more. In 2015, [only 28 percent of those surveyed by The Atlantic and Aspen Institute](#) felt that a healthy marriage was an important part of their personal sense of the American dream and just 14 percent said that having children was important.

For the majority of Americans, the 2000s was a “[lost decade](#),” with wages flat lining or declining. Middle-class jobs disappeared during the Great Recession and many have never come back. Instead, [many of the fastest-growing sectors are those that pay the least](#). Median income remains [below pre-recession levels](#). How is all of this influencing how Americans are feeling about the American dream?

Surveys continue to show that Americans, in large numbers, still believe in many of the tenets of the American dream. For example, majorities of Americans believe that hard work will lead to success. But, their belief in the American dream is wavering. Between 1986 and 2011, around 50 percent of those polled by [Pew](#) consistently said they felt that the American dream was “somewhat alive.” However, over that same time period, the share who said it was “very alive” decreased by about half, and the share that felt it was “not really alive” more than doubled.

Majorities of Americans think it will get worse in the future. Survey after [survey](#) finds that when asked about the next generation, Americans are pessimistic, saying that it will be harder and take more effort for the next generation to get ahead.

These gloomy sentiments may be part of a more general shift: The majority of Americans once thought the playing field was more or less level. No more. Back in 1998, a [Gallup poll](#) about equal opportunity found that 68 percent thought the economic system was basically fair, while only 29 percent thought it was basically unfair. In 2013, feelings about fairness had reversed:

Only 44 percent thought the economic system was fair, while 50 percent had come to feel it was unfair. Another [2013 poll](#) found that by an almost two-to-one margin (64 to 33 percent), Americans agreed that “the U.S. no longer offers an equal chance to get ahead.”

Perhaps as a result of all of this, there are signs that the very idea of the American dream is changing. The American dream has long been equated with moving up the class ladder and owning a home. But [polling leading up to the 2012 election revealed something new](#)—middle-class Americans expressed more concern about holding on to what they had than they were with getting more. Echoing these concerns, Pew [reported](#) in 2015 that when asked which they would prefer—financial security or moving up the income ladder—92 percent selected security. This is a seven percentage point increase since just 2011, when 85 percent selected security over economic mobility.

And while majorities of Americans continue to say that home ownership is a key part of the American dream in general, when a survey asked people which things were the most important to their personal American dream, only 26 percent selected “owning a nice home” as a top choice, while [37 percent](#) chose “achieving financial security” and 36 percent chose “being debt free.” In a 2013 Allstate/National Journal Heartland Monitor [poll](#) that asked respondents to define what it means to be middle class, 54 percent of respondents chose “having the ability to keep up with expenses and hold a steady job while not falling behind or taking on too much debt,” and only 43 percent defined being middle class as earning more, buying a home, and saving.

* * *

For more and more families, achieving the traditional American dream has become just that—a dream. Instead, what surveys indicate is that people are downsizing their definition of the American dream. Today, the desire to own a home or to move up economically is often replaced by a desire to be debt free and to have financial stability.

These developments point to a possible change in the underlying psychology of the American dream, and thus for the country more broadly. When people are more concerned about falling down than they are with moving up, planning ahead and having big goals is not only pointless but painful, since time and again something outside of one’s control comes along and upends their plans. There are grave consequences to this: People stop making investments in their education; they delay or never have children; they stop buying homes, they are less likely to take entrepreneurial risks; and they defer their dreams, often indefinitely.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/10/american-dreams/408535/>

Source 3

Straight Talk on Economic Mobility

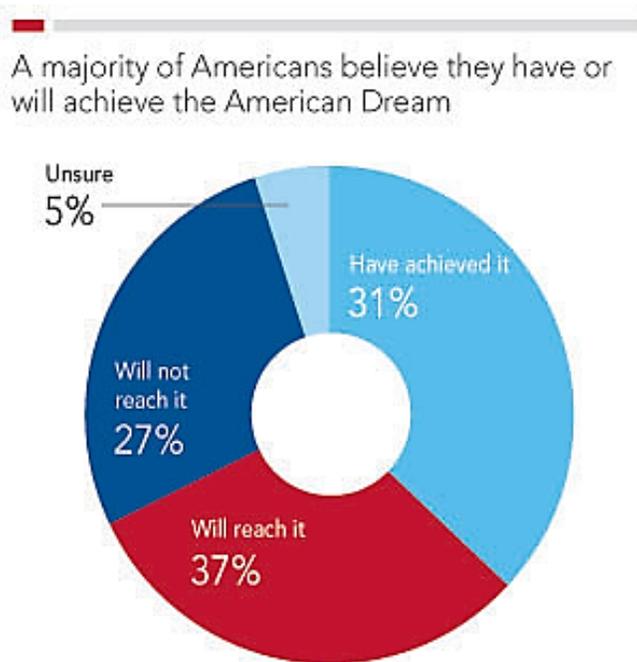
Brendan Sloner

Posted on **December 8, 2011**

Americans may be skeptical of some large welfare state programs, but a widely shared conviction is that children that are born to poor parents should have the chance to move upward. That’s why it was good to hear President Obama finally talking passionately about economic mobility in his Tuesday [speech](#) on income inequality in Osawatomie, Kansas:

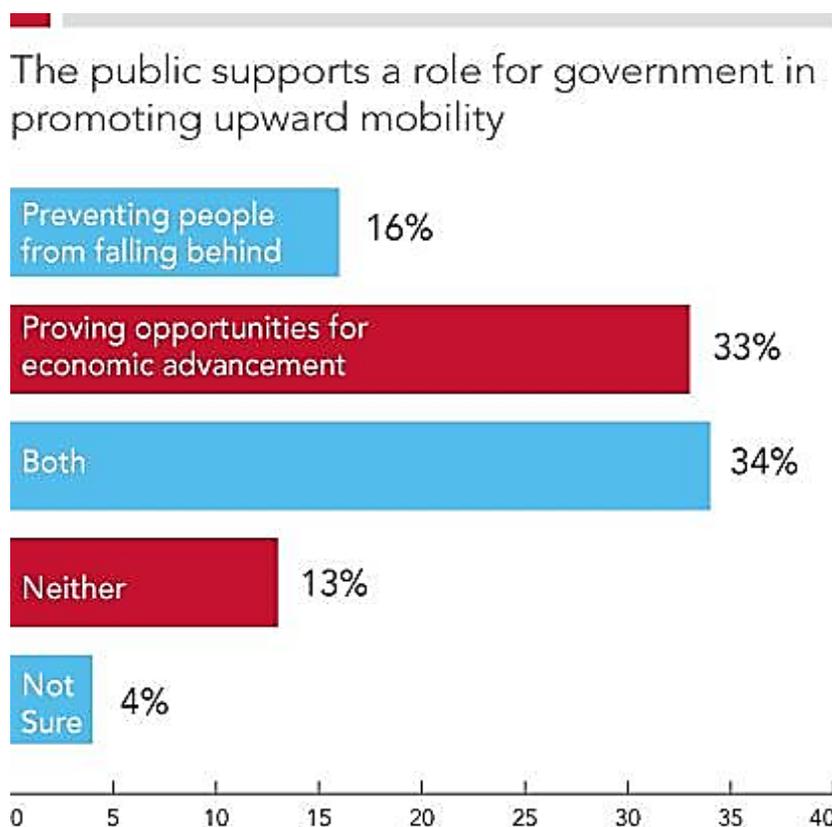
“Over the last few decades, the rungs on the ladder of opportunity have grown farther and farther apart, and the middle class has shrunk. You know, a few years after World War II, a child who was born into poverty had a slightly better than 50-50 chance of becoming middle class as an adult. By 1980, that chance had fallen to around 40%. And if the trend of rising inequality over the last few decades continues, it’s estimated that a child born today will only have a one-in-three chance of making it to the middle class – 33%.

Americans believe they can achieve the American dream through hard work, but also see an expanded role for government. Pew conducted in-depth public opinion polls on economic mobility in 2009 and 2010. In 2009, 46% of respondents said that they believed that their children will have a harder time moving up the income ladder than they did, but this increased to 59% in 2011.



Still, more than 2/3 of Americans believe that they are in control of their economic situation and the same proportion say they have achieved or will achieve the American Dream.

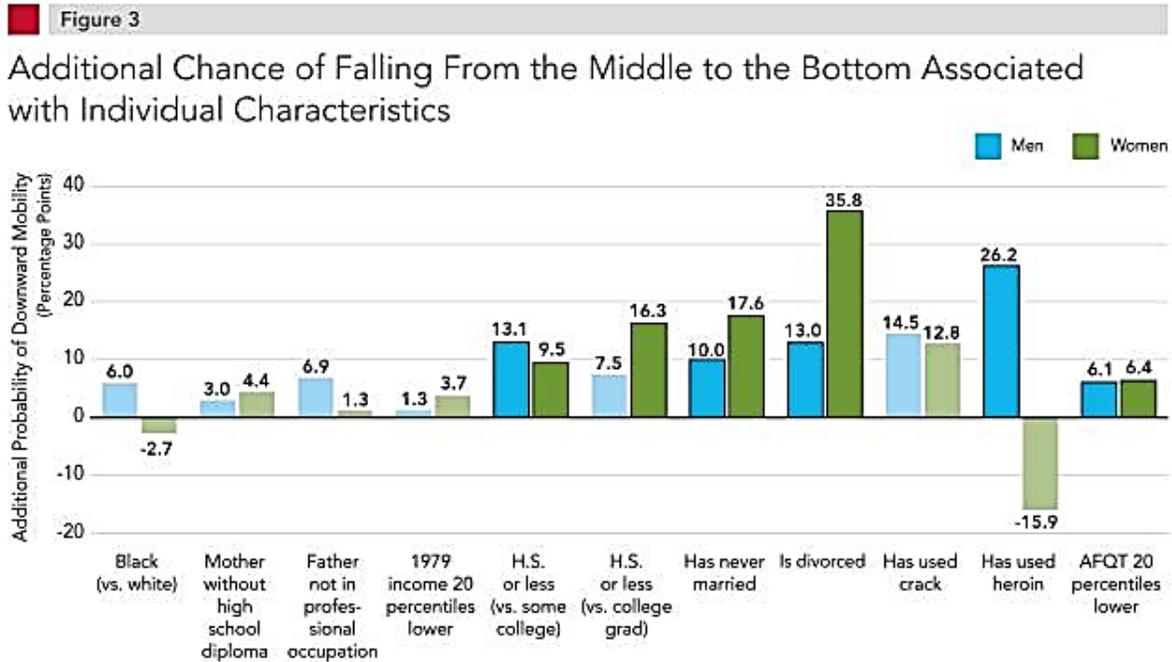
Finally, respondents were asked a set of questions about what they would like to see the government doing to promote mobility. (Note: none of the questions asked *at what cost* it would be worth addressing these problems, which tends to erode support). In the poll, 83 percent want the government to either provide opportunities for the poor and middle class to improve their economic situations, prevent them from falling behind or both.



Many people in the middle class experience *downward* mobility

In a September 2011 [report](#), Greg Acs looks at the risk of the falling out of the middle class (defined as children raised between the 30th and 70th percentile). He finds that a third of such individuals will fall out of the middle class by adulthood.

The figure below illustrates some of the specific risk factors for downward mobility:



Specific risk factors include divorce (especially for women), lower education, and use of drugs.

Final Thoughts

I think we need to pivot away from our currently narrow (but important) conversation on the disparity between the 1 and 99% to address the predictors of success for low and middle income Americans. Talking about mobility is the right way to enter the conversation, although it is important to frame the discussion as a matter of providing a fair starting place: hard work matters, but it can only matter when people have the right tools to be successful, escape poverty, and improve their standard of living.

<https://inequalitiesblog.wordpress.com/2011/12/.../straight-talk-on-economic-mobility...>

Source 4

I Hear America Singing

Walt Whitman, 1819 - 1892

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe
and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off
work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the
deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing
as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the
morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at
work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

Source 5

I, Too

Langston Hughes, 1902 - 1967

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table

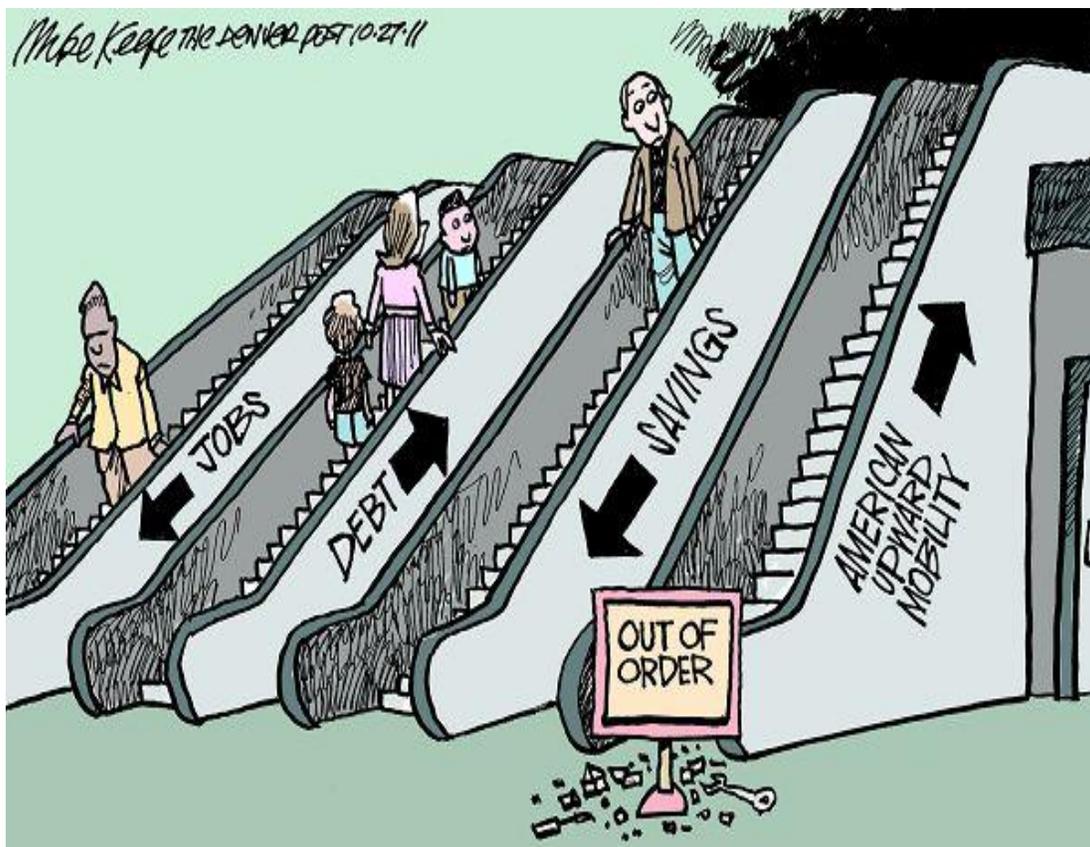
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,

"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Source 6



Cartoon B Mike Keefe Denver Post, 10/27/11

Question to consider	Is the belief in the American Dream dependent on an individual’s perspective?
Question to consider	How has the definition of the American Dream changed over the years?
Question to consider	Does the government have an obligation to the citizens to help them realize the American Dream?
<p><u>Part Two:</u> <u>Argumentative Performance Task</u></p>	
Your Assignment	<p>Write an argumentative essay addressing the question: Is it possible for all people living in the United States to achieve the American Dream?</p> <p>Provide a clear definition of the term “American Dream.” Clearly state your claim and support it with evidence from the texts; include counter-claims and rebuttals.</p>
Essay Scoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Organization and Purpose:</u> How well did you state your claim or thesis and address it with a logical progression of ideas from beginning to end? How well did your ideas thoughtfully flow from beginning to end using effective transitions? How effective was your introduction and your conclusion? 2. <u>Evidence/ Elaboration:</u> How well did you integrate relevant and specific information from at least 3 sources? How well did you elaborate your ideas? How well did you clearly state ideas in your own words using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose? Did you reference the sources you used by title or number when using details or facts directly from them? 3. <u>Conventions:</u> How well did you follow the rules of grammar usage, punctuation, capitalization and spelling?
Now begin work on your argumentative essay.	<p>Manage your time carefully so that you can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Plan your multi-paragraph argumentative essay. · Write your multi-paragraph argumentative essay. · Revise and edit the final draft of your multi-paragraph argumentative essay. · Please be as thorough as possible. · Remember to check your notes and your prewriting/planning as you write and then revise and edit your argumentative essay

Source	Pro	Con
1. Is The American Dream Still Alive?		
2. The Downsizing of the American Dream		
3. Straight Talk On Economic Mobility		
4. “I Hear America Singing”		
5. “I, Too”		
6. Cartoon		