**TOPIC: THE AMERICAN DREAM**

**Discipline**

Language Arts, History

**Grade Level**

7 – 12

**Context**

* 1930

**Type of Activity**

Individual, Small Group, Research, Pre-reading, Writing

**Objectives**

* Students will understand how the concept of the “American Dream” plays a role in *The Grapes of Wrath*.
* Students will reflect on what the “American Dream” means to them and if/how it plays a role in their lives.
* Students will gain an understanding of what life was like in America during the 1930s.

**Overview**

The “American Dream” is a constant theme in *The Grapes of Wrath*, although Steinbeck may have argued that in the case of the Dust Bowl refugees like the Joad family, it was more of a California Dream. This concept is important to understanding the novel and the motivation of the characters.

By reflecting upon the meaning of the “American Dream,” students are taking the time to be introspective.

This activity can be done at any point in the unit.

**Materials Needed/Preparation**

* *The Grapes of Wrath*

**Estimated Time**

3 class periods (can be shortened)

**Procedures**

* Day one
  + Journal/writing topic: What does the “American Dream” mean to you?
  + Discuss and have students volunteer their responses.
  + As homework, students interview a parent or other family member (some of whom may be immigrants).
* What does the “American Dream” mean?
* How has the “American Dream” been a part of your life?
* Day two
  + Journal/writing topic: After your interview, did your idea of the “American Dream” change?
  + Have students share their journal responses and their interviews.
  + As homework, assign students a mini research report on a topic relating to American culture during the 1930s. Possible topics include:
* Music, art, literature, migration, the economy, hardships, Hollywood, etc.
* As homework, students are to research information about their topic for presenting to the class.
* Consider collaborating with the computers/technology teacher.
* Students should be encouraged to bring in pictures, music samples, statistics, charts, etc.
* Day three
  + Have students present their findings to the class.

**Standards Met**

* History and Social Science Content Standards 11
  + Students analyze the different explanations for the Great Depression and how the New Deal fundamentally changed the role of the federal government: 3
* Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12
  + Key Ideas and Details: 2, 3
* Writing Standards 6-12
  + Research to Build and Present Knowledge: 7, 8
* Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12
  + Comprehension and Collaboration: 2
  + Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: 4, 5
* Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12
  + Key Ideas and Details: 2, 3
  + Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: 7, 8

**Post Activity/Takeaways/Follow-up**

* Takeaways
  + Students should have a more vivid picture of life in America during the 1930s.
  + Students should have an understanding of the “American Dream” and how it plays a role in people’s lives, including their own.
* Follow-up
  + While reading through the novel, refer back to student presentations on life in the 1930s and on the “American Dream.” Does life in *The Grapes of Wrath* seem similar to, or different from what students learned in their research and presentations? Does the “American Dream” play the same role as it does in the lives of students and their families?

**Assessment**

* How thorough was the interview? What questions, beyond the basic ones, were asked? Did the student gain an idea of how the “American Dream” has been a part of the life of the person interviewed?
* Keeping in mind the amount of time students were given to research, how thorough was each student’s research and presentation? Was the research and presentation on topic? Accurate?