

From Rags to Riches? – The American Dream Revisited – Eine Landeskundereihe für die Oberstufe (S II)

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II/C5

Der *American Dream* in Gefahr? Straßenprotest in Washington

Worin besteht der *American Dream*? Was bedeutet er für den einzelnen Amerikaner? Und gibt es ihn heute überhaupt noch?

Die Reihe ermöglicht den Schülern in literarischen und expositorischen Texten eine Auseinandersetzung mit den unterschiedlichsten Perspektiven auf den *American Dream*. Auch ein vergleichender Blick nach Europa wird gewagt: Träumen wir Europäer etwa den besseren Traum?

Die Lernenden erhalten vielfach die Gelegenheit, ihr Selbst- und Fremdbild zu hinterfragen und sich sowohl mit Klischees als auch mit der amerikanischen Realität auseinanderzusetzen.

Klassenstufe: 11/12 (G8); 12/13 (G9)

Dauer: ca. 8 Doppelstunden

Bereich: Landeskunde USA, *American Dream*, Lebensentwürfe von Immigranten

Kompetenzen:

1. Umgang mit Texten: analytische Auseinandersetzung mit unterschiedlichen Textsorten
2. Methodenkompetenz: kooperatives Lernen
3. Interkulturelle Kompetenz: den Entwurf und die Bedeutung des amerikanischen Traums anhand ausgewählter literarischer Beispiele nachvollziehen und mit den eigenen Lebensentwürfen vergleichen

Materialübersicht

- 1. Doppelstunde: Connecting to the topic – analysing quotations and life stories**
- M 1 (Bd) Picture stimulus for the unit
- M 2 (Ab) About the American Dream – analysing quotations
- M 3 (Ab) Presenting living examples of the American Dream
- 2. Doppelstunde: Immigration – living on hopes and dreams**
- M 4 (Tx) Follow your dreams – a Jewish immigrant tells her story
- Excerpt from the short story *The Miracle* (1920) by Janina Yezierska
- 3. Doppelstunde: The original idea of the American Dream – what was it all about?**
- M 5 (Tx) William Faulkner on the idea of the American Dream
- Excerpt from the essay *On Primitive The American dream, What Happened to it* by William Faulkner
- 4. Doppelstunde: Education – a key to the American Dream**
- M 6 (Tx) A Mexican immigrant on his long path to an education
- Excerpt from *Possible lives: The Promise of Public Education in America* (1995) by Mike Rose
- 5. Doppelstunde: Hard work will get you there – realising the American Dream**
- M 7 (Tx) *Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper* – a poem on achieving the American Dream
- Poem *Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper* (1993) by Martín Espada
- 6. Doppelstunde: Off to new horizons! – Breaking with old traditions**
- M 8 (Tx) An acceptance letter from Yale – finding the courage to break away from old traditions
- Excerpt from the novel *Girl in Translation* (2010) by Jean Kwok
- 7. Doppelstunde: The American Dream today – does it still exist?**
- M 9 (Bd) Does the American Dream still exist? – Looking at some data
- 8. Doppelstunde: Is there a European Dream?**
- M 10 (Tx) The American Dream vs the European Dream
- Excerpt from *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream* (2004) by Jeremy Rifkin
- M 11 (Ab) How to write an essay

M 2 About the American Dream – analysing quotations

In search of a better life many people from different countries and backgrounds emigrated to the USA. Those immigrants shaped the progress of the country, and created the national heritage of the American Dream. Let's have a look at some quotes about this dream.

a) "Amerika, du hast es besser [...]"

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832),
German writer

b) "There's no free lunch"

An Italian immigrant on what
years of American life had taught

c) "Like all people who have nothing,
I lived on my dreams."

Anzia Yezierska (1881–1970), American novelist
and Jewish immigrant from Poland

d) "This generation immigrants will take
any kind of work and do any kind of hard
work. They are the greatest believers in
the American dream."

Dr. Sash... an American sociologist, on the
immigrants from the West Indies

e) "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Emma Lazarus (1849–1887), American poet

f) "To seek their American dream, many
Mexican Americans had given up their homes,
and everything to come here. When they get
here, they learn that they have to find a job and
an education to survive."

Carlos Fuentes (1928–2012), Mexican novelist and essayist

g) "Here was no hot running water,
cold water. The water in the village
was filthy ... Any place with 'clean
water' must be like 'the sky above
the sky.' America is heaven."

Chin Moy Lee, a Chinese immigrant

Tasks

1. Work in pairs: Choose one of the quotations and paraphrase it to explain what it means.
2. Report to the class the most important or interesting conclusions you have reached in your group about the meaning of the quotation.
3. Divide the class in two halves and compare the quotations: One half decides how the quotations are different, and one half decides how the quotations are similar.
4. Find a common theme for the texts you are going to work with in this unit.

M 4 Follow your dreams – a Jewish immigrant tells her story

The following text is taken from *Hungry Hearts*, a collection of short stories first published in 1920. The author of the short story excerpt and her Jewish family emigrated to New York's Lower East Side in the 19th century.

A. Approaching the text**1. Instant drama:**

Work in pairs. Use the eight lines below to develop a drama scene. Create the whole scene: relationship, atmosphere, emotions, movement, pause, rhythm, intonation, gesture. You may change the order of the lines. You may not change, add, cancel or swap around anything in the lines.

Read the eight lines and rearrange them:

- “Let me explain.”
- “I was sure you could do it alone.”
- “You promised.”
- “So I lied.”
- “No! I can't! Do it for me.”
- “America is so cruel.”
- “But I want to make a person of myself.”
- “You said, ‘Come to America, it's the golden land!’”

2. Act out the scene in front of the class. The class takes notes on the situation and the emotions the characters display.

3. Read the following text and decide which presentation comes closest to the emotions the narrator expresses.

Excerpt from *The Miracle* (1920) by Anzia Yezierska

Like all people who have nothing, I lived on dreams. With nothing but my longing for love, I burned my way through stone until I got to America. And what happened to me when I became an American is more than I can picture before my eyes, even in a dream.

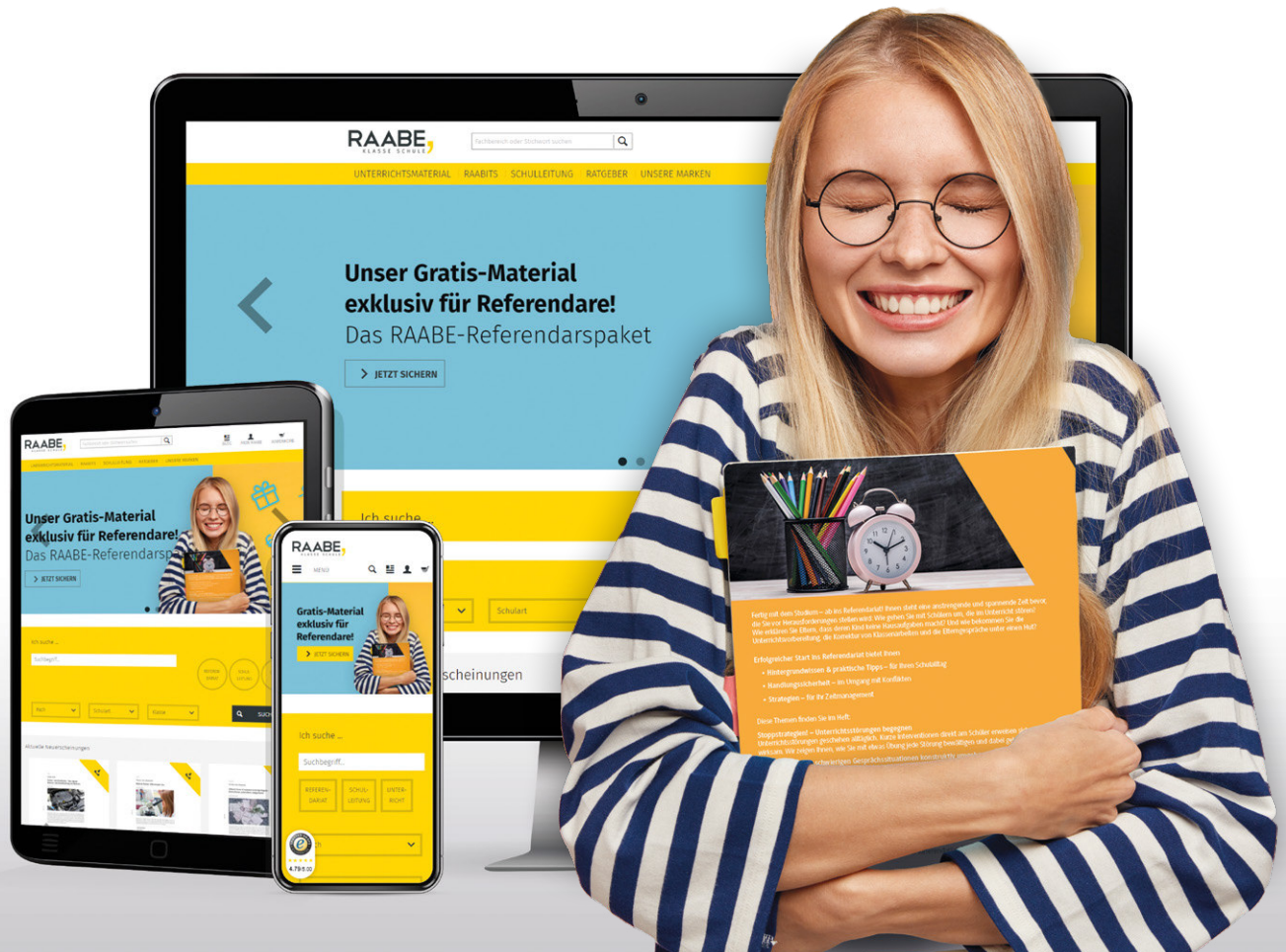
[...] Nu, I got to America. I pushed a machine in a shirt-waist factory, when I was yet
 5 lucky to get work. Always my head was drying up with saving and pinching and worrying to
 send home a little from the little I earned. All that my face saw all day long was girls and machines
 – and no love. And even when I came already home from work, I could only talk to the girls in
 the working-girls boarding-house, or shut myself up in my dark, lonesome bedroom. No family, no
 friends, nobody to get me acquainted with nobody! The only men I saw were what passed me by in
 10 the street and in cars. “Is this a ‘lovers land?’” was calling in my heart. “Where are my dreams that
 were so real to me in the old country?”

[...] For two days and for two nights I lay still on my bed, unable to move. I looked around on my
 empty walls, thinking, thinking, “Where am I? Is this the world? Is this America?” Suddenly I sprang
 up from bed. “What can come from pitying yourself?” I cried. “If the world kicks you down and
 makes nothing of you, you bounce yourself up and make something of yourself.” A fire blazed up in
 me to conquer the world because I was downed by the world. “Make a person of yourself,” I said.
 “Begin to learn English. Make yourself for an American if you want to live in America.” [...]

The first night I went to school I felt like falling on everybody's neck and kissing them. I felt like
 kissing the books and the benches. It was such great happiness to learn to read and write the English
 20 words.

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